

Introduction

Man observes. A flower, the sunset, a picture. But more than anything else, man observes his fellow man. Close up and from a distance, acquaintances and strangers, with fascination or indifference, briefly and at length. Certainly men will also gladly speak with others, and often do, but most conversations begin and end in observation, and are accompanied by observation throughout. Observation prepares the ground for conversation, fills pauses in conversation and occupies, together with listening, the attention of the listener. In one's interpersonal relations most of a person's time is taken up with observing the other, because most of the time people are preoccupied with showing themselves to others, whether consciously or not. Eighty percent of behavior is non-verbal. This includes also making non-linguistic sounds, as well as smells and physical contact, but the greater part of non-verbal behavior is such as can be noticed by the eyes of the observer. In non-verbal communication and behavior the main role is played by the body and its ability to produce signs. In this the body is assisted by clothes, jewelry, tattoos, paint and masks, but the main onus falls on the body itself, which performs its quiet job without motion, in postures, and also with motion, in gestures. Human behavior is to a large extent composed of gestures. These can substitute for speech, or accompany and assist it. Postures and gestures can accompany thoughts and emotions, expressing or hiding, stimulating or curbing them. Gestures can tell us much more about a person than he wants us to know, and even more than what he knows about himself. They can indicate physiological traits, psychological characteristics, cultural roots and habits.

Artists are more familiar with the secrets of gestures than most other people: sculptors, painters and, of course, writers. Some sixty to seventy percent of narrative texts consist of descriptions of non-verbal behavior. Furthermore, the text itself consists to a great extent of non-verbal, non- and para-linguistic elements. Gestures are no doubt the most senior of non-verbal poetic devices. Not just sculpture and painting, but also literature often turns out to be an art of gestures. The time spent in reading consists mostly of the reader's observation of moving pictures of bodily behaviors conjured up by his mind – the mental representations of gestures. In light of the tremendous importance which gestures have in literature, literary research has devoted too little attention to gestures and the ways they are represented.

The study of gestures in literature is located at the cross-roads of a number of different disciplines. First-and-foremost to be mentioned is the “mother discipline”, namely the study of gestures, whose beginnings go back to ancient books on the art of speech-making, such as those by Quintillian and Cicero, in which gestures are construed as a rhetorical device which supports speech. In the Middle Ages gestures became part of metaphysical approaches, such as that of Hugues de Saint-Victor, who lived in Paris in the twelfth century, and according to whom bodily motions were reflections of the movements of the universe. Gestures have often been incorporated into systems of mysticism such as the Kabbala, both as part of the body's metaphysical symbolism and as an element of meditation techniques. In the Talmudic and Halakhic literature, both ancient and later, is not rare to find discussions of corporal movements and their meaning and function in prayer and other religious practices.

Andrea de Jorio's book from 1832, in which he compares gestures in Naples to those of antiquity, is the earliest systematic study of the matter in Western scholarship.¹ In the Far East very well-developed traditions of gestures have existed for centuries. Postures and gestures of the hands, *mudrā* in Sanskrit, constitute an important element in various dance traditions, provide the basis for many yoga postures and healing techniques, and are integral part of religious ceremonies. The legendary Nandikeśvara *The Mirror of Gesture* is one of the most ancient texts ever written on the art of the gesture.

A most interesting and rare example of gestural behavior is the system of hand signs used during the recital of the Torah among Yemenite Jews and, to a certain extent, in other Jewish communities as well. Except for a very few schematic descriptions no systematic studies of this system has been made, whether from an anthropological, psycholinguistic or cognitive perspective, for the purpose of examining the relationship between recital and gestures. These are issues which are still waiting for scholarly analysis. Elsewhere I devoted a paper to the study of the gestures associated with the Torah recital among Yemenite Jews. There I came to the conclusion that they may be considered "bodily techniques", to use Marcel Mauss' term,² in whose performance a complex cognitive mechanism and a rich cultural semiosis may be discerned, which brings them close to the Far Eastern *mudrā* techniques, in addition to an independent ritual functionality going considerably beyond their connections to the accents of the biblical text and the tunes of recital.³

The study of gestures, itself an interdisciplinary field, has been expanding apace in recent years. It possesses various schools of thought, sprouts conferences and journals, and is well on the way to becoming a full-fledged academic and scientific discipline. At the

University of Chicago a gesture laboratory has been operating for a number of years now, under the management of David McNeill,⁴ one of the main researchers in the field, father of the “growth point” theory and the most prominent representative of what may be called the theory of the unification of speech and gesture. Many scholars have come out of McNeill’s laboratory, which has produced some important studies, mostly in the field of psycholinguistics and adjacent domains. Another important center is Jurgen Streeck’s institute of gesture studies at the University of Texas at Austin, which specializes mainly in anthropological studies. In 2002 the International Society of Gesture Studies was founded,⁵ an event marked by a well-attended international conference with a rich interdisciplinary program and the founding of a new journal, *Gesture*.⁶ Since then the Society’s conferences take place every two to three years.

Uri Hadar of Tel-Aviv University is a prominent scholar in the field of gesture and represents what may be somewhat inexactly termed as the theory of the separation of speech and gesture. Hadar is a psychologist and the studies he has carried, by himself and in cooperation with others, represent the latest developments in the psychology of gesture. Uri Ehrlich’s book ‘*All my bones shall say*’: *The Non-verbal Language of Prayer* represents the traditional and well-developed field of the study of ritual gestures.

These are just a few examples of recent developments in the study of gestures. The newly-founded Society has brought about greater cooperation between centers of scholarship in the United States and the tradition veteran centers in France and Germany. More than anything its coming into being, however, points to an already existing state of affairs: the study of gesture is generating ever greater interest and attracting ever growing numbers of scholars from various fields.

Of the domains constituting the modern field of the study of gesture, the oldest are anthropology and ethnography. David Efron, whose *Gesture, Race and Culture*, a Ph.D. thesis on the gestures used by Jews and Italians in New York, was presented to Columbia University and published in 1941, is considered to be the founder of the modern scientific study of gesture. Today the anthropology of gesture is taken to be part of the field of the anthropology of non-verbal behavior and very close to the study of non-verbal communication, a broad and complex field encompassing a rich variety of topics, including glances, laughter, sign language, spatial practices and more. About thirty years ago the anthropology and sociology of the body, today an expanding field at the crossroads of the above-mentioned domains, began to take shape. It has produced some fascinating studies which document, analyze and compare cultural practices of using the body in various ethnic and social groups. Students of body anthropology have adopted as mentor the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss, who in a programmatic paper entitled “Les Techniques du corps” (1936) argued that culture played a crucial role in shaping bodily practices. Psycho-physiological and ethological studies of gestures assume that ontogenetic and phylogenetic factors are dominant in shaping bodily behavior. This tradition began with Charles Darwin’s famous paper “The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals” (1872). One of the most fascinating hypotheses which have been proposed in this field associates the birth of language with gestures. Among the more recent fields related to the study of gesture are kinesics or the study of bodily motions, and proxemics or the study of inter-personal distance in behavior. Both of these fields originated in the United States and are now evolving very rapidly throughout the world. The former is associated with Ray Birdwhistell and the latter with Edward Hall.

Cognitive scientists have instilled new life into the study of gestures and have to a great measure shaped the field. Cognitive psychology has made especially significant contributions to the study of the microgenesis of gestures. Cognitive models of gesture processing are usually based on models of linguistic processing. The study of emotions is today inseparable from the study of cognitive processes. The question of the relationship between the processing of gestures and of emotions is particularly germane to the study of emotions in literary reading.

To conclude this short survey of the interdisciplinary nature of the study of gesture we should point to the importance of studies on bodily symbolism and the semiotics of gestures. These studies have their foundations in bodily anthropology, but from there they have evolved, by way of the study of culture and occasionally also psychoanalysis, and provided some surprising and far-reaching theoretical insights. Examples of research of this kind are the famous studies by Roland Barthes on fashion, of Julia Kristeva on gestures and of Jean Baudrillard on advertisements and striptease. Psychoanalysis has dealt surprisingly little with gestures, given Freud's classical dictum that gestures reveal more about the man than do words. Psychoanalytical conclusions concerning gestures and their meaning are to be found mainly in interdisciplinary studies, such as Luce Irigaray's paper on the gender meaning of gestures.⁷ Studies such as Baudrillard's and Irigaray's ascribe a great deal of importance to autoeroticism in the body's psycho-cultural processing, its movements and its semiotization.

For the study of gestures in literature the achievements of all the above-mentioned domains must be united. The pioneering role in the development of this field belongs to Fernando Poyatos, who for many years published and distributed a program of research

into non-verbal communication in literature. Although many of these studies remained at the program stage, Poyatos succeeded in establishing and consolidating the field known as “literary anthropology”, where literature, especially that representing the various types of realism, is treated as anthropological source material or as input to theories of anthropology and communications. My own experience in reading literature, particular the postmodernist variety, has made me come to the conclusion that literature of all genres not only realizes or reflects familiar anthropological and communicative phenomena but also, or perhaps mainly, creates them. For this reason I prefer to speak of an “imaginary anthropology”, a system of processes whereby the narrative personality takes shape through a reading of the text, a system of invented customs, rites and quasi-cultural practices. At the center of this system we find the gesture, a micro-myth in the book’s human microcosm. I view a gesture as a dynamic, usually non-linear, process of a personality’s origination, as a living unity of body, personality, movement, space and ethical-social context and, if the gesture is literary, also of language and consciousness. At any rate, gesture marks change: according to some it is a change in the direction of death, involving the creation of the sign, whereas according to others it is a change in the direction of life, involving the birth of the personality. It is this change in literary becoming which is the focus of our interest here, at the level of the micro. At the macro level I try to identify systems of gestures, techniques of gesture representation, and gestural styles which are characteristic of this or that literary work, author or genre, and also to expose the philosophies or ideologies behind them. Since the study of literary gestures is a comparatively new field, based mainly on the general study of gestures, which is unfamiliar to most students of literature, I believe that a relatively broad

introduction to various aspects of this domain is appropriate, and therefore the next chapter shall be devoted to just that.

1

Gestures in culture, art and literature serve not only as representation but also as a presentation device.

A. Represented and non-represented gestures activate an observer's gestures.

It is not easy to determine the precise beginnings of the interest in gesture. The history of the study of gesture should probably begin with the spontaneous awareness of gestures, an awareness whose appearance is proven by the presence of representations of gestures in the cultural products of even the earliest stages of civilization. What are the rock paintings of the Paleolithic age if not the earliest documentation of man's observation of his own gestures? These paintings show their creators' main primal and spontaneous, natural if you will, motivation: to observe bodily movement as an embodiment both of nature and of culture. It is said that wonderment gave birth to philosophy; in the same vein, we may say that wonderment at the movement of life gave birth to thinking about gestures and their various representations, in dance, in sculpture, in painting and in words. One can argue about the ritual, religious, magical and decorative meanings of ancient rock paintings, but above everything they represent, in a non-discursive and non-

propositional way, the knowledge which pre-historic man had about the three facets of gesture: meaning, power and beauty.

However, a different question arises here: why do the pre-historical paintings of the Upper Paleolithic, such as those discovered at Altamira in Spain or at Lascaux in France (between 15,000 and 10,000 BC), depict mainly animal figures, whereas human figures are absent (Fig. 1)? The paintings look so professional, the artist's strokes so sure and skilled, that it is hardly credible that pre-historical man did not know how to draw a human being. Nor is there any reason to ascribe to pre-historic human society a normative injunction of the kind found in Judaism, against representations of the human form. The commonly accepted hypothesis, that rock paintings served as magical ritual objects, provides only a general context, not a satisfactory explanation, especially in view of the fact that not all the animal depictions look like magic paintings. There are those who argue that the animals represent the "other", raw nature. This argument may perhaps add another tinge to the anthropological context, but it still does not explain why the picture does not represent the relationship between man and the animal-other, particularly in light of the fact that a spatial-gestural representation would be a perfect medium for showing this relationship. Certainly it is inconceivable that pre-historic man did not know how to perform complex, delicate gestures; in fact, ethological studies comparing human to animal gestures, especially those of monkeys, have proven that they did know. The explanation thus must be sought in the functional and pragmatic domain.

A possible hypothesis is the following: *pre-historical paintings do not represent gestures, because it was their purpose to originate a gesture.* Edward Hall in his discussion of rock paintings as the earliest documents in the history of spatial-visual perception points out

that very few people are aware of the fact that sight is active, not passive, that in fact it is trans-active since it constitutes part of a person's interrelationship with his environment.⁸

The gesture does not appear in the painting because it is meant to appear in the behavior of the picture's observer. The painting thus functions as a sensory stimulus which arouses in the observer programs of reaction constructed in accordance with bodily motor scripts combining both inborn and learned actions which are eminently useful for the survival and development of the individual and the group. Thus, for example, a picture depicting a hunted animal creates a dynamic imaging of the hunt, and the hunter who stands before it reacts actively to this stimulus, with gestures and perhaps sounds as well. If the figure of the hunter had been present inside the picture, no real flesh-and-blood hunter would have needed to be present at the imaginary hunt. According to the model proposed here, *a gesture is not a representation or a sign, but rather a dynamic mental-motor construct, originating in the observation of this or that (not necessarily gestural) sign in a specific functional-pragmatic context.* According to this view pre-historic man possessed considerable knowledge both concerning the cognitive and emotional processes involved in the origination and perception of gestures, as well as concerning their interactive, dynamic, personality-related nature. Even today there are signs, including verbal ones, which when they appear before us in certain contexts will cause scripts of bodily behavior to run. These may remain in the planning stage, induce partial half-reflexive reactions such as making a fist in anger, or become implemented in the form of complete gestures, for example hand-clapping in enthusiasm. We may surmise that rock paintings served as an instrument for educating about gestures, and also for teaching active observation, in the same sense as one is taught to actively read a French "nouveau

roman". The interaction between a rock painting and the observer was doubtlessly conceived as constituting part of the synergetic relationship between man, nature and the entire cosmos. In this system cultural processes became separated from natural processes, only to be united with them immediately again. The person who painted an ox on a rock immediately observed the painting and the rock in their unity. He did, however, distinguish the figure of the ox as the rock's reaction to man's presence. He may have conceived the picture as the reaction gesture of the body of the rock, just as he conceived of his own gesture as constituting his body's reaction to the ox's presence. A person who wanted to live constructed his relations with the world as a living system. He did not *represent* this relation in order to *maintain* it in fact and thus to turn himself into an active leader of the flow of life. In order to maintain life man had to close the "energy circle" of rock-man-rock. He believed that his gestures vis-à-vis the rock painting serve for managing life's energy (or any other spiritual substance) in the world. These hypothetical gestures of pre-historic man thus played a function similar to that of the *mudrās* in yoga, especially in their own special branch, yoga-mudrā, and in Buddhism. A *mudrā* ("seal" or "image" in Sanskrit) is a special hand-gesture which seals a body posture and thereby closes a desirable pattern of energy flow between the energy's sources in the world and the body, as well as among the various energy centers within the body. Could pre-historic man have been aware of this role of gestures? Did he know how to control and organize them in accordance with his cultural needs? It is certainly possible that he did, even if he lacked the words to describe and preserve this knowledge. The transition to historical times was marked by a transition from gesture creation to the representation of gestures in art. This was, in other words, a transition from a persono-dynamic conception of

gestures, in which space and relations with the world originated in real time between the observer and the object of observation, and in which the observer was at the same time also a gestural artist, to a semiotic-static conception, in which personality, space and their relation were represented by (iconic) signs and the observer was separated and distanced from the gesture. The highest achievements in the art of the static gesture in antiquity belong to Egyptian civilization (Fig. 2).

The Narmer Palette shown in Figure 2 is one of the earliest extant Egyptian works of art (c. 3000 BC). It is dedicated to the victory of Narmer, king of Upper Egypt, over his northern rival. The palette depicts both human and animal figures, the latter serving as symbols. The relations between the figures, in particular those between the two central figures of the victorious king and his vanquished enemy, are represented through spatial organization (the king is shown enlarged, in the center and raised, whereas the figure of the enemy is reduced in size) and conventional gestures (the king's left hand is smiting the enemy, his right hand is raised as a sign of authority, power and victory; the enemy kneels, his hands spread out downwards helplessly). The figures are executed in typical Egyptian style: the upper part of the body is shown frontally, the lower in profile, the head in profile and the eye frontally. This type of depiction is meant to show the figures and their interrelations outside of time and space, outside of movement, in monumental motionlessness – in eternity. The work's semiotic overload also would appear to block any dynamic freedom of observation and interpretation. But let us go back to the figure of the king and analyze it in terms of its gesture. If we take the gesture to consist of a dynamic and complex construction then this specifically Egyptian figure design would not have to be taken as intended to freeze all movement; to the contrary, we can interpret

it as reconstituting it on the basis on multi-dimensional bodily tension. In one of its dimensions the gesture connects the figure of the king with the observer. For this reason the lower part of the body appears in profile, so that the gestures of the legs, stepping or walking, could be shown, and the upper part of the body is shown frontally for the same reason, so that the gestures, this time those of the hands, could be seen. The frontal view not only leaves both hands visible, it makes it possible to depict each hand with its own gesture and, at the same time, also shows that both hands, spread out almost symmetrically on either side, are united in a single gesture spanning the whole world (east and west, morning and evening), made by the supreme ruler of the earth. The body's unnatural rotation imbues the gestures with springiness and tenseness. This manner of executing a figure constituted then as now an act of violence against observers' sensory and cognitive processes. The observer is forced again and again to try and rotate the figure in order to imagine in it natural wholeness and completeness, in keeping with our everyday observational experience. The figure's rotation grants a special kind of dynamic momentum to its gestures, and even creates a sequence of circular movements intertwined with gestures made by various organs in a number of different observational planes, as if it were a kind of three-dimensional filmstrip.

And what was the pragmatic function of this kind of bodily representation in the Egyptian style? The answer is quite simple: The upper part of the body is shown frontally because the king's gesture is meant for the observer; it looks back at the observer, hypnotizes him, enters into his mind and lets him become part of the gestures' interactive dynamics. The eye says to the observer, as it were: You are mine, the hand of my rule is raised above your head, I am everywhere. The gesture of the king's right hand is one of victory over

the vanquished enemy, but it is also a threatening gesture with respect to the observer, either a subject or a potential enemy. This threatening gesture had the purpose of arousing in the observer a behavioral mode of escape, defense or surrender. It is no coincidence that in the king's right hand the muscles are so exquisitely delineated: The victor's hand is still strong and his arm is still raised high. At any rate, even if the reaction of an observer of the palette remained at the level of cognitive and emotional planning and processing without reaching the stage of implementation, we may surmise that the work did (and perhaps still does) originate a complex persono-dynamic system of various gestures and spatial movements, which come into being through the interaction of artifact and observer. Thanks to this gestural-dynamic analysis we discovered much more life and movement in Egyptian style than would have been expected on the basis of the usual models of explanation. Unlike scholars who argue that the body was perceived first-and-foremost as static,⁹ it turns out that if there does exist a primal perception of the body then that *perception* is always dynamic, even if the body is *represented* as static. Gestural persono-dynamic analysis can thus expose hidden mechanisms by which an observer of Egyptian art is manipulated. The Egyptians' profound understanding of gestures was expressed in their medicine, and also in their mythological pictorial art, so rich in the symbolism of the gestures of the gods. What can this analysis help us discover about classical Greek, especially Hellenistic, art, so extremely realistic and representative? Did the Greeks only know how to imitate and represent gestures, albeit with outstanding skill? Or did they perhaps also know the secret powers of gestures? Let us observe one of the more famous examples of Greek art, the *Winged Victory (Nike) of Samothrace*, dating from c. 200 BCE, today in the Louvre Museum, Paris (Fig. 3).

What is the secret of this statue's attraction? A rather unoriginal question, it repeatedly demands a renewed answer. This is a characteristic of the beautiful. From the perspective proposed in the present study, we may argue that *Nike gives rise to a gestural persono-dynamic system with the observer at its center*. She is the Goddess of Victory, but here she appears, quite paradoxically, in a gesture of love. This is not a still, relaxed, heavenly, self-absorbed and self-observant love expressed, for example, by the *Venus de Milo*. Victory is fervently and ardently in love, perhaps in the victor; her emotions are carried on powerful wings and are expressed in her body's gesture of passion. The observer catches the goddess in her most intimate and vulnerable moment of manifest emotion. A preliminary *icono-kinesic* analysis can prove this easily. Anyone who observes the position of Victory's legs, or better, tries to imitate it, immediately realizes that it is unstable, that it cannot be a posture of rest. But neither is it a walk or a run. Clearly, however, it is part of some movement. According to Adam Kendon and David McNeill any gesture consists of at least three perceptible stages: entry, stroke and exit.¹⁰ The stroke constitutes the gesture's climax. In our case there can be no doubt that we observe Nike in the stroke of her gesture. Her entire body takes part in it, not just the legs. As she moves her legs she also raises her wings, raises her chest and tenses her belly muscles, indicating that the execution of the gesture's stroke is accompanied by energetic inhalation, not by exhalation. If the statue's head were not missing it would be positioned frontally, with the chin slightly upraised. Nike is shown in a gesture of bold attraction directed at an unseen lover or, in the specific case of looking at the statue, at the observer. The gesture consists of a turn of the body as a whole, together with a small step and raised wings, the latter in a mortal perhaps taking the form of the hands raised, extended

forward and spread. The gesture's non-human contrast creates a special kind of tension in the sculpture: the contrast and tension between the body's forward tilt and the wings' backward extension. The main point, however, is that this gesture is intended to bring about an unconscious motor reaction in the observer's body: his muscles stretch, his neck, shoulders and hips prepare to execute a turn which will not take place, and the chin and eyebrows rise slightly. The entire body leans slightly towards the gesture. The need for the opposing, complementary movement is also justified by the folds of the tunic, raised by a strong frontal wind. Whether it is the imagined wind, or the observer's imagined hand and body movement, someone or something must in any case meet and answer Nike's gesture. Even if we assume that the proud goddess' only desire is to experience the mad embrace of the storm, we would come to the same conclusion, albeit tinged with a psychological hue. Victory's passionate gesture may then be assumed to be based on the well-known concept of auto-eroticism: pleasuring one's own body by self-caresses, by means of a current of water or wind, and so on. The choice of hypothesis is a matter of personal taste. In any case, it is now quite clear that the Greeks were not only familiar with the human body, but also knew quite a bit about the secrets of the gestures inherent in it and applied their knowledge to produce gestural persono-dynamic sculptures of genius. At this stage I shall leave gestural representations in ancient literary sources out of the discussion. This is also the reason why I shall not go into detail here about gestures in Judaism, a subject which has only rarely been addressed in the scholarly literature. Nevertheless, we cannot refrain from asking at this point, in the context of our discussion of awareness of the power of gesture in the ancient world, what the Jews of antiquity knew about it. At the time when the Greeks executed the *Winged Victory* the

Jews were putting the finishing touches on the Bible. This is thus the proper place to raise the question. Let us consider, as an example, the account of the Children of Israel's war against the Amalekites. The verses in question are one of the main (and also one of the very few) sources we possess about gestures among the ancient Jews; they provided the basis for many ritual laws and customs:

And Moses said unto Joshua: 'Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.' So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, *when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.* But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. *And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword* (Exodus 17:9-13).

On the one hand the gesture of raising the hand is presented as the source, or as an expression, of supreme power. The prophet's gestures decide the fates of nations. But on the other hand what decides the battle is not Moses' gesture but Joshua's sword. The Bible is apparently well aware of the gesture's power, but also recoils from it, perhaps because of its magical, even pagan, nature. The Bible may well have considered a gesture's ability to affect the actions of others as tinged in witchcraft. As part of its battle against idolatry it could therefore only view gestures with mistrust and reservation, to say the least. In general, reading the Old Testament can be full of surprises for the student of gesture. On the one hand it is full of gestures, consisting mostly of normative ritual performances, accompanied by acts of bowing, greeting, thanking, surrender, blessing, lamenting, and so on. The few published studies on gestures in the Bible¹¹ or in prayer¹² are devoted to this kind of gesture. On the other hand, the Old Testament is almost entirely devoid of spontaneous gestures. The question thus arises as to how it happened

that a book whose heroes are so expressive and the events it describes so dramatic could so completely ignore individual, one-time gestures and the personality dynamics they entail? Furthermore, the few examples of spontaneous gestures it does contain appear mostly in negative, problematic or unsavory contexts; such gestures are executed by Israel's enemies or by sinners. Here are two examples. In one we read of Balak's reaction to the blessing which Balaam pronounced over the Children of Israel, contrary to the Balak's instructions: "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together; and Balak said unto Balaam: 'I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times.'" (Numbers 24:10). The handclap is a spontaneous, emotional and very expressive gesture, indicating surprise and shock; it may be accompanied by some phonetic expression (a shout, a sigh, a sentence) or stand alone. In Kendon's terms this is a typical example of gesticulation, in contrast to emblems, pantomime and sign language. In the second example we see another gesture of the same type. Here King Jeroboam is cursed by the man of God because: "And he went up unto the altar which he had made in Beth-el on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and went up unto the altar, to offer." (Kings 1 12:33), following which:

And it came to pass, when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Beth-el, that Jeroboam put forth his hand from the altar, saying: 'Lay hold on him.' And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back to him. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. And the king answered and said unto the man of God: 'Entreat now the favour of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me.' And the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him, and became as it was before (I Kings 13:4-6).

Examples of spontaneous gesticulation in the Bible are quiet rare.¹³ Balak's gesture is only an accompaniment to his words. In Jeroboam's case the gesture appears as an

accompaniment and a non-verbal enhancement of the verbal command “Seize him!”, and becomes the medium whereby the king is punished for idolatry and for his humiliating behavior towards the man of God. Jeroboam’s gesture is represented as a violent and immoral act which brings on a curse, of course in the social-religious context of the battle against idolatry. Although the gesture is aimed at the man of God (it belongs to the class of deictic gestures) its meaning is aimed against God Himself. It is a gesture of provocation, and the reaction to it is immediate. Jeroboam’s hand is raised like a sharp sword, but his heavenly rival’s counterstroke disarms him. Here we cannot go into the dynamics which this gesture generates with respect to the observer-reader, but obviously this scene presents the gesture as a powerful weapon which can however become a two-edged sword, since it creates an interactive personality dynamics of a struggle for power.

The royal gesture of power and authority can end in helpless paralysis. In this lies a similarity between the gestures of Balak and Jeroboam: Both are executed in the context of the struggle against idolatry and both show man’s incapacity to dominate his own body and carry out his intention. Both gestures signal the loss of personal freedom in the encounter with the absolute other, an other which is dynamic, quick and takes by surprise. We can thus say that the Bible *is* aware of the characteristics and the power of gesture, although it only rarely depicts gesticulation in the context of the struggle against idolatry, magic and witchcraft, which among the surrounding peoples and also among idolatrous Jews were frequently associated with gestures and other bodily movements. Only normative, ritual, traditional gestures were representations which were deemed permissible. All the rest implied secrecy and danger. Gestures are weapons used in battle by cosmic and ethical forces, and must therefore be treated with great caution. The death

of personal gestures in the Bible is quite likely also related to the prohibition on graven images. It is certainly possible that reservations about representing gestures were based on the premise that such representations had the power to grant the figure's personality too much of a presence, bordering on actual existence, and consequently to create an intensive dynamic cognitive, emotional and motor interrelationship between the figure or text and the observer or reader, as characteristically happens between a pagan statue and its worshipper. As I have shown in another paper, spontaneous gesticulation plays an important role within a complex, usually paradoxical or dialectical dynamic convention of representing the body in the Bible.¹⁴

Let us now turn our attention eastward, away from the Levant. India is the homeland of the most highly developed (and most studied) system of knowledge about gestures in the world. In this system, probably for the first time in the history of mankind, gestures were perceived consciously and systematically not only as instruments of expression but also, or perhaps mainly, as instruments whereby man influenced himself, as self communication in the physical, cognitive and emotional channels. In ancient esoteric traditions, Tantrism for example, *mudrā* is perceived as one element in the mystic unity of the three components: body (*mudrā*), speech (*mantra*) and thought.¹⁵ *Mudrā* represents various embodiments of gods, the feminine reflection of the Buddha – Bodhisattva, or femininity itself, in the form of a union of mates in a sexual ceremony.¹⁶ The hands and the fingers represent powers and gods, letters and words.¹⁷ *Mudrās* are an integral part of religious ceremonies, meditation, yoga and dance (Fig. 4).

An ancient Indian legend tells of the birth of dancing: Indra and some other gods wanted to create this pastime and commanded Brahma to make a fifth Veda which would be

intended for all castes. Brahma, on the basis of the four existing Vedas, made a fifth, called “drama” (*Nāṭya*) and consisting of words, songs, gestures and aroma. Brahma then passed on the knowledge of drama to Bharata, who then wrote the *Art of Drama (Nāṭya Sastra)*, taught it to the gods and produced the first play.¹⁸ Since then both gods and mortals dance and in doing so also use mudrās. The purpose of the dance is to present the cosmic dramas, to experience unity, and to forget the self.¹⁹

Many scholars believe that the mudrās have their origins in “natural” gestures or in the written letters and words of mantras.²⁰ Mudrās first appeared in Buddhist ceremonies and art around the beginning of the Common Era, but only expanded, multiplied and took on symbolic magical and mystical meanings since the fifth century CE, due to the growth and dissemination of Tantrism.²¹ From India various mudrā traditions passed on to China, Tibet, Japan and other Far Eastern lands. The earliest manuscript in Chinese on ritual religious mudrās dates from 402-412 CE. The earliest illuminated manuscript is from Japan and dates from the end of the seventh century. Since then the number of mudrās has increased to about three-hundred, and have become part of the royal ceremonial in China and Japan. The mudrās (of both Buddhist and Hindu rites) have also spread to Java, Bali and Nepal. The number of manuscripts with instructions for the use of the mudrās and explanations of their symbolic and religious meaning has increased apace.²²

It is important to stress the connection between gesture and word in the mudrā methods, identical to the connection between the articulation of the hand and the articulation of the mouth, which was rediscovered by Freudian psychology. As an example we can choose, from among the hundreds of symbolic gestures in the Chinese theater, and the dozens of these which are deictic, the following interesting gesture: Pointing to the city gate. This is

a special gesture which is used for this purpose only. Usually a city's name consists of three hieroglyphs, which appear on the wall above the gate. The actor is required to point with his hand at the inscription with the city's name every time he reads a hieroglyph. Reading the city's name thus involves three acts of pointing, every time the name is pronounced.²³ This method, like other mudrā methods, is reminiscent of the gestural system which accompanies the study of the Torah among Yemenite Jews. These methods and conceptions are based, generally speaking, on a profound insight into the fundamental unity of three processes: The origination of thought/memory, the origination of speech, and the origination of gesture, as well as the cultural implications of this insight. As I pointed out above, recent theories in the study of gesture are based on the same insight.

Mudrā lore, especially the understanding of their persono-dynamic power, reached its apex in the meditative art of yoga and Tantrism. This is an art with many different techniques, such as projection of the god's figure onto the body (of the meditator), touching with one's fingers various parts of the body, including other fingers, and so on. Such gestures are meant to arouse a resonance in the student's body and mind in accordance with their symbolic meaning. The process of Tantric meditation consists of three stages: (1) Mentally constructing an image of the god while gazing at a picture ("visualization"). (2) Becoming one with the god; this is a unification of words, their visual images, their sounds and gestures (phonemes take on quasi-human features and turn into imaginary gestures, with color, brightness, movement); in the mind of the yogi an imaginary acoustic-visual-gestural world (the construct) is created, and the personality becomes lost in it. (3) The imaginary world (the construct) is destroyed by means of

imaginary gestures and events. (4) Emptiness and truth are experienced.²⁴ We may take this technique, which was formulated within Tantrism but certainly evolved from much earlier traditions,²⁵ to constitute a first cognitive model of how a reader processes a literary gesture. After all, one of the meanings of the word *mudrā*, according to a proposal by Otto Francke, is “writing” or “art of writing”. Fritz Hommel, too, supposes that the etymology of the word goes back to the Babylonian *musaru* – “writing”, in which the sound [s] turned into [z] as the word entered the Persian language, and then became [d]: *musaru* – *muzara* – *mudrā*.²⁶ David McNeill, one of the most prominent figures in the psycholinguistic study of gesture, was influenced by this approach when constructing his model of gestural origination. It is also important to point out that in ancient Tantric meditation the assimilation and execution of a gesture are part of a complex synergic system in which the cognitive processes of gesture representation processing activate (and are activated by) dynamic psycho-motor processes in the observer’s personality. In other words, *to read means to imagine, plan and carry out gestures*.

Another topic is Zen-Buddhism, where gestures are of extraordinary importance. Zen monks strive to enter a state of awareness in which words will not hide the truth. In order to attain this goal various discursive linguistic techniques have been developed, but the main method consists of non-verbal expression and behavior. The use of manual gestures and striking with a stick are very frequent occurrences in conversations among monks. Teachers clarify their ideas with the help of gestures. A monk who constructs an argument in the shape of an illuminating, well-turned gesture will have earned the appreciation of his teacher. Zen finds the hoped-for unity of silence and speech, negation

and affirmation, existence and non-existence, in gesture, which is nothing but the “absolute affirmation”.²⁷ Here is an example:

When Hyakujo (Pai-chang, 720-814) wished to decide who would be the next chief of the Tai-kuei-shan monastery, he called in two of his chief disciples, and producing a pitcher, which a Buddhist monk generally carries about him, said to them, “Do not call it a pitcher but tell me what it is”. The first one replied, “It cannot be called a piece of wood”. The Abbot did not consider the reply quite to the mark; thereupon the second one came forward, lightly pushed the pitcher down, and without making any remark quietly left the room. He was chosen to be the new abbot.²⁸

Life, as embodied in the motions of the body and in the relations between different bodies, is the absolute affirmation and the answer to all questions. A gesture is created as part of the dynamics of question and answer. Propositional processes combine with spatial-motor process to become inseparable from them; they condition and accelerate each other.

The official history of the study of gesture in the West begins with the Roman rhetorician Marcus Fabius Quintillian (35-95 CE) and his *Institutio Oratoria*. In his discussion of the fifth division of rhetoric, *pronunciatio*, which deals with actual performance, Quintillian has quite a bit to say about gesture. Did gestures play persono-dynamic roles in Roman rhetoric, in addition to their semantic and symbolic functions? They certainly did. According to Quintillian the perfect speaker can use his body language to arouse certain feelings in his audience, which help his message to come through; as Cicero wrote, “such passion always show[s] from your eyes, your face, your gestures, and even from your finger”.²⁹ Indeed, Roman speakers did reach such heights, and certainly realized that gestures were not merely an instrument of communication but were also capable of driving dynamic processes in complex inter-personal cognitive-emotional system.

In Roman art gestures appear in a variety of roles. Gesture marks the main figure in a composition, even if it is not spatially located in the center; the executor and the addressee of the gesture are isolated from both background and surrounding crowds.³⁰ A hand-gesture can be used to identify a figure or as an “eye-catching device”, as in the fragment of Trajan’s Column shown in Fig. 5. The Emperor’s gestures express authority and political might, and thus define the relations among the figures, whether the depicted scene is of the Emperor exhorting his soldiers or of the enemy’s surrender.³¹ This “eye-catching device” is in reality a cognitive mechanism, part of the attention management system. Elsewhere we shall inquire into the question of whether literary gestures also have such functions.

St. Augustine left no gesture unremarked. In his *On Christian Doctrine* he discusses the nature and types of signs. There he writes that a gesture is a sign intended only for the person to whom we want to communicate our desires and that actors converse with the audience by means of their eyes.³² Short as this passage is, it is enough to show that St. Augustine saw in gesture not only a mechanism for the transmission of meaning but also, and more importantly, a mechanism for the expression of the will. We may assume that this Christian philosopher understood personality interactions as a dynamic array of wants and desires, and perceived gestures as a powerful instrument for its operation and processing. His reference to actors is not coincidental: The theater is perceived as a pragmatic system for the origination of very intensive energetic dynamic processes. Interestingly enough, St. Augustine spoke not of gestures in conversations which actors held among themselves, but of the discourse between them and the audience. From this we can learn that observing a work of art can of-and-by-itself be understood as a

dialogue. Augustine's recognition of gesture's dynamic-psychological nature and of the *dynamic dialogue-like character of observing gestures in art* would appear to demonstrate a deep intuition, premature in one sense, but also reflecting and summarizing the role of gesture in Classical culture.

In the Middle Ages what Classical culture knew about gesture was not forgotten. There are those who see in gesture the connecting link between Graeco-Roman and Medieval art.³³ Furthermore, a gesture which in the Classical past was considered one (not dominant) element at the foundations of social life, could in the Middle Ages be transformed into an essential cultural feature. In fact, prominent students of the medieval period such as Marc Bloch and Jacques le Goff characterized the Middle Ages as a culture of gestures.³⁴ Simple gestures such as a handshake or raising one's hand not only expressed a meaning but also possessed a legal force more binding than written texts, signatures and stamps. Gestures were the most central and trustworthy document in that culture. In art and drama gesture was represented as the kind of event which can change the course of history, such as, for example, the gestures of Satan, Adam and Eve in the scenes of seduction and eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge presented in the mystery plays so popular at the time.³⁵ Gesture linked together body, will, ethics and medicine in a dynamic relationship.³⁶ This link found its practical expression in the fact that gestures often constituted the crossroads where various disciplines and occupations met, for example physiognomy, rhetoric, the plastic arts, pantomime, liturgy and politics.³⁷ In contrast to the meditative gestures of yoga or Buddhism, a medieval gesture is always directed towards someone else; the absolute other, God, is the ultimate source and authority and also the overt or covert object of every gesture.³⁸ In the fifth century CE

Martianus Capella determined or, more exactly, reconstructed, following Quintilian, the principle of the harmony of the three practical arts: rhetoric, poetry and gesture.³⁹ Subsequently the study of gesture lapsed, to revive only in the twelfth-to-thirteenth centuries.

Jean-Claude Schmitt, the number-one expert on medieval non-verbal communication, describes the concept of gesture among the Scholastics:

Even though historians have traditionally given it little importance, it seems to me that one of the important changes produced in the West during the XIIth century involves the attitudes towards the body. This change is marked notably by a new interest in gestures. [...] At the same time a definition of the word “gesture” is given, at the head of a veritable theory of gesture language, the first of its genre; it is found in the work of Parisian theologian Hugh of Saint Victor, in his *Institutione Noviciorum*: “*gestus est motus et figuratio membrorum corporis, ad omnem agendi et habendi modum.*” Gesture is the movement and figuration of the body’s limbs with an *aim*, but also according to the *measure* and *modality* proper to the achievement of all action and attitude. This voluntary distorted translation indicates the richness of such a definition, which merits a closer look here.

To begin with, gesture is considered a particular category of the more general notion of *movement*, which plays a central role in the philosophical and scientific revival of the XIIth century. Movement is no longer considered an attribute of each body, but the result of the interaction of all the elements in nature. Carried over to the human body, this idea of the interdependence in the movement of its limbs is essential; moreover it links these coordinated movements of the human body to the movements of the Universe, nature and society in vast harmony (*concordia*). [...]

The idea of “*figuratio*” underlines the visual dimension of this theory: in fact, gestures indicate the state of the inner soul (*intus*) on the outside of the body (*foris*). [...] Better still, this notion of figuration, at the same time as those of movement and agreement, attaches gesture to the esthetical ideas of that time: in the middle of the XIIth century, representation of the human body in the sculpture of tympanums used new models which consequently influenced man’s mastery of gestures.

The locution *ad modum* expresses first of all an idea of goal, of moral and material finality in the “discipline” of gestures (*disciplina*) [...] But the notion of “*modus*” seems to me to comprise a supplementary dimension – the idea of measure that Hugh of Saint Victor identified as the just milieu which results in the opposition of two vicious gestures opposite in meaning [...] The gestural norm is therefore neither a rigid rule nor a single state, but the dynamic and unstable outcome of opposites. A

permanent tension dwells in this definition of measure and constitutes the *modality* of gestures, the third meaning of the word *modus*.⁴⁰

At the end of the thirteenth century the study of gesture gained the status of a science (*ars*) in relation to music and voice through the works of the Franciscan monk Roger Bacon. These mark the beginning of the rehabilitation of gesture, together with that of the theater.⁴¹

It is important to stress here not the well-known medieval symbolism of the body, but rather the meaning of gesture as a legal document. Certainly the expected stability and permanence of documents would appear to be quite inconsistent with the variability and dynamism of gestures. For this reason the legitimacy of gestures is based on the human body's connections with the heavenly bodies. This connection is not unidirectional. It involves not only the delegation of authority from heaven downwards; the gesture affects the course of events in the universe and not only reflects them. The belief in the magical power of gesture and the belief in its legal force derive from the same ancient source – the experimental and experiential knowledge that a gesture *physically* influences the body of the person who executes it as well as that of its addressee. A gesture is a historical, and primarily ethical, event. Its religious symbolic and ritualistic significance are secondary. A given gesture becomes a document as soon as both sides realize that, like a sword, it leaves indelible marks on their bodies and souls, and that a gesture's impression on the body cannot be erased. The body will always remember the scars left on it by a gesture. The latter therefore constitutes a mechanism whereby memory - historical, sacred and private - is constituted. This function provided the basis for the secondary role of gesture,⁴² namely as a mnemonic technique, similar (in function if not in form) to the gestural technique used by Yemenite Jews when learning the Torah. The body's memory

is not only stronger and more long-lasting than other memories; it is also the most trustworthy and authentic, and consequently the most legitimate. It is a benign memory which does not repeatedly harass its carrier with cyclical compulsiveness but lies there, like a precious document, on one of the most orderly shelves in the quietest of the halls of memory. This gestural document can be evoked and reanimated as soon as the other applies and demands it, that is in a moment of taking responsibility. A gesture is a code for taking responsibility for changes which a person makes in his world, in others and in himself. If the medieval gestural document is symbolic, it so mainly in the following sense: A symbol, too, is a code for identifying the other and for taking responsibility for encountering him and relating to him in the past. And if the gestural document expresses anything, it is first-and-foremost the processes whereby a happy, harmonious personality originates, one which is excited at the realization and the feeling that at the moment of executing the gesture it fulfills its transcendental destiny in empirical history. Such a personality knows that through its gestures it is writing itself, that it is inscribing the story of its coming into being in the eternal book of life. In that sense we can speak of *medieval gesture as a mechanism for creating the myth of that personality*. A gesture is a becoming which is but a dialectic of dynamism and stasis, of process and object, of change and stability. For this reason it can arise in a person so freely, spontaneously and elegantly, and yet can also be preserved and survive in its necessary form, which compels and is compelled by social reality. If this reality changes, the gesture will shape up in its limitless flexibility and again constitute a legal document, and at the same time also serve as living testimony for this change which occurred in the past. Gesture as an event lies outside the dichotomy of action and sign. In the twentieth century intellectuals such as

Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva argued that gestures do not involve actions, but rather the death of movement.⁴³ Yet today it is possible to overcome once more both this dichotomy as well as the “deadly charm” of poststructuralism and to reconstruct, in a modern scientific manner, the analytics of gesture as an event.

As we just saw, what Zen monks knew about gesture was known also to knights, monks and artists in medieval Europe. The Renaissance revitalized the anatomical concept of gesture in the plastic arts. The gestures of Michelangelo’s muscular figures come naturally and with harmonic ease out of the body’s structure, continuing and completing the tensing of tendons and the flow of blood in arteries. A gesture does not require religious legitimization: It is always legitimate, since it is part of the organism. The organic nature of gestures is the source of their harmony, effectiveness and beauty. All these differences notwithstanding, the perception of gesture as an event was retained, and its anatomical-dynamic development proved so successful that it became an artistic canon for the centuries which followed. Regard Michelangelo’s scene of the creation of Adam on the Sistine Chapel ceiling (Fig. 6). Here the Vatican’s supreme artist interprets the act of man’s creation not in the usual manner, i.e. as breathing the breath of life into him, but as the gesture of touch. Adam already exists, but he is only body. It is the gesture which brings to life his human, spiritual side and creates his personality. As a matter of fact there are two gestures here, not one, each moving and stretching towards the other: God’s and Adam’s. The painting depicts the dialogical and interpersonal dynamics of the emergence of gesture. There is no contact in the painting; the double gesture is one of a *permanently “not yet consummated” touch*, of constant tension, movement and becoming. One cause of tension is its asymmetry: God’s domineering, energetic gesture

of giving, as against Adam's limp gesture of receiving. But the slightest lift of a finger suffices to make the event happen, for the life of body and soul to flow, commingle and become inseparable. Muscles tense, and the body bends and turns lightly: The gesture involves effort and struggle. Perhaps it is the eternal effort to do the impossible – to reach the other, to overcome the distance, to fill space, so ominous in its emptiness, with a physical human presence, to fill it with love. Michelangelo's painting represents gesture as a *dynamics of passion*. Furthermore, Adam's body and gaze turn not only towards God in reaction to His movement but also towards Eve, who awaits her own creation under God's left arm. The body, so present and so exposed, is not the means of gesture, but rather its cause and its aim.

In the wake of, and in connection with, this anatomistic development, the late Renaissance witnessed a mechanistic revolution in the perception of gesture, following which the first textbooks on gymnastics and acrobatics appeared. The very first book of this kind, published in 1599 by Arcange Tuccaro, drew its inspiration from the Aristotelian tradition.⁴⁴ In 1644 the London physician John Bulwer published a book on the art of speechmaking, *Chirologia et Chirognomia* and thirty years later, again in London, George Dalgarno published a first book of its kind on the sign-language of deaf-mutes. Between the years 1756 and 1786 Johann-Jacob Engel prepared a systematic classification of gestures and other means for expressing emotions.⁴⁵ When the entry "Geste", written by the playwright Louis de Cahusac, appeared in the French *Encyclopedie*, it was devoted entirely to the role of gestures in dance, the theater and the opera, and quite ignored any religious, ritual, ethical or everyday aspects of their use.

In Montaigne's *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* gesture is conceived as a natural, universal language, reflecting an approach which was in vogue during the Enlightenment. In the writings of Rousseau and Diderot gestures are taken to have constituted primitive mankind's first language, a preliminary, pre-linguistic, means for expressing feelings. Gestures have been compared to hieroglyphics (for example, by Frances Bacon).⁴⁶ Since then an ever-increasing number of studies on gesture, looks and facial expressions has appeared, and an expanding philosophical, philological and linguistic discussion has taken place on the role of gesture and of the body in general in the origination of language and the evolution of civilization. Growing social awareness culminated in 1832 in the appearance of the first ethnographical study on gesture, Andrea de Jorio's well-known *La Mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano (Gesture in Naples and Gesture in Classical Antiquity)*, in which the author discusses the cultural uniqueness of gestures and the way their meanings depend on the specific context of the conversation. From that point onwards the study of gesture has taken two main paths, one physiological-evolutionary (influenced by Charles Darwin) and the other social-cultural (under the influence of de Jorio, and later also Robert Hertz). Studies using both methods continue to be carried out to this day, but the debates between them, which typified the nineteenth century, subsided in the twentieth century and gave rise to a third, unifying approach, which takes social, evolutionary and ecological factors into consideration. This latter approach is exemplified by Gregory Bateson's and Margaret Mead's joint study of bodily cultural habits in Bali.⁴⁷

As already mentioned above, today the study of gesture has developed into a complete discipline, with a rich body of knowledge and multiple schools of thought, some of which

make it possible to view gesture as an integral component of complex interactive speech and language systems, as well as important element in the creation and appreciation of art. Even a brief survey of some of the theories which have been developed within the framework of these schools of thought will show how solid a base the modern study of gesture gives to the intuitions of the ancients concerning the role of gesture in major cultural practices.

Wilhelm Wundt in his *Völkerpsychologie*, first published in 1900 (a chapter was later translated into English and published as *The Language of Gestures*), is of the opinion that artists' hand movements while at work, that is the motions of sculpting and painting (to which writing may be added), are nothing more than evolved very complex transformations of simple descriptive (imitative) gestures made by "grasping organs", i.e. the hands.⁴⁸ Wundt speaks of art growing out of gestures, at the ontogenetic, evolutionary level. To this a phylogenetic level must be added, since in an artist's personal development and in the psycho-physiology of his works gestural mechanisms are involved which affect his or her thinking, feeling, and bodily actions.⁴⁹ Wundt writes:

Different forms of mimed gestures have a firm relationship with the beginnings of graphic art. The indicative gesture is to some extent a primeval form of drawing, not utilizing lasting materials as a medium, but consisting of transitory movements which recall the object, since these gestures call forth the same image from the viewer. [...] A certain analogy between gesture and the products of graphic art exists in signs of simple demonstrative meaning.⁵⁰

In his discussion of the origins of art and the history of primitive art such as rock paintings, pictography and ritual dance, Wundt develops his ideas further:

The primitive work of art may give pleasure after it has come into being, but wherever it is totally absent, it cannot exercise any pleasure-stimulating effects. What, on the other hand, is peculiar to this primitive art is the drive to reveal the emotions in their natural expressive forms of mimic and pantomimic movements. The effective pantomimic expressions especially enliven and increase the contents of the affects

themselves. As the primitive animal dance imitates the movements of the animals (memory calling forth affects similar to those which the animal itself aroused), so the drawing is at first only an expression of the lively remembrance of an object reinforcing itself by pantomimic movements.⁵¹

These thoughts lead him to an important insight concerning the gestural origins of writing: “Within this zone of transition where pictography is still both image and writing – image in its directly perceptible meaning and writing in its purpose of communication – it is clearly recognizable that gestural communication and pictography influence one another.”⁵²

Wundt’s book began a trend which reached a climax, so it would seem, in the contemporary psycholinguistic study of gesture. The research done by David McNeill and his students is based on the hypothesis of a deep-level cognitive unity of thought, speech and gesture. Gesture is conceived of as a thought, as a cognitive entity.⁵³ The processes of speech and gesture production are not separate and together they constitute a dynamic chaotic system possessing a self-organizing character.⁵⁴ McNeill is especially interested in the relations of gesture to discourse and narrative speech. He claims that gestures reflect the discursive functions of the sentences which accompany them.⁵⁵ Different types of gesture fulfill different pragmatic functions: iconic (or representative) gestures reflect the narrative level of speech, that is they provide a pictorial representation of the events and their participants; metaphorical and deictic gestures reflect the meta-narrative level, that is they appear as comments on the structure of the narrative itself and on the relation between various figures and objects in the story, and represent the story as an assemblage of objects in space; at the para-narrative level (involving the speaker’s relation to the gesture space itself) deictic gestures appear; gestures called “beats” transmit no content, but mark changes in levels of speech.⁵⁶ To these discursive levels

there exist three corresponding spatial modes: concrete or topographical space (gestures which map the physical space), referential space (gestures which divide up the space and determine relationships between these divisions and different figures) and structural space (gestures which mark continuity or discontinuity in the development of the theme).⁵⁷

At the microlevel McNeill analyzes what he calls, following Vigotsky, the basic unit of expression, which unites gesture (possessing a synthetic and comprehensive character) and language (possessing a linear and discontinuous character). This unit usually corresponds to the linguistic-gestural sentence constructed around a “growth point” – the word-image created in the depths of the speaker’s consciousness moments before the utterance.⁵⁸ The growth point preserves linguistic-gestural unity in the performed utterance as well. It is realized in the same place in the sentence which corresponds to the gesture’s stroke.⁵⁹ It appears as a “significant (newsworthy) contrast”, which distinguishes the new (idea, expression, behavior) from the background of the context.⁶⁰

The stream of thought, according to McNeill, advances in circles in which points of growth are created and broken, in cycles of organization and disintegration, order and chaos.⁶¹ The studies of McNeill’s school lead to the following hypothesis: if indeed there is a basic cognitive unity to thought, speech and gesture, and if gesture do in fact encode various pragmatic discursive and narrative functions, then it may be surmised that:

1. Descriptions of gestures in works of literature activate in the reader the same dynamic cognitive system which is activated in speech accompanied by physical gestures;

2. *Just as gestures encode discursive and narrative structures, so do discursive and narrative structures encode gestures. Therefore reading any text (not just one which describes gestures) activates the cognitive system of gesture origination.* Usually in the case of silent reading the activity of this system stops at the planning stage and is never implemented, although it can bring about the performance of micro-gestures which can be seen at the micro-muscular level.

Another school of thought in contemporary gesture studies is represented by the works of Bryan Butterworth, Robert Krauss and Uri Hadar, Geoffrey Beattie, Pierre Feyereisen and Jacques-Dominique de Lannoy. According to their approach gesture and speech are conceived as communicative systems which are autonomous but linked in a certain way, differently from the way they are presented in McNeill's approach. Krauss and Hadar have constructed a gesture production model based on Levelt's speech production model; they claim that the speech production system uses the gesture production system for the purpose of retrieving words.⁶² Krauss and Hadar write:

[The model] assumes gestures to be products of memorial representations rather than of communicative intentions. What we believe to be involved are interconnected systems containing concepts, lemmas, long-term visuospatial representations and motor schemata so arranged that the activation of any concept can result in the activation of a loosely connected motor schemata.⁶³

The most important aspect of Krauss and Hadar's work from our perspective is that *every word can activate a motor scheme*. Whether this is taken to be a hypothesis or a fact, it deserves to be taken into account in the development of a cognitive model of literary gesture processing and tested theoretically and experimentally. One can presume that reading a text activates word-encoded visual and spatial representations. These representations in turn activate gestural motor schemata, programs and frames. In

contrast to speakers, readers do not have to search for words, perform lexical gestures, reflect them to themselves and to use them as aids in the formulation mechanism. In other words, the gesture planning mechanism's output consists of mental gestures – more complex representations which constitute the input to the reading system at a higher level of organization, the level of understanding the text's conceptual meaning. It thus turns out that on the basis of Krauss and Hadar's speech model a preliminary reading gesture model can be constructed: relatively simple concepts activate mental gestures and the latter are then integrated into the production of more complex concepts (we should add here that as a side-effect of activating motor schemata that do not attain full implementation micro-gestures and micro-muscular movements may appear. These do not constitute input for conceptualization but are nevertheless integrated into the overall cognitive-emotional-physical reading system and are linked to gestures and the system's other components).

The study of the role played by gesture in speech comprehension can help in the construction of a reading gesture model. Feyereisen and de Lannoy make a distinction between semantic and non-semantic processes in the complex task of participating in communication. According to them interpretation of the message integrates information transmitted in verbal and non-verbal channels.⁶⁴ Gestures are amalgamated into processes such as making expression decisions and making judgments concerning the truth and acceptability of messages; they affect reaction and comprehension times, help solve problems of ambiguity and disorientation; and, finally, gestures affect the work of memory storage and retrieval.⁶⁵

In reading there is ostensibly just one channel of communication – the discursive channel. But cognitive processing of discursive information involves various different types of representations and activates various types of schemata. We may therefore speak of interrelationships between different channels of mental representation processing – propositional and gestural. The profound cooperation between these two channels, which possesses a phylogenetic as well as an ontogenetic base, may express itself also at this level of the system. Underlying this hypothesis is the assumption of the unity of speech and reading, anchored in bodily activity. Mark Johnson and George Lakoff have shown that consciousness and language (and thus reading and writing as well) are based on bodily experience which includes, among other things, movements and spatial and gestural experience, so that metaphors and many abstract concepts turn out to constitute elaborations of certain relations in the physical-bodily world. Johnson argues for the existence of different dynamic schemata which organize experience and consciousness. These he calls “embodied schemata”, “image schemata” and “metaphorical projections”.⁶⁶ Paul Deane expanded the boundaries of Johnson’s and Lakoff’s theory and applied it to grammar, in particular to syntax. He claims that not only concepts but also syntactic structures are based on bodily schemata.⁶⁷

The interaction between speech and gesture is plain to see; it “only” demands a suitable scientific explanation. What is much less obvious is the assumption of a relation between *language* and gesture. David F. Armstrong, William C. Stokoe and Sherman E. Wilcox claim, based on extensive theoretical and experimental data, that language develops, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically, out of bodily motions, out of the experience of contact with the physical environment and with physical objects, out of gestural and

spatial needs.⁶⁸ Gestures are the source of syntax, the sentence, and relations among signs, symbols and words.⁶⁹ The body and gestures, language and speech all constitute a single synergetic system constructed of many layers of complex schemata.⁷⁰ Stokoe and Marschark claim that gesture is the primeval sign and that gesture syntax conforms to sentence syntax.⁷¹ At the evolutionary level gestures were the first, perhaps also the most important, stage in the transition from ape to thinking, signing and speaking *homo erectus*.⁷² Bernard Koechlin conceives of speech, painting and creative endeavor in general as modifications of gesture, which create a bond between the real and the imagined and make the transition from the concrete to the abstract possible.⁷³

Genevieve Calbris, following Ivan Fonagy, describes “phono-gestural parallelism” and speaker-hearer synchronization.⁷⁴ She speaks of the overlap between kinetic, visual, emotional and poetic representations.⁷⁵ Just as the motions of the speech mechanism correspond to the motions of the body as a whole (in Fonagy’s approach), so also intonation corresponds to the body motions of both addresser and addressee.⁷⁶ Calbris quotes Fonagy, according to whom there exists a correspondence between emotions and movements of language and body.⁷⁷ Gesture, so Calbris claims, are not arbitrary, but rather “motivated and conventional” at one-and-the-same time.⁷⁸ She notes the physical-semantic connection which is characteristic of French gestures.⁷⁹ Gestures function as an interpretation of verbal expression, creating metaphorical and etymological links which bridge between the abstract and the concrete.⁸⁰

Benard Rimé and Loris Schiaratura propose a three-dimensional representational network model:

We come then to a consideration of our representations of reality as containing three types of element: (1) concepts and verbal attributes likely to be articulated into language propositions, (2) images, and (3) incipient somatonic changes reminiscent of the various motor responses involved in the perception of the referent. [...] Through their interactions, somatonic elements of a representation form with imagery the active reminiscence of the apprehension process. [...] Each of the three elements has the property of eliciting, or cueing the two others. Thus, concepts, images, and motor changes are equally appropriate inputs to the network of elements that constitutes the representation. Each element of a network is itself associated with elements of other networks or representations, because of either structural analogy or former evocation in spatiotemporal contiguity. Therefore, any new external or mental event is likely to elicit through its own representational components the activation of motoric, imagistic, or conceptual elements associated with other representational networks. Although motoric elements usually go unnoticed by the subject, the imagistic ones are perceived, and the conceptual elements accompanying them are articulated and rationalized through the sense-giving activity of silent language. This gives rise to the continuous flow of inner speech and imagery characteristic of mental life. [...] Accompanying labels and concepts become richer and more apt. Successive repetition of this cognitive work may lead the network to the point that its linguistic formalization is completed.⁸¹

The preceding passage constitutes a clear summation of a position which can constitute a philosophical basis for the study of gesture in literature (and art): *reading any text may involve mechanisms which produce mental and physical gestures in the reader; such gestures are an inseparable part of the reading experience, which includes not only acquisition, comprehension and interpretation, but also bodily experience and activation.*

Fig. 7 presents the cognitive model of literary gesture processing I developed on the basis of the theories reviewed above.⁸²

We read with the body. That is what turns reading into performance and action, and thus into a part of life. As we have seen, the interactive nature of represented, and even of non-represented, gesture appears as an important, if not crucial, esthetic and poetic element in the works of art and cultural practices of different periods. Gesture as a

phenomenological, anthropological and esthetic category can be thus a powerful tool in the discussion of art.

B. Gesture is an anthropological motive of art. A paradox: the real gesture is a non-realized one.

What is art? This is a generative, not an essential, question. In other words, it does not ask “What is the essence” or “What is the structure” of art, but rather “What is the motivation” for art. “What is art?” means “Why is art?”. Let us first break out of Heidegger’s cycle, where art is derived from the artist who is derived from an act of art, and so on. The question of “Why art?” is not about the source but rather about motivation and conditions, in other words, it is a question of drive and choice. These drive and choice are always concrete human *events* – cognitive and emotional, bodily and material. In the human body, in the perception of its limits nature becomes man, as Helmuth Plessner claimed.⁸³ Therefore the question of “What is art?” is a cultural-anthropological question. Now we must avoid the double temptation of perceptualism and institutionalism. Art is never “perceived”, neither in terms of an establishment nor in terms of experience and emotion. Art always *happens* or comes into being, as Roman Ingarden has already shown; it always “becomes art” and never already “is art”. The preceding statement is not philosophical at all, but purely anthropological: art becomes art when and as long as its anthropological motives are operative and the cultural conditions continue to exist. Now let us overcome the strongest temptation of all, the

political temptation. Politics is a kind of cultural activity driven by anthropological motives. Therefore from a taxonomical aspect it is equivalent to art and does not belong to the level of motives. And thus we are left in the pure space of anthropology. We should stress that this is not an “anthropology of art”: our purpose and our occupation are not anthropological but rather have to do with esthetics and thinking about art. A better name for what we do here would be “anthropological esthetics”, which should also be distinguished from an esthetic discussion of the objects of anthropological and ethnographical research.

Anthropology is not a uniform discipline; however, it is not possible, nor is it necessary, to isolate any specific domains within it for the purposes of the present discussion. Any domain can be of use at the right time and the right place, whether it be physical, social, cognitive, philosophical or any other kind of anthropology. The small bricks which build up what counts as the “why” of art can be texts, bodily techniques, symbols or myths. Still, assuming that art is a bodily-material occurrence, we can focus on certain elements without having to disperse over an unbounded territory. The immediate topic of our discussion is thus *gestural symbolism*. Our choice of aspect is not arbitrary. It is based on two basic assumptions which will be examined anew in the course of the discussion: according to the first assumption, whose roots go back to the classical work by Wilhelm Wundt, art is gesticulation; the second assumption, which can claim support from such disparate approaches as those of Susanne Langer⁸⁴ and Hans-Georg Gadamer,⁸⁵ is that *art is gesticulation which originates symbols*. Let us be quite clear: the gestures in question are not symbolic (emblems, icons and so on), for between them and art there exists no necessary connection.

Our discussion of art, since it is in fact anthropological, is empirical and inductive. That this is so is a consequence, again, not of philosophical considerations but of the necessity (or possibility) of the discipline itself. When we say that art is a bodily-gestural event, we are stating that the motives and the conditions for the coming into being of art are the motives and the conditions of gesture; not gesture as metaphor, as simile or as a philosophical concept, but gesture as an actual physical event, which fills and takes control of the work of art and both the artist's and the observer's mind and imagination. We shall construct the esthetical discussion as an anthropology of the body and of non-verbal communication. This method does not depend on the kind of art – verbal or non-verbal. We make the assumption, made plausible for example by the work of Mark Johnson,⁸⁶ that the motives of symbolizing gesticulation are to be found at the foundations of verbal activity as well. When Jean Baudrillard writes about the artist's gesture in putting his signature on his work of art,⁸⁷ or when Kristine Santilli writes about the gesture of a poem towards the absent beloved (reader),⁸⁸ what they are actually writing about is gestural anthropological esthetics, but in a non-systematic fashion. Their discussions are based on an anthropological approach: in the case of Baudrillard it is that of man preoccupied with originating/reconstructing his subjectivity; in the case of Santilli man is conceived as trapped within an infinite/unrealized desire for the other. These conceptions by themselves are not connected at all to the anthropology of gesture. They do, however impose certain philosophical conceptions on gesture. Philosophers think up gestures in order to use them to link their philosophical positions to art. We take up this discourse here, but with a difference in approach, moving from gesture to art.

Wilhelm Wundt was one of the first scholars in modern times to have noted the connection between art and gesture. However, there are important differences between his approach and ours. Wundt's hypothesis, like that of Diderot before him, was that an artist creates because he performs gestures and through them. We claim, in contrast, that *artistic creation and gesture have one-and-the-same cause*. Not only does Botticelli paint his "The Annunciation" because he is performing a gesture and in order to perform a gesture; "The Annunciation" is motivated by the same cause which motivates (Botticelli's, the observer's, and the painted figure's) gesture.

One would expect that if a gesture is represented in a painting or a text the path of analysis from its motive to the motive of the work of art would be shorter and more obvious. But this is not quite true, since after all a representation and a subject could have motives that are completely different from those of art. Even the anthropology of representation, which is closely connected to the anthropology of gesture and constitutes an integral part of anthropological esthetics, will not cling to the represented object or event. Furthermore, the representation of gesture in discourse will often appear as a rhetorical figure or as a kind of epic formula, cliché or metaphor. In such a case the representation of the gesture means that the gesture has not been actually performed. For example, if today we can say to someone "I take my hat off to you", that is because in our culture we do not in fact take off our hats any more as a mark of respect. Language by the very act of originating a substitute-expression preserves and processes its historical-cultural memory. One cannot both use this expression and at the same time also perform the gesture in question. Here is another example. When Teodoro, the main character in Lope de Vega's play "Dog in the Manger", says to the Countess Diana or to the Count

Ludovico “I kiss your feet” he neither does nor intends to carry out such an action. The substitution is not at the level of performance, but at the level of cultural memory. The (unperformed) gesture is not the cause of the rhetorical figure here; the appearance of the rhetorical figure has the same (pragmatic, psychological, ethical) cause which the performance of this gesture had in the past. Representing the gesture thus does not shorten the process of analysis; in fact, it may even lengthen it, whenever the need arises to explain not only the motive for the gesture but also the motive for the absence or non-performance of a gesture, or its substitution by a representation.

There are of course cases in which the motive for representing a gesture is identical to the motive of the gesture itself, and is therefore also identical to the artistic motive. In such cases the work of art will possess greater expressive (performative) power, not necessarily due to an artistic theme or technique. Let us examine two paintings of the annunciation, one by Botticelli (1489-1490) (fig. 8) and the other by Leonardo (1472-1475) (fig. 9). In both the angel’s gesture of annunciation and Mary’s gesture are represented, but the difference between the gestures in both pictures is tremendous. Whereas in Leonardo’s painting the angel as expected performs a traditional annunciation gesture, of the type found in numerous medieval and later works, in Botticelli’s painting the annunciation gesture is transformed into the gesture of touch. Mary’s gesture as rendered by Leonardo expresses her refusal to accept the annunciation whereas Botticelli’s Mary flinches back from contact. In Leonardo’s painting the gesture is a sign, an emblem, a ritual, whereas in Botticelli’s case it is a spontaneous, uncontrollable movement. With Leonardo each figure’s gesture stands by itself; they are linked together only by the source text on which the painting is based. In Botticelli’s work, on the other

hand, a living interactive dynamic process develops, one which any observer can understand intuitively, even without knowledge of the connection to the Gospel. In the two paintings the gestures derive from completely different motives. Compared to Leonardo's canonical interpretation the human drama which Botticelli depicts is scandalous: the angel tries to touch the Virgin because he is so inflamed with passion that he cannot control himself; she is frightened and flinches back from the power of his feelings, embodied in his gesture, and especially in his gaze. The angel's facial expression, which cannot be seen clearly in photographs but possesses an astonishing power when viewed on the original work, is quite unambiguous: he is quite plainly love-sick. Just as the angel wants to touch Mary in his gesture, so Botticelli wants to touch her in his painting. The motive of this work is identical to the motive of the gesture. All the other poetic and compositional elements of the painting are derived from the gesture's essence and purpose: the proximity of the two figures, in contrast to the distance and intervening furniture in Leonardo's painting, and the erotic, sensually provocative way Mary's body and dress are bent. The gesture's representation is drawn from anthropological conceptions – about man, the human body, communication, revelation and faith. Botticelli's revelation is touch, drama, the movement of passion; the body is spontaneous, uncontrollable, vibrating and dancing, twisting and bending in excitement, always connected to the body of an other with invisible yet powerful threads. Divine love is human love, and vice versa. A tiny, almost negligible, change in the positioning of the angel's right-hand fingers, transforms the gesture of sanctity and annunciation into one of desire. Or perhaps it is the other way around: the painting shows how *a ritual gesture originates out of a spontaneous one, exposing at the heart of a symbolic emblem the*

unrealized and impossible touching of an other, of the holy, the mother, the origin of all longing and yearning.

In Botticelli's representation, in contrast to Leonardo, the gesture is unstable, not only as a result of its interactive nature, but also, and mainly, due to its ability to arouse, to stimulate spontaneous and unexpected reactions. In other words, he creates *a chaotic gesture*: he catches the figures in a moment of hesitation, of choice and decision, at a kind of bifurcation point where what happens next is not known, when anything can happen. Their bodies are not in postures but in an unstable momentum of movement. Their centers of gravity are located outside the body, in the empty space between their outstretched hands. It is from this empty space that the painting's conceptual and esthetic purposes are derived; the very need to create art, the demand for art, arises from it. Art comes in to fill this lack, this empty space which touches the edge of gesture. And although Leonardo's painting is less dynamic, gestural, intimate and erotic, it is derived from the same motivation.

But why gesture? What is its motive? And why is it a gesture which originates the work of art and not, say, a neurosis or a trauma? Of course a gesture may have a psychological motive/function, psycholinguistic for example, as when it helps extract words during speech production or in coping with stress and nervousness. The communicative and expressive functions of gesture appear self-evident, in which the sign origination mechanism (including symbol and emblem origination) would appear to be included. Its legal (as in medieval times) and agonistic (playful, as in the eighteenth century) uses can also be considered part of the communicative function. In addition we can speak about its ethical function, which is realized in the act of vacating space for an other (as in an

invitation, reception, hosting), and even in the origination and presencing of an other, as in pointing and touching; touching seems to be an extreme case of pointing, whereas pointing can be deemed to constitute an embryonic, undeveloped case of touching. While this typology is valid and justified, it does involve a number of difficulties which weaken its stability and reliability. In psycholinguistics there are furious debates on whether gestures accompany the production of speech or constitute an integral part of it. Emblem-gestures do not necessarily become symbols: Churchill's famous "V" gesture, for example, has become an emblem for victory, but not a symbol. The medieval legal gesture is closer to the ethical gesture of the origination of the other, because it can be better considered as creating a new reality than as expressing a given one. Consequently it, together with the ethical gesture, approaches the magical gesture which is not necessarily connected to ritual or expression. Finally, ethical gestures also do not appear to be so unambiguous when one realizes, for example, that a pointing gesture can be perceived as a gesture of objectification, of appropriation and control, in other words as a gesture of totalitarianism, the complete opposite of ethics. So what can we assume in this area of ambivalence and uncertainty? One thing is clear: the philosophy and philosophical anthropology of gesture have yet to be developed and have yet to provide reliable methods of classification and interpretation. Thus, for example, Moshe Barash's interpretation of gestures in Renaissance paintings is based on predetermined symbolic meanings of gestures.⁸⁹ Such an approach is in danger of circularity: if we want to find out the symbolic meanings of gestures we must not ascribe any specific *a priori* meanings to them. The analytics and the dialectics of gesture should be constructed in the space *before* the symbol so that we will be able to see how the symbol grows out of that

space. What does this have to do with art? I suppose that art emerges out of the same space. The symbols born of gestures are traces of the art which grows from gestural roots. Go follow the symbol's tracks to the gesture from which it originated and you will find the motive of art.

Here it is perhaps appropriate to say a few words about symbols and their definition. This is a subject which resists exhaustive treatment. One can describe dozens of theories of symbolism, old and new, as did Tzvetan Todorov,⁹⁰ or one can turn symbolism into a key to esthetics and philosophy in general as Susanne Langer did. But the mystery of the symbol remains. The reason for this is simple: symbol and mystery are synonyms. A symbol is chaos in the precise, scientific meaning of that word. Certainly we internalize symbols in childhood or, if you will, we acquire them together with the "collective subconscious". But in fact symbols always turn out to be like an explosion. They do not have multiple meanings – their meanings are infinite and unexpected, and there exists no way to know how and when a symbol will appear and strike its emotional and mental blow, just as it is impossible to predict how a person will react to that blow. Essentialist and functionalist discussions will not be of much help here. Again, as in the case of art, one can only point to a symbol's origin and explain the motive for its creation. For this purpose we may seek support in models of sign origination, such as Eric Gans' generative anthropology, according to which the preliminary sign is created out of a failed gesture of appropriation.⁹¹ The power of a gesture of appropriation lies in its transparency, its visibility, its devastation unambiguousness. But when it is deferred, when it freezes at the limit of violence and shakes in hesitation it becomes uncertain and unpredictable, and so it can become transformed into a mystery and a symbol. But this

model is insufficient. It is impossible to explain the wealth of symbolism by means of a single gesture, especially in light of the fact that even in its hesitation it does not become really chaotic but only opens up to a second possibility – the possibility of stopping and moving backwards. This constitutes a possibility of death beside life rather than of a big bang of limitless possibilities of life as is the case with a real symbol.

And yet Gans' idea of a deferred gesture, like Derrida's impossible gift, leads our discussion towards an important insight and a useful distinction: not philosophically or metaphorically, but in a completely precise, nearly positivist sense, *the deferred, hesitant, unrealized gesture turns out, when represented in a work of art, to constitute a memory and a narrative which tells of the origination of a symbol and a work of art, of the motive for the origination of art.* The distinction between a realized and an unrealized gesture is important: it is the distinction between order and chaos, between silence and speech, between necessity and freedom. But how can we make such a distinction in practice? At what moment does an unrealized gesture become realized? This issue is no more and no less complex and solvable than the distinction between essence and becoming in philosophy; in fact, it is one of its manifestations. Since we can hardly go into this matter in detail here we shall limit ourselves to the test case of a gesture in which the complex distinction we spoke of appears somewhat less murky – *the gesture of touch.* At first glance it would seem that the moment of physical contact between the two people participating in the communicative scene is the gesture's climax/stroke and realization; after all touch is, so it would seem, its purpose. This intuitive self-evidence is suspicious, of course, and will be examined together with other assumptions in the discussion below. Armed with this hypothesis let us now undertake a short survey of a series of paintings

from different periods and schools, in the center of which stands an explicit unrealized gesture, usually one of touch-non-touch, a partial, strange, implicit, deferred, hidden, mistaken, failed, etc. gesture. This survey will prove useful for both anthropological esthetics and iconography, as well as for the (cultural, historical, communicative) anthropology of gesture and the body.

Nikolai Ge's painting "What Is Truth?" (1890) (fig. 10) contains a simple communicative scene: Pontius Pilate asks Christ the title question and accompanies his verbal utterance, which is not represented visually in any way, with a gesture of extending the right hand and raising it to shoulder height. In terms of Paul Ekman's classification⁹² this gesture would be defined as an *illustrator*, which accompanies speech for the purpose of explanation or emphasis. But even a preliminary look at the painting shows quite clearly that this gesture (Pilate's arm, palm and fingers) is the work's significant center. From an iconographic point of view, as well as from the perspective of spatial-proxemic dynamics, the gesture represents the distance and the proximity between the two figures and thus becomes something much more important than an accompaniment to speech and larger than a visual and dramatic translation of the utterance which the title expresses explicitly. The perspective space between Pilate's fingertips and Jesus' shoulder is hardly discernable. The gesture is projected onto a two-dimensional plane, in which Pilate's hand looks as if it almost touches his interlocutor's shoulder. Thus an *illustrator-gesture* is transformed into an unrealized gesture of touch. It stops not because the painter, like a photographer, caught it in the middle, but to the contrary, because he describes its stroke, its only accessible climax, the last impassable boundary on whose other side gesture is no longer possible. This is the boundary of human consciousness. Christ is presented, of

course, as truth incarnate. The truth/deity motivates the gesture of recognition but at the same time defers it. *Pilate's gesture thus does not accompany the question; rather, it is itself the question, the eternal aporia, the unsuccessful attempt to touch the other. Ge's art is derived from this vibrant non-touch. What gives life to the painting is neither the religious quest in and of itself, nor the aporia itself with which so many torment themselves, but rather the gestural conception of the torments of the aporia and of the quest.*

What causes and enables this Russian painter to conceive of the aporia as a gesture of non-touch? First of all, it is the Gospel narrative itself. Pilate's hand alludes to another gesture of his – the washing of the hands, which has been transformed from a functional act to a symbolic gesture of shirking responsibility. The gesture as such is thus perceived as an excuse, as non-action, as refraining from faith and love. This is another reason why Christ's hands in the painting are not shown (in addition to the realistic reason that His hands are tied behind His back). Jesus has no motive to gesture since He is truth, faith and love, He is absolute responsibility, in contrast to Pilate's pragmatic excuse. This special philosophy of gesture gives rise to all the painting's poetic and compositional elements. It explains, among other things, why Pilate is in sunlight whereas Christ is in the shade. This approach originates a kind of apophatic (negational) thinking: the gesture is a non-gesture, recognition is aporia, the search for truth pushes it further away. In conclusion we may say that the gesture of non-touch, which is not represented but seen in Ge's painting, is characterized by *liminality* (the human/divine, recognition/secret, I/other boundary), *negativity* (the touch does not materialize) and *chaoticness* (it is unexpected, accidental).⁹³

The traits with which we concluded the analysis of the preceding painting can be found also in the scene represented at the center of Jacques Louis David's "The Death of Socrates" (1787) (fig. 11). Here the gesture of non-touch is created out of the failure of the act of holding the goblet. Its chance character this time is not the result of a visual illusion but of a dramatic sequence of events: Socrates is absorbed in what he is saying and turns his head towards his listeners; therefore his other hand misses the cup of hemlock which is being presented to him. The missed grasp can be justified also by the fact that the youth who presents the goblet has his head turned and covers his eyes as if hiding tears. Because of the missed reach the grasping movement turns into a gesture which makes the boundary between life and death visible and concrete – into a liminal gesture. This gesture is unstable, momentary, vibrating, the result of an error, or noise in the communication channel; in a moment the two persons will correct the error and then the gesture will disappear like a miracle or an illusion, like a moment of grace and like life itself. But at this moment this non-real gesture exists; and clearly this gesture and its magical moment of existence are the root from which this work of art grew. The painting's "standard" gesture, the one in which Socrates points upwards, and which supposedly constitutes the painting's significant center, is but a kind of necessary but somewhat artificial counterbalance to the unrealized chaotic gesture.

Helmuth Plessner in his *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* wrote that awareness of the boundaries of the self/body, and consequently a withdrawal from that boundary, are what differentiates humans from other animals. Gesture is of course one of the clearest explications of human eccentricity (to control one's body in contrast to "being" in it), which is united with an awareness of the body's boundary and the

withdrawal from that boundary. True, Plessner was one of the founders of philosophical anthropology, but his discussion of gesture and of the awareness of gesture takes place in the philosophical sphere. From an anthropological point of view these concepts are of doubtful validity, both because such awareness is not continuous nor is it necessarily typical of gesture, and because there are so many types of gestures and related bodily techniques, practices and habits. Still, in the case of the gesture of non-touch Plessner's insight is valid and certain beyond a doubt. This gesture not only points to the boundary and marks it; the gesture actually creates it with its withdrawing eccentricity, by making place for it. The boundary comes into being where the gesture stops, and that place turns into a breach of chaos, error or failure on the one hand, and into an inexhaustible source of signing and symbolism on the other. This is the reason why in David's painting it is not the "standard" (left-handed) gesture but the failed, unrealized (right-handed) one which gives Socrates a measure of vitality and humanity in the face of the tragic moment and in contrast to the somewhat stony, sculptural look of his body.

In Georges de La Tour's "The Dream of St. Joseph" (1640)⁹⁴ (fig. 12) the angel's touch constitutes the divine touching the human, and also the dream touching reality. According to the traditional interpretation the angel appears above Joseph's bed and makes the gesture of annunciation with his right hand, thus informing Joseph that he is not to cast out his wife Mary or, on another occasion, that he should flee with his family to escape the wrath of the king. But La Tour turns the gesture of annunciation into a gesture of touch, very much as Botticelli did in his "The Annunciation". And just as in Botticelli's painting, the touch here is unrealized. Thin rays of light separate the angel's hand from Joseph's arm. The gesture of the other hand is apparently an illustrator which

accompanies the angel's almost unrepresented utterance: to judge by its form and direction, we can surmise that it accompanies the word "rise" in the second (Matthew 2:12) or third (Matthew 2:19) revelation. But the main gesture is that of the other hand (the right hand again), which is not realized. It is from this latter gesture that La Tour's work of art grows, from his perception of *the revelation as a non-touch*. Furthermore, even the dream as such is seen and experienced in the painting as a kind of non-real gesture. "Touch-non-touch", the experience which makes room for the counter-movement, originates and defines the space of the event/work of art. From this space Joseph's journey will begin. From precisely this experience/place La Tour's work of art sets out as well. This lit-up space between the two touching-not-touching bodies looks like a source of power and blessing; and yet it is very unstable, fragile, evanescent and unpredictable. It is the source of both Joseph's revelation and the artist's inspiration. The daring desire for a touch-non-touch led La Tour through all his previous paintings to this work of art.

The question of what caused or enabled La Tour to present the revelation as a non-touch can only be answered by a comprehensive cultural-historical study. Here we shall limit ourselves just to pointing at a possible direction. Baroque art could no longer be satisfied with an empty but mystery-filled space between two non-touching hands as in Botticelli's Renaissance; the Baroque originated boundary and meaning on the wrinkled surface of the skin, as Gilles Deleuze would have said. Furthermore, touching the skin is what creates its folds and so transforms it into a boundary of the body and of subjectivity. The gesture originates the body/man and not the other way around. Joseph's wrinkled face is separated from the black space behind it in reaction to the light of the angel's non-human

and unwrinkled face. Another reason, or another motive for the gesture in this painting, is related to the emergence of Mannerism in the culture and art of the period in question. The Mannerism of bodily movement together with the Mannerism of the angel's garb and hairstyle announces the beginning of the "great era of gesture", which reaches its peak during the eighteenth century. In this culture gesture is not a symbol but a means of expression and signification; gesture is action and action is gesture. The gesture of touch in de La Tour's painting thus in a way points at Joseph and marks him as having been chosen for a certain destiny. In addition, the gesture is presented as an act of grasping and pulling, unrealized but hinted at in the painting: the angel appears to be pulling at Joseph's hand without actually touching it; he leads him without waking him up, making *a covenant of touch-non-touch* with him, as God did with Abraham. That is the essence of the Baroque gesture, and that is the essence of art as it is embodied in this painting.

To sum up so far, we have seen a number of test-cases of the use of anthropological esthetics, especially of the method to which it can give rise on the basis of the study of gesture. All the compositions we examined were seen to have been created due to the same motive: an unrealized desire for gesture, which sweeps the figures, the painters and the viewers along with it. It is that same multi-faceted desire: to touch the other (God or death) with the hand, to touch the figure with the brush, and to touch the work of art with one's eyes; this is an unending desire, for a touch which can never be realized.

C. Literature not only represents but also performs gestures.

The study of gesture in literature is a relatively young field.⁹⁵ Among the most prominent representatives is Fernando Poyatos' "Literary Anthropology" project, devoted to a detailed documentation of non-verbal behaviors, which are described or "transcribed" in text. Poyatos discusses the physical circumstances of the reading act which, so he claims, has been ignored by students of literature. These circumstances consist, according to Poyatos, of the following elements: a book's physical existence; the reader's personal physical environment; and the reader's physical circumstances. This is complemented by an analysis of the physiological basis of the text's assimilation and interpretation.⁹⁶

Attempts to conduct a systematic study of gestures in literature have been few indeed. The most highly developed direction in this field is the study of gesture in classical and medieval literature.⁹⁷ Ronald Newbold, in his "Nonverbal Expressiveness in Late Greek Epic: Quintus of Smyrna, and Nonnus,"⁹⁸ deals with non-verbal expression in the late classical Greek period, and stresses the great interest shown by artists of the times in non-verbal bodily expression.⁹⁹ Apparently in times of pan-theatralization of cultural life bodily movements become more significant than words, even in literature. Thus, for example, Nonnus, one of the writers discussed in the article, argues that words can be quite superfluous since the world consists of continuous spiral movement with the body at its center.¹⁰⁰ On the basis of Dudek and Hall's concept of "gestural style", Newbold proposes to identify a "gestural cognitive-affective style" in works of literature,¹⁰¹ a style characterized by sensuality and eroticism, dynamism, primevalness or even primitiveness, firmness or even aggressiveness, and a freely-roaming imagination, not fettered by reality. These conclusions, together with the results of Poyatos' studies according to which widespread use of gestures and other non-verbal behavior is

characteristic of realistic literature in particular, enable us to advance a hypothesis as to the trans-generic and trans-historical nature of the poetics of gesture.

The poetic, narrative, symbolic and stylistic roles of gesture have been studied in the works of Shakespeare,¹⁰² Dostoevsky,¹⁰³ Kleist,¹⁰⁴ Kafka,¹⁰⁵ Joyce,¹⁰⁶ Hawthorne, Hemingway and O'Connor.¹⁰⁷ In studies devoted to gesture in the writings of Milorad Pavić I came to the conclusion that they played a major role in the author's poetics.¹⁰⁸ Here we shall survey in greater detail two studies in which gesture in literature is understood as a text-reader interaction device or even as a text's performance. Herbert Josephs in his study of gesture in the writings of Diderot quotes Roger Kempf, who characterized Diderot's works as "poetry of bodies in movement".¹⁰⁹ According to Josephs the human body for Diderot constituted a store of motor and acoustic symbols, of spontaneous expressions of emotions, or of ritual gestures whose purpose was to conceal emotion.¹¹⁰ For Diderot, the meaning and operation of gestures went far beyond their technical and symbolic function:

Diderot's intense emotional responses to certain paintings – originating, according to Aram Vartanian, in his incompletely sublimated erotic temperament – enabled him to participate in a scene as if the painted attitudes had been communicated to his own body. He then recreated the experience for his reader, again in a language suggestive of physical movement, sometimes finding the words that weren't spoken, but more often directing his communication to the reader's own responsiveness to gesture.¹¹¹

Furthermore, Diderot exposes a deep similarity between gesture and poetic discourse.¹¹²

Poetic language

[B]ecame endowed with the energetic movement of physical activity, with some inner drive that caused it to come to life once again, as if upon the stage. [Diderot] recognized that the hieroglyphs or mental images through which poetic meaning was communicated were reconstructed by the listener and reader largely on the impulses provided by suggestive rhythmical patterns. [...] Ideas and feelings ... are not merely

comprehended by the reader, they are experienced within his whole body. [...] Language, in the best poetic speech, becomes itself a new gesture.¹¹³

When the language of poetry functions as a physiological stimulus the reader, who listens to what he reads, begins performing gestures of his own, thus taking language back to the roots of its birth, to its primitive, living, creative source.¹¹⁴ Ignoring for our purposes the ideological basis of these insights of Diderot's, let us observe the described phenomenon. Josephs found in Diderot a preliminary model of reading as a complex dynamic system of cognitive, emotional and physical processes. Gestures, represented by the text's written words, are perceived as a mechanism for activating the reader. At the head of the chain is the written words and, at the other end, the reader's gesture which accompanies his reading.

Kristine Santilli's approach to poetry, gesture and their interrelation is original and fresh:

This book is about the reaching, bending and gathering gestures of poems' gestures within poems and poems themselves, as gestures of a certain kind. It makes the argument that poetic language conveys meaning much the same way that spontaneous gestures convey meaning, arising inadvertently beside the language we speak. [...] The book argues that there is a "body-knowledge" embedded in poetic language not unlike the knowledge embedded in the hands of pianist.¹¹⁵

Poetry possesses its own "tacit mind" and "linguistic body", which perform "poetic gestures" a moment before speaking. Santilli's study is founded upon a broad philosophical erudition. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, a source of inspiration for many students of gesture, leads her to the conclusion that gestures embodied in poetic metaphors connect the latter to their meanings.¹¹⁶ Santilli assumes, following ideas of Lacan, who did not write much about gesture, that gestures shape the other which is concealed in the roots of things.¹¹⁷ Gestures grow from the drive to mourn, to perceive once more what or whom we love and is gone, to create something or

someone within the vacuum of silence.¹¹⁸ Santilli distinguishes two main poetic gestures in poetry. The first is the gesture of gathering, of extending the hand and then pulling it back towards the body. Through this gesture a person manifests his chosen-ness and his uniqueness, and reclaims his existence as a beloved and wanted entity, in other words becomes a human being.¹¹⁹

The second gesture is that of bending: To bend means to believe, so claims the author, to make the strongest movement of desire; this movement enables us to point, wave, prostrate ourselves, raise our faces towards the heavens, to dance.¹²⁰ All gestures of bending imitate death, embody the meaning of loss and mourning.¹²¹ All gesture, including poetry as gesture, have as their purpose the preservation of the deep, silent, unique and mortal other. The language of poetry embodies the will to preserve and remember the beloved who is gone, not through the meaning itself but rather through its movements, by bending towards it and gathering it to one's heart. Poetry "knows" its task; that is its ethical imperative, its "law. Therefore poetic gesture expresses not only the will but also the responsibility for preserving the other, the beloved, not to abandon him to his death, at least as long as the poem goes on.¹²²

Kristine Santilli's book provides evidence for a broad variety of possibilities in the study of gesture in literature. Gestures are not only described in the text; they do not merely organize it and activate the reader's body movements. They are also performed by the text itself.

Literature performs gestures by means of interactive representations of gestures. Interactive gesture creates an oscillating figure and indicates liminality, thus turning into a bifurcation point in the figure's becoming ("Genia" by Uri Nissan Gnessin)

Gnessin can be said to have been one of the most gestural of the writers of his generation. One of his poetic endeavors was the attempt to create a unique poetics for representing non-verbal behavior which, together with Jacob Steinberg's poetics of gesture, pointed the way and gave preliminary expression to the emergence of bodily, motor and spatial perception among the adherents of modernism within Modern Hebrew literature. We begin by pointing to Gnessin's most significant achievement in the sphere of narrative fiction, namely his development of a non-verbal textual arsenal operating at the syntactic level. In other words, he augmented non-verbal aspects of the operation of the text itself. In the present chapter we shall perform a number of observations on how his text functions in this manner.

For the purpose of our inquiry into the unique aspects of Gnessin's non-verbal poetics and esthetics as exemplified in his story "Genia" we shall make use of another useful distinction, namely between two possible ways of representing a gestural-proxemic event (or series of events):

1. An interactive representation, meant to bring about an immediate activation of the reader. This kind of representation is fast-paced and dynamic, sparing in details, but not in sensuality or sentimentality.
2. A descriptive representation, intended to describe the event as a theatrical scene from an external, somewhat estranged, point of view. Here movements are anchored in a static, stage-like manner. If the reader is activated, it is as a by-product in this type of representation.

These two types of representation belong to two different esthetic worlds, appeal to different cognitive mechanisms, and serve different pragmatic, social and ideological needs. The basic difference between them lies of course in the fact that an interactive representation activates the non-verbal processing abilities, including gestural, spatial and visual memory, whereas a descriptive representation, even when the object of the representation is bodily or visual, activates mainly propositional abilities, which are naturally usually of a linguistic or logical nature. The tension between the two types creates a strong poetic effect which will be described below.

Let us begin with a detailed look at the story's initial chapter, where both types of representation can be found. The story opens with a strong interactive gesture: "The moment we entered the hall my friend sprang back" (9).¹²³ This short and somewhat curtailed representation creates a figure possessing an immediate, dynamic bodily and spatial presence. The figure's back-and-forth movement marks the threshold to which it is linked from the moment of its appearance, so that from now on being on the borderline as a persono-dynamic trait marks the figure. This "*threshold gesture*" thus points to the threshold, the figure and the link between the two. But first-and-foremost it points to

itself and its source, to the liminal nature of every gesture. Immediately after this abrupt opening, which can itself be represented as a kind of “narrative gesture”, the narrator goes on to describe the hall which the story’s main characters have entered.

It is a description which takes up two paragraphs. In the first the figures and their spatial-proximal location on the “stage” are presented: “Mr. Gildin [...] sat sunk in a chair with a white cover, his neck towards the door; Mrs. Gildin [...] sat on his right on a bent black Viennese chair; their two daughters [...] sat on a soft sofa placed diagonally in the room to the left of their father, and facing it was one guest, whose identity I did not know, sunk in a chair with a white cover, her face towards the entrance” (ibid.). The second paragraph describes the postures and movements of the figures, all waiting tensely: “The master of the house sat leaning against the back of the chair on his left side, his left leg lying on his right leg, his head lowered to his shoulder and his fingers drumming sporadically on the table’s edge; the mistress of the house crossed her arms across her chest, bent her head nearly to the side, and occasionally replaced the strange smirk on the wrinkles of her lips for a moment and silently hummed some broken bars of music; the high-school girls sat next to each other with straight backs, motionless except for occasionally moving the palms of their hands” (ibid.). The representation of this mute scene differs sharply from the representation of motion in the first sentence, as any descriptive representation differs from its interactive counterpart. The former depicts a continuous state of affairs whereas the latter describes a one-time movement. The former gradually constructs a network of images whereas the latter acts as if the event were without context. The former has the task of solving the riddle posed by the initial sentence.

But there is also a deeper difference between the two, a difference which has to do with the nature of gesture. An interactive representation activates the non-linear, chaotic dynamic of a figure's becoming; it is impossible to predict its future fate with any certainty since even minute changes can have major consequences out of all proportion to their cause. Events thus can repeat themselves, but always with some slight and unexpected difference. Time, in any case, is irreversible, so that not only is the future unforeseeable, also the events of the past cannot be explained by or reconstructed on the basis of what is happening in the present. *The gesture marks the bifurcation points*, those moments when stability is lost and events split up, moments controlled by chaos and chance. In other words, an interactive gesture originates the figure as if it was a real personality, and makes the time of reading seem as if it was real history. The figure which thus comes to be becomes both the subject and the object of the reader's ethical attitude.¹²⁴ This is what makes the figure's gesture interactive. The question now remains of whether any gesture in a text will always and of necessity play such an important role, and whether descriptive gestures cannot fulfill the same function.

The main character's gesture as he enters the hall, represented in the story's opening sentence, marks a bifurcation point and serves to delimit the boundary. Eventually it will turn out that this gesture had a strong ethical motivation, incorporated into the two paragraphs of precise spatial description: the hero, Lerner, found himself face-to-face with the "guest", Genia, the story's femme fatale, the hero's former lover. From a formal perspective Lerner's gesture, like most gestures (as pointed out by Kendon), is constructed like a pendulum, as a back-and-forth sequence of steps, which tells, from the semiotic standpoint, the story of the relationship between Lerner (or any other man in his

situation) and Genia, an eternal tale of coming together and growing apart. If it is indeed the case that, as Sandor Feldman wrote, what lies at the bottom of every gesture is the child's need to play at sticking close to and moving away from his mother,¹²⁵ and if Julia Kristeva's intuition that all signs as such only symbolize the lament of separation, is true, then no doubt Lerner's gesture, too, embodies the story of his love and separation. Nor can there be any doubt that his gesture points in the direction of the sacred center of the cultural space presented in the story: Genia is the only person directly in front of the entrance, the spot which in a synagogue would be occupied by the Arc of the Covenant and in a church by the altar. The description of Genia's posture as she sits in the chair, her silent motionlessness which contrasts with the other characters' nervous movements, leave no shadow of a doubt that she plays the role of a goddess in her temple. This is not surprising, for a gesture constitutes a face-to-face bending towards the absent, as Kristine Santilli shows, "other", or towards a god or goddess as the absolute "other".

Let us now continue our reading of Chapter One. The entrance of the two figures, the narrator and Lerner, into the room, arouses movement in everyone present. The narrator now continues his detailed, lively description of the scene:

I went in first, and my friend followed my footsteps. I shook the hands of the head of the household and went on; but before I managed to reach the table I was forced to turn my head back and look in wonder. Mrs. Gildin also felt that she had to rise from her chair with measured rapidity and to look at us: We heard our friend's voice, shaking, stuttering with confusing rapidity:

- Actually ... I ... forgive me ... an unexpected reason ... today I can't ...
- Well! - Mr. Gildin was astonished, just as we were.
- I can't – My friend became ever more bewildered.
- How is that possible? – The master of the house could not calm down.

And the mistress of the house found it necessary to shrug her shoulders with that same charm and to sit down (ibid.).

The quiet, measured flow of descriptive representation is suddenly disturbed by interactive gestures. The main such gestures are not the narrator turning his head or Mrs. Gildin rising from her chair, but rather the gestures of the text “itself”, embodied in the punctuation and the typographical layout, the nonverbal-anthropological functioning of which was emphasized by Fernando Poyatos. These gestures almost automatically echo and are duplicated in the readers’ gestures of reading and speech. The chaotic power of chance which usually hides behind the words here bursts out unexpectedly in the spoken words themselves and breaks up the syntactic sequence and even the sequence of letters making up the words. Furthermore, the interactive speech gestures in a sense contradict the descriptive representation of the body’s movements (Mrs. Gildin’s, for example). The continuous, calm conversational plane representing the body’s motions puts the breakup of conversation in speech gestures in sharp relief. The reader not only perceives and experiences the breakup: he multiplies and deepens it. The “graphical” disintegration of signs, driven by hidden emotional energy (we cannot really say “hidden from sight”, since sight is the one sense which does perceive them), is immediately translated into dissociation, into a loss of conscious continuity, into misunderstanding. When the narrator wants to express the outbreak of chaos within his own consciousness he goes over, as if out of a rigid internal logic, to the present tense, and so brings the interactive gestures into being almost naturally: “I did not understand a thing of what was going on. What happened to him all of a sudden? I looked at my friend’s face and saw that it was clouded, startled and confused. His lower lip trembled slowly, his eyes wandered as if

afraid as he looked towards the table across from him, and his hands constantly felt his handkerchief” (10).

The narrator’s rhetorical devices are obvious, and the gestures’ psychological meaning is clear. Still, let us go back and focus on their internal dynamics. Remember that one of the methodological conclusions we reached in our previous discussion was that gestures should not be viewed singly but rather as parts of an entire mental visual representation, as a picture constituting a planned and logical composition. The study of literary gesture can then take on the nature of a veritable iconographical inquiry, especially when analyzing the texts of authors with a plastic, gestural style such as Milorad Pavić, Meir Shalev, Jacob Steinberg, and Gnessin as well. In our case the reader joins the narrator in “looking at” Lerner’s face. Looking is in and of itself also a gesture, the narrator’s and also the reader’s. What drives it is a lack of understanding of the other, the other’s lack of transparency, and also the desire to grab hold of the elusive meaning he conveys, to touch the other, hidden within the haze of his otherness. Here again we wish to evoke Kristine Santilli’s idea that gesture, especially bending, constitutes an attempt to presence the (beloved) gone lover. But how can Lerner be “beloved” when throughout the entire course of the story we are shown how he becomes “unloved”. In fact this is not the right question to ask. Lerner becomes the “beloved” the moment that looks and gestures are aimed at him. They point at him in a desperate but unremitting attempt to bring him back from non-existence to existence. It is as if the gestures touch the figure and do not let it disappear altogether, although they do not actually “grab” it. Here, again, we can see that the interactive gesture marks the boundaries in the text: it brings both the figure and the boundary into existence, and keeps the figure within the confines of its own permanent

liminality. At one pole of the scene stands Genia in her descriptive representation as the embodiment of centrality, authority and power, while the non-verbal dynamics in the room have now brought Lerner to the other pole, as an embodiment of liminality and marginality, expressed by interactive gestures (his own, the narrator's and those of other figures, the reader's and also that of the text itself). The tension between these two poles gives rise to lines of power along which the reader's gaze travels, from Genia's face to Lerner's and back. This *pendulum*, or figure-eight, is the typical attractor, *chaotic and strange* in the scientific sense of the latter term, of the dynamics of gesture.

Let us now turn to the iconographical-gestural elements in the representation of Lerner's face. It is immediately clear that the same stable-yet-vacillating character which we noticed before reappears in the details of the description, but at a higher level: "His lower lip trembles", "His eyes wander". From the story's very first sentence pendulum movements structure Lerner's figure as *an oscillator*. The narrator marks the main focuses of gesticulation. The mouth represents the speech gestures' mechanism, which is exposed in the process of disintegration-for-the-purpose-of-explication described above. In this process speech gestures (the stutter, for example) represented and embodied in the text point to themselves and the text, as if saying: here is the text which is performing the gesture. This is a case of auto-representation or gestural tautology. As pointed out above, from the philosophical standpoint this is characteristic of gesture as such. From the mouth the line of representation moves to the eyes, swings together with Lerner's gaze around the scene's opposite pole and then goes down to the hands. But from the hands it immediately returns to the face by means of a mention of the nose: "his handkerchief" (in Hebrew, literally: "his nose-scarf"). Once again we encounter the dynamics of a

pendulum which originates the figure as an oscillator. The dynamics of the oscillator turns the figure into a living personality. A major role in this process is played by interactive gestures.

In the course of the chapter the narrator continues to present the character of Genia as a kind of goddess or, alternately, as an oracle. The events in the scene roll on as inside some meaningful, theatrical or iconic, space in which the location of the characters and of their gestures has a function of metaphysical meaning assignment.

[Genia's eyes] looked as if they were promising something whose echoing memory alone would instill a resounding illumination and a pulsating vitality into every corner of the psyche; but at the same time they also appeared to give a clear warning, as if passing along a message ... the whole time she looked straight into my friend's face, as he stood before her and tried in vain to convince the master of the house that he was unable to stay ... finally ... strange, well, he could definitely not stay ... on her lips there appeared a clear smile of scorn mixed with innocent curiosity ... as a last resort my friend also pointed a beseeching finger at me. Yes, Fridin also knows that this is impossible (11).

There is a breakdown in communication, a misunderstanding which creates a mysterious fog around Genia's figure and turns her into a kind of angry prophetess pronouncing hermetical, scornful messages, and everyone else into novices engaged in an eternal hermeneutical task. Her stance face-to-face with Lerner is like an act of revelation, which hides more than it reveals. And now as he stands opposite her, Lerner points at Fridin the narrator. The iconic meaning of this gesture is clear: it points to the substitute, to the next victim; it creates the object of passion and marks the direction of the vector of desire. In this gesture Lerner himself creates the triangle of mimetic desire, to use René Girard's terms, which will eventually destroy him. This scene, in its gestural and proxemic dimensions, does not anticipate what happens next, it creates it. In gestural iconography every gesture creates *a minor myth*, and the scene in question is replete with rather

charged gestures. In such a myth everything comes alive; the eyes “promise” and “shine”, the finger “beseeches”. Mythopoesis activates the reader in an interactive gesture as the narrator once more moves from past to present tense: “And my friend points, finally, a beseeching finger at me”. In the reader’s mind this gesture is visually represented as pointing at him, at the reader himself. This is due not only to a complex gestural-proxemic mechanism but also to a simple identification of the reader’s perspective with that of the narrator’s. Such an identification is not rare in literature, but not every author creates such strong interactive gestures that make the reader participate in a represented kinesthetic dynamic. At the end of the vector of mimetic desire, embodied in Lerner’s gesture, we thus find the reader, who is both victim and high priest in Genia’s temple.

Lerner’s speech before the assembled advocates of Jewish education is canceled. The narrator becomes a friend of the “guest” Evgenia Pavlovna. As Chapter Two begins the spatial configuration changes completely: instead of standing before her, the narrator reports: “I chose a place next to the guest and conversed with her” (11). A transparent, banal dialogue has replaced the mysterious non-verbal communication of before, and is soon enough revealed as nothing more than empty chatter and gossip: “Tea was served. The mistress of the house filled the cups and her husband began speaking about Lerner’s strange aspect. They began expressing opinions, looking for reasons, telling stories” (12). This conversation non-verbally mars the course of Genia’s dialogue: “The woman I was speaking with began to lose the thread of her conversation with me frequently, answered unasked questions, gave piecemeal answers, or none at all. This made me angry” (ibid.). The remnants of Lerner’s shadow still lie over Genia and Fridin, but does not separate them. Quite to the contrary: it is the last temptation, an invitation to adventure, the

challenge of standing face-to-face, a continuation of the chain of events begun by Lerner's gesture. The breakdown of verbal communication with Genia arouses the narrator, and her silence makes room for him, creating the space into which he is tempted to enter and fill: "This made me angry. - Vainly, my friends, - I thought of using the fact that my friend had pointed to me in his confusion. So I looked askance at the woman I was speaking with. He should not have done this, but, of course, had an important reason ..." (ibid.). The description here is of a conversation, but the real event, the narrator's walk into the space marked by Lerner's gesture, is embodied in non-verbal behavior. The gestures arouse each other and combine into a gestural story of their own.

Chapter Three once again opens with a supposedly serious discussion on issues of Zionism and the Enlightenment which, however, soon turns out to have been nothing but an introduction to, or an excuse for, the next gestural scene. True, the characters continue speaking, but the gestures are more than an accompaniment to their conversation. As the emotional tension of the dialogue rises, the discursive energy of the communication, which was never very high, decreases evermore, and non-verbal meaning creation rises again. A pragmatic analysis will easily expose the gradual emptying of the dialogue in this scene. Now Genia mentions her ties to the literary "colony" in Odessa, and Fridin all of a sudden sees in her the figure which he had previously known only from hearing:

My heart jumped. I listened carefully. My companion gave me a piercing gaze and a cunning smile was born on her prominent yet-not-prominent lips.

- Ah ... Do you know Lerner from back then? ...
- What do you mean? ... Only from then ... [...]
- He ... Doesn't he have anything to do with literature? ...
- Meaning? ...

This is how she thought things should have been ... Ha-ha-ha ... She remembers his arguments ... clerks ... paper pushers ... the idle ... Then, after she had become acquainted with them in Odessa ...

- In Odessa?

- Yes. After all the whole “colony” is there now ... they would tell her.

My eyes lit up. Genia! Really?

I heard no more. New skies, although unclear as yet, opened before me. I measured the woman speaking to me with a piercing gaze from toe to head, and dark, dim, purifying memories awakened in my heart, memories of chance and intentional conversations, witticisms both sharp and not so ...

I felt an overwhelming desire to burst into loud laughter in front of her, but I held back.

- In Odessa – I interrupted her – I also have a few acquaintances among that “colony” ...

I looked insolently straight into her eyes.

At first she apparently did not pay any particular attention to my comment; but now she turn her eyes towards me and began looking straight into my face. Now the same expression appeared on her face that I had seen there when she could not take her eyes off my friend Lerner.

[...] I was overwhelmed by my burning desire. [...] My eyes became turbid from pleasure. [...]

- But wait, please – she cried out to me, suddenly serious, placed her palm on my shoulder unnecessarily, put the thumb of her other hand to her lips and raised her enthusiastic eyes towards the ceiling, as if making an effort to remember something. At the same time something was happening in my heart. – Fridin ... Fridin ... Aren't you than man whom Belyj told me about ...

- Belyj?

- Yes ... He told me a lot. A lot about you ... [...]

- Hmm ... Well ...

- A lot. He told me a lot ...

I looked into her eyes, and felt encouraged (14-15).

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that this scene of Fridin and Genia's becoming acquainted with each other is nothing but a kind of sensual dance or erotic game. Its choreography is refined and sophisticated. The trick is that in this dance of looks, smiles, laughter, touch, intonation, repetitions, pauses and silences, the partners change roles a number of times. And since most of these non-verbal actions are interactive the reader at

the end of the chapter feels dizzy, as if he had himself participated in the dance. Let us take a closer look at the scene's gestural dynamics. At first she looks at him with a piercing gaze and laughs. Lerner's figure again comes between them, this time not as a screen but, to the contrary, as bait. Her dialogue breaks up. Three-period gaps create a space into which Fridin is invited to enter. He is led into the trap by a sure, strong hand. Three more periods, and yet another three..., and he falls into the hole between the words, hearing no more. Now their roles are reversed. It is his turn to gaze piercingly and laugh. When he identifies Genia with a familiar figure he reacts with a violent, possessive look: "I measured the woman speaking to me with a piercing gaze from toe to head". He is under the illusion that he "knows", identifies, perceives her. At once the mysterious figure becomes transparent and known. This liberates an enormous flood of pent-up violence in the narrator: "I felt an overwhelming desire to burst into loud laughter in front of her, but I held back. [...] I looked insolently straight into her eyes". Fridin's feeling of control makes his head spin. He penetrates her with his gaze. She reciprocates and looks directly at his face, with the same look she used to give to Lerner, having identified Fridin with her former lover. Despite the situation's ambivalent nature, Fridin extracts actual physical pleasure from it: "My eyes became turbid from pleasure". What he does not understand is that in this dance it is always Genia who leads, that his looks, laughter and desire are nothing but an echo, an imitation of her looks and movements, that his own control and knowledge are but an illusion. And indeed just a moment later Genia already takes back her role and they again exchange their masks. This time she identifies him with a figure she knew before from her conversations with another man. The game of

entrapping imitations goes on. The figures standing between the present personality and her imaginary image serve as a kind of perverse glue – false but very strong.

Genia's becoming acquainted with the narrator's personality is accompanied by two prominent gestures, her hand touching his shoulder and her touching herself. The gesture of touch is a clear symbol of making the personality present, of ascertaining one's existence, of creating the circle of control and meaning. This gesture never misleads: it brings an object into being and points to it as the object of desire. The dialogue which accompanies Genia's gesture disintegrates entirely and turns into a succession of single sounds and meaningless repetitions. All the power of emotion, understanding and knowledge is embodied in gestures of the body and of speech: "She looked at me with a penetrating gaze and called with unconscious emphasis". This entire dialogue of penetrating looks is nothing but a duplication of Genia's "primal" originating look. Fridin's look, his laughter and even his desire are nothing but the looks of Genia herself, and the desire of her own self. Her self-directed gestures reveal the truth: only she exists; Fridin "comes out of her mouth", he is the other end of her own vector of desire, of her gesture.

The reader of this scene follows the feverish turnover of emotional situations embodied in the gestures. Fridin's face changes expression with bewildering rapidity. The important things are embodied in what has not been said, or even done. Thus, for example, when the narrator says: "I felt an overwhelming desire to burst into loud laughter in front of her, but I held back", the reader nevertheless sees the figure's laughing face. More precisely, this laughing face is the figure itself at the moment of reading. This is a strong *interactive gesture*, which can even cause a minor echo of laughter on reader's face. In

fact, therefore, Fridin did not hold back at all. Clearly Genia perceives this non-holding-back holding back as well. Fridin's implicit, unaccomplished but interactive gesture is immediately echoed by her gesture, which also contains implicit laughter: she gives Fridin the same look which she gave Lerner at the beginning of the story. There the narrator stressed the laughter or scorn which this look held, but here this characterization remains implicit. This time Genia's gesture is thus not interactive, although at the level of structure it is strongly anchored in the calculated gestural network which is unfolded in the story.

We should add also that Genia's gestures of touching are not interactive. This is the case not only because they are themselves presented descriptively, but also because Fridin, surprised, confused and somewhat frightened after his downfall from the heights of arrogance and dominance, fails to succeed to report on his own reaction to her gestures. His inner voice is cut off: "At the same time something was happening in my heart-". The change occurred in his heart, but it is not the words but rather the text's non-verbal communication, the meaningless segmentation, the dialogue's lack of continuity which embody this change, in a kind of textual gesture of speech. This gesture, unlike Genia's, is clearly interactive, and infects the reader with Fridin's confusion as easily and as naturally as a physical gesture would. The scene's closing sentence, "I looked into her eyes, and felt encouraged", does nothing to encourage the reader or to extricate him from his confusion. We may safely assume that the reader's feeling accurately reflects Fridin's real feeling as well, which was not expressed but rather concealed by this sentence.

We shall now skip over to Chapter Twelve, in which Fridin's and Genia's love is consummated. As we have seen in previous analyses, a high intensity of meaning-

creation and emotional tension is accompanied in the text by a high intensity of non-verbal dynamics. The narrator directs his story's main events with a strong, sensual plasticity created by representing the characters' movements in a narrative space-time; in other words, he directs them as *bodily events*. The characters speak about Berdichevski's writings and ideas, but the real dialogue takes place in their body language:

And after she had acquired a more-or-less faithful idea of this author's basic pleadings she once told me excitedly:

- Do you know ... we should from the very first walk on his head ... walk – she shifted, raised her hand and slowly bent it like a bow – Don't you understand? Then we shall come to the life we yearn for...

It was precisely at that hour – when I saw her in front of me covered with a light house robe, with her disheveled curly hair, her hot, pale face, her bright dreamy eyes, and her hand as if grasping the future which was taking shape in front of her – it was at that precise moment that there awakened in me those worm-like memories, those leech-like memories which sucked my blood and my heart...

[...] She stopped walking, turned her head towards me in some excitement, and her warm, sweeping gaze pulled me into it ... my eyes became turbid, my head turned, everything disappeared, I only saw her eye's pupil; [...] she moved her feet from their place, slowly came up to me and placed her palm on my shoulder without forcing herself [...] and called softly:

- There's no need ... do you hear? ... just say Genia ...

Tick, tick, tick...

She flowed away from me and kept walking around the room with uneven steps [...] Her words came out straight but her voice was soft and trembled a little. An aroma from a bunch of flowers wafted over to me.

- Genia! I jumped up from where I was and shouted as if begging – My Genia!...

This was the first lovers' kiss in my life...

I had the feeling that our souls came together then... (31-32).

Genia's gesture which accompanied her talk about walking is an illustrator of the ideograph type, an illustration and dramatization of an idea expressed in words. Such gestures are not rare in literature, but here the narrator's gaze freezes the figure and observes this gesture again, this time not in the context of speech but as part of the

figure's overall bodily presence. More precisely, it is the gesture which focuses Fridin's look on her body and turns it into *an object of observation, into a sign or even an icon*. This gesture, in a completely unexpected and chaotic fashion, arouses in the narrator certain memories, unclear but strong enough to evoke the presence of Genia's imaginary double, the one who like glue or bait ties him to her present figure. Furthermore, if Lacan's intuition about gesture is right, then Genia's personality dies or disappears in the gesture frozen in the narrator's lustful look and turns into a sign, a phantasm. This provides support for the hypothesis that *gestures are the signposts marking the boundary*. The gesture in question here marks a double boundary: the uncertain boundary of the narrator's chaotic transition to the highest stage in his love for Genia, and the boundary of Genia's presence/absence as a personality/sign. This is the same truth about gesture which was embodied in its entirety in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, the myth of the temptation of a look: as Orpheus glanced at Eurydice she disappeared forever. Turning the vector of desire towards someone turns him or her into an (absent) object.

But the myth of David and Genia is not as tragic, especially in view of the fact that they exchange roles once again, so that in her next gesture Genia plays Orpheus' role. First she "sweeps" him with her look and then she puts her palm on his shoulder. This gesture of touch, appearing now for the second time in the story, turns out to constitute a kind of ceremonial initiation gesture. With her look and her movement Genia turns David into her subject and lover, who swings on the border of existence and non-existence, marked as a liminal personality. He, of course, is happy to be swept into the totalitarian circle of her gestures. As if the look and the touch were not enough, Genia also adds a spoken gesture, an intonation: "And she called softly", "Her voice was soft and trembled". And

as if even this was not enough, the gestures of the discourse itself come and finish the job: “There’s no need ... do you hear? ... Just say Genia... [...] Let us be friends... I... let us be friends, David!...”. The discourse looks as if it is breaking up, thus creating the tempting gaps into which Fridin is swept. This is what creates the effect of oscillation, of wavering on the border, which may impart to the figure coming into being within sight of both narrator and reader prominent lines of frankness, authenticity and vitality. This scene’s gestures create a dialectic relationship between, on the one hand, an inevitable fateful course of events and, on the other, of a random, chaotic development, as if the given moment were a bifurcation point at which various different eventualities were still possible. Clearly Fridin, who is both victim and high priest in this pseudo-tragic rite, is in the throes of the paradoxical feeling that he is both ruler and subject: “My Genia!” on the one hand, and “a beseeching voice” on the other. *Gestures thus mark the boundary and are traces of its paradoxical transgression.*

If we were to continue our survey here and look at additional gestures, which can be found in nearly every sentence of the story, we would see that as the narrative and emotional tension rises, the proportion of interactive gestures grows, at the expense of their descriptive counterparts. It would also become clear that our hypothesis was correct, and that these gestures embody liminal states and possess all the characteristic features of such states – doubt, ambivalence, blurred identities, role play, uncertainty and chaos. Still, gestures are always also a part of a power game, of a set of desires and their unendingly duplicating imitations. Here we shall just look at some short examples. In Chapter Fourteen a stormy conversation between Fridin and Lerner opens with the following description:

When Lerner came into my room, the sight of his twisted face which showed so much buried, choked-off pain, and his sunken eyes whose fate, so it seemed, was like mine, aroused suffocating tears in my throat. – Are you still asleep? This dry, trembling voice pours out on you a sea of poisonous everlasting solitude; the voice of a young, modest and life-loving widow upon returning from the funeral of her beloved husband... (35).

Who is the figure represented here? It is the eyes of the narrator which look out from Lerner's face. This figure's voice crosses its boundaries and falls "on you". So it is not even "his", i.e. Lerner's, voice; his characterization is disconnected from the enunciated words so that the reader does not hear the voice but rather sees a visual figure of a "young widow", which also unfolds over the figures of Lerner and the narrator. Her "voice" is translated into a symbolic, iconic representation which demands interactive activation by the reader: the woman's figure originates in such a way that even if her movement is not represented, its processing provides it with a vector of desire aimed at where her lover is not; it provides it with a gesture whose form would most likely be that of a slight bending, such a turn of the head or a light bend of the back.

Here are some further examples: "Finally my friend raised his moist and burning eyes in my direction. I looked expectantly at his face. [...] Some more moments passed. He gave me another look with his eyes. [...] My heart felt squeezed and my eyes could not see clearly. I turned my face quickly", "finally he rose from his chair", "my friend stuttered in his excitement", "I lowered my head", "I, too, l-o-v-e-d h-e-r! – my friend stressed his words again and pointed with his finger at his heart as he stood facing me" (35-36). In each one of these gestures, and in all of them together, there is an acrobat-like figure walking on an unstable thin tightrope between life and death, I and he, here and there. The gestures give birth to heterogeneity and heterotopy, create the irreversible arrow of

time. But when Genia enters the room she brings with her a different life tempo and representations of descriptive gestures:

The door opened and Genia entered the room. I rose towards her. Lerner lowered his eyes. She calmly placed her parasol in the corner next to the stove. She approached me, gave me her hand and greeted me; then she went impassively over to Lerner, as if to an old acquaintance, and stretched her hand out to him as well. – How are you, Mr. Lerner? He raised his eyes and gave her his hand. – Ha... hello – he slowly arose. – Sit down, please, sit down – she calmed him down and looked around her – I'll find a place (38).

The handshakes and Genia's measured movements, while very significant are not interactive. They all look as if they do not raise the figure beyond a billboard-like superficiality; they neither point to the figure nor do they mark the unexpected dynamic boundaries which outline its chaotic face like folds expanding along the surface. Further along another gesture of this type is encountered, important, symbolic and descriptive: "Please listen, David – she turned to me – come here ... here... sit down... - she made me sit on her knees" (40). Although this representation tries to imitate the rhythm of the movements, it does not create an effect of cooperation and activation. For this there can be a number of reasons. The first lies in the identity of the narrator and main character, the intimate, frank voice of the narrator who arouses a high degree of identification in the reader. Small wonder, then, that in this case all of the narrative, poetic and mimetic mechanisms conspire to create interactivity mainly with respect to this figure and not to others. Another reason is the strangeness of the visual image which is created in the scene in question. Its symbolic meaning, namely a baby sitting on its mother's knees, is quite obvious and well anchored in the character traits of both figures as they are delineated throughout the composition. Yet its cognitive processing does not proceed smoothly but sets up a kind of disorientation, which is immediately compensated for by the symbol's billboard-like nature. The last reason is personal and gender-related: the present author

identifies neither with the childish nor with the maternal figure in this scene. To sum up, we may conclude the issue by saying that this gesture lacks vitality and power because it lacks the emotional dynamism which usually accompanies the narrator's gestures; it is as if the narrator is missing from this representation, despite the fact that he is represented in Genia's dialogue. This occurrence, although it is of a bodily nature, is missing Fridin's body. This is so despite the fact that he gives Genia a "scalding kiss" (ibid.) and tells her that he loves her. But the absence of any interactive representation of Fridin, his body, his movements and his feelings, is quite striking and certainly meaningful. While at the beginning of the story his eyes became "turbid" just at the thought of Genia and her gaze, now even sitting on her knees is marked by no more than the expression "scalding kiss", whose stereotypical nature makes it rather cool. The gestures' evolution, especially that of the interactive ones, thus reflects quite faithfully the development of the relations among the figures in the course of the story's narrative and conceptual unfolding.

We shall close this discussion with a brief note on the end of Chapter Seventeen, in which the collapse of the main characters' love is described. Here we see furtive glances instead of honest looks, hot kisses which belie the cold inside, oppressive silence instead of seductive speech. "I looked at her eyes once more and fell silent. Before she left me she again sent me her new, terrible look [...] then she turned her eyes on me again, beyond the threshold..." (42). Like Orpheus who loses Eurydice with his last look, Genia loses David forever. But in accordance with the iron logic of gestural dynamics, this gesture reconstitutes her personality. Orpheus in the myth will forever be remembered in the gesture of turning the head. Genia's personality is realized through the look which she sends Fridin "beyond the threshold". Her action creates an icon and originates the myth,

and in so doing becomes a strong interactive gesture, whose strength originates in its clearly liminal meaning, its tempo and the sentence's syntactic structure. Genia is no longer at the center as she was at the beginning of the story. Now she is, like Lerner before her, at the threshold. This is the fate of every literary figure which turns into a living personality through its liminal gestures.

3

Literary gestures point to, touch, and reject the other.

A. A figure's becoming consists of gestures, which are motivated by the pendulum of desire to presence the beloved's rejected body only to reject it anew ("The Letter" by Isaac Dov Berkovich)

This short story by Berkowitz is of particular importance for our discussion not only because it is full of bodily events and mechanisms of sophisticated gestural poetics, but also because this entire apparatus of events and mechanisms operates to present a body which is perceived as *absent*, or as unperceived. The story describes one day in the miserable life of Yeruham the shoemaker, after "his virgin daughter [...] bore a child conceived of fornication" (131).¹²⁶ Yeruham, in awful pain, asks an anonymous youth to write a letter for him, to inform his eldest daughter of the terrible disaster that has befallen the family. The unwritten letter, like the daughter's non-existent body, becomes a sign and object of desire and violence, repression and commemoration.

The figure of Yeruham the shoemaker is represented in the text mainly through bodily events. Just as in Agnon's "Righteous Circles" the body's disappearance is, paradoxically but necessarily, bound up in its manifestation.¹²⁷ Yeruham fences in the corner, which his daughter and her baby occupy, with boxes and barrels. Clearly, however, in the absence

of the daughter his own figure becomes a sign pointing with every movement to the body which has suddenly filled the center of his life: “Yeruham himself paced through his own house like a madman [...] paced through his house from morning until evening, with long steps first in one direction then in another” (ibid.). His bodily disorientation, reflecting of course his emotional and mental disorientation, marks his body as a liminal space-time. It turns him into the border sign, into a cognitive and emotional pendulum. Marked in this way Yeruham’s body, which substitutes for his absent daughter, turns into an object of violent punishment: “At night, in the silence, when the baby’s cries could be heard inside the enclosure, Yeruham would jump from his bed, sit up with a twisted face, gnash his teeth, make threatening moves with his fist at the dark, and tear at his hair. During those days his appearance changed drastically: his face became yellow and bloated, his beard thinned, his eyes turned turbid and red, and instilled terror on their surroundings” (ibid.). As a substitute for doing violence to his daughter and her child, Yeruham punishes his own body with gestures with purposeful violence against himself. Violence marks the body, but also destroys it. A gesture turns into a paradox: a gesture as such is a sign possessing communicative and expressive power, but a gesture in the dark expresses the inability to express.

Yeruham goes out of his house in search for someone who can write a letter for him. In his walk through the town he meets robustly healthy characters, quite unlike himself: “The youths, with their fresh, joyful faces”, as against “a bent solitary old man, standing next to the lamp, lurking with feverish eyes” (ibid.). The following scene certainly also reminds him of his misfortune: “His eyes followed two tall men in military uniform who hurried across the street with clanging spurs and approached a bevy of young women on

a stroll” (ibid.). Both the soldiers’ height and Yeruham’s gaze are stressed here for the purpose of focusing narrative representation in non-verbal communication channels. When Yeruham finds a suitable youth for the task his emotions and intentions are also expressed along these channels: “Yeruham took hold of the youth by his shoulder and walked him up to the narrow alley. The surprised youth accompanied him unwillingly [...] The old man placed a small warm coin in the boy’s hand with trembling fingers and immediately grasped him and turned to go with him into the narrow alley” (ibid.). Yeruham’s sharp gestures imply pent-up violence aimed at the body, a violence which is embodied in the many verbs indicating bodily movement: took hold, walked him, placed, grasped. These gestures, mostly based on touch, originate a double semiotic-cognitive mechanism. On the one hand they identify the subject and the object of the relationship and mark the vector of desire, Yeruham’s desire for a body, his attempt to reconstitute the body/existence of his daughter who to him is dead, and at the same time also to confirm his own body/personality/existence which is in danger of disappearing following the disappearance of his daughter. This is the typical mechanism of control gestures. On the other hand the “immediate” “grasp” of the body deprives it of existence and empties it of its semiotic and personality signification, if signification is taken to mean the distance between signifier and signified or between the subject and object of desire. The grasping gesture thus does not grasp, touching is non-touching. *Yeruham’s gesture or, more precisely, his touching-not-touching of the youth, creates, as expected, a point of liminality in the text, a semiotic and ethical borderline state of existence and non-existence.* The blurring of the youth’s identity and its coalescence with the identity of Yeruham’s daughter, in Yeruham’s mind, of course, is part of this liminality.

When they arrive at Yeruham's home, the latter's fixation on the youth surpasses the bounds of reason. His words are not important, nor does Yeruham's extended chatter about his daughter's "broken leg" signify anything beyond a failed attempt at distraction. It is the figure of the youth himself, standing like a mirror face-to-face with the old man, which constitutes the focus of attention:

The boy sat at the table, took the pen in his hand, looked at the old man and waited for him to speak. Yeruham stood facing him, thoughtful, gazing ahead with unseeing eyes. Then he bent down and held his head with his two hands on the table, turned his face towards the face of the youth and examined him for a short while with feverish eyes. [...] He returned to the table with a burning face. He sat on the bench across from the youth and supported his head with his right hand. [...] Yeruham again gazed at the youth's face in mute inquiry. [...] He then stood up over the bench, bent over until his face came close to the boy's and began reciting in a whisper. [...] Standing away from the table the old man shut his eyes firmly, pushed his hand against his forehead, and his face showed deep wrinkles. Then he opened his eyes and peeked dejectedly at the boy. Finally he approached him from the side, bent down to his ear and said in a strange whisper, slurring his words in his nose [...] (132).

If we take Yeruham's postures and self-gestures as nothing more than expressions of tension, pain and anger then they constitute nothing more than a kind of informational surplus. But at the deeper level of personality-bodily dynamics they function as markers of the body, confirming its presence for Yeruham himself as well as for the reader. In fact, the reader is expected to feel and understand what the old man did not, namely the fact that among the town's joyful youths what he sought was not someone to help him write the letter but a substitute for his absent, cordoned-off daughter. Yeruham's stance vis-à-vis the boy is underpinned by a complex gestural mechanism: the youth serves as a kind of magical mirror in which the old man sees not only his own reflection but also that of his daughter. Yeruham identifies first with the youth and then with his daughter, who is identified with the youth. *Eventually Yeruham's "supportive" self-touch is nothing more than a substitute for, or a simulation of his loving touch of his daughter, precisely*

in the same sense as pulling at his own hair simulates punishing his daughter's body. The temptation of gaze and gesture are so strong that Yeruham, who can neither give in to it nor overcome it, shuts his eyes and runs away from this painful encounter with the boy, an encounter he created with his own hands.

Whereas in the non-verbal channel body dynamics plays a central role, in the verbal channel Yeruham tries to segregate his daughter's body and her sin, as he tried to segregate her physically within his home. However, what he in fact accomplishes is to *presence* her body anew by means of metonymic reference: “-Do you understand? Her leg was broken ...” (ibid.). The metaphorical sundering of the body inevitably reminds one of the biblical stories of the concubine in Gibeah. In this way Yeruham removes some of the guilt from his daughter and transfers it, partially at least, to himself and to social circumstance. This presents him not just as a father but also as a “man”, adding a note of jealousy to his spectrum of angers. To this we should add yet another aspect: Yeruham perceives what has happened as a personal affront, and so his self gesture can also be explained as a dramatization of the idea of or belief in Providence, for good and bad. This aspect, taken together with Yeruham's domineering and violent gestures towards the youth, add an important characteristic to his figure, which at first appeared so wretched and helpless: “Yeruham began pacing the house, stepping first in this direction and then in that, rubbing his forehead with his hand scratching his hair. Then he approached the fireplace, stood there facing the blackened chimney and silently spoke to himself: ‘Oh my God, my God! Why has all this happened to me?’... Eventually he returned to the table and moved his hand towards the youth's face in a motion of desperation” (133). These gestures and their accompanying spoken words are intended to

originate or to verify Yeruham's position as a personality, a hero, a beloved, specifically beloved of God. *What motivates a person to perform gestures is a crisis of love, fear of abandonment, metaphysical and physical loneliness, a desire for intimacy, security and trust, separation and betrayal, in this case Yeruham's daughter's betrayal as an expression of God's betrayal of him.* The man's elegiac cries and gestures turn him into a new Job, a suffering just man, a martyr who ensures for himself a place in the holy center, in the *axis mundi*. The eternal cry of "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" turns abandonment into love and the martyr into the son of God.

Yeruham very likely would have preferred to remain in this liminal state forever, to stay at the boundary line, not to have to decide or do anything, to escape from the river of time, to freeze in death-like immobility in a kind of Hamlet-like hibernation: "Yeruham sat on the bench helplessly and became silent. He sat, looked at the boy and examined him with his dead eyes. [...] He rose from the bench, moved over to his desk and sat there in the dark, remaining there motionless for some time, holding his head in his hands. [...] The old man did not answer and continued sitting motionless where he was" (ibid.). As a metaphor of his situation, a fly stuck between life and death is mentioned a number of times throughout the story: "In the silence of the house the sound of the dying fly could be heard again, fumbling and flapping around the neck of the lamp" (ibid.). But Yeruham awakens when the spark of truth shines in the mirror standing before him in the form of the youth: "- Listen, I'd better write your daughter the whole truth. After all, I know ... Yeruham stirred, jumped up and gave the boy a terrifying glance" (ibid.). Now it has become absolutely clear that Yeruham does not want the letter to be written, that he never intended to have it written in the first place, that he only searched for someone to

“grasp”: “Yeruham grabbed the youth by his shoulders, shook him in all directions [...] Yeruham let him go and glanced at him with unseeing eyes. Suddenly he raised his hand and slapped him on his cheeks” (134). A slap as an action raises the question of the *boundary between gesture and act*. The boundary is clearer in the case of illustrators, for example, the gestures which accompany speech. But in the general case gestures are just a physical communicative act. In the present case the slap is a communicative and symbolic act. Yeruham tries to smash the mirror in which he sees his own reflection and that of his daughter. He punishes her, and himself, as if trying to smash the very relationship that exists between them, as embodied all of a sudden in the figure of the youth and in the letter which the old man dictates to him. The letter turns out to constitute a paradoxical object, like the well-known letter in Edgar Allen Poe’s story: the more one tries to hide it the more it manifests itself, and when it is in the most obvious place it becomes invisible. This feature turns the letter into a metaphor for the body. A slap is like writing that letter; *it is the most radical form of the gesture of touch: it brings its object into being and annihilates it at one-and-the-same time. The letter that is never written is the letter with the most presence and significance. The most desperate attempt to make the body disappear turns into a gesture which presences it most powerfully.*

B. An interactive and unstable pointing gesture turns out to be a perpetuum mobile of character (re-)creation (“Not This One” by Jessaiahu Bershadsky).

Bershadsky’s lyrical short story “Not This One” tells of young love, loss and the boundary between life and death. In it the narrator mourns his beloved, snatched from his

arms by a fatal illness. The whole story is in a sense a gesture of farewell, of longing, in which the beloved's character is brought into being, briefly and lightly touched, and ultimately lost. Both the presence and the absence of Nehamka, the narrator's love, are shaped by three bodily events, located at three key points in the story: before and during Nehamka's illness, and after her death. In all the scenes the relationship between the two young lovers is represented as consisting of touch and gaze, with no representation of verbal communication between them. From one scene to the next Nehamka becomes ever more distant from the narrator, their touch ever looser and more evanescent. In the first scene both characters sit "next to each other", in the second the narrator sits "by her bed", and in the third she "lies flat on the ground". In the first scene the narrator originates the figure of Nehamka by means of representations of the body and of motions:

When we sat next to each other, my hand would stroke her rich golden silken hair which fell down the nape of her neck in long tresses. I loved to feel with my hand the soft, delicate back of her arms which were exposed up to her elbows under the wide sleeves of her light summer dress, and to hold in my hand her small, delicate hands with their long, thin fingers [...] But when we met in daytime I loved more than anything else to look into her dark-blue almond-shaped eyes [...] at her coral lips. Especially when they were laughing (21-22).¹²⁸

The first part of the representation of Nehamka's figure is constructed so that its parts unavoidably contain the gestures of the other, namely the narrator's. Her hair manifests itself only together with the narrator's caressing hand, and her arms are also seen only in his hands. True, her face is ostensibly represented outside the narrator's gestures, but as a matter of fact the perspective from which the face is described is that of the first person, the speaker in the text, so that the depiction constitutes an interactive representation of the object of the imaginary "reader's" looking gesture. The heroine's laughing face, too,

is located within an interactive communicative context. Note also the significant transition between what may be called an “internal” representation of the interaction between the figures in the first part of the quoted passage, and an interactive representation of the figure in relation to the reader. The narrator creates an emotional and cognitive dynamic in which the reader will react with a gesture of his own to the story’s gestures of stimulation and temptation, in an attempt to touch the heroine’s face and feel how she slips through his fingers, eventually to disappear. In this dynamic the *ars-poetical* is related to the mimetic: the literary figure’s fate is the same as that of a human being, and *reading, like life, is the gesture of touching death*. All of the narrator’s gestures only serve to point at the place where disaster awaits, on the borderline between life and death. More precisely, they embody, or even originate, the borderline. The narrator’s hand and gaze move at a measured, gentle, somewhat epic pace over the various signs of the body, as if sculpting it out of the empty surface of the literary page. But when this figure emerges and stands as a living personality before the reader it turns out that the real body was the white marble page out of which the figure was sculpted, whereas the figure itself was the thin trembling surface which covers the emptiness for just a few moments. *Gestures thus mark the boundary between figure and background, and thus embody its constant shifting between existence and non-existence*. The figure’s tremble, one of its substantive characteristics, is exposed in particular at the level of the plot, in explicative scenes where the heroine straddles the borderline between life and death, as in the following:

I sat next to her bed most hours of the day and the night, sitting and looking with particular fondness at her feverish face, at her arm, lying uncovered and powerless on the blanket, at her shoulders and the upper part of her chest, exposed in her fever from under her blanket. Sometimes the blanket would fall at her feet and

reveal the edge of a small, delicate foot with pinkish, small, thin, slightly rounded and bent toes and tiny pale pink toenails ... When I touched her to make her comfortable, to pull the blanket over her, the soft, delicate warmth of her young body would send a pleasurable heat throughout mine (23).

On the one hand their communication is limited to looks and an occasional quick touch. But on the other hand it appears as if their bond deepens. Not because the narrator looks at Nehamka “with particular fondness”, nor because he gazes at her chest, her shoulders and her feet, but because he represents his own body as a kind of vessel intertwined in her body. A two-pronged process is taking place. Nehamka’s figure is moving away from the narrator’s touch, but at the same time it is also merging into his figure. At any rate, in both processes, although they would appear to be moving in disparate directions, her just-now created personality is already disappearing. This kind of ambivalence is clearly characteristic of gesture as such, as we have already often described it: *the gesture of touch originates the two figures at either end of it and the relationship between them,, but at the same time it also empties the personality by turning it into a sign and an object of passion and domination*. Eventually Nehamka’s personality melts in a sense into the narrator’s mind, his memory, his story. There is no way out of this paradoxical cycle: the story presences the personality, but only by presenting it as a sign, whereas the sign can represent the figure only in its becoming a personality. Personality and sign are two sides of the same coin, as are presence and absence. A personality cannot be absent. But there *can* be a sign of “absence of personality”. Such a sign says “it is absent”, but this has no meaning, for it presences the personality which cannot be the signified of the sign “it is absent”, just as in the final scene:

When I found Nehamka the next morning flat on the ground [...] I jumped over to her, bent over and rolled the blanket which completely covered her from her face ... At that moment I sprang back. No, no ... This

wasn't at all the same Nehamka [...] I looked at this one, lying flat on the ground, while my eyes were as if searching for the other one, the one I knew before... [...] I was shocked every time I remembered again that unpleasant coldness I felt at that casual touch [...] That Nehamka, so it appeared to me, does not exist anymore at all ... What, is she dead? ... That doesn't matter, so long as she no longer ... no longer exists at all [...] Where is she? Is she really gone?! ... Gone?! (23-24).

Here we clearly see a repetition of the patterns of non-verbal behavior which characterized the relationship between the narrator and Nehamka in the previous scenes. The gestures of rolling down the blanket, the casual touch and the looks all serve as codes or symbols, in the literal sense of the word, that is as identity markers, as signs of a bond and of recognition. The narrator fails to identify Nehamka, but this is not due to the fact that her "body" lacks a soul or a personality, but because it is not her body at all. The body is not only inseparable from the personality, it *is* the personality. The narrator's energetic gesture towards the blanket, the look in his eyes, which "search for the other", are directed at the "absent" Nehamka, but by their very performance they give a new presence to the Nehamka that has never disappeared even for a moment. The last scene's emotional and somewhat sentimental power is based on a simple psycholinguistic fact: the more the narrator repeats his cry of "gone" Nehamka's living figure is ever more present. As in the paradoxical world of Maurice Blanchot's *The Last Man*, as in martyriological mythology and ideology, as in Louis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland*, as in the monotheistic faiths – the receding figure does not become more remote, for it is the disappearing personality that is forever revealed and existent. This hyper-dialectic is at the root of Bershadsky's conception of figure, personality and body as expressed in "Not This One".

To conclude this chapter, let us consider the title of the story, whose structure is a negation of deixis. But deixis cannot be negated; a negative deixis is an impossibility. The pointing gesture embodied in the word “this” neither disappears, nor becomes weaker nor even changes direction when the word “not” is added to it. It matters not whether the gesture in question refers to Nehamka’s figure (i.e., it is not she who is lying flat on the floor) or to a corpse (i.e., it is not it which is Nehamka). What matters is that the phrase “Not This One” makes the gesture of pointing *interactive and unstable*: it arouses in the reader again and again the same kind of cognitive disorientation that was expressed by means of the narrator’s eye movement, that is, it forces him to transfer his “gaze” from “this” figure and to look for the other, the one who is “not this one”. If the other does not exist, one’s gaze returns to “this one”, who is once again negated as the object of the reading gesture “not this one”. Or vice versa: if only the other exists, then the gesture focuses on it as its object, turns it into “this one” and is immediately shunted aside by the expression “not this one”, and so on and so forth. The angle between these two vectors, one pointing to “this one” and the other to “not this one”, defines the space within which the figure comes into being, which thus demonstrates a clearly bi-stable character. The story moves towards originating Nehamka’s figure as an oscillator; this is so not by chance: this is a feature which, as we have frequently pointed out, gives a human face to the figure. The oscillating bi-stable gesture of “not this one”, because it is interactive, turns the reader into its subject, into its active executor, and thus also into the subject of the ethical relationship with the figure, as if it were an actual personality. In other words, this gesture generates mythopoesis, an interactive, dynamic process whereby Nehamka’s personality is reified through its miracle, namely this very same gesture itself.

Gesture thus turns out to be a kind of perpetuum mobile, a myth/memory of Nehamka and a mechanism for her continuous reincarnation.

C. The formula of gesture: touching-yet-not-touching. A figure's constituting anthropoetic gesture is a failed gesture, one which points to itself and its failure ("Finally" by Gershon Shofman).

David Chertov, the main character in Shofman's story "Finally", unsuccessfully tried to join the ranks of the revolutionaries in White Russia, escaped to Western Europe and wandered from one place to another until finally he found his death in the course of the breaking up of a socialist demonstration at which he was present almost by chance. This is a story with scarcely any action and no dialogue. Whatever is of significance in the plot takes place at the gestural level; gestures of touch and look abound throughout.

When the story opens David, still in the city of his birth, is attracted to a girl named Esther, a kind of local goddess, a Venus who devours the hearts of young men, as unattainable as the horizon: "That same mysterious spark which at that time shone in the eyes of most boys his age around him, did not settle into his cold, heavy eyes [...]. Occasionally he would catch in the meantime that beautiful look, which suddenly filled with scorn, as if saying: me you cannot cheat!" (44)¹²⁹ That speaking look builds a space around David, a space which closes in on him and imprisons him in hopeless solitude. This gap, the unbridgeable distance between him and the object of his desire is what makes his gesture possible. The text contains no indication that David loves Esther. His

feelings are not represented at all. *It looks like magic, hypnosis or, alternatively, like an unconscious bodily reflex.* The gesture appears as if spontaneously; it is the gesture which originates the characters and not the other way around. It not only marks the vector of desire but also actually creates it: “One evening, at a clandestine meeting, without candle-light, Andros spoke [...] Chertov, standing near Esther’s intoxicating presence, heard nothing and understood nothing. One of his hands moved *as if on its own* and fluttered slowly over her waist, touching by the way the end of her fresh and powerful braid. [...] Esther shook herself, apparently felt his touch, and without looking around her went away and moved to another place” (45) (the italics are mine – R. K.).

The mythological features in Esther’s character are intertwined with its psychological features. David’s gesture points to the center of sanctity and power, and also plays a childish game with the alternately approaching and leaving mother-figure. David’s touch-not-touch marks the boundary which he will forever want to cross, without success. His is a liminal figure, coming into being by touching the boundary which escapes his touch again and again. It is not the ideology of the “uprooted” (“*ha-talush*”) but the pendulum-like dynamics of the gesture itself which constructs David’s figure as wavering at the threshold. David’s gesture is a desperate attempt to break through the shell of the self and encounter the other, be the other. But there is no escape: crossing the border (in reality, when running away from his city) only brings him an encounter with his own absolute self, with figures of his family:

When he stood on the ferry, ready for his long journey, and looked at the Dnepr for the last time, his eyes moistened. How many times did he take this ferry just so [...] for the chance of perhaps he would encounter Esther here. [...] The Dnepr! There, on the sand at the bank, he would stand as a small boy and gaze at its comfortable and comforting wrinkles while his weak mother beat the laundry on the rock with

the pale and oft-washed board. Or on summer Sabbath afternoons, when he would blink with his eyes, led by his great-grandfather along its billowing eddy” (45).

A gaze, like any gesture, indicates a boundary, here embodied by the big river. The border is like a mirror: the closer David approaches and tries to touch it, the more clearly he understands that he is touching only himself. Further into the story, as David matures, this metaphor becomes reality in another scene of liminality, oscillation and flight: “Chertov entered his room and without taking off his coat took a step now in one direction, now in another, glanced at the cracked mirror – where he saw his great-grandfather ... and fled outside” (53). Just as in this passage David’s liminal movement, “a step now in one direction, now in another”, reflects the mirror’s duplicating action, so in the previous passage his gaze at the Dnepr doubles the river (“his eyes moistened”), turns his own figure into the Dnepr, into an embodiment of the boundary, into the place where *the gesture towards the other touches the self*.

When David crosses the political border, this is not only accompanied by a gesture, it originates the gesture, even if it is imaginary: “‘To land, to the solid ground, to the sweet life!’ – Chertov marched heavily over the melting ice of the channel-border and felt Esther’s hostile gaze on his back” (46). His imaginary relation to Esther is embodied in non-verbal communication, if not in touch then in a look, if not face-to-face then in a gaze at the back. In light of the figure’s psycho-mythical features it is no wonder that David’s self-hatred is imagined as a gesture by Esther. The question is rather whether or not his touching Esther on the back in the previous scene was imagined or not. That there was physical contact is clear, but the physical body is not the gesture’s object, but rather the subject represented in the body. In the “touching scene” both characters behave

strangely: David's hand "moved as if on its own". Esther, hypnotized by the stars, may or may not have felt his touch. Very likely David in his gesture touched not this Esther, the flesh-and-blood girl standing next to him, but rather an imagined "daughter of the gods, holding the fate of humanity in her hands" (45). This figment of his imagination did not feel the touch of the mortal David Chertov at all, but only sensed some motion, perhaps quite tiny, in cosmic forces near her. The course of this discussion leads us to conclude that *all gesture is imagined*, in the sense that it necessarily consists of a sign formed out of a relation among other signs, in particular in the sense that it originates characters and creates myths.

Let us now move on to the next gesture of touch. Except for the event's location (a foreign city in Western Europe), all the other circumstances making up the scene of the gesture are repeated here: "Now he approaches the closely-packed group which surrounded a vendor's stall. Drunk with exile, his hand *went out* to the girl next to him, *touching-not-touching*. Then he sees the vendor as if through a strange vapor [...] The girl turns her face in anger and moves away. Chertov sobers a bit and his heart falls" (46) (the italics is mine – R. K.). The most significant detail in this scene is the gesture's definition: "touching-not-touching", especially in view of the fact that it is performed almost unconsciously and that it possesses no communicative function. Psychologically it certainly points to a kind of mental deviation, but from a gestural point of view Chertov's weird habit can certainly be defined as an *anthropoetic gesture*, i.e. a strange gesture with a distinctly poetic function that serves as a characteristic feature of an individual or a group.¹³⁰ In the case at hand the gesture's uniqueness consists of its unreal character, its uncertain emergence at the borders of existence and non-existence. This gesture is the

main persono-dynamic mechanism for the origination and characterization of David's figure.

As is typical of anthropoetic gestures, Chertov's touching-not-touching gesture is repeated:

On the square in front of the gray church stands a large crowd in close rows, waiting for the Emperor to come out. [...] Chertov drinks in the girl's fragrant, tanned and hairy nape [...] But now the Emperor must be coming out, since the pressure of the crowd increased suddenly, breathing stopped, and the girl as if made herself available: 'Do with me whatever pleases you!'... But this magical moment does not last long. The crowd immediately disintegrates, the policemen appear – and Chertov's world collapses (47).

Chertov's whole personality is reified in "this magical moment", in an erotic fantasy of the gesture's consummation. The course of his myth, a myth of escape, journey and transition, is marked by gestures of (non-)touching. The non-completion of one gesture drives David to the next, and so on. Thus the gesture of touch, which could have been the gesture of appropriation, a foundation of power and authority ("Do with me whatever pleases you"), and often is, fails here and turns into a mechanism for creating the figure's neurotic instability. This instability, however, ensures the dynamism of the figure's personality. Let us go back and look at the scene described in the last passage. It is constructed on the basis of a sophisticated parallelism between two courses of movement, an external course unto which Chertov stumbles almost inadvertently, and an internal course in which the hero operates out of a mysterious fateful necessity which is characteristic of him. This unity of chance and necessity gives the figure an almost Greek vitality and completeness. The girl's appearance is fortuitous, but the touch gesture aimed at her is necessary. The timing of the crowd's dispersal is accidental, but the gesture's failure is necessary. In this scene the crowd's growing pressure parallels the pressure of

the hero's desire, and the expectation of the Emperor's emergence parallels the expectation of touching. The "magical moment" is that in which the vector of the crowd's desire unites with David's, although the two are aimed at different objects. The psycho-anthropological mechanism which lies at the bottom of both is what unites them. To use Eric Gans' terminology, this is the mechanism of a failed gesture of appropriation towards the central object of sanctity,¹³¹ be that the Emperor in the crowd's mind, or the girl in Chertov's. The same semiotic, anthropological and psychological structure can be distinguished in the impossibility of completing the touching gesture in the case of both of these objects. The moment before revelation, the "now" standing between past and future, the distance between the subject to the object of touching, between the self and the other, which can approach nothingness but not disappear – that is the moment of supreme erotic ecstasy in David's case, religious-nationalistic and also pseudo-erotic in the case of the pressing crowd. Both the crowd's movement and Chertov's (nearly unperformed) movement are nothing but chance lines of the activity of eternal cosmic (i.e. psycho-cultural) forces. The main character's personal myth, which comes into being in relation to the figure of the imagined girl, is inextricably bound with the crowd's collective myth, which latter also comes into being in relation to the figure of the Emperor, no less, and perhaps more, imaginary than that of the girl. In fact, Chertov's myth never left the lap of the crowd's religious-political myth.

From here we shall skip to the last chapter, which summarizes David's wanderings from one land to another, from one apartment to another, from one woman to another, from one gesture to another:

In order to escape for a second time, to escape from himself [...] he moved to an apartment in a far corner. As he carried his effects to his new home he felt himself as he did then, fourteen years earlier, when he

marched on the snow piled on the channel-border. This was not by chance. For when on the day before he spoke with his new landlady for the first time, her little daughter peeked at him from behind her, a girl about eleven years old, and Chertov felt right away that here, only here, will he find peace. [...] He would converse with the little girl when they were left alone, and by the way would kiss her on her head, which emitted a fragrance of warm bread (52).

Helly “the redeeming girl” reminds David of Esther. Crossing the border is accompanied by touching a female figure; or, more precisely, the “goddess” epiphany originates in Chertov the liminality embodied in gesture – his and hers, the gesture of salvation:

Once at twilight, when he stood at the entrance to the kitchen and asked his landlady for a cup of tea, he placed his hand, as if fencing in the entrance, on the door handle, and Helly came up to him silently, pressed against him wordlessly, and passed her small, sweet cheek, and then her pointed, somewhat cleft jaw against the back of his hand ... Chertov made an effort not to look at her and kept speaking composedly to the unsuspecting mother, as if hiding a sin (53).

This scene constitutes an almost transparent explication of the liminal experience: evening, threshold, fence, camouflage, crime, the door handle as the eternal symbol of searching, missing and yearning. The author sculpts the scene’s symbolic iconicity in simple yet strong lines. True, the main gesture is Helly’s but David’s figure is also provided with a gestural dynamism which goes beyond the frozen visual aspect of the image of his posture. First of all, his posture “when he stood [...] he placed his hand [...] on the door handle” is depicted by the author as an active behavior, “as if fencing in the entrance”. Secondly, after Helly’s gesture his non-gesture is represented as an attempt to hide his feelings: “made an effort not to look at her”. However, as we already stressed above, *a gesture in a literary text cannot be negated*. The representation of the non-performance of a gesture presences it no less than would the representation of its performance. Furthermore, such a negative representation imposes a dynamic bi-stability

on the figure, which wavers between two states (here: looked – did not look), and so confers the vitality of a personality on it. The expression “made an effort not to look” really contains two gestures: moving the eyes in the direction of the other, in other words looking at Helly, and then a movement back following the realization that *the other cannot be looked at*; this look, like a touch or any other gesture, constitutes crossing a boundary, a transgression, “a sin”. The second state is also unstable, because the unrealized touch left a vacuum which once more entraps David’s gaze-vector-of-desire, and his eyes once again look, actually or not, at Helly who is beyond the boundary, and back again. David’s figure is thus stuck at the boundary as a kind of oscillator, in everlasting liminality, with no ability to grow up. He is completely immersed inside his *anthropoetic pendulum gesture* which, we must emphasize, turns him into a living personality which arouses an intensive ethical and esthetic reaction in the reader. On the matter of Helly’s gesture we may add that it, too, confers an implicit dynamism to David’s supposedly static posture. By passing her cheek and jaw on his hand she creates a simulation of *his* gesture, as if it were he who was caressing her face, despite the fact that his hand did not move at all. This event, too, can thus be added to Chertov’s collection of imagined gestures-non-gestures.

At the end of the story David dies in the course of performing his last gestures, including the paradigmatic one of crossing the border between life and death – breathing: “The voices became silent, and out of the darkness which surrounded him Esther floated up, appeared, friendly, loving: her face also took on much of the others, of Helly ... With his remaining strength Chertov breathed into himself the heavy, sad happiness, instead of the breath of air which was no more” (55). Even the crossing of this last border is

accompanied by the imagined presence of Esther-Helly. As the vector of his desire for her figure, David this time performs an ultimate gesture: unable to move, he “breathed into himself” the feeling which embodies the woman’s non-present presence. Breath is the gesture of life and the gesture of death, the first and last gesture of bending over towards the disappearing beloved one; a gesture which in the absence of the beloved points to itself as a sign of absence and yearning – a sigh. But David’s last gesture, like all his previous ones as well, is not realized. His breathing towards the figure of Esther-Helly stops and fails in mid-action, because there is no more air. Despite the uniqueness of David’s behavior and the uniqueness of his anthropoetic gestures, the mechanism which lies at the basis of these gestures is not unique: Every gesture comes into being as a gesture by stopping at the apex of its momentum, goes back to the beginning, swings up again, again and again, like a pendulum. Otherwise the gesture would lose its ability to set up communication between the self and the other, since between the two there would no longer be any distance; there would be no other, no relation and no communication. The gesture as pendulum originates the figure as an oscillator and so turns it into a personality. In this sense, to sum up our discussion, *every gesture is a failed gesture, which points to itself and its failure, and which embodies the ethics of the relation in which it is involved in the body’s (kyn)esthetics.*

4

Gesture appears to be a micro-myth that unites cosmos and chaos in a bi-stable figure. Touching-not-touching gestures create symbols (“The Song That Was Sung” by Shmuel Yosef Agnon).

“The Song That Was Sung” is one of those stories which point towards a central event at the end although they are not “punch-line stories”. The event in question in this story possesses a clearly revelational and miraculous character and is embodied in a complex configuration of verbal and non-verbal representations in the text. The revelation bursts into the given reality in an unexpected, chaotic offensive, spearheaded by a complex, strange, unique figure which comes into being on the story’s pages. The entire story takes the form of a series of observations of a single personality and of a group, which prepare the final event. These observations themselves, mostly of a bodily-gestural nature, of course create the figure, its complexity, and Agnon’s imaginary anthropology.

The story relates the narrator’s spiritual journey and is thus divided into two stages. At the first stage the narrator presents his mediator with the world of the occult, the “sweet man” (152),¹³² and describes the preparations for the journey. At the second stage the narrator tells the story of the adventure itself; there the mediator takes on the role of the central figure. Let us begin with the first stage. The “sweet man” is presented by means of a number of biographical details, but what turns the figure into a living personality

with an existence of its own is its non-verbal bodily representation: “He was thin and his clothes were worn [...] with a kind of hump coming out of his shoulders” (ibid.). But his main virtue is his smile: “His smile shone on his lips and turned golden the dust in his beard. This unceasing smile on his mouth gave him a mediocre face. But an innocence which he had, gave grace to his movements and enraptured my heart” (ibid.). In the course of the story the man’s speech is accompanied by a smile or laughter: “He smiled and said”, “And here he laughed”, “He would sit thus in front of me with a joyful face as always, whether in prayer, or alone, or standing in the market surrounded by people” (152-153). Already in the very first lines this smile induces in the reader (together with the narrator) a kind of cognitive and emotional disorientation. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, as in the case of “that man’s” smile in “Righteous Circles”, the smile imparts an element of uncertainty to the figure and brings about misunderstanding (mediocrity or uniqueness?). The uncertainty stands in contradiction to the hero’s innocence. Secondly, the story begins with a series of synesthetic metaphors whose fundamental trait is disorientation: “the sweet man”, “his smile shone [...] and turned golden the dust...”, “innocence [...] gave grace to his movements”. And of course in the depiction of the hero’s face we have the obvious dichotomy of dust on the one hand and gold and light (“shone”) on the other. On the one hand this is a unique face, shining with the light, perhaps hidden or perhaps manifest, of brilliance and gold; on the other hand, a mediocre face and dust, ashes and dirt. The figure originates as an oscillation of two faces. Both states exist at one-and-the-same time, but each appears and makes itself manifest against the contrasting background of the other, with the reader changing his or her perspective somewhat. In other words, the figure demonstrates clear

features of bi-stability. However, according to the inescapable logic of non-linear literary dynamics, uncertainty and non-transparency originate the figure as the subject of an ethical relation, in other words as an other, as if it were a real personality. The story creates the myth of this personality, based on the creation of its unique face in the encounter with the narrator and the reader, the ultimate other of every literary figure. At the center of mythopoesis, or the chaotic system of the figure's origination, is the smile – the gesture of the face. In this story the smile is connected to joy and laughter (not a necessary connection), and laughter, too, becomes the subject of the sweet man's talk and one of the story's major and special topics.

Laughter is among the most important and widespread gestures. Its functions may change from one culture to another but its central position in face-to-face communication can be seen in every culture. Still, ever since the days of "Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed" down to Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* laughter has remained a mysterious, ambivalent and uncertain non-verbal sign. What is most mysterious is the relation between laughter and theology, mysticism and mythology. A god who creates and annihilates worlds with his laughter and a clown with two faces, one laughing and one crying – these are the two poles of the complex problem of laughter, which is projected unto the figure of the sweet man as he relates the following tale: "He added and said: 'It is said in the name of the Baal Shem Tov: It is said in Talmud: There were these two comedians etc.: however, there was only one man there, but he laughed at the world and the world laughed at him'" (152). Let us go to the source and examine the connection between the theology/cosmology/ethics of laughter and its gestural functioning. The Baal Shem Tov's interpretation refers to a Talmudic text which has been one of the basic

foundations of the well-known debate concerning the justification of joy, a debate that has been going on for centuries. Here is a translation of the relevant Talmudic passage:

To R. Beroka of Huzaah, Elijah would frequently appear, when he (R. Beroka) would be standing in the market of Be-Lepht. One day he asked Elijah whether there was any one in the market who would have a share in the world to come, and Elijah answered: "Nay." [...] Again it happened that two brothers were passing by, and Elijah said to R. Beroka: "These two brothers shall also have a share in the world to come." R. Beroka approached them and asked to know their occupations, and they replied: "Our occupation is to cheer and comfort all those who are downcast, and when we see two men quarrelling, to make peace between them."¹³³

The position of the Talmud in the quoted passage is by no means ambiguous. It refers not to joy or laughter as such, but to an ethical-theological evaluation of the actions of those who bring joy or amuse others: their deed is considered so worthy that they have earned their place in heaven when still alive. To emphasize once more: not just those who are joyful themselves, but also whoever brings joy to others, are the heroes of this legend. In other words, the joy in question is one which is realized as an action, as an active performance, as an interpersonal relationship. But the Baal Shem Tov's interpretation as quoted in Agnon's story relate to laughter and thus take the discussion to another plane. The laughter in this case is closer to scorn than to joy; it is in this context that the sweet man utters his fable, in which he compares the relation between the world and the person from the fable to the relation between himself and his relatives abroad. As in the case of the posture of Elijah in "Righteous Circles" and in many other places, Agnon creates a "shift" of the two sources: the primary source is pushed aside by the secondary source; it is however not pushed off the picture, but only to the margins of the field of vision. This intertextual dioptrics again creates an oscillation of the figure between two states of stability, two poles of identity: the Prophet Elijah and the Baal Shem Tov, joy and

laughter. In place of Elijah's theological ethics, the Baal Shem Tov supposedly proposes a kind of existentialist cosmology in which a person stands not before another person but before the world as a kind of mirror, neither bringing the joy to the other but rather laughing at each other. These two poles, from the point of view of the analytics of gesture, reflect two different, although not necessarily contradictory, gestural mechanisms: the interactive, communicative gesture on the one hand and, on the other, the autistic, self-directed gesture. Agnon's text originates the sweet man's smile as a bi-stable oscillator of these two gestures – *to touch the self with laughter or to touch another with joy*. That is also the gesture of the Agnonian text itself, the uncertain smile which preserves the secret of its location precisely between the two poles and which creates a constant dilemma among scholars: is the smile a sign that the author is happy together with his heroes and readers, or is he perhaps laughing at them?

The story's second stage, the journey itself, begins with the determination of its direction. The narrator wants to visit the synagogue of the "Community of the Pure of Heart" to which the sweet man belongs, in order to observe the ritual dance with which the members of the community end their prayers. The narrator's wife and children accompany him on his journey. The problem is that he does not know where the synagogue is located. Their journey, part excursion, part pseudo-anthropological, part mystical, also begins with (spatial and spiritual) disorientation and uncertainty: "I followed my heart" (153), says the narrator, testifying not only to the fact that this is an internal journey, an illusion or dream, but also to the crucial role which basic (emotional-bodily, intuitive, irrational) mechanisms played in his decision making and his orientation. The journey's uncertainty and its unexpected character are not noise in the

system. Quite the contrary, in fact: since these are the traits of chaotic dynamics, they ensure that the path of the heart will lead to the acquisition of personality knowledge, that the journey will come into being like the emergence of personality, that is as a myth, and that at its end the miracle of epiphany and self-realization will take place. But the road is still long and in the middle of the journey, as a necessary extension of the bodily-gestural activation begun in the first stage, the body's role in the narrator's quest becomes ever more dominant. The physical dimension in the narrator's figure is given increasing prominence as a reaction balancing out the physical dimension in the sweet man's figure. Both figures, like communicating vessels, constitute a single dynamic system. Not only do different figures reflect and multiply each other, as in the surrealistic narratives of the *Twenty-One Stories* ("Sefer Ha-Ma'asim"), but the system of figures as an integral whole shows evolutionary features. This is a system characterized, of course, by self-replication and survivability, but more than that by the fact that its chaoticness, non-linearity and complexity serve as a *condition* for its stability. The narrator's way to the synagogue of the "Community of the Pure of Heart" is completely random. This is not the randomness of an unknown regularity, but a true, chaotic randomness. In other words, you only find what you seek if you do not know where it is; or you do not find it. The figure and the story which originate in this chaotic manner become personality and myth due to that very chaoticness. The same happens in religious myths whose main characters are heroes of faith; even for those whose faith is rock solid, revelation is always unexpected. Chaoticness ensures its irrationality or, more precisely, it ensures the emergence of another rationality, existing beyond words and causality. A bodily gesture is the "natural" embodiment of this irrational rationality.

The narrator's orientation during his journey, his arrival, his contact with the objects of his quest are performed by means of the body: "My hand lifted as if on its own and attached itself to the door handle. I said to myself in a whisper: Here" (153). The narrator's gesture of touching the door handle is the first miracle in the story's mythopoesis. Semiotically this gesture is constructed like a kind of handshake, of the man's hand with the handle of the door. Its meaning is that of the creation of an alliance, a greeting. This gesture is a code, a key, a sign of communication, of forming a connection, of involvement – *sym-bolon*. *The gesture, especially as a gesture of touch, is presented as the paradigmatic symbol*. Whereas a symbol's structure is not and cannot be accidental, its timing, place and concrete implementation are always unexpected and chaotic. This is what gives it strength, vitality and the ability to constantly renew itself. The narrator's gesture-symbol originates a relationship of subject-object that serves as the center of sanctity towards which the vector of desire is directed. The door handle marks the boundary, and the gesture, like all gestures, points to it and touches it, embodying the liminal experience and the transgression. The gesture creates spatial orientation and temporal direction; in other words, it imparts to the figure's origination the character of an irreversible process. The concept of time's irreversibility, which in modern science has overcome all other approaches, is the historical, human concept of time. The concept of the literary figure's irreversible origination makes it possible to explain how the figure becomes personality, the object and subject of an ethical relation, and how reading becomes historical, i.e. how it becomes a realization of that relation.

Upon entering the synagogue the narrator and his family encounter the praying congregation whose "sadness in their faces is mixed with joy" (154). The narrator then

experiences a second revelation, still more wonderful and mysterious: “A voice that was not a voice rose from the ground and from the walls of the house, like the voice of the paint which the engraver puts into the letters of the tombstone, and like the voice of an old prayer shawl when it is swallowing its tears. I held my breath and signaled to my wife and children to listen. They raised their eyes and gazed until their eyes took off and became visibility, with no mediation of the face” (ibid.). The poetic metaphors which make up the narrator’s description of this paradoxical experience are constructed as gestures. The narrator wishes to describe an irrational phenomenon, a bodily experience which is incapable of being perceived mentally or represented verbally – “a voice that was not a voice”. It therefore requires a non-verbal representation. Furthermore, this experience is no longer within the domain of hearing; the voice is a voice no more, but rather something broader, synesthetic, and is therefore embodied in a visual representation. The narrator realizes the “seeing voices” model of revelation (subsequently, too, when the narrator signaled to his wife and children that they should listen, their gazes turn into pure vision). This representation’s cognitive process is of necessity constructed as a gestural scene, consisting of three components: (a) the gesture’s subject – the engraver’s figure which can be represented as a complete human figure, including body and face, or as the engraver’s hand holding a tool such as a paintbrush; (b) the gesture’s object – the tombstone with letters engraved on it, touched by the engraver’s brush; (c) the gesture itself – the engraver’s hand motion, realizing the relation between subject and object, and the metaphor as a whole. It is impossible for the reader to imagine the narrator’s paradoxical experience with the voice without also imagining the personality and its gesture, which is nothing but *a micro-myth*, the plastic

representation of the unperceivable revelation. This gesture-myth, like any gesture and any myth, marks the space and the time as a space-time of liminal experience, of the paradoxical touching of death, impossible but necessary for originating voice and symbol, speech, language and that paradigmatic sign, the tombstone. The gesture of the engraver (“mekhokek”) signifies the origination of the law (“khok”) and its transgression at one-and-the-same time and testifies to the fact that the experience reported by the narrator is the pure, continuous liminal experience, the stage of transition, of passage, of rebirth on this journey. It may be said in passing that there is another piece of, albeit indirect, evidence which gives further support to this claim: “I, too, stood as if within myself on the eve of the Ninth of Ab at nightfall” (154). The Ninth of Ab, it is well-known, has a special meaning in Agnon’s own personal mythopoesis: it is his imagined birthday.

In the second metaphor, “like the voice of an old prayer shawl when it is swallowing its tears”, the gestural scene is less clear but no less decisive, and the mythopoeic dimension is much more prominent, even if only thanks to the personification of the prayer shawl. Here, too, the audible gesture is translated into a visual dynamics. This dynamics is not simple. The processing of this metaphor oscillates between two states or mechanisms: (a) a standard concrete-bodily representation of a human face on which tears run and which swallows them, with the words “prayer shawl” remaining in the background as a categorical label; in this state the propositional and visual channels of cognitive processing operate separately and preserve their autonomy; this could have been a stable state had it not brought about a loss of the connection to the text’s meaning; therefore it strives towards the second state; (b) a concrete but unusual representation of the prayer

shawl as a face, as the subject of the gesture of crying and swallowing the tears; this non-categorical diffusion of the various processing channels gives rise to disorientation and confusion; this state, too, is unstable and strives for a return to the first state, and so on. This bi-stable uncertain metaphor-oscillator, like the previous metaphor, functions as a gesture-myth whose poetic force activates the reader's cognitive-emotional system.

The gentle grief and profound sadness embodied in these metaphors stand in contradiction to the narrator's expectation to encounter happy people in the synagogue. Indeed, this time the praying congregants have no intention of dancing after the prayer. Instead, the narrator is exposed to another revelation, whose unexpected chaotic force changes the nature of his perception of man:

Suddenly a voice that was not a voice was heard, like the voice of an hour when it encounters the next hour and leaves it forever. I raised my eyes and saw the man who had visited me today standing with his face towards the people. That smile which had illuminated his face was torn away, his hands were drawn into fists out of anxiety, and he spoke to himself. His voice surrounded the words and the words surrounded his voice. I listened and heard:

A world whose smoke is a desert

And the sun covers the shadows.

[...] My two hands shut into fists and began trembling, as if struck by the same anxiety. It appeared that my wife and children did the same. I looked across at them to see if this was indeed what happened. They suddenly disappeared, or perhaps they had not been with me at all. Only a sweet, flapping smile was in the air, like a dream which one sees and thinks that others do, too (154).

The third experience of a "voice that is not a voice" is embodied in an abstract metaphorical image with no visual representation, if that is possible. Quite likely this metaphor, too, will receive some kind of non-propositional presence during its cognitive processing at the time of reading, but within the framework of the present study we

cannot inquire into this topic in any detail. Still, the metaphor's emotional effect is clear enough: it creates or strengthens an atmosphere of painful parting, by means of catering to strong psychological, archetypal and symbolic mechanisms such as desertion anxiety, fear of death, the feeling of passing time, and so on. At any rate, this metaphor is linked to its two predecessors by means of the motif of death, a death which when one touches it, an act realized here by the paint touching the tombstone, the tears touching the prayer shawl and the hour touching the next hour, leaves a track of time, or in other words creates memory and history. Whatever the actual historical events on which the present story is based, in its text micro-myths are created which develop into a single apocalyptic myth whose main hero is the smiling/non-smiling man. His face itself is the myth, the plastic representation of the personality's miraculous history,¹³⁴ which this time presents the replacement of existential joy with existential anxiety. He is the prophet of joy and rage whose intentions and message are expressed first and mainly by means of non-verbal communication, and by means of verbal communication with the people. While the meaning of his poem, prophecy or oracle is obscure and in need of interpretation, his gestural-proxemic behavior is unambiguous and realizes his figure's bodily potential which was prepared during the first stage of the plot: in contrast to his lively movements at the beginning of the story, the man now stands motionless facing the people, like a tragic hero on a theater stage. His smile, in a kind of violent body motion, is "torn away" from his face, something which never happened, as we recall from the first half of the story; also "his hands were drawn into fists out of anxiety". All these signs say one thing: here, in this man's body and face, in his gestures and postures, passes the boundary between past and future, between joy and grief, between life and death. Here, like in the

story of the Baal Shem Tov's sermon about the Talmudic tale, there occurs a reversal; instead of the sweet man, who smiles at *others*, we perceive a man speaking to *himself* and observing the world in existential and metaphysical anxiety.

True, the man is in any case situated at the center of the synagogue's social space. But the narrator's minor gestures of looking and hearing create a unique bond between the two: "I raised my eyes and saw", "I listened and heard", like a reverse, affirmative realization of the verse about those who "have eyes, and see not, that have ears, and hear not" (Jer. 5:21). The narrator does see and does hear, and the strength of the sweet/anxious man's gesture is perceived by him and shakes his body: "My two hands shut into fists and began trembling, as if struck by the same anxiety". This phenomenon of echoing gestures is very widespread in everyday life, too; it is characteristic of people whose personality has a strong physical presence and to people who like each other. The "pure of heart" prophet in our story makes the world shake with an apocalyptic gesture. In a kind of ecstatic hypnosis ("like a dream which one sees and thinks that others do, too") the narrator himself turns into his reflection, into the hero's double. The lines become blurred and the two figures, of the sweet man and the narrator, become amalgamated into the figure of the double-faced clown, anxious and smiling, crying and laughing, which develops from the beginning of the story until the end. This bi-stable figure, so clearly chaotic and uncertain, perhaps existing and perhaps not, is embodied in a gesture – in "a sweet, flapping smile". *The very boundary between existence and non-existence is marked in this gesture, which is, like all gestures, a myth about the miracle of the union of chaos and cosmos in the living face of the personality.*

5

Gestures establish the power of symbolism and visibility in the modern culture of the “fall of public man” (the stories by Jacob Steinberg).

A. Gesture is an unsuccessful attempt to touch a mystery and discover the symbol within it. The symbol is what originates as an abortive gesture’s obsessive object (“The Red Scarf”).

The special importance of discussing Jacob Steinberg’s gestural poetics lies not only in the fact that this writer and poet is one of the most proficient masters of gesture of Hebrew, and not only Hebrew, literature; such a discussion is almost indispensable because in Steinberg’s prose writing the secret of his literary gestures’ power lies in the secret of the power of symbol. Symbols, a quite common object of study in poetics, anthropology, philosophy and logic, were and remain an unsolved aporia. This is the usual state of affairs. However, in his “The Red Scarf” Steinberg produces a special kind of symbol, whose appearance is in the nature of mystery squared. The story centers on a simple object whose symbolic character is easily perceived, however the story itself consists, as Chaya Shacham already showed,¹³⁵ of a search after the symbol’s meaning. Its chaotic, i.e. essential, uncertainty, the tension of movement towards the unknown, the overwhelming desire to touch the secret – these are what give the symbol its strength. *The touching movement towards the unknown constitutes gesture. Gesture is a firm but unsuccessful attempt to touch the secret and discover the symbol within it, not the symbol*

as a fossil or a dead sign but rather the symbol as a living organism and personality. Just as we can say that the ultimate object of every gesture is a symbol, we can also say that a symbol is defined as the object of gesture. Symbols possess a tremendous psycho-cultural potential which is realized through useful cognitive mechanisms. Processing the literary gesture is one of the main, and most common, of such mechanisms, but it is not always easily perceived. We saw it in Agnon's "The Song That Was Sung": "A voice that was not a voice rose from the ground and from the house walls, like the sound of paint which the stone mason puts into the letters of a tombstone, and like the sound of an old prayer shawl when it is swallowing its tears". It also can be seen in Pavić's writing, as for example: "Nothing else happened in the dream, just the rush of the river deftly folded, like a glaringly white turban".¹³⁶ Steinberg's story constitutes a broad explication of the unity of gesticulation and symbolism.

The hero and narrator of "The Red Scarf" visits his beloved one winter night after the Bolshevik Revolution. Overwhelmed by complex emotions, he forgets the late hour, the curfew, the Cossacks patrolling the city streets, but does not forget the one detail which captured his attention when he looked up from the street at the girl's window before going up to her apartment – the red scarf tied to the white curtain. The narrator's very first encounter with the scarf, still absent and anonymous, is already described as a gestural scene: "I only had ten minutes left and, without putting watch into my pocket, as if not wanting to waste even a single glance, raised my head upwards, to the house's third row of windows; I notices that there was light in the window of the girl's room, but together with the usual impression of a bright square of light which hit my eyes the moment I raised them upwards, something else, unusual and a bit strange, was etched in

my mind” (173).¹³⁷ Everything thus begins with a gesture – the narrator’s gaze at his beloved’s window, embodying the vector of his desire and its reconfirmation, his desire to touch her, to confirm her unseen presence, “symbolized” by the light in the window. Clearly it is only the lover’s gesture towards his invisible beloved, Orpheus’ gesture of gazing at Eurydice, which turns the light in the window into a symbol. But this is only the beginning. In his absent-mindedness, torn between attention to his watch and the light, between time and eternity, the narrator dimly feels the change in the familiar symbol of the window, notes the change, a kind of communicative noise or surplus information. This noise in “initial conditions”, characteristic of non-linear chaotic systems, will turn out to be an important factor with powerful consequences for the subsequent turn of events. A minor estrangement in the object of the looking gesture brings about a reprocessing of the representation of the gesture itself, as if the repetition presences and clarifies the missing symbol: “[I] ... raised my head upwards” – “...my eyes the moment I raised them upwards”. Even the change in the details of the representation is not random: focusing on the eyes stresses looking as a gesture of eyes.

The strange symbol does not exist yet, but it already affects and shapes the hero’s behavior, drawing his vector of desire towards it: “I try with all my strength to grasp at the thought that was touching-not-touching my brain; [...] suddenly I stood as if unable to move, aiming all my senses at that foreign thing which blinked in front of my eyes out there, as I stood with head raised before the lighted window” (ibid.). The narrator’s graphic language exposes the mechanism which operates it with abundant clarity. His energy is expended in an effort to “grasp at the thought”, a metaphor of mental activity based on a bodily action, a strong form of the gesture of touch. The thought’s “blinking”

is also represented in this gesture, in the phrase “*touching-not-touching*”. The object’s instability, its oscillation on the border of existence-non-existence, is what arouses the gesture. The communication between the (eventual) symbol and the receiving psyche is shown to be a kind of gestural interaction. An aspiration for stability, a desire and need to presence the missing sign cause the narrator to repeat the representation of this “primeval” looking gesture for the third time: “as I stood with head raised before the lighted window”. The pragmatic role of this superfluous discourse is clear: *reprocessing the gesture’s representation creates the symbol*.

And now the symbol appears: “I stood for a moment like this, motionless, eyes half-closed, when the thin, transparent feminine scarf began to be engraved in my mind, the scarf that hung over the white curtain which half-covered the window. Actually it was the girl’s summer scarf, which I knew, and that now, as I saw it hanging over the white curtain on this mysterious night, was impressed on my mind as something unusual, as a signal of mystery with a definite purpose” (ibid.). This is indeed the nature of every symbol: on the one hand it is something familiar but, on the other, it derives its powers of rejuvenation from its uncertainty. Its meaning is always undefined and unexpected; it functions as a chaotic system. Its secretive character impart two facets to the symbol: it is perceived as a “signal” of “mystery”, a sign without referent, the gesture of pointing at an absent object. The main character’s looking gesture and its object are characterized by a special isomorphism, reminiscent of the phenomenon of gestural echoing, which strengthens the close dialogue between gesture and symbol: the narrator’s eyes are “half” closed, and the blind “half” covers the window, imagined again and again.

But whereas the hero's gestures now point clearly at the emerging symbol, the symbol itself points in an unknown direction. The only thing that is clear is that it *does* point, since it is perceived as "a signal of mystery with a definite purpose". The symbol initially appears as purely deictic, as pointing beyond the object even when the latter already exists. This pointing turns the symbol into a mystery: "But when I knocked with my fingers on the wall of the girl's room and stood still for a moment, waiting in expectation for the door to open, a sudden deep and narrow chasm opened in my soul. And as I held the edge of the cold door handle in my trembling hand, I realized and saw that the mystery of the red band lay deep within my soul and would not go away" (ibid.). The gesture of touching the door handle represented in this scene marks the boundary, the threshold; the hero's expectation is embodied in an implicit gesture of looking (forward). Like the main character in Agnon's "The Song That Was Sung", whose hand "was tied and joined to the door handle", Steinberg's narrator presents himself as a liminal figure, tormented and troubled but also in tense expectation of what will be revealed beyond the threshold. In both cases the gesture of touch marks the direction of expectation and desire, but revelation remains shrouded in the scarf of mystery. In both stories, as also in the Song of Songs and numerous other places, *the gesture of touching-not-touching (with the "trembling hand") the door handle appears as a paradigmatic symbol, as a plastic, non-verbal definition of it.*

If a gesture generates the symbol as mystery, it also embodies the search for its solution: "I entered [...] with the intention of directing my gaze first of all at the girl's face, in order to make out on it the solution to an unclear mystery" (174). Here it is no longer very clear whether it is desire which originates the mystery or *vice versa*. The gesture by

its very essence embodies this complexity: as we pointed out a number of times, it is powered by the absence of its object. The gesture's meaning consists of an attempt to presence the object, in the present case, the girl's face and hands. The gestural dynamics of looks and touches, as the scene continues, constitutes a very short non-verbal play structured according to a clear semiotic-energetic mold:

The girl, who was sitting on the bed with her hands folded on her knees, looked straight at me; I, too, as I approached her, did not take my eyes off her, nor did I emit a sound from my mouth. [...] Her eyes were still glued to my face. I sat down gently on the edge of the bed, my hand coming to rest as if on its own on the girl's hand. With our hands touching-not-touching we both sat for a few moments in silence. Slowly, as my hand increased its pressure on that of the girl, she moved her eyes away from me and turned her freezing gaze towards the window, towards the red scarf. As if I was also fascinated by that transparent red piece of fabric which blinked at me from beyond the window I, too, aimed my quiet gaze at it while my hand unconsciously kept up its pressure on the girl's hand (ibid.).

The pattern of the preceding passage consists of a network of signs: signs of compression (accumulators and shifters) and signs of replacement (connectors and secateurs) to use Patrice Pavis' terms.¹³⁸ The two characters move towards each other, but their looks and gestures do not encounter anything; gestures always touch nothingness. As a result of this gestural and proxemic dynamic their movements unite and turn towards the ultimate object of desire, which itself is also nothing but a mystery. Let us have a closer look at this pattern. The first stage in the formation of girl's figure moves along the line of energetic compression through a series of signs-accumulators: her hands, her knees, her look. This line is linked by a gestural-proxemic connector to the narrator's line of accumulators: eye, mouth. The two lines are isomorphic and symmetrical with respect to the connector between them. This symmetry is multiplied: her eyes – glued – to my face; my hand – on the girl's hand; The girl ... was sitting on the bed - I sat down ... on the

edge of the bed. A sudden secateur stops the energy flow between the two characters: “our hands touching-not-touching”. This gesture marks the boundary between the two, creating an oscillation of desire; the space between the two heroes’ clasped hands constitutes the place where nothingness and mystery originate. From now on the figures take the line of replacement, consisting of a series of connectors: from their hands the severance or nothingness goes over to their looks (“she moved her eyes away from me”), her “freezing” look and from there to the window and beyond, to the red scarf, where the coldness of the girl’s look encounters the cold of the winter night brooding in the dark window. The girl’s gestures originate the secret and aim the energy of desire at it. Her looking-pointing gesture with its powerful plastic expression serves as a model for imitation. It is thus quite natural that the enamored youth performs an echoing gesture and also looks at the object of her gesture, in perfect concord with René Girard’s mimetic triangle of desire.¹³⁹

The girl leads the narrator to her symbol with a firm hand, creating gaps in both communicative and physical space: At first she “did not answer anything, just moved slightly towards the head of the bed, as if inviting me to sit next to her” (ibid.); afterwards she traps his look in hers, in a manner of speaking, and finally she “sends” him together with her look towards the window. But this was just a misleading game. The girl’s gesture once again unexpectedly does not lead the main character to the object, but to a mystery, to a powerful secateur. The gesture misses, fails, turns out to have been a misunderstanding, a blank shot. The secateur is accompanied by a symptomatic replacement of the channel of communication: “Suddenly the girl’s voice was heard, sounding in my ears like a confined voice coming from afar: ‘Look, there on the street

Cossacks are walking. What time is it now?' I did not answer. The girl rose from the bed, approached the window with silent steps, with me after her. For a moment both of us stood unmoving, listening to the sound of the mystery in our hearts" (ibid.). *To sum up the narrator's movement line from the story's beginning to this point, we may say that his gestures towards his beloved miss her, encounter nothingness and lead him further towards a mystery which blinks in erotic seduction and activates his next gestures, and so on. This mechanism, which we call the Orpheus gesture, is what originates the special symbol – a symbol without meaning, the red scarf.*

This game of seduction, played out with strong gestures that go well beyond the insignificant and trivial spoken utterances, continues in the next scene:

The girl place one hand on my shoulder and stood like that motionless for a moment. Suddenly she slowly moved her hand out towards the red scarf, slid her fingers over it as if thinking about something and finally removed the light fabric in a hurry from the white curtain. At that moment she quickly drew her other hand away from my shoulder and began rolling up the scarf with both hands. Then she stopped in the middle, as if regretting what she had done, rolled it out for its entire length and spread it on her head (ibid.).

The dynamic of the gestures embodies here also the semiotic-energetic dynamic of the symbols. The girl, like some ancient sphinx, keeps on passing the hero through initiation riddles on the way to occult knowledge, not only to the loss of virginal naivety, which Chaya Shacham emphasized in her work.¹⁴⁰ The girl's movements are woven into a sensual discourse without words, into a hermetic message which the hero must decipher. The order of the movements is of particular importance: the inviting touch on her friend's shoulder; turning together, with no loss of contact, towards the red scarf; playing with the scarf and an invitation of sorts to join the game; the sudden break of contact, identification of the scarf with herself as an object of desire, then a gesture and an

invitation to continue the game according to the model of imitation which she set up before. This scene is obviously built according to the same pattern we noted in the previous one: the gesture of attraction to the self, contact, breaking contact, the gesture of shifting towards an alternative object.

The narrator willingly cooperates with this game, which has no goal outside of itself; the mystery of the scarf enchants him and he takes care not to break its spell: “‘How...’, I thought of asking something about the scarf but immediately changed my mind” (ibid.). His attempts to create a situation of contact are futile; the girl evades from his gestures again:

We sat on the bed once more. I saw the strange shiver of coldness which did not let go of the girl, took one of the pillows from her white bed and put it lengthwise on the bed. The girl leaned on it with her head, slowly folded her legs under herself and closed her eyes. [...] With a tired heart I folded my body next to the girl’s and the touch of the blue blanket on the bed aroused in me a cold shiver of nerves shocked by the light pain of mystery [...]. A moment later my head rested on the pillow’s edge, near the girl’s head. My lips nearly touched hers and my breath mingled with hers. But the girl did not move” (ibid.).

The gestural mold we noted in the previous scenes is here repeated in every detail, including the imitation or echo (the shiver from cold) and the symmetry in the figures’ movements in relation to the gesture-connector between them. And just like before, the connector here is reversed and becomes a secateur in the touching-not-touching gesture: “My lips nearly touched hers”. The “nearly” of the touch signals the essential impossibility of the gesture’s realization, even when it is actually performed. The gesture’s object is always non-existent; when the narrator kisses his beloved he already does not know if she is awake or not, if his kiss is a gesture of courtship or expresses a morbid deviation. This uncertainty, the oscillation, the shiver, are vital for the origination

of the figure as a personality in accordance with the laws of literary chaotic personodynamics, once of whose main mechanisms, as we saw, is the processing of gesture. This dynamics is also what turns the figure into a strange symbol, a symbol that is absent; in other words, it is what gives the symbol its power as personality. *The gesture turns out to be the source of the symbol's vitality.*

Let us now continue to follow the emergence of symbolism in the story. In the previous scene the scarf ended up on the girl's head, become integrated into and identified with her figure. But this identification is only illusory, and does not last long. The narrator's gesture is what separates the two and creates the gap of mystery needed for the origination of the symbol: "I lifted my head a little, my one hand leaning on the iron bar at the end of the bed and the other, trembling hand drawn as if of its own volition into the narrow entry of mystery between the red scarf and the girl's reddening, soft cheek" (ibid.). This gesture is quite clearly constructed in imitation of the girl's gesture in which she placed herself between the hero and the scarf by touching them both at the same time. These separating-mediating gestures create the differentiation needed for originating meaning in the form of knowledge of personality. The girl's body and the narrator's trembling hand are just there, in the gap "in between". The narrator's hand, like the hand of the main character in "The Song That Was Sung", touches the gate or the entrance "of its own volition" and the figure becomes stuck in a trembling liminality, split in two: "For a long moment my hand trembled in that soft, warm hiding place, with half of my body reclining over the body of this attractive and silent woman. Slowly my hand slipped into the warm, tangled net of hair, but at my fingertips, which now-and-then came into contact with the transparent fabric of the light scarf, I felt occasional light pricks of cold" (ibid.).

The complete gesture may be conceived as divided into a number of minor gestures: the trembling of the hand, placing “half the body” next to the girl’s body, slipping the hand into her hair, lightly touching the scarf, “pricks” of cold at the fingertips despite the warmth which is mentioned twice – the warm hiding place and the warm hair. The liminal character of all these gestures is clear. It gives the figures and the processes of their origination a distinctly *oscillatory* quality. It would appear that this liminal oscillation of the gesture is what creates the uncertainty, the cognitive disorientation which constitutes the “mystery”; this oscillation itself is the symbol. To sum up: a symbol is an application for approval for the purpose of connecting to or becoming acquainted with another (world); it is a movement of crossing the boundary of the self, a movement which naturally, almost instinctively (“of its own volition”) becomes realized as a gesture in the first half, up to the climax, its stroke; since the gesture does not reach the other it withdraws symmetrically during the second half, from the stroke to the beginning; the symbol turns into a mystery and the desire again drives one to try and touch it; the mystery is perceived as an other, and therefore touching it requires turning and crossing the boundary of the self, whereupon the process is reversed. This dynamic of emerging and disappearing symbols reflects the process of the formation and disintegration of growth points in David McNeill’s theory.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the living, organic unity of thought, language and movement is realized when the text is read as a symbol, not as an archive of meanings but as an explosion of the possibilities of meaning, as the chaotic bifurcation point, as persono-ethical uncertainty and unpredictability, as the oscillation of gesture on the borderline of existence.

Although so far we have come a considerable way in the gestural-symbolic analysis of Steinberg's writing, there are still surprises in store. In the next scene a gesture is not realized, not because it "touches-not-touches", trembles and vibrates, but to the contrary, because it crosses the boundary, after which it is no longer a gesture: "My eyes shut as if on their own and my head, which suddenly felt painfully heavy, eventually sank powerless on the girl's chest, and my lips attached themselves to the lips of the mute and magical feminine creature with a quick, heavy movement, which did not resemble a kiss. It seemed that at that moment both of us were deprived of the regular language of creatures and my tired, heavy lips knocked in pain and anxiety on the gate of the woman's soul. The girl did not move" (ibid.). In the previous passage the touch of his lips to hers was not yet a kiss, and now his lips' "knock" was no longer a kiss. Despite the difference, the result is the same: the hero is stuck in the "gate", in bothersome and tiresome liminal uncertainty as to the communicative and psychological validity of his gestures. It thus does not matter on which side of the boundary a person is located; *as long as the gesture is not identical to itself the symbol lives*. The boundary serves as a kind of mirror in which the hero's gesture is reflected again and again as an echo of his lover's gestures ("my eyes shut"). Echoing appears as an additional manifestation of the gestural mechanism of symbolism: I identify the gesture encoded in the symbol as my gesture and identify with the symbol and carry out the same gesture, at a more-or-less subdued cognitive level. This makes its individuation or its revival possible, and turns the symbol itself into an acting personality, into a myth.

In the last passage perhaps more than in its predecessors the narrator's discourse exposes his own mythical-gestural underpinnings. He not only refers to an irrational sphere

(“deprived of the ... language of creatures”), not only presents the woman as a “mute and magical” creature, but constructs the passage’s concluding metaphor as a typical *gestural micro-myth*: “my ... lips knocked in pain and anxiety on the gate of the woman’s soul”. A gesture which resists standard cognitive processing originates the figure of its performer as a bi-stable oscillator moving between two unstable representations:

(a) representation through separation of the propositional and visual channels: the visual image of unmoving lips and face, accompanied by the word “knock” in the background; this is an unstable state because it contradicts the read text, and is therefore replaced by the second state;

(b) representation through diffusion among the two channels: an image of lips and face moving back-and-forth as if performing the act of knocking; this is an unstable state because it contradicts experience, and therefore aspires to return to the previous state, and so on.

As we have repeatedly stressed, this kind of oscillatory dynamics imparts a unique kind of personality to the figure. In this way a gestural metaphor is transformed into an anthropoetic gesture, into a micro-myth in which the figure is embodied in all its uniqueness, including its unique features of discourse and consciousness. In this process, it will be recalled, the figure takes on a reality as if it were an actual personality, an object and subject of ethical relations with the reader. In the metaphor in question the narrator’s lips knocking on the girl’s lips distinguish him uniquely more than any of his previous actions and words. For these knocking lips are, after all, also the source of the discourse itself.

A symbol, like a living creature, evolves, changes and modifies the ways in which it affects people, but never leaves a mind into which it has penetrated. The oscillatory movement of the narrator's figure continues also along the physical-proxemic axis, in his movement between his beloved lying on her bed and the window, but the symbol in its various manifestations remains stuck in his mind. At first "the fear of enchantment spread over a human creature's face" (ibid.) deters him and forces him to rise from the bed and escape to the window, where he apparently succeeds in getting rid of his pursuit of his compulsive impression: "The thin curtain on the window covered my head down to my shoulder, as if separating me from the secretive desire hovering over the body of the beautiful woman covered in the slumber of the secret of her bed" (ibid.). But the symbol has taken deep roots inside the narrator's discourse: in the two above-quoted sentences the scarf appears in two metaphors derived from a physical-gestural source – "spread over ... face" and "covered in...". The white curtain is inseparable from the symbol of the red scarf from the moment of its creation. The temporary respite which the narrator enjoys from the power of the symbol's influence is but a trap, the illusion of a possible solution – "the solution of pleasure" (175). If the solution means something stable, certain or static, then there is none. Neither pole of the oscillator is stable. The hero is thrown from one to the other and back:

I took silent steps towards the bed, but as I approached the girl I again felt, as I saw the red scarf spread over her face, a kind of unclear anxiety. The girl still lay unmoving, her eyes shut under the thin fabric and her breath measured and secret, like the breath of a creature in deep sleep. I bent over her and whispered her name in her ear. She did not move. One moment passed and then another, while I remained hovering over her back, my eyes attached to the transparent red fabric mask (ibid.).

The meaning of the scarf as a symbol is not known, nor is it important. What *is* important is its dynamic function: *the symbol is what originates as the gesture's (obsessive) object*. Furthermore, it is what turns the gesture into a posture, not static but tense, tight like a wound spring, energetic and interactive. A symbol is that tenseness itself, the interaction of tensions between restrained gestures.

Following the just-quoted passage the pendulum of symbolism carries the narrator into a new phase of movements between his beloved and the red scarf. His new action is but an unconscious imitation, that is an echo, of the girl's action. Its imitative nature isolates this action as a complete significant unit with a symbolic function, that is as a *Gestus*:¹⁴²

With trembling hands I grasped the ends of the light scarf and slowly removed the fabric cover from the girl's face [...]. For some time I stood unmoving next to the bed with my eyes roving and gazing alternately at the gauzy, mute band hanging and waving from my arm and at the face of the girl, on which I imagined I could see a kind of light scornful smile. Finally I turned my head and went over to the window again, giving in completely to a mysterious desire which felt as if it was not born of my heart. Again I stood a few moments without moving, listening to the increasingly strong pounding of my heart, until finally I placed the scarf on the window curtain. With trembling hands I arranged the red mystery-filled sign over the thin whiteness of the curtain which blinked at me as a last remnant of the first days of grace. Weak-kneed I moved away from the window and stood in the middle of the room, alternately moving my eyes from the girl to the red vision of fright which I had resurrected with my hands (175).

The symbol is thus resurrected; in fact, it never died. It metamorphoses from one form to another, changing the "vision" in which it appears. The symbol aspires to change and turn back into its original source. This return is not continuous but proceeds by rhythmic bounds, semiotic-energetic states with no necessary connection between them. In each of these states the symbol becomes an object of manipulation with a definite vector (direction and strength). The vectors are embodied in the gestures of manipulation, manipulators in Paul Ekman's terminology. A gesture performed in a certain state *points*

to the next state – to its position in meaning space (cognitive space if you will) and to the object of manipulation in it, and so creates a connection between the two states without creating a causal link. Every such transition causes the hero to freeze in bewilderment. At the end of his action series he succeeds in *pointing* to their roles, but despite his efforts he fails to understand the symbol's meaning. That is how things stand at the level of what is represented. At the level of the means of representation or the level of discourse matters are quite similar. The gesture's representation *shows* itself, in Wittgenstein's terminology, pointing at the previous and the next representations without explaining or demonstrating them logically. This non-rational sequence of showing/indicating gestures constitutes the symbol's mystery, providing yet another reason for anxiety. The mystery of the symbol is created by the trembling of the hero's hands, the pounding of his heart, his confused walk hither and thither, the wandering of his eyes, the wave of the scarf. The entire series of gestures constitutes the great symbolic gesture, *gestus* or *maha-mudra*. The narrator's "hands" establish it as a "vision" and as a "sign". The symbolic gesture is called that not because it possesses symbolic meaning, but because it originates symbolism. In its completeness it points to itself and turns into an anthropoetic gesture.

Despite its auto-referential character, this mega-symbol in the narrative sequence points to the next mega-symbol:

Suddenly, while my eyes were still locked on the girl's face and I was still standing in the middle of the room, the girl opened her eyes, large eyes, questioning and deep in fear. Her gaze, which at the moment when her eyes opened fell on the red scarf on the curtain, no longer moved away from the long, mute band and her face began to twist from some invisible fear. She placed her hand on her chest and a short, broken cry of fear escaped from between her lips: "What's this?" Her eyes continued staring in fear at the window, her face blanched and her chest rose and fell violently. I was astonished and also did not take my eyes off the red band waving in front of us like an undecipherable sign (ibid.).

In this as in previous scenes looks and gestures create a network of imitations and echoes from which the figures are sculpted. Again and again looks fly from one face to another and are not caught or swallowed by them; rather, they are reflected and replicated until they reach the ultimate object of all looks and gestures – the mysterious and unattainable symbol. In other words, the symbol is the “other” end of the look which is frightened of the power and proximity of the unknown. *The gesture of terror points to the symbol or shows it – that is, it originates the symbol.* The gesture’s need for an echo is expressed as the symbol’s need for replication. Like a fractal growing in front of our eyes, like mirrors standing opposite each other, the gestures are reflected in each other, enhancing the symbols and their mystery. At the end of the last passage it is no longer clear what amazes the narrator more, the sight of the red scarf or his beloved’s surprised look. But this makes no difference: the two are identical, and both compose the symbol and disappear within its depths as in a black hole of meaning.

Towards the end of the story the narrator poses the critical question to his beloved: “Out of the mists of a drunkenness which suddenly overwhelmed me I grasped her two hands and in a voice dry from hidden fear I whispered: ‘Tell me – why did you place the scarf on the curtain?’ For a moment there was silence between us and the pounding of our hearts appeared to freeze. I was struck by a strange distress, as if at that moment my life lay in the balance. I bowed my head in the darkness and blurted out my last words: ‘Because I know that you put the scarf on the window!’” (ibid.). In reply the girl explains to him the pragmatic reason for her act, which was to place a “red sign” as a kind of bait to lure her beloved, so that he would not ignore her house and pass it by. But this is clearly not the question which is on the hero’s mind, nor is hers an answer to a real

question. Again, as happens in the course of the entire story, verbal communication is seen to be empty or, alternately, as superfluous. There can be no doubt that functionally the symbol is a sign, a semiotic-energetic piece of bait which cannot be ignored and drags us into a cultural and psychological whirlpool. The real problem, almost completely unconnected to the question of its function, namely that of the symbol's *meaning*, is not given a solution. The narrator's distress and dissatisfaction at the girl's answer are expressed in terms of that answer itself: "When my burning body covered her chest I suddenly froze from cold for an instant. With dry lips I whispered at her mouth in a voice which sounded like just a hidden murmur which sometimes hovers between two corpses lying next to each other in the dark: 'But was it really for me?' After a moment the girl emitted a subdued groan, the nocturnal groan of a woman with no answers" (176). In this last scene, too, a gesture, the gesture of the kiss, remains unrealized. This is a gesture into which another one merges, the gesture of speech: "I whispered at her mouth". The two gestures cannot be performed simultaneously. The speech gesture stops, in a sense freezes the kiss, fixates it as a touch-not-touch and creates the gap in which the question reemerges and revives the uncertainty, the lack of knowledge, the oscillation and instability, the game and the seduction. In other words, the symbol reemerges – the scarf, red like a red border between the lips of the two lovers who lose and reinvent each other again and again in their gesture-non-gesture. This interplay can be seen as the key to this story, just as literary gestology, and the gestology of symbolism in particular, can be seen as the key to the poetics of Jacob Steinberg's narrative fiction.

B. Gesture turns into convulsion, and convulsion turns into gesture in the culture of the “fall of public man” (“The Sick Woman in the Forest”).

The short poetic story “The Sick Woman in the Forest” (1922) ends with the following sentences:

[...] Yocheved bends over her daughter in order to hear what her lips whisper [...] The old woman is silent for a moment and her head comes even closer to her daughter’s face [...] The old woman falls silent and the dying girl suddenly moves every part of her body, *her leg touches the Russian book* which her mother brings her every morning to the forest and on her lips a wan smile whips past like a quick shadow. The sound of the word “father” heard from the old woman’s mouth, the light thought that today is Wednesday and the wonderful feeling, *the feeling of reality which she felt the moment her leg touched the hard cover of the book*, all that became united in her heart with a light dream of life. But a moment later the smile vanishes from her lips, her lids fall of their own volition over the tired eyes, and the old Yocheved also rises from above the hammock and leans against the trunk of the nearby pine (133) (italics are mine – R. K.).¹⁴³

The movement represented here is just the reflexive spasms of the dying. But the way it is represented forces the reader to view it as a gesture. This gesture’s uniqueness lies in the fact that it does not *express* or *reflect* an emotion, a thought, a situation or a relation; rather it is what *originates* them. The leg touching the book turns out to be the last touch in life, and so brings into being the *boundary* between life and death, presence and absence. The gesture, which presences the personality at the moment of its disappearance, turns out to be a kind of *non-gesture*, a variation on the theme of “touching-not-touching”. The other special feature of this gesture lies in the random character of its origination. Usually spontaneity is perceived as a kind of supposedly chance occurrence which exposes a hidden regularity, but here the gesture grows out of *true randomness*: it appears as a type of dissipative structure of meaning/life manifesting

itself suddenly when entropy/death emerges.¹⁴⁴ This is not a symbolic gesture, but rather a gesture which originates the symbol – the symbol of crossing the boundary between life and death. Three features of the gesture give the symbol its vitality and power: *liminality, negativity and chaoticness*.

The proxemic movements of the sick girl's mother serve as entrance into and exit from the stage of gesture: "Yocheved bends over her daughter" (entrance) – "Yocheved ... rises from above the hammock" (exit). Yocheved's motions and words, actions and objects provide a context for the thoughts of the girl who borrows her materials from her: "father" (the word's sound, not its meaning!), "Wednesday", the "Russian book which her mother brings her". These materials have no binding connection to the girl's momentary feeling, nor with the symbolic meaning of the scene as a whole. What creates the link between the context and the situation and the experience (including both their existential and symbolic dimension) is the liminal, negative and chaotic gesture.

What is the meaning of this reduction of gesture to a convulsion, a movement without memory, history or cultural context? This is the most extreme case of a gesture devoid of form and of expression, having forgotten both the gesture-as-law of the Middle Ages, the gesture-as-play of the eighteenth century, and the gesture-as-code of the nineteenth century. A physiological spasm is the body's new language, a language without meaning or subject, without ideology or mythology. Is not this the kind of language of which Roland Barthes dreamt in *Writing Degree Zero*? Well, yes and no. Yes, because the shuddering body comes up and speaks about existential alienation in a language of ultimate naivety. No, because this speech does not embody social alienation and therefore again serves as an alibi of writing. Here the gesture originates not in the Barthian

mechanism of mythization but in its radical abolition: the iconic force of the shuddering girl is not based on emptying the initial sign, because there is none. The myth is not formed in the naturalization of culture but in the acculturation of nature – in turning the throes of death into a gesture.

The gesture we are discussing here lies outside categories of spontaneity, expressiveness, effectiveness, functionality, sincerity or authenticity. If so, what cultural categories can possibly serve for discussing the cultural and anthropological motives for the appearance of this gesture in Steinberg's story? In order to be able to identify these categories we shall have to deal with the story from the perspective of anthropology and sociology of body, medicine and death, against the relevant biographical and historical backgrounds. Let us begin with pointing out that medicine and illness played a crucial role in some very significant stages of the author's life and he apparently retained a sensitivity towards them throughout his life. Here is what Israel Cohen has to say on the subject:

Steinberg had various plans to study. One of his dreams was to learn medicine and become a physician. But what he had in mind was suggestive healing, performed by means of a doctor's personal influence on his patients, not handing out prescriptions [...]. This idea never materialized and all his life he retained a mistrust of doctors, even fear. Every visit to the doctor involved a great psychological effort for him. He was sensitive and treated his physical and mental pains as intimate secrets which one does not reveal even to the most discrete person, including himself. Treatment by a physician he considered as an intervention by a stranger in his own private affairs. For this reason he always feared doctors who were concerned for his health. He feared them but was also attracted. But after he had given in and gone to the doctor he did not complete the prescribed course of treatment. He boasted of his medical knowledge and would experiment on treating himself. When such a treatment succeeded he would report the fact in tones of joy and victory. It will be remembered that he attempted to treat his sick eye himself as a child.¹⁴⁵

Here Cohen describes this incident:

His story “A Doctor’s End”, which Steinberg himself described as a credible biographical source, is indeed a veritable treasure of information about his childhood. There he engraved the figures of his father, his mother, and himself as a twelve-year-old. One time he played and lay for a long time in the sand. As a result he got an infection in his eyes, which were closed shut “with accumulations of a foreign, crumbling material”. This frightened his mother but his father calmed her down and ordered his daughter to bring some “boronic powder”. His mother wailed “Oh, my God!”, whereupon “my father interrupted her with strong words of reproach, aimed at the youth lying in shame with a torn shirt”:

“A boy over twelve years old! Playing in the sand!”

When the eyes became worse his mother approached his father and said to him:

“For God’s sake, go with him to the doctor tomorrow”.

“Even if he lies there like a carcass I won’t go with him to the doctor”, father retorted angrily.

[...] From that moment his father’s authority over him began to wane. He stopped going to the doctor and began buying the blue stone, the kind which the doctor had, and applied it to his eyes himself. ‘I’m no longer a little child’.¹⁴⁶

What are of interest in this pseudo-biographical testimony are its implicit assumptions.

The main such assumption relates to the sovereignty of the individual and his life, which are perceived as threatened by the circle of public life. The second concerns the place of the body in this confrontation. The body is conceived as an important mechanism for establishing the sovereignty of the individual: by way of negation the body protects one’s privacy against external forces, hides it and itself becomes a mystery; at the same time the body serves as a training base for exercising individual sovereignty. Instead of being a medium of signification or expression, the body unites with the subject and turns into a mystery in need of interpretation, in other words into a symbol. In short, Israel Cohen’s literary-biographical report testifies to the social mold which Richard Sennett called *the fall of public man*.¹⁴⁷ In this mold the sick body – marked, non-transparent, divided into organs – can offer an individual infinite possibilities of supposed realization in the face of the threat of death. The movement of illness gives salvation, in Baudrillard’s words, to

the gestural moment in the subject's existence which is on the verge of disappearing.¹⁴⁸

These conditions, which made it possible to turn convulsion into a gesture, were able to emerge, on the one hand, in the fertile cultural soil of the period between the two World Wars in which the story appeared, especially German and Austrian expressionism and, on the other hand, in the anthropological paradigm which characterized the (realistic and neo-romantic) classical literature of the nineteenth century, a literature which influenced Steinberg greatly in his original writings and in his translations. Suffice it to mention here the distorted body perception in Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fe* on the one hand, and the perception of the sick body in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* on the other. The distance between these two perceptions is as the distance between the twentieth and the nineteenth centuries: in the literature of the inter-war years there is no sign of the romantic depiction of the body and its illnesses so characteristic of the classical novel; what we do find there, as expected, is an exaggerated focus on isolated body parts and small body details, a trend which prevented any possibility of romantic sentimentality for about five decades, until postmodernist literature came into its own. However, Steinberg's story combines both paradigms. An expressionistic focus on details of the body and the form of its movements is here combined with the (somewhat existentialistic) metaphysics of enlightenment and revelation in the body. The body is cleaved, but this cleavage contains in it a promise of private salvation, a last grace which is independent of the individual's will. We shall refer to this combination as "*metaphysical expressionism*" and add it to the list of conditions which enable the convulsion-gesture in the story under consideration here and shed light on the author's interest in invalids and the way he develops this motif in a number of his stories.

Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, mentioned above, provides us with an opportunity to mention yet another event in Jacob Steinberg's life. During the period when he lived in Warsaw, around the year 1908, he was about to be conscripted into the Russian army. In order to avoid this, the usual bribes had to be paid, of course, but in addition the young writer was forced to fake an epileptic fit in the presence of the recruiting committee. Here is Israel Cohen's description of that day: "When he appeared before the recruiting committee he pretended to be afflicted with epilepsy. In front of those who examined him he had some very grave epileptic fits. The performance succeeded and he was given his exemption. But when people came in to congratulate him on what had happened they found neither him nor his wife at home and left in disappointment. At that time they drew further apart".¹⁴⁹ Were it not for a number of other biographical details we were told and were it not for the last-mentioned analysis we would not have ascribed to the incident any special significance. But now there are three things which we cannot ignore: Steinberg used the illness for redemption; the redeeming illness was faked; and the event constitutes yet another link in the traumatic history of his relations with his first wife. Cohen reports: "Their marriage was not successful, and they separated after they had a son. This event had a tremendous effect on Steinberg, one whose impression never faded throughout his life. It would appear that a habit that he had or something which he did when he was upset in those days and which caused the separation aroused his remorse. We have a number of testimonies of contemporary writers or acquaintances of his from that period which tell of his depression and deep silences".¹⁵⁰ Cohen most probably refers here to some act of violence; after all, he wrote, when describing Steinberg's childhood, that "his attitude towards his friends was harsh, suspicious, violent. Once, when he had befriended

an orphan who did not do his bidding quickly enough, he beat him cruelly and wounded him mortally”.¹⁵¹ These facts lead to a single conclusion: a physical illness may appear in Steinberg’s writings as a reflection of feelings of guilt and compensation: guilt feelings for having performed an act of physical violence, punishing the body for the violent act, and compensation for the punishment and for curbing his violence. This psychological mechanism has clear cultural roots: the body is perceived as a place of lust and sin. This model is isomorphic to the anthropological model described above: the body is isolated from social relations in order to avoid violence, and as a result the violence is turned towards the body in a regressive demonstration of the sovereignty of the individual. This process creates phantasms of a sick, flawed, dying body. The convulsion thus turns into a gesture in the sense of reflecting the compensatory mechanism in the observed external sign. *It turns into a gesture by functioning as a sign which points to the object of violence (the body) and whose coming into being testifies that the violence is curbed, or deferred,* as Derrida would say.

What about the possibility of faking the symptoms? Clearly the act of faking itself turns the physiological movement indicating illness, weakness and loss of control into a gesture which demonstrates the individual’s powers and knowledge concerning the functioning and malfunctioning of the body, and his or her unusual ability to control it. This possibility is what gives the convulsion a potential for artistic imitation, turning the convulsing person into a player, or at least into a subject acting within the meaningful space of the “play”. The function of the play of fakery is the opposite of the representation of the throes in the story: it presents culture as nature in accordance with the Barthian model of myth creation as a mechanism of control. As it passes from the

stage of life to the stage of the story, the act of faking turns over and becomes an act of authentic “reality”, in reaction to the need to process the trauma while representing its repression. The *possibility of a fake, pseudo-reflexive bodily movement* is thus yet another condition for the appearance of the convulsion-gesture in Steinberg’s story.

The story “The Sick Woman in the Forest” fits in with a number of works dealing with tuberculosis. These include novels such as Knut Hamsun’s *Chapter the Last* (1923), Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1924) and Erich Maria Remarque’s *Three Comrades* (1937), stories such as W. Somerset Maugham’s “Sanatorium” (1938) as well as many other compositions on various topics whose characters have tuberculosis, including works by Mikhail Bulgakov, Franz Kafka and Anton Chekhov.¹⁵² Kafka and Chekhov, in fact died of the disease. In most cases tuberculosis symbolizes tragic fate. Despite its extremely ancient and universal roots (the microbe which causes the disease has been found in Egyptian mummies; tuberculosis is mentioned in God’s admonitions in the Pentateuch) it is the most modernist of European illnesses since it hits not only the body but also the most sensitive nerves of modern man – his ego, power and self-control. Epidemics of tuberculosis, an infectious and fatal disease, gave rise in the nineteenth century to a new kind of medical establishment: the sanatorium for consumptive patients. These institutions for the treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis were usually built in the mountains, for isolation and because of the good air. At the beginning of the twentieth century such places were still very expensive. Establishments for the indigent, built and maintained out of charity, were too few to accommodate the demand, and patients were forced to wait for long months before being admitted. Clearly many never made it at all. In Eastern Europe, in the territories of the Russian Empire, the situation was much worse

still: the few sanatoria for those without the means to travel to Crimea or abroad, or at least rent a summer home outside the city (not everyone was fortunate enough to have rich friends, like Dostoevsky's Hypolite), were so badly maintained that their patients had very little chance of recovery. Steinberg's story presents an idyllic sanatorium in the countryside, albeit not in the mountains, where consumptive young Jews of both sexes, to all appearances from humble background, await their fate.¹⁵³ Yet the story represents in poetic conciseness the same cultural model represented in perfect detail in Mann's *The Magic Mountain*: the patient lives (or rather waits for his death) in an imaginary, isolated and detached world, enclosed in his infinite otherness. Steinberg's sick girl is detached from the other characters in the story and from the narrator. She is hardly present at all, until the last moment when her personality finally comes to be realized through her gesture. Paradoxically, her morbid spasm takes the sick girl out of her disease for an instant, brings her down from the mountain of death and introduces her to the world, to the other and to life. In Steinberg's *mysticism of illness* this encounter is thus perceived as a necessary stage of the disease itself. If we take into consideration also Steinberg's own medical proclivities as described above we can conclude as follows: neither medications nor physicians, neither society and its institutions nor interpersonal ethics can salvage the dying remnants of subjectivity; only a *transcendental* bodily mechanism would be capable of doing this. For this role of deus ex machina Steinberg chooses a convulsion-as-gesture. It is to this mystical, almost religious existentialism that it owes the right to appear in the story as a miracle, crowning the creation of the myth of the sick girl in the forest.

C. Mechanical gestures constitute the power of visibility, which turns a person into a golem (“Gardens”).

Steinberg’s stories appeared at a crucial stage in the modern history of literary gesture, when from being an expressive and communicative sign anchored and given meaning in as part of a sequence of signs it turned into an autonomous, mysterious and uncertain symbol. And when that happens the structure of the meaning of the literary gestures changes: *from rhetorical figures they turn into pictures*. Steinberg’s writing reflects the gradual but stubborn process whereby the gesture exceeds the bounds of linguistic expressive poetics and expands to the boundaries of plastic iconography. This plasticity is not theatrical in nature, although it does at times originate a limited virtual staginess, as in the dynamics of the space of the room in the story “The Red Scarf”. Rather, it is a purely picture-oriented plasticity, still fragmentary and not always deliberate, but permanently present as a new prosaic characteristic. When gesture turns from language into picture it testifies to the victory of the culture of visibility and announces the rise of the culture of hyper-reality, in which the picture replaces reality without signifying or symbolizing it.

An analysis of the representations of the body and its motions will enable us to describe Steinberg’s *poetics of visibility*. In his early story “Gardens” (1914) a special cultural environment is created, with the intention of realizing and justifying this poetics. The author constructs circles of cultural minority or foreignness, naturally accompanied by liminality and (imagined) uncertainty of identity. The town in the story is located in southern Russia near the city of Kherson, a borderline provincial capital with a river and sea harbor. The city itself lies on the Dnepr river but Steinberg chooses to write that the

town is located “beyond the city of Kherson, where the Bug river is drawn in unending bands into the sea”(111),¹⁵⁴ while there is another provincial capital not far from Kherson, on the Bug river itself, by the name of Nikolaev. To explain this as the author’s choice in order to stress the expression “the watermelons of Kherson” and to introduce the subjects of the “gardens” or watermelon patches seems overly artificial. Next to the town there is a Moldovan village, not an impossibility in reality, whose function demands however an explanation: since Moldovans are a tiny minority in that region, certainly not more than one-half of a percent of the population, they serve in the story as a model for constructing a minority identity. At the beginning of the story it is the identity of Hanna-Haya, the porger’s wife and mother of Feigeh, the story’s main character. She “resembles a Gentile woman” (112) and her voice is “like the voice of the daughter of Gentiles” (ibid.). She is foreign to her Jewish surroundings and her body has a special language, a foreign language:

A tall, broad-shouldered woman with a full face covered with summer freckles and thick, red lips. Even the women on the street on which the porger’s wife lived were unable to look at Hanna-Haya’s face because of the great repose, uncommon among Jews, which it expressed. Even more so when Hanna-Haya would lie down flat in front of her home and soak in the noon sun with closed eyes. Then all the passers-by would say: Only a Moldovan woman would be so brazen! The glove which Hanna-Haya put on before she lay down falls from her hand, her two full breasts cause the buttons of her blouse to open and their whiteness bursts out into the light of day; [...] She spreads her hands on the sand and absorbs the heat of the sun into her limbs (ibid.).

The comparison to a “Moldovan woman” points a minority woman’s wantonness and the resulting liminality and marginality. “Moldovanka”, i.e. The Moldovan Woman, is the name of one of the best-known quarters of Odessa (itself not far from Kherson), where Steinberg lived in the years 1901-1903, years which were crucial for both his personal

and literary development. At the end of the nineteenth century this quarter was a lively Jewish neighborhood, which became, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a center of organized Jewish (and also non-Jewish) crime in Odessa. In 1905 there was a pogrom in Odessa, and robbers participated in the defense groups which protected the neighborhood. Tales about the daring and dashing men of Moldovanka were popular throughout the Russian Empire. One of the main characters in these stories, Mishka Yaponchik, “king of the thieves” served as the model for the character of Benny Krik, hero of Isaac Babel’s *Odessa Stories* which were published in the course of the 1920s and then printed as a collection in 1931.

So this is the source of the “Moldovan woman”. This figure’s liminality is emphasized by the exaggerated iconicity of her bodily representation: a large, half-nude woman lying on the ground in a scandalously free, not to say erotic, posture. She is asleep, which turns her into an object of pure observation. Her *visibility* thrusts subjectivity aside and hides it. Furthermore, her breasts, in focus at the center of the picture, become autonomous and with a mysterious force perform a clear gesture of exposure: “her two full breasts cause the buttons of her blouse to open and their whiteness bursts out into the light of day”. Like in “The Sick Woman in the Forest” the body performs a non-voluntary and casual gesture-non-gesture – liminal, negative and chaotic. Moldovanka’s almost criminal gesture attracts and threatens at one-and-the-same time. This gesture, the accidental loosening of the buttons which points to the breasts and marks them as objects of observation, is the embodiment of visibility. Jean Baudrillard would certainly have called this picture pornographic. Whether we accept or reject such an appellation, one thing is

certain: Steinberg's poetics of visibility expands the boundaries and enriches the possibilities of the literary gesture.

In the picture analyzed above, just as in a perfect Hellenistic sculpture, motion is not represented but concealed or enciphered within the shapes of the limbs and in the static spatial relations among themselves or between them and the clothes. This relation remains tense and uncertain: perhaps the breasts actually open the buttons but perhaps they do not and the movement described is only hinted at in the shape of the blouse covering the woman's breasts. This state of stationary movement is temptation incarnate, since it turns the represented posture into an interactive gesture, one which activates the reader/observer. The real temptation is not an actual movement towards the victim but rather a gesture-non-gesture which causes one, like someone gazing at the Winged Victory of Samothrace, to move in closer to the tempting illusion.

The story of Feigeh's love for Mendel begins in a picture which only looks different, but in fact possesses the same structure. First of all, Feigeh's love is aroused when she observes the relations between Mariana and Stepan as these are expressed in the visible sphere – in postures and gestures. The temptation of visibility switches on the strongest mechanism of social behavior – imitation: the first scene of the love between Feigeh and Mendel is constructed as an imitation of the externally visible forms of the Russian couple's courtship behaviors. In this case the Jewish Feigeh's identification with the behavioral model of the ruling majority group turns her, like it does her mother, too, into a virtual cordoned-off marginal minority within the Jewish cultural structure. Even before the scene of the actual meeting with Mendel the narrator paints Feigeh's awakening love: “She jumps into the hay, contracted and pressed with her naked breasts into the soft,

slightly pricking hay stalks. For just a moment she feels like the rest before sleep, but immediately the smell of the hay begins to bubble in her nose, the ends of the stalks stimulate her cheeks and her eyes open of their own volition” (114). Mariana calls “Stepa-an!” and Feigeh goes out to look for Mendel: “Suddenly the sound of Feigeh’s cry is heard: ‘M-mendel!’. Immediately after this shout the girl’s heart begins to beat strongly. She put her hand over her eyes, as if frightened to look at the results of the strange cry which escaped from her throat unwittingly in the middle of the night” (ibid.). The scene of Feigeh lying in the hay is constructed in accordance with the same poetics of visibility which served the author in the scene of Hanna-Haya’s lying on the ground and anticipates in all its details the later scene, in which Feigeh presses herself to Mendel and it is he, instead of the hay, who caresses her breasts and her cheeks. But this later scene is secondary; it is an imitation of the first scene, whose total hypnotic hyper-pictorialness not only brings about its own imitations but also overshadows them and hides them within its own intensity; it turns them into unendingly hopeless compensations.

Just as in the picture of Hanna-Haya so also in the “hay scene” and in the call to Mendel the body goes out of control and becomes behaviorally autonomous in response to the stimuli of the environment which are represented as active and independent. The hay stalks prick, their smell bubbles, the ends of the stalks stimulate her cheeks. Feigeh does not lie down, she “pressed with her naked breasts into the ... hay stalks”. A tense dynamic staticness turns the entire scene into one large interactive gesture, into a sculpture in which every square inch of marble is filled with unseen yet attractive motion. And then Galatea’s eyes opened, in a reversal of nature: what was without will is given

breath and moves while a living creature no longer controls its movements. The eyes open and the cry bursts out of the throat like a fateful convulsion – inevitable and full of meaning. After the cry Feigeh “put her hand over her eyes, as if frightened to look at the results of the ... cry”. This is also a gesture whose purpose is to verify and confirm (without success) the validity of the controlling will, and also a manipulator gesture which points, outside of will and knowledge, to the true focus of distress: it is not the throat or the mouth, as might perhaps have been expected, which is guilty of this outburst, but rather the eyes, which “open unwittingly”; Feigeh is afraid “to look”, because her observation and the visibility of the things around her are what cause her to lose her self-control and make the subjectivity melt away in the temptation of sculpture-like plasticity. It is as if the hand gesture punishes the eyes and marks the act of transgression – the unpardonable sin of breaking through the boundary. The gesture, together with the cry itself, mark the boundary and point to the present moment as liminal and enlightening in Feigeh’s life. Her enlightenment is accompanied of course by a loss of subjectivity. In this scene, too, gestures are thus characterized by *liminality, negativity and chaoticness*.

It would seem that in Steinberg’s stories there is a certain tendency to use representations of involuntary and uncontrolled body motions (not defined as spontaneous gestures), performed as if on their own, in which one loses one’s humanity for a moment while inanimate matter is granted a redemptive or destructive autonomy. The symbolic underpinnings of this motif are clear: this is a transformation of the motif of the *golem*. True, this is an element whose use is fragmentary, even localized – it is used in the construction of the poetics of the gestures; but its cultural significance is so great, and the

roles of the gestures which contain this element are so central, that we cannot ignore it completely. Let us recount some facts first, as an introduction to the topic. Here, again, the important contexts are Romanticism and Expressionism. Here we shall skip over the more distant but obvious influence of Romanticism (Goethe, Heine, Hofmann, Arnim, Andersen) and focus on the closer context: 1915 was the year of publication of the novel *Der Golem* by the Austrian Expressionist prosaist and playwright Gustav Meyrink. In 1915 a film by the same name came out, not adapted from Meyrink's novel, but based on a screenplay by Henrik Galeen and Paul Wegener, who also played the main role, that of the *golem*. In 1920 Wegener came back to this motif in the film *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* ("How the Golem Came into the World"), which is considered the most successful film version of this legend. In 1910 the film *Frankenstein* came out, directed by J. Searle Dawley, with actor Charles Ogle in the role of the Monster; this was the first movie version of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). This film was followed by a long line of adaptations and remakes which turned the artificial monstrosity created in Victor Frankenstein's laboratory and then escaped his control into one of the main symbols of popular culture in the twentieth century. Clearly the subject of the falsification of subjectivity and the loss of control over its origination could only appear during the period of the modernistic totalitarianism of subjectivity.

After the ecstasy of the "hay scene" and the profoundly emotional drama of the "call scene", the tension of Feigeh's passion is on the wane. In the youth's arms Feigeh attains one last climax of excitement which leads only to uncertainty and a dead end; in fact, it is doubtful even if its source is to be sought in Mendel himself: "When Mendel begins to press her against his heart she moves herself in a quick movement onto the youth's knees,

hugs his neck with one hand and guards Mendel's caresses with the other, lest they go beyond her bare shoulder" (115) – Her behavior is represented as mimetic and artificial, and therefore as dishonest; "But slowly she lowers her head unto Mendel's shoulder, and her eyes close by themselves" (ibid.) – The girl's movements become ever more automatic, represented as an expression of authenticity; here we see an aggravation of the characteristic contradiction between social behavior and individualism and spontaneity, interpreted as authenticity and sincerity; "A few moments later, as the cool morning wind rising above the Bug touches her bare breasts, a sudden shiver comes over her whole body and she pushes herself more tightly against the youth" – Feigeh's real gesture towards Mendel only trails the unreal gesture, a non-gesture of the wind. The wind's touch-non-touch (in the previous scene it was the hay) and her shiver – a kind of the convulsion, the body's physiological reaction – are the true and primal gestures. The apex of subjectivity is at the moment it disappears or is swallowed by nature's raw mechanicism, almost completely in accordance with Vsevolod Meyerhold's theory of theater and acting – biomechanics – developed by the Russian director and actor in the years 1902-1913. After that climax all of Mendel's caresses give the impression of artificial gestures, caricatures of a golem. Feigeh and Mendel are lost to each other; Mendel has a successful competitor – the auto-eroticism embodied in the *hyper-pictorialness* of the body of Feigeh's mother, who "absorbs the heat of the sun into her limbs", and in the body of Feigeh herself, exposed to the non-existent touch of the wind.

Small wonder, then, that this model is repeated in the description of the relation between Feigeh and Ephraim, her sensitive and sickly husband who is frightened of his wife's wild power:

This is what Feigeh does on a sunny morning: she stands in the middle of the room, raises one foot – a small, white foot webbed with light blue tendons – and drowns it in the bands of light. Then she does the light-play to her other foot, while Ephraim the yeshiva student lies and holds his breath, watching the nude playing woman and thinking: Beware of the women of Kherson! And at prayer time in the yeshiva, as he moves during the “eighteen blessings” he suddenly feels something like a needle sting on his left side and a weird desire to sit in some corner, lean against the wall and think about repentance, something which he cannot even explain to himself: suddenly he sees the image of his wife, even though his eyes are tightly shut, with her small, white foot waving in the air (118).

Again the picture dominates life, visibility takes over reality. Again what is in the center of the picture is the play of the body or, more precisely, the focused limb, in an auto-erotic game with itself and with the sun. Feigeh’s small leg turns into a rather large picture whose iconic (Baudrillard would say, striptease-like) hyper-reality, in a system of signing and marking which tears the body by turning it into an object of pure observation, causes Ephraim to look at her again and again. While this scene is similar to the picture of her mother lying under the sun in her backyard, the distance between them is as great as the distance between decadence and romanticism: a game instead of innocent indulgence “with closed eyes”, a single leg instead of an entire body, “bands of light” instead of “the heat of the sun”, a daughter’s small foot instead of mother’s “full size”, white skin instead of “summer freckles” and, finally, a closed room instead of an open yard. And now Ephraim is in the same place as the Jews who observe this wonder, who ascribe the power of this vision to the otherness and foreignness of the woman who appears in it: the lukewarm “women of Kherson” instead of the much sharper “Moldovan woman”. So strong is the hypnotic power of the picture of the foot “waving in the air” that the narrator describes it twice. This tendency towards decadent hyper-pictorialness becomes stronger the more Feigeh becomes disconnected from nature and from work, as

expressed in the ever-growing element of auto-eroticism in Feigeh's gestures as the story continues:

She moves around the house. She has no work and she looks out the windows or throws herself on the sofa in the living room, which contains almost no furniture. Her chest, which rose again during the weeks of rest, moves slowly, and her eyes, which have regained their luster, wander around the room, finally coming to rest on her own body, while her hands curl, playing with her round knees which are raised a bit above the sofa ... (119);

She knows that she now has nothing in her world but eating, drinking, and a passion to look at night [...] at her body which has grown fleshy and become soft and white. From morning until noon she can sometimes sit and look out of the window without being bored: then she feels a kind of sweet lethargy in all her limbs, and she imagines that she is still a girl of seventeen (ibid.).

Here auto-eroticism lies next to the rule of visibility, and together they explain Feigeh's "passion to look at night [...] at her body". In the passage's first part a whole system of spatial and bodily movements is created: Feigeh wanders around the space of the room, her chest "moves", her gaze "wanders" and, finally, a strange poetic expression: "her hands curl, playing with her round knees". As always the gestures mark the dynamics of desire, which in the absence of the external object closes in on its source, the body. Desire thrills the space, the body and the hand, originating the gestures. Here, too, the status of the gesture is not clear: it is neither communicative, nor expressive, nor yet ethical. As an auto-erotic manipulator it is quite blurred. It is as if the narrator is afraid of using more explicit words such as "caress" or "touch". He again calls on the poetics of "touch-non-touch" which has served him so often in the past, except that this time its negativity is activated by means of a linguistic choice: the metaphor on the one hand creates the gap between hands and knees by turning the movement into an uncertain (negative and chaotic) non-gesture and, on the other hand, it is also what turns the

movement into an *anthropoetic gesture*, one which halts the reading, hypnotizes by virtue of its very form and special design, presented as a unique characteristic of the figure, and forces the reader to vacillate between different images, to take a position, to decide what it is that he is seeing, and what his ethical and emotional attitude towards what he sees is. An anthropoetic gesture is a micro-myth, an event in which the figure is realized to the utmost of its visibility, a moment in which the hermeneutical and ethical tension of reading reaches one of its climaxes. At that moment observation takes over from reading, the picture takes over from the text. Of course spatial and gestural metaphors always act similarly by creating a complex configuration of cognitive propositional and visual processes. However, here it is not a question of a metaphor, but of a gesture represented in a somewhat metaphorical manner, so that the phenomenon itself is no longer verbal. The picture formed here is no longer a kind of complex textuality but rather pure pictorialness, which embodies the oscillation of “passion” in simple, strong, sensual lines. We could perhaps compare the style of Steinberg’s writing in these passages to what Dudek and Hall called the *gestural style* in architecture. The picture here is closed in on itself: it embodies not only the object of observation but also the observation itself, the subject’s “passion” which is at the same time also the object, of looking upon itself. Like in a Baroque painting, as for example in Velázquez’s “Las Meninas”, the reader-observer finds himself in the midst of a game of mirrors of a “passion”, embodied in look and gesture. Steinberg, usually a refined poet, becomes in these pictures gestural, coarse and wild, even a bit primitive, as is characteristic of this style: the vision of Feigeh’s white body seen prominently but blurred against the background of the black of night completes this decadent expressionist-neo-romantic picture. This text is motivated by the

passion for observation which undergoes sublimation through the poetics of visibility. And when we hear Feigeh's mother-in-law saying: "Just a piece of flesh, she's a piece of flesh..." (119), we hear behind them a note of thanks by the narrator to his heroine, like the mystic's thanks to the golem of his creation, Pygmalion's to Galatea, or a painter to his model, who with her senses (the "sweet lethargy" of being a girl of seventeen), her postures and her gestures succeeds in embodying his dream of love and eternal youth.

In this story everything shivers and vibrates. Vibrations model movement in space and time, voluntary and involuntary gestures, uncontrollable physiological movements; one of the implementations of this model is the convulsion. When Feigeh feeds Ephraim "her whole body begins suddenly to shake from this work" (120); when Hanna-Haya sees her daughter again after a lengthy separation, "for a moment the anxiety of love shook her great body" (ibid.); "[Ephraim's] eyelashes vibrate" (122); and negatively, at the end of the story: "when Mendel's hand occasionally touches Feigeh's hand lightly no shiver goes through her flesh" (ibid.). It would seem that the convulsion-gesture of the sick girl in the forest, far from being a unique occurrence in Steinberg's work, is a characteristic poetic element in it. Steinberg's heroes are not weak or impotent, quite the opposite: they shake from pent-up passion and power, and from fear of that power. The text itself shakes from its creator's suppressed power. In particular the women in "Gardens", the sturdy "women of Kherson", are strong yet sensitive. They are especially sensitive to views; visibility catches them and freezes their gazes, turns them into golems, takes their life away even if only for an instant. In the last part of the story Ephraim embodies that evil visibility which, like the lethal gaze of a Gorgon, turns all who see her into stone. Here is what happens to Hanna-Haya when she sees her son-in-law for the first time: "For a

moment the anxiety of love shook her great body. Her legs which had grown fat were already marching out to the meeting when suddenly the face of her son-in-law shone in front of her eyes like luminous moon surrounded by the thin hairs of a yellow beard. Hanna-Haya could no longer hide her look from this thin face which was nodding in this direction and that in the slow movement of a sick person [...]. Only after Feigeh jumped from the wagon and together with the driver brought out her husband as well, only then did Hanna-Haya move from her place by the window and come out in the noisy steps of a woman who had gone to fat” (120). Even Mariana, a simple Russian peasant woman, cannot withstand the power of the picture of the sick Ephraim’s face: she “enters the house of her Jewish neighbors, but as she stands still at the threshold she is frightened by the look in the eyes of the sick man, whose head is drowning in the moonlight floating in through the small window. She now forgets that she approaches the oven and her soul is caught up in a web of fears and magic at the sight of the yeshiva student’s long body, lying in tense motionlessness on the wooden bed, covered in shivering moonlight...” (121). The sickly white color of Ephraim’s skin is particularly prominent, of course, against the background of the tanned skin of these two “women of Kherson”. The moon metaphor in both passages, especially in the second, imparts a magical mystical halo to the picture. This time the roles are reversed and Ephraim plays the other, the foreigner; the encounter with his appearance, as the earlier encounter with the appearance of the “Moldovan woman”, is threatening yet hypnotizing.

Ephraim’s life is ebbing away due to pulmonary tuberculosis. The most prominent symptom of this disease, beside the bloody cough, is weakness and emaciation. His condition only gives more prominence to Ephraim’s otherness. Here, at the boundary,

even the weakest gesture is of course strongly validated. Here the picture is in complete control: “and the sick man holds out his fearfully thin and long hands to her [i.e. to Feigeh] [...]. He begins to cry, his tears dropping from eyes one after the other while his hands are still held up in the air. From his chest a strange, frightening kind of creaking sound escapes” (122). The meaning of this gesture is clear: it is a desperate attempt to hold on to a life which is slipping out of his hands, to touch the woman he loves, the embodiment of life, who is moving beyond his grasp; characteristically, this gesture is not realized and the hands remain in mid-air in a non-gesture which marks, like in “The Sick Woman in the Forest”, the boundary between life and death. But what is of particular significance is not the gesture’s meaning but its pictorial power as emphasized in the text. Ephraim’s *appearance* is frightening: it is the appearance of the golem, of Frankenstein’s half-alive half-man. The picture turns a living human gesture into the gesture of a machine or a corpse, giving yet another demonstration, for the last time in the story, of Steinberg’s *gestural poetics of visibility*.

D. Gestures derive their power from their ritual (revelatory or traumatic, or both) nature. Revelatory/traumatic visibility of gestures activates the work of memory and symbolism (“The Rabbi’s Daughter”).

A well-known passage in the story “The Rabbi’s Daughter” describes how Sara recollects a passing encounter with an anonymous youth. The memory comes back to her as Berl her groom looks into her eyes while his hand embraces her neck. This wholly non-verbal scene is considered one of the strongest pieces of narrative fiction that Steinberg ever

wrote. It exposes the connection which *visibility* has to mechanisms of *the origination of culture and of memory*. Here is the passage, almost in its entirety:

And Berl, who began with a pounding heart to rub hands, secretly laid, for the first time since he became betrothed to Sara, his warm hand on the girl's neck. At that moment Sara was napping lightly. She awakened from the touch of her groom's hand and felt as if a hot and heavy load lay on her heart. She raised her head and meant to remove from her neck the hand whose fingers were each on its own projecting a heavy, bubbling heat into her skin. But she remained sitting, unmoving, and her knees shook and she had trouble breathing. Berl bent over her, as if wanting to see if she was asleep. His hand now pressed over her heart, causing a sweet, magical pain. She wanted to say to him: "Stop!" but not a sound escaped from her mouth. Now Berl looked into her eyes. The girl's gaze met Berl's. It appeared to Sara that her groom's eyes were looking at her out of a moist and brilliant fog and at that moment she recalled what had happened to her one summer day many years before, when she was eighteen. She had then returned from bathing in the river [...]. At the top of the hill, where the two paths down to the river separate – the bathing places for men and for women – she encountered a youth who was returning from bathing: his towel was clearly visible on his shoulder, his hat was in his hand and his wavy wet hair glistened in the sunlight; his red lips emitted a thin whistle and his laughing eyes were filled with light. He encountered the girl unwittingly and as he passed his wet gaze attached itself to the girl's face, and for the first time the youth's red lips and the end of his white neck, which peeked out from under an as yet unbuttoned shirt, were engraved in Sara's eyes. Suddenly the girl felt a kind of weakness in her heart and she had difficulty breathing. She shut her eyes for an instant and when she opened them again the youth had already gone some distance down the hill. She had a hard time walking because her knees felt weak. She stood in place for a moment and felt in her heart a kind of desire to go back and bathe once again, but the tin cup which hung peacefully on her arm aroused in her a feeling akin to shame, and she quickly moved and began walking towards her home. – And now, as Berl's hand pressed down on her heart Sara felt herself for the second time in her life as if she had been tied with ropes (124).

Berl's hand gesture is clearly one of appropriation – violent but necessary – which on the one hand originates the object of desire and, on the other, annihilates it. Or, in other words, the gesture itself turns its goal, Sara, into an object. It takes away her humanity and her control over herself and transforms her into a golem. But this imaginary death is necessary for the purpose of the rite performed here without its participants' awareness – a rite of passage in which Sara serves as both victim and initiate and in which the gesture

functions as a boundary marker passing through Sara's body. The shiver is a reliable sign of liminality. Berl's hand on Sara's neck is performing a symbolic, ritual simulation of a beheading: according to René Girard tearing up the victim's body is a necessary act for originating the sign as the second stage, after the gesture of appropriation, in the process of the origination of culture. A second gesture is Berl's gaze "out of a moist and brilliant fog". The first gesture prepares the ground for the second: it brought about a physical and emotional arousal which of course gave rise also to the cognitive reaction – the recall of a similar past physical-emotional event. She recalls not only a look, but an entire visual (spatial and gestural) scene. This is the scene which was "first engraved" in her head as a powerful originary event, as a revelation. This originary event is embodied in a picture whose extreme visibility, like a neurotic trauma, completely erases the distance between past and present, between one person and another, between one place and another, and takes total control over the mind. It is precisely this mechanism which is operative in the rite activated by means of the gesture. This leads us to an important conclusion: *if indeed it is true that any rite is a kind of gesture, then it is also true that some gestures, those which motivate us physically, emotionally and cognitively, which are perceived by us as symbols of great significance, derive their power from their ritual (revelatory or traumatic, or both) nature, from their ability to take us back to the originary events in our lives, our culture and our memory. From this, too, derives the ritualistic essence of gestural visibility.*

A number of scholars have pointed to gesture as the origin of sign and symbol. In Eric Gans' generative anthropology, as mentioned above, an aborted appropriation gesture in the originary scene, the hand pointing to the inaccessible (sacred) object of desire, turns

into the primeval sign in the eyes of the rival participants in the crisis. Roy Ellen writes that the structure of the body and the relations between its various parts serve as the basis of symbolism and cognitive, morphological and functional molds.¹⁵⁵ Donald G. MacRae points to the body as the origin of history, narrative and metaphor.¹⁵⁶ Johnson, Lakoff and Dean claim a bodily origin for concepts, expressions and syntactic structures.¹⁵⁷ Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox's comprehensive study summarizes decades of work on the hypothesis that the origin of language is to be sought in gesture.¹⁵⁸

These are just a few examples of a growing trend. In addition to suitable cognitive and anthropological conditions, cultural conditions also have to be right for symbols and symbolism in general to evolve from gestures. Under such conditions making the proper distinctions may encounter a certain difficulty connected to a methodological confusion: symbolic gestures and gestural symbols do not contribute to this distinction, nor do they prove the mutual – genetic or functional – cultural conditioning of a symbol and a gesture. Thus, for example, Churchill's famous "V" gesture is symbolic; on the other hand, the picture of the arm and clenched fist on the flags of certain resistance movements is a gestural symbol, in which the symbol relates to the gesture as representative to represented. But the representation is accidental; a non-gestural symbol does not represent a gesture, nor does it appear to be at all connected to a gesture. The genetic link between gesture and symbol is not to be found at the level of representation but rather in the gestural activity which enables and originates symbolism itself. The mechanism of symbolism origination from a gesture is not easily discoverable in the study of cultural systems. In this respect a literary text constitutes an important and fertile basis for such a discovery because literary gestures, as verbal representations, can help

avoid the temptation of direct visual representation. Just as according to generative anthropology of Gans a narrative turns out to be the story of a sign's birth, so in our gestological study the dynamics of gesture turn out to constitute a process of symbol origination. Note: the gesture neither "turns into" or "is represented by" a symbol; rather, *the dynamics of gesture enables the dynamics of symbolism*, one process causing another, origination leading to origination. In our analysis of "The Red Scarf" we demonstrated the workings of this mechanism. The preceding passage from "The Rabbi's Daughter" exposes this mechanism's ties to processes of culture origination and rituality, and testifies to the fact that Steinberg's text is very much aware of this function.

In the said passage the figure of the youth in Sara's recollection originates as a symbol of love. This origination is made possible and also supposedly *encoded* in a dynamic series of gestures. When a similarity is perceived with Berl's behavior, the gestures in a sense become *decoded* and they realize the symbol in its origination. The power of a symbol does not lie in the fact that it reminds, mentions or represents, but rather in its ability to become, open, move and motivate. The key sentence in this respect is the following: "and as he passed his wet gaze attached itself to the girl's face, and for the first time the youth's red lips and the end of his white neck, which peeked out from under an as yet unbuttoned shirt, were engraved in Sara's eyes. Suddenly the girl felt a kind of weakness in her heart and she had difficulty breathing. She shut her eyes for an instant and when she opened them again the youth had already gone some distance down the hill". The process consists of three stages: the picture originates in represented and implicit (non-represented) movements; the origination is blocked by the imaginary death of shutting the eyes; the picture disappears. This process reflects the origination of Sara's symbol of love

and also reflects the work of the visual symbolism origination mechanism as such: *the emergence and repression of the memory of traumatic visibility*.

E. Within the culture of visibility, there is a kind of urban gesture, whose main virtue is the uncertain duality of mannerism and spontaneity. Gestures of this kind supply the figure of the uprooted (“talush”) Jew with deep roots in industrial urban culture (“Among the White Poplars”).

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At the beginning of the twentieth century the non-verbal behavior of the urban populace, surviving as a heritage from the previous century, was motivated by three cultural needs: to enable universal communication, valid in an environment of many strangers; to hide one’s (personal, national, social) identity under neutral, uniform clothes and gestures so as to remain unknown to others; to develop the skill of coding and deciphering small behavioral details that would enable one to reshape one’s identity in accordance with the new social structure, for example in a residential neighborhood or a petit-bourgeois profession. Meeting these needs was crucial especially in new occupations and among new socio-ethnic groups. Thus, for example, mass production and mass marketing gave birth to a new profession, the traveling salesman, and the Jewish Enlightenment movement (“Haskala”) gave rise to a number of alternately rising and waning waves of urban Jewry. The main character in Steinberg’s story “Among the White Poplars”, Boris Borisovich Meyerson the Jewish salesman, stands at the intersection of these two groups. Three of this love story’s five chapters are devoted to shaping the image of this figure. The characters here speak very little and the narrator provides few biographical details, so

that the main channel of information consists of non-verbal communication, especially gesture: clothes have lost the ability to characterize their urban wearer; only the description of the peasant girl's figure is still filled with depictions of garments, a memorial to a culture that has disappeared and an expression of the gender empowerment of the poetics of visibility – in the direction of the female figures. The salesman's friend, the teacher Peskin, also represents the Jewish Enlightenment, but belongs to its small-town branch, whereas the narrator is more interested in cultural habits associated with “the mentality of a city-dweller” (163),¹⁵⁹ habits which occasionally arouse Peskin's wonderment. The latter's sensitive and sharp discernment sometimes serves as a combined observation point for the narrator's observation of Meyerson. Here we shall follow these observations in an attempt to discover Steinberg's conception of the new Jewish salesman's urban gestures.

Peskin and Meyerson go together to the village where one may see the wonderful silver poplar grove, and the no less wonderful girl. Peskin knows the way and leads the way, but something in Meyerson's behavior disturbs the teacher's peace of mind:

In [Peskin's] mind a doubt was born concerning his friend whose quick and confident strides seemed to say that on this morning walk he was not at all dependent on the guide and did not feel the need to observe. This thought saddened the teacher somewhat. It appeared that the teacher, who had already tasted what it was like to be compelled to live in an out-of-the-way town, suddenly focused on his companion's strength-giving single-mindedness, this blue-eyed and broad-shouldered salesman, one of the masses of Jewish youths born into poverty whom the towns eject towards centers of fickle and complex trade and they travel to distant foreign lands in the confidence of people with a sure understanding who are only at their best abroad (???please revise this sentence???). For a moment the teacher felt himself different from his companion and unfit for something. As if with the intention of disturbing the salesman's tranquility he called to him: “Look a bit to the sides, my friend. See the sun coming up...”. The latter responded by a brief look eastward, and then answered humorously: “Salesmen never look to the sides, didn't you know that?” This was a wise saying of one of his colleagues, of the kind which the more elderly among them would use to spice up a talk among friends on the upper banks in the train (163).

Despite many elements of strangeness, Meyerson's behavior indicates that he feels at home in this strange place. From Peskin's perspective his friend's confidence and tranquility are manifested by his not "feeling the need to observe". Here an inverse psycho-cultural relation is stressed between the ability to orient and communicate in a strange environment and the need to observe. This conception of the teacher (who is not a guide) is interesting already in that it supposes a *need* to observe, not the will or ability to do so, as if this was an instinct or drive which a certain type of people possessed but which would appear to be absent in the salesman. This conception, rooted in the Romantic-Enlightenment mentality, is just a cultural cliché, no more reliable than the "wise" saying that "salesmen never look to the sides". However, what is important is not the reliability of the clichés but rather the relations among clichés in the minds of their bearers. The narrator through Peskin the teacher notes one of these relations here: the desire to observe ruffles a person's peace of mind. The culture of visibility/observation is an environment of the worried and the apprehensive, of those who cannot find their way or "manage" on the road. Those who "look to the sides" are precisely the people who are much more self-focused than those in whom this need is absent and are focused on a goal which is external to themselves, in the other, the stranger, the new and unknown. Once the goal is set the person is immediately freed from the need to look to the sides, which in fact means a look inside, which originates the personality not as the subject of a journey and an encounter with an other (as, for example, in a myth) but as an object fenced in, nurtured and protected from the environment. Interestingly enough, the jealous teacher associates Meyerson's freedom from reflexive need with his urban background. But in this he is mistaken; his mistake, too, is derived from his Romantic-Enlightenment

attitude. In fact, the very act of setting up “observation” as a psycho-cultural standard is anchored deep within the urban middle-class culture to which both friends belong alike.

But the Jewish salesman is not entirely liberated from the temptation of observation. Rather it would be fair to say that he vacillates at the threshold, since he also knows how to give in to visibility in moments of loss of self-control. The following passage illustrates the liminal state and its gestures:

The teacher was engrossed in the tranquility of a person capable of daydreaming and the other, the salesman, after first observing his surroundings now gazed with the peaceful eyes of a traveler used to changing scenery. Only when the boat’s speed increased and the banks receded and rose on both sides of the water did the salesman turn his head occasionally hither and thither to look longingly at the abundant waters imprisoned between the steep banks. It seemed as if this foolhardy son of Jews, who had become used to gazing with impunity at Gentiles, was struck by *a momentary hesitation* when this wild natural scenery, empty of human presence, closed in on his world. But he looked to the side in confusion only for an instant. He immediately turned his gaze to the web of logs of the ferry station which appeared in the distance, and out of joy he dipped the long, brave palm of his hand in the clear water, the bare, thin hand of *a focused and free city man* (164) (the italics are mine – R. K.).

So this is the difference between the two characters: the teacher’s tranquility is made possible in a daydream, whereas for the salesman daydreaming is only possible as confusion, as a loss of stability. Meyerson’s urban, professional communication skills are presented in a bad light, as a habit of “gazing with impunity at Gentiles”. The sight of nature, devoid of a subject of dialogue and an object of communicative gesture, causes “hesitation” – an expression of emotional and cultural disorientation. Unlike Peskin, his looks “aside” reflect indecision, loss of concentration. This state is unstable and is quickly replaced by something which may be seen as his gesture towards nature: in his characteristic style of poetic visibility, the narrator focuses his sights on the movement of a single limb – Meyerson’s “long, brave palm of his hand ... the bare, thin hand”. This

picture of the hand touching the flowing water of the river can represent the main characteristic of the figure of the salesman: the manner of his esthetic existence does not enable him to persist in the gesture and turn it to a real connection; visibility is given him in “changing scenery” and he experiences contact in a kind of “*touch-non-touch*” in the constantly flowing river water. The story of his relationship with Annushka is already coded in this negative gesture. Peskin the teacher relates this to the fact that he is a “focused and free city man”. But in this he is mistaken once again. There is no freedom and no focus in this gesture, nor can there be. A gesture is not described in categories of freedom, and it is not clear what the hand of a city dweller looks like. The picture is strong but blurred, as if wavering in concert with the hero’s hand. Still, describing the gesture in terms of freedom and focus points to a cultural connection which constitutes part of the teacher/narrator/author’s conception of urban life. How could the gesture express freedom? In modern urban culture gesture is perceived from a double perspective: since it necessarily constitutes a function of the social order it can also be spontaneous and so express, in accordance with the modern conception of the personality, the free movement of individuality. In a culture which conceives of spontaneity as valued honesty, frankness and authenticity, in which personal life is contrasted with the social order, and which turns freedom into the opposite of that order, gesture is perceived as the embodiment of that hoped-for duality – of the social order and personal freedom. Thus without using a concept which did not yet exist in his day Steinberg describes gesture as chaotic. So again, the hesitant movements, the non-touching touch and the casual unity of order and freedom are what characterize the salesman’s gesticulation as *liminal, negative and chaotic*.

In a later part of the story, in the greeting scene and the conversation between Meyerson, Annushka and her father, the gesticulation reveals some additional characteristics. The unity of focus and freedom turns out to be no more than *self-control and pure theatricality*. In his cultural observations the narrator adds yet another characteristic to the city dweller – the actor: “The salesman responded to the landlord with a handshake which was protracted a bit as if intentionally; but his hand relaxed immediately and he turned his head towards the clear voice heard from the corner of the room [...]. The girl’s eyes meantime were drawn to the visiting stranger and he, the salesman, went up to her without being asked and extended his hand to her” (164). Like in Meyerhold’s biomechanics the theatrical persuasion here consists of maximal bodily control, expression of emotions and an automatic sequence of simple, powerful gestural reactions: the handshake “was protracted a bit as if intentionally”, and the eyes “were drawn” on their own to the stranger. In the game which Meyerson is playing such a handshake is indeed intentional, but gives the impression of a spontaneous emotional (and therefore) sincere and convincing expression. According to the narrator’s Rousseauistic cultural conceptions, playing games and theatricality are the very opposite of an authentic and freely existing personality.¹⁶⁰ For this reason the narrator again, in the following sentences, uses the effect of confusion in order to add yet another feature to the characterization of the city dweller:

The salesman, even after the parting handshake, did not for a moment take his gaze off those eyes which poured out their light directly without putting on any passing expression of innocence or youthful intrigue. He, who had grown up in the city, was not used to such eyes, the likes of which can be seen occasionally on a remote Jewish girl who flourishes sadly in one of the small towns [...]. While the salesman was uncharacteristically searching within himself for something to say, the teacher broke in and said: “My friend the visiting traveler is a city dweller” and added: “a salesman!”. The expression in the girl’s eyes changed all of a sudden. For an instant she looked at the salesman in almost open scorn, and then extended

her hand towards the chair next to the sofa, as if she intended, out of the forgetfulness of habit, to take one of the books with torn bindings that lay there. But in fact her scornful look had the effect of giving the salesman back his tranquility, as had the contemptuous looks of the devious, suspicious foreign merchants whom he was used to confront with hidden intentions (165).

So even the simple country girl knows the rules of the game. But still, fitting one's facial expression to one's interlocutor is considered a manifestation of honesty and spontaneity. In contrast, Meyerson's own communication does not depend on these concepts but rather on the patterns of communication themselves. As far as he is concerned it is unimportant whether the girl's look really expresses an emotion which moves her at the given moment; it is even unimportant whether this emotion is friendly or hostile towards him, increases or reduces his chances as far as she is concerned, deepens their acquaintance or not. What is important is that this scornful look is consistent with the communicative mold with which Meyerson is familiar from his interactions in the urban environment, an environment of strangers defending themselves against each other by using contempt, irony and other means of showing suspicion and keeping others at a distance. The moment Annushka adopts this urban look her movements, too, show the same opacity and ambiguity so characteristic of urban communication, and instead of the innocent clarity of a "direct" gaze comes a gesture which the narrator presents as misleading: "[she] extended her hand towards the chair next to the sofa, as if she intended, out of the forgetfulness of habit, to take one of the books". *The function and nature of this gesture are not clear, and that is its main characteristic.* It may well be a theatrical, even manneristic gesture of invitation to sit down, but it can just as well be spontaneous, even automatic, as the narrator presents it. In the first case the gesture is ritual, controlled; it neither expresses emotions nor reflects subconscious processes. In

the second case the gesture is a kind of slip of the tongue which exposes processes of repression. But as mentioned above it is not the gesture's meaning but its duality of meaning that is its main virtue. Neither mannerism nor psychologism turn Meyerson's and Annushka's gestures and looks into codes which they share; rather, it is the duality of rituality and spontaneity characteristic of urban culture, which blurs the boundary between public and private life. Annushka is not a simple farm girl: "She stayed in the home of a shopkeeper; she studied in the junior high school in the nearby city" (165) and there absorbed the tempting patterns of urban culture.

The narrator's judgment that the salesman, the modern version of the wandering Jew, "lacks roots" (167) is not quite correct. He does have roots, in modern urban culture. This culture is characterized by conceptions, habits of thought, behavioral and communicative patterns, and linguistic and bodily practices of its own, by ways of observation, gestures and even para-linguistic elements of its own. Here is, for example, how Meyerson's way of speaking is described: "When he also began to take part in the conversation he would say what he had to say with a pleasurable and unhurried speed, a kind of living, unworrying flow of conversation, which he was used to when he hoped to succeed in something and which he know how to season unobtrusively with hinted affection towards the listener" (165). Here we have the combination of "freedom" and "focus", the unity of spontaneity and theatricality, and also, perhaps most importantly, the temptation of a simulacrum, a simulation of a "real", happy and perfect life and dialogue, the illusion of advertisement in the service of mass marketing. This is the salesman's profession which has become his character, the mask which has turned into the face. Of course Meyerson is like all tempters, all the Don Juans which fill the literature of every land. But he is also

different: for this new urban dweller it is not that temptation was transformed into a profession, but the profession turned into temptation. In this he is not alone, does not “lack roots”. Quite to the contrary. He is quite deeply rooted in urban culture, to which he is loyal and from whose resources he feeds with wonderful skill, just like many others – merchants, agents, people in advertising and communications, artists and intellectuals.

F. The modern urban (non-)gesture embodies a paradoxical unity of the desire for and fear of touching the other (“In the Cold”).

Literary anthropology can identify the author’s sensitivities to human and social data which shaped his writing. It begins by applying anthropological models to textual analysis, identifies a few elements and conceptions, and eventually comes to a full understanding of the motives and cultural conditions which made it possible for the work in question to appear in its present form. If we distinguish between *literary anthropology*¹⁶¹ on the one hand, as the use of literature for purposes of anthropological research, and *anthropological criticism* on the other, as the use of anthropology for purposes of literary research, we shall see that as far as the actual concrete practice of reading, understanding and interpretation is concerned, the distinction disappears and the two above-mentioned perspectives become inseparably amalgamated. A symbol is a paradigmatic example of the unity of reading and cultural activity. In this case both critic and anthropologist will inquire not into the symbol’s “meaning” (what belongs to its list of given “data”) but rather study its movements along lines of cultural and psycho-cultural patterns. A symbol’s poetic and anthropological functions are two sides of the

same coin. This enables us to explain the vitality of symbols: they retain their power as long as they are capable of taking the observer out of the static center of a well-defined and well-ordered body of cultural knowledge and drag him into a chaotic, uncertain and unexpected dynamics, eventually managing to originate a mold of a new order, fragile but full of vitality, which floats above the chaos – a dissipative structure. A strong, living symbol creates a dangerous and pleasurable motion, a vibration of implicit anthropological assumptions that organize our awareness. This motion causes euphoric ecstasy at the encounter between man and symbol. The motion from myself and back is one of the most ancient amusements and spiritual training exercises. During the Stone Age man learned to elicit pleasure and utility out of exporting his consciousness towards the painting of an animal on a rock. Symbols of liminality and rites of passage and initiation are merely extreme realizations of the chaotic-dynamic nature of symbolism, which has hardly changed even today.

A symbol is thus a movement which marks disappearing boundary lines, a fold if you will. But despite its unstable character, this fold plays a most important social and cultural function: it defines the private and the public domains. Symbols work at maintaining the configuration of the private and the public which is characteristic of a given culture at a given time. This configuration has socio-economic, demographic and geopolitical roots, but it is learned and preserved by means of symbols. Members of the group acquire behavioral skills by means of symbols, since symbols are the main language in which a culture speaks to itself about itself. Examples of this kind of speech can be discovered in every composition: signs and symbols in a text hide nothing; to the contrary, they tell to whoever wants to hear the story of their birth and life in the ecstatic

vibration of conceptions of man in culture – in anthropological tension. In this respect there is no writing which is not anthropological. However, some works, such as Steinberg's, are characterized by, shall we say, a greater anthropological transparency. His stories are anthropologically informative and poetically rich, and in the unity of these two features a unique symbolism emerges: solid, powerful and clear, but at the same time also fragile, puzzling and elusive, a perfect union of order and chaos in a dissipative structure. In our analysis of the story "In the Cold" we shall see how symbolism works to create the cultural dynamics of the public and private domains. The analysis will expose the story's cultural-anthropological motives and conditions.

The story itself, written in typically Chekhov-like style, reports on a single hour in the life of a Jewish broker named Mendel. One very cold winter evening Mendel must cope with numerous troubles: the bitter cold, buying kindle-wood, and his wife's impositions and anger. Interwoven through all this is a miniature story, a kind of preliminary sketch, of the relations between Mendel and a Ukrainian farmer who chops wood in Mendel's yard. As we shall see, *the cold here symbolizes the threat which the public domain poses for the individual*. The whole story grows out of the cultural-anthropological conception that the boundary between the public and private domains is not safe, that it is up to the individual to dig in and defend himself against the threat of the external. In connection with this approach the individual, Mendel in our case, loses both the will and the appropriate skills for functioning properly in the public domain. Some will see in Mendel's failure a hint at the figure of the universal Jew, or one that is characteristic of the period in question, but it is in fact quite clear that this is a figure which grows out of the soil of European culture in general, with no specific Jewish background, turning

Steinberg's story into a socio-philosophical allegory inspired by European modernism in general.

Let us examine how this allegory is constructed. In this short exposition even Mendel's home represents a dangerous admixture of outside and inside: "It is well-known in the Ukraine that any house made of clay whose loft is not covered in straw or hay during the winter is certain to become vulnerable to the embraces of a sharp, surreptitious cold" (129).¹⁶² The blurring of the house's boundaries is perceived as vulnerability. Later in the story this will receive further validation at the ethical level, when not only the personified cold but also actual human figures will find themselves in a position of vulnerability. The cold is not just outside; it has already penetrated into the house and now threatens Mendel from the cooling stove. The main character encounters it with his fingers, touching "the cold stones". The gesture of touch, aimed at encountering the warmth of security and intimacy, is not realized, but is swallowed within its own *negativity as touch-non-touch, as a non-gesture*. The body becomes vulnerable, "and a cold shiver went through [Mendel's] flesh" (ibid.). The shiver, a clear marker of liminality, marks the human body as a breached boundary. Gesture, real touch, is not possible in a culture in which the public and private domains are not clearly separated. A meaningful gesture is particularly impossible when it is represented by the figure of a broker, whose very profession is to set up a gesture of touching between two people. Mendel's failure symbolizes what Richard Sennett calls the "failure of public man". The failure consists first of all of the fact that a person does not derive pleasure from, nor succeeds in functioning in spaces which were traditional domains of public activity, such as a market or a fair. On that playground Mendel loses: "Only a single wagon with sheaves of straw stood for sale in

the market. He had already begun negotiating with the Gentile when Hanna-Haya, his noisy neighbor, jumped in, offered a higher prize and quickly moved the wagon into her yard. What could he have done?" (129-130). He lost not because he did not have enough money or because of any other socio-economic or psychological factor; he lost because in the culture which he represents a person no longer realizes himself in a public interaction like making a bargain; on the contrary, he feels threatened by it and tries to avoid it. So although the story appears to present a rural idyll, the main character represents a different cultural type, that of industrial-age urban man, the type which Steinberg knew better than any other, for that was the type to which he belonged, too.

Those who still function well in the public domain are the women: Mendel's wife who loves to go shopping and his "noisy neighbor". Both are representing in a somewhat disparaging manner, both put the hero under pressure and threaten the tranquility of his privacy. The symbolic imagery of femininity is so strong that Mendel uses a classical means for crossing boundaries and making forbidden transitions between cultural domains – the disguise: in order to be able to get out of the yard Mendel puts on "his wife's scarf, pulling it around his neck and ears" (ibid.). In the disguise of a woman Mendel finally dares go out. This exit is marked by symbolic signs of liminality – suffocation, pain and darkness; and outside a different world awaits him, a social order of which Mendel is not a part:

In the first moment after he goes out his breathing is interrupted by the cold and in his leg he feels the pain of a piece of wood which struck him in the dark... A shout bursts out from Mendel's throat, a shout which is heard by the Gentile chopping wood; the latter lets go of the axe which at that moment is stuck in a piece of wood, straightens his back, gradually takes out a bag of tobacco from his pocket and fills his pipe for a smoke. Mendel, his leg still in pain, bends down to the ground and begins collecting pieces of wood, but

the cold immediately sticks its needles into Mendel's fingertips so that every time he picks up a piece he emits a short, subdued groan (130).

We see that crossing the border of the public domain causes Mendel pain and involves other unexpected threats, perhaps hiding in the dark. But for him existence itself in this domain is even harder. The mute scene in the passage above is constructed according to the well-known classical rules of dramatic gesticulation: the strong (major, tragic, etc.) hero makes only a few measured, beautiful and slow movements, while the weak (minor, comic, etc.) hero makes many movements, and these are hurried, ugly or funny; the former is stable and straight-backed and the latter bends and groans ceaselessly. The psycho-cultural soil on which this scene grows is similar to that which we found in other stories by Steinberg: *control over one's body constitutes a demonstration of sovereignty by the individual over his space, which is threatened by public space*. Mendel's body movements here reach the limit of caricature, especially in comparison with the stable, relaxed posture of the Gentile. Mendel does not control his body, that is his private sphere; the cold penetrates into his fingers, bends his body, takes away his confidence and strength. Even more important is the social aspect of the two heroes' behavior: the Gentile's actions are not only relaxed and assured, they are fundamentally *of a social character*, even through very simple and restrained. The Gentile reacts to Mendel's appearance as he would react to the appearance of a friend, or even just a passerby, in accordance with the a simple rustic's code of honor: he stops what he is doing, turns to the "guest" and takes out a tobacco pouch as if inviting his casual and temporary companion for a pleasurable pause for smoking and conversation. This is a quasi-ritual behavioral pattern befitting a person in the public domain. It does not matter what the

actual intentions of the Gentile were: he certainly did not mean to offer Mendel to smoke with him, but his reaction was spontaneous, almost unavoidable, since it was based on a cultural habit acquired in childhood. Mendel's habits, on the other hand, do not make it possible for him to communicate with strangers in the public domain. The ability to feel at ease in the company of and in conversation with strangers from different subcultures and social classes is a cultural habit which has almost completely disappeared in urban industrial Europe. The author quite clearly presents this trait of Mendel's as a weakness, which can be perceived in the irony of the words of Mendel himself: "Indeed, this is the Gentiles' strength', he thinks out of a feeling which has in it some sadness and also a bit of contempt towards the strange Gentiles, who are not like ordinary people, 'When I go out, my heart bursts from the cold to the point of fainting' (130). The intended reference in these words is certainly not his physical weakness, but rather it is an allegory for social weakness. The strong expression "to the point of fainting" creates a clear semiotic pragmatic dynamics of falling and failure, providing a continuation of Mendel's series of groans. He embodies the hysterical phantasm of a threatened privacy – a nightmare about complete loss of self-control in fainting, loss of consciousness, loss of self. This is the nightmare of the modern age.

The motif, if it may be so called, of groaning/falling continues into the following scene: "The room is already in darkness, but Mendel does not light the lamp, as if afraid of the great cold he would feel in walking. And when the first slight sound of the flame catching fire is heard from the stove he quickly kneels in front of the stove's opening and spreads his hands into the flame, which is not a true flame yet..." (ibid.). Had we limited ourselves to pointing to his kneeling as a sign of falling and of weakness we would have

left Mendel's figure in the domain of pure, although not spiteful, caricature. But there is another feature of this movement, connected to its cultural sources, especially since it is supported by another gesture in the scene – spreading the hands. Both movements possess deep roots in the Bible, in the Midrashic and Talmudic literature and in Jewish rites.¹⁶³ They turn Mendel's "standing by the stove" into an almost sacral-ritual event. Still, we cannot come to an understanding of this double gesture by studying the source. On the other hand, Kristine Santilli's gestural hermeneutics can indeed help us. She interprets a similar scene from Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus barely survives, lies curled up on the ground, gathers some leaves with his hands to help him warm himself, and prays to the gods for salvation. Santilli explains the universal symbolic meaning of the gestures of extending the hand/gathering: their function is to originate and encourage the subject, who is on the verge of collapse and disappearance, to regain his self-control, his authority and his central position (in the case of Odysseus himself, to regain the gods' love).¹⁶⁴ This is the hidden symbolism of Mendel's spreading his hands as a gesture of bending/gathering. His kneeling would, according to Santilli's classification, belong to the class of bending gestures, whose symbolic meaning is different from that of gathering: they signify the longing for the absent other/beloved. *The combination of the two gestures thus embodies the complex cultural symbolism of an individual who struggles, on the one hand, for his own survival within his domain and his body in the face of the public other's threats, and who longs, on the other hand, to the touch and the company of that other, who is gradually disappearing from his cultural world.*

As far as Mendel is concerned that monstrous public other has a clearly chaotic character: he is unpredictable. Although all of the farmer's actions and movement are performed, as

the narrator stresses a number of times, “tranquilly”, Mendel fears him as if he were a source of incomprehensible, uncontrollable and destructive chaos. The irony here is that Mendel is actually his employer, and takes care to treat his as a servant, especially by calling him “chelovek”, a word meaning “man” which is in common use by masters to refer to servants. It would thus appear that Mendel here uses a mistaken and inappropriate normative system and fails both in his role as master and in his face-to-face communication with the Gentile, which is full of misunderstandings and errors, even when he finally adopts a more humane attitude towards the stranger:

The door leading from the corridor to the house opens slowly. “Here comes the Gentile to get his penny for chopping. When he comes in he will bring in the cold from outside”, thinks Mendel dejectedly, and without moving from where he is he shouts to the Gentile, whose steps can already be heard: “Close the door well, chelovek!” The woodcutter then comes into the room, his heavy steps sounding like an echo of the axe blows which had just become silent. “Don’t pound so with your boots, chelovek”, Mendel calls to him again, “there’s a child asleep here in the cradle”. But the woodcutter does not change his steps. He approaches the stove slowly with the intention of lighting up his pipe... “He’ll fill the entire house with smoke”, Mendel thinks in pent-up anger and quickly takes the coin out of his pocket to give to the Gentile. But the latter does not take the wage for his work from Mendel’s hand and says tranquilly as he bends over the mouth of the stove: “Wait, I have to light the pipe”. [...] Like a man with an unsolved riddle in his heart, Mendel nods his head for an instant, then moves a bit to the side to make room in front of the stove. “Warm yourself up a bit before the fire, chelovek, it must have been cold chopping the wood”. “I’m used to it”, answers the Gentile, “warm yourself, I’m not cold”. Mendel now looks at the woodcutter with greater interest [...]. “You have a long way to go, chelovek? Are you by any chance from the city?” “From Mikhailovka”, the Gentile names the village where he lives (130-131).

Mendel’s helplessness when communicating with the farmer does not stem from the cultural – class or national – gap between the two: one may assume that Mendel would have been quite familiar with the character of the Ukrainians in whose proximity he was born and lived. The reason is more specific: Mendel’s figure represents, as pointed out above, the threatened privacy which shrinks from communicating with strangers and fails

when it does, thus turning the story into *an allegory on the fall of public man*. Proof of this is provided by Mendel's inability and unwillingness to maintain (or stand) proper communication with his wife, Mendel's closest and most preeminent other. "[...] 'Mendel, did you watch when the Gentile went out? Something may have stuck to him as he left...'" Mendel does not want to talk with his wife now, so he says: 'I accompanied him outside'. When he lies about going outside he again feels cold..." (131). This little white lie, accompanied by a characteristic bodily feeling, exposes grate cultural and social distress, the distress of an individual in an industrial urban environment: a desperate amateurishness in the way he plays in the public domains; a person puts on a mask not in order to play in the public domain but in order to hide, to fence himself in and to protect himself from it. Still, in the middle of the allegory stands a complex "sacral"-gestural metaphor of kneeling and extending the hands in front of the stove in the middle of the house: *at the height of his cold desperation in the face of the terror of publicness, a man tries to collect the remnants of his last skills for an ethical gesture – to make for an other room in the center of the house, to host, to originate a dialogue. But this gesture stems, so it would appear, from a misunderstanding, and as a result it fails, remains unrequited and unrealized. This story thus provides yet another example, complex and even paradoxical, of an impossible negative gesture – a non-gesture.*

6

Gesture creates a myth of impossible and inevitable touch-non-touch. The more a gesture is realized, the less it touches (*The Nimrod Flip-Out* by Etgar Keret).

Etgar Keret's writing is not filled with gestures as is that of Meir Shalev. Keret's gestures are not framed and marked as symbolic and conceptual foci as are Agnon's. To the contrary, they are intertwined with his typical pseudo-trivial discourse at the level of the narrative, and with a pseudo-routine bodily kinetics at the level of representation. Still, a careful gestural analysis may show that in Keret's stories the gestures are located at poetic key-points and serve as phase-transition markers for the figures' mental states and their interrelations, the plot and various patterns. The gestures here are not very numerous or varied, but they constitute an important strategic tool for the cognitive and emotional activation of the reader. Let us go over the stories in the order in which they appear in the volume.

The focal point of "Fatso" is the transformation of a woman, the narrator's lover, into a chubby man. "And you lie awake, looking at her beautiful body, at the sunset outside, at the moon appearing as if out of nowhere, at the silvery light flickering over her body, stroking the hair on her back. And within less than five minutes you find yourself lying next to this guy – this short fat guy" (3).¹⁶⁵ It certainly appears as if the narrator's gaze and the stroking gesture, performed perhaps by him or perhaps by the moonlight, are

participants in the miracle of metamorphosis, as if it is the narrator's look and loving touch which make possible the appearance and realization of the other person next to him. A slight gesture of love would appear to arouse a powerful myth and revive the other's other personality. The narrator's body is not represented at all, not in this gesture nor anywhere else in the story, except for one place: "The hand shifts gears as you exit to Ayalon like a robot" (8).¹⁶⁶ In this case, too, however, the movement expresses not his personality but rather its absence, his personal will's absorption by the body's automatic reflexes. Fatso's personality, in contrast, is given a rich bodily-gestural representation: "his thick fingers fiddling with the remote, zapping to the sports channels", relates how "his throat is dry and his stomach is growling", "tapping that gold-ringed pinky of his", "laughs like a baby", he "winks at you", "he waves to you, and stays in the beanbag, staring at the fashion channel" (3-4). The difference derives from the narrator's main personality trait: "who hardly knows what he wants most of the time" (5). His lack of will is expressed through the absence of bodily representations and the absence of gestures. At the same time, however, there is a special touch gesture which stands at the center of the plot, at the center of the formation of the narrator's personality and at the center of his relationship with the second figure, a gesture which does not presence the self but rather permits the manifestation of the other and activates the mimetic mechanism: "When you first met him, you didn't give a damn about soccer, but now you know every team. And whenever one of your favorites wins, you feel like you've made a wish and it's come true" (ibid.). Imitating the other's will originates the narrator's will and identity. And, of course, together with the origination and realization of the will a tormenting feeling of guilt emerges, one which demands atonement before the previous identity, the woman,

the super-ego: “Every night you fall asleep with him struggling to stay awake for the Argentinean finals, and in the morning there she is, the beautiful, forgiving woman that you also love till it hurts” (ibid.). *The gesture thus activates the metamorphosis myth, which in turn activates the myth of the personality’s psycho-cultural origination.*

In the story “One Kiss on the Mouth in Mombasa” the centrality of the gesture is obvious enough. The narrator’s lover accepts his marriage proposal but sees fit to tell him that she kissed an anonymous Dutch tourist during her trip to Mombasa. The girl’s confession is not the result of any modesty on her part: she also reports on her sex life with her ex-boyfriend, thus creating a sharp contrast with the nearly accidental, innocent kiss. The ground for the kissing gesture is prepared by three characteristics in the Dutchman’s behavior: “there was something so gentle about the way he talked to her, something so weightless, that it was as if he hadn’t said anything at all” (16) (the para-linguistic characteristic) as he sought to approach her; “he just smiled and nodded” (the gestural characteristic), “and moved back to his regular spot on the steps of the hut” (the proxemic characteristic) when she turned him down. Also when he spoke to her for a second time and she agreed to kiss, the manner of his speech is stressed: “It was awfully funny, the way he spoke, kind of confused” (17). The kiss had no continuation. So why does the narrator’s jealousy come through when he stresses that there is no reason to be jealous? It is the gesture itself which arouses his jealousy. A pictorial expressiveness with deep psycho-cultural roots impart great force to the gesture. What stands behind it is not intimacy but touch over distance; it does not embody actualization but rather the fixation of desire as a promise of its persistence. This gestural pictorialness is what surprises the heroine and becomes engraved in her memory; through her confession she presences the

Dutchman's personality in the narrator's mind and arouses his jealousy. She activates the reader's imagination and focuses his reading on a single critical mental picture. *This is the secret of this (or perhaps of any) gesture: it presences what is absent, actualizes what is unrealized, embodies the power of impotence.*

In "One Good Deed a Day" it is not a gesture which stands at the center of the story but a complex, well-constructed conversation between two young Israelis traveling around the United States and a black junky who asks for five dollars in return for useless advice. Instead of giving him what he wants the good-willed young men try to invite the black to a meal. He feels insulted and even refuses a ten-dollar bill which the narrator offers him in the end. The story raises a fascinating moral issue: goodwill, too dogmatically and formalistically conceived as a necessity to do "one good deed for the day", may do harm. Such a conceptual desire, instead of originating an ethical relation of respect towards others, may in fact undermine the delicate balance, the informal *status quo* in the relations among the various participants in the social game. The breaking point in this conversation is marked by the question and gesture of Avihai, the narrator's companion: "You're hungry?" Avihai asked him. 'So come and eat with us.' [...] Avihai put a hand on his shoulder and tried to lead him to the restaurant" (51). In contrast to previous stories, where the gesture establishes an ethical relation, here Avihai's gesture of touch breaks the relation and marks an invasion of the personality's sovereign domain, an attempt to force certain conceptions and desires on it. *The gesture of touch can thus serve as either an ethical movement of personality origination or as a moralistic mechanism which by impersonating morality strive to control personality.*

The story “Eight Per Cent of Nothing” describes a person’s return to himself after having been lost in a toxic maze of marketing psychology, cynicism and corruption. It is the story of how “Benny Brokerage” became Michael again. Two people help him do this: Leah Minster and her husband Tuvia, who cheats on her with a woman for whom he rented an apartment with Michael’s help, as the owner of the prestigious “Benny Brokerage” agency. Michael inadvertently reveals Tuvia’s infidelity to his wife and meets with her once for a short and superficial encounter. In Michael’s words, “there was no harm done really” (64). But his personality experiences a very significant spiritual adventure which leads to a drastic change in the way he perceives himself and his life. This adventure goes through three climaxes, marked by means of touch gestures, some realized and others not. The first climax is *an unperformed gesture*, in which Michael “wasn’t holding out his hand” (60) to take Tuvia’s check for five instead of eight percent as payment for his brokerage services. By means of this weak and unsuccessful non-gesture Michael tried to save face, to avoid giving in to the other’s cynical brutality. It is this momentary rebellion, not his surrender and acceptance of the check, which is embodied in bodily representation. Although this representation is negative, characteristically for passive rebellion, it is what characterizes the hero’s personality. The second climax consists of Leah Minster’s *touch-non-touch* when he showed her an apartment: “he felt her moving closer, not touching him exactly, but close enough” (63). In this scene, too, an intimate non-touch is delimited and marked as something which arouses, illuminates and excites. Both of the non-gestures discussed so far delimit Michael’s personality between the two spouses: his unwillingness to touch Tuvia because he fears the latter’s destructive intimacy, and his unwillingness or inability to touch Leah

because he fears to lose the momentary enchantment of an unreal intimacy with her. In any case, *Michael's initiation does not consist in execution of the touch but in its tormenting and pleasurable temptation.* Against this background it comes as a considerable shock that the only actual touch which Michael performs is on a corpse. Michael's car is stuck behind a vehicle which does not move although the traffic light is green. Michael becomes angry and gets in a fighting mood: "Turned out there was nobody to pick a fight with, though, because the driver, who seemed at first to be dozing, didn't wake up, even when Benny Brokerage nudged him" (ibid.). The gesture of touch is finally (and terminally) actualized only when it can no longer originate another personality, when it no longer establishes a relationship. In fact, it does not become actualized even now, since at its other end there is only the *absence* of a living person. *This gesture thus turns out, like the ones before it, to be one of non-touch, delimiting the hero's personality and his loneliness.*

The story "Dirt" centers on a very meaningful gesture of hand-washing. The narrator develops two possible alternative plots of his life: in one he opens a chain of Laundromats, and in the other he shoots himself and dies. In both plots, by means of different version of a childish fantasy, the narrator closes accounts with his father, abuses him and abandons him to the torments of guilt feelings, loneliness and desperation, with the dirt of his sin on his hand, symbolized by dirty laundry in one of the plots, by his son's blood in the other: "The first thing my father does [after he finds his son dying] is wash his hands. Only then does he call for an ambulance. That hand washing is going to cost him dearly. He won't forgive himself till his dying day. He'll even be ashamed to tell people. How his son is lying there next to him, dying, and he instead of feeling grief or

compassion or fear, something, all he can feel is revulsion” (82). Thanks to Pontius Pilate washing the hands has turned from a simple act into a parable, a cultural symbol of an attempted shirking off of responsibility and guilt, and a psychological symbol of the failure of this attempt. This gesture is the father’s eternal mark of Cain, the miniature myth of his shirking off responsibility for his son’s death and of his implicit confession of guilt, of his inability to have real physical and emotional contact with his son. The main gesture is preceded by a preparatory one – the touch: “My father finds me. At first, he doesn’t notice the blood. He thinks I’m dozing or playing one of my stupid games with him. It’s only when he touches the back of my neck and feels something hot and sticky oozing from his fingers towards his arm that he realizes something’s wrong” (81). All this touch says, just as in the previous examples, is that *contact is not possible*. The gesture of touch, because of its physical, emotional and symbolic strength, is fateful, sharp and dangerous like a double-edged sword, penetrating deeply into the other and leaving indelible marks in its performer, whether he intends or wants to or not. Furthermore, here for the second time the gesture of touch reveals its liminal character: the stories’ characters touch other characters at the moment of their (the latter’s) deaths; they do not realize that they are touching a dead or dying person until the touch itself tells them. Contact thus not only turns out to be impossible, a non-gesture; in such scenes some light, perhaps only a tiny amount, is shed on the secret of gesture: it marks the boundary between life and death or, to be more precise, since death cannot be marked, *gesture defines the limits of life*. And since these limits are constantly moving and changing, gesture may perhaps constitute a mark, an indication, a claim, a cry: “This is life!”. Such an indication of course immediately creates an absence of marking, meaning

“This is death!”. Thus the moment it appears the gesture turns into a trace, a seal or a sign – a *mūdra*, into a memory which preserves the relation of signification-non-signification, into a road sign marking the dynamic and chaotic boundary moving with tremendous speed and in unexpected ways between one person and another.

The Latin word *gestus*, derived from *gerere* – to do, to perform, and the Sanskrit word *mūdra* – seal or sign, express the two diametrical opposites of the dialectics of gesture. A gesture is not an action. No action is in need of gestures. But a gesture does mark the limits of action – stopping an action, non-action, going back to action. The dynamics of a gesture is determined by the pace of life based on the economics of energy: the drive to life and dominance, passion, a will to constitute my self and the world around me – these are what motivate the gesture and supply the energy for its first move, from myself outside (stretching the hand, bending the back). The gesture is born and I see the limits of the self. At that very moment I see that what lies beyond the limit is not me, is an absence of me, and I feel my fingertips touching nothingness, touching death. At the end of the first move, the energy which motivated the gesture runs out. At that moment, in the pleasure and the terror of emptiness, the gesture freezes at its greatest amplitude or climax and turns into a seal, a symbol. When Jacques Lacan said that gesture was the death of movement, the absence of an event, he referred to this stage of the gesture’s becoming. This is a state of zero energy, a kind of low-point in the pendulum’s trajectory, but also a state of maximal ability to signify. *The gesture points to the location of the absence*. It is the first sign, as Eric Gans wrote. It is also the paradigm sign. The amplitude determines to a great extent the gesture’s meaning. An extended shake of the hand means more than a short shake. A long bow is more meaningful than a short one.

However, this state of immobility in any case lasts no more than a few moments. Its continuation for a long period of time (as also an unusual briefness) is characteristic of people suffering from psychomotor disturbances or extreme weakness, or of people with a strong cognitive and emotional disorientation, or of extremely tragic or comic, even caricature, figures. The normal pace of gestures is determined by the pace of life, by an optimal energy regime. Therefore a gesture lasts for no less time than is needed to identify the limits of non-existence, but also no longer, in order not to have to cope with its threat. Training oneself to be able to stand at the limit and control the energy instead of being controlled by it is an important part of spiritual practices in the Far East (and not only there), in which frozen gestures, mūdras, play an important part. Still, in everyday life under the influence of psycho-social mechanisms quick rhythmical gestures generate the constant game of hide-n-seek with death. New energy, albeit much weaker, is made to flow towards the gesture and activates its second move, from the outside into the self. The boundaries fall, signification ceases, the world with the other personality in it is lost, and the person “comes back to himself”, feeling guilt about this loss, about his inability to realize himself and his relation with the other, but also with a will to come back and perform a new gesture. This will is nothing but a new energy charge, activated by means of the memory of having touched the limit of non-existence, through the trace of the gesture. The gestural pendulum, chaotic and stable, continues to move.

In the next story, “Dorable” the dynamics of gesture appears much more prosaic, although in fact it creates an even greater strangeness because it is anchored not in a childish fantasy but in the fabric of a supposedly routine life of an “average” Israeli family. The wife, without the husband’s knowledge, opens a gas station in their yard.

Certain changes in the wife's behavior arouse the husband's suspicion until one day, almost by accident, he discovers the truth: "But before he could get very far, he spotted her, right there in the middle of their neglected backyard, just where he'd once promised her he'd plant a mulberry tree. She was wearing dirty blue overalls, and leaning over the Mitsubishi with a fuel hose in her hand. He looked up and saw that the hose led right into a fuel pump" (87). At the story's climax, at the moment of discovery, there is a mute scene constructed as a complex configuration of gestures, postures, looks and spatial relations. The slow, precise description of the main character's looking movements creates an effect of tension and a resolution of the mystery in the style of a detective story. The description of the wife and her clothes creates an estrangement of the figure, in the main character's eyes and in the eyes of the reader; it places her in the center of a stage where a strange idol is worshipped, in the midst of a non-trivial act of treachery. The woman has not realized herself in her relationship with her husband and their marital alliance with its symbolic meanings has failed; their backyard, like the courtyard of a defiled temple, is neglected. The altar of idol worship is located at the same spot where the husband's pledge was supposed to be realized – the planting of a tree. And now the wife's location in this scene of betrayal marks the unfulfilled promise, the failure of the alliance and the destruction of the temple.

Glittery eyes for people whose wish does not come true, but only if it is not a wish to get glittery eyes. That is what a beautiful kindergarten girl, bright and popular, domineering and spoiled, the main character of the story "Glittery Eyes", discovers when she interrogates the boy with the glittery eyes, a lonely, introverted, shy boy, about the source of that wonderful glitter. The girl discovers that his eyes glitter because his wish, that she

would be his girlfriend, cannot come true. The non-verbal characteristic of glittery eyes lies at the center of this story, whose topic is ethics as an issue of realization of the will and realization of the relation with the other. In the boy's figure the symbol of the glittery eyes embodies the ethical relation as ignorance of the other, as the infinity of the distance to him, in Levinas' terminology. This characteristic has a parallel in the main non-verbal element in the girl's figure – once again the charged and ambivalent gesture of touch. The girl performs this gesture twice, in imitation of adults:

"I'm sorry I yelled," she reassured him, touching him with her tiny hand. "maybe you only have to want certain kinds of things. [...] For a few seconds, the little girl didn't say anything, because the dirty little boy had managed to surprise her. Then she touched him again with her tiny hand and explained, in a voice that her father used whenever she tried to run across the street or to touch something electrical, "But I can't be your girlfriend, because I'm very smart and popular, and you're just a dirty little boy who always sits quietly far away from everyone and the only thing that's special about you is that you have glittery eyes, and even that will disappear now if I agree to be your girlfriend" (95).

The para-linguistic character of her speech ("in a voice that her father used") as well as the accompanying gesture create a distance between the two which *makes contact impossible, turns the gesture into a non-gesture, and preserves the unique identity of the boy with the glittery eyes*. This non-verbal configuration (eyes, tone of voice, gesture, the implicit proximity of the children standing face-to-face) becomes the story's symbolic focus, a myth embodying an insoluble ethical conundrum.

The hero of "Teddy Trunk" has an important job. Today he has a car with attached driver, but when he was young, before he did his military service, he would travel in the trunk, because there was no room for him among his friends in the front part of the car. Here I shall focus on just one of the many non-verbal elements in the story, one that is repeated three times, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end: during the drive, Teddy is

“listening to a tape and drumming on the dashboard” (97); or, in the second version, Teddy “drums on the dashboard in time to the song on the radio” (99). This ostensibly trivial gesture is an object manipulator (in the Ekman terminology), which usually reflects tension, mental anxiety, an attempt to adapt to the current situation, a relation to the given object and the body. This apparently minor and trivial gesture exposes the intimate relationship between the hero and the object of touch and manipulation in his hands – the car. His nervous gesture not only reflects a release of the tension, based on his traumatic reminiscence, between Teddy’s body and that of the car, but even more, it serves as an index of the body’s presence, marking the body’s boundaries with the help of his extended hand and the lined movements of his fingers, as compensation for the trauma of having had his body stashed away in the past. It is as if the gesture were saying: “I am here, I exist, I am the dominant center, I am the car – not the trunk, the margins and the suppressed”. *Paradoxically (or perhaps not), this gesture of presence preserves and reconstructs the trace of absence.*

One can hardly overstate the importance of the non-verbal, para-linguistic aspects of speech. Written literature is of course aware of their power and tries various and occasionally strange syntactic and typographical effects in order to realize or imitate them. The story “Malfunction” is one of these attempts. The narrator buys a second-hand computer from a terminally ill person. However, there is something wrong with the computer itself or with the keyboard, since the letter “f” is doubled whenever it appears in a word. The narrator remembers his visit to the computer’s previous owner, who in his ad in the paper stated that he was selling it because he was going on a trip:

“The truth is,” he said, “that death is a bit like a trip to somewhere, so it isn’t false advertising.” As he said it, he had a quivery voice, optimistic like, as though for a second he’d managed to picture death as a happy-

go-lucky class trip to a new place, and not just some good-for-nothing darkness that's breathing down your neck. "Does it come with a warranty?" I asked, and he laughed. I meant it seriously, but when he laughed, I felt awkward, so I pretended like it was meant to be funny" (104).

The tremble in the man's voice has infected the computer. The latter's "trembling voice" takes for form of a doubling of the letter "f" in the story's printed text. This tremble of restrained hope and joy then goes on to infect the reader's voice as he reads the lines as they are written. So this is not a joke: there is a warranty. The intonation, in this case even an error or a noise in the information flow such as a tremble, something which is not in the words themselves, *the gesture of speech* – is this writ of guarantee; a guarantee for the continuation of feeling and laughter, of hope and joy – a guarantee of life.

When during our discussion of "Malfunction" we spoke of the "gesture of speech", that was not just a metaphor. Experts do indeed occasionally refer to para-linguistic elements as the gesticulation of the speech mechanism. But in order to analyze the story "Halibut" we do not need such a sophisticated scientific ideas. Here we have a completely overt use of some well-known, clearly non-verbal means of communication such as smiles, silences, gestures and even pantomime. The narrator returns from a business trip abroad and meets with his friend Ari at a seaside restaurant. He orders a "talking fish" from the menu. The fish, however, does not speak and he is disappointed. After Ari, whose last bachelor meal has been ruined, leaves, the fish begins to speak. It encourages the narrator, who hates this country, to leave everything and go away. The narrator refuses, pleading prior business engagements as an excuse. The fish is depressed. Here we have precisely-delineated characters, well-known unresolved existential dilemmas, a dainty taste of a mixture of the fantastic with the psychological; a perfect example of the light-

yet-profound story à la Keret. However, the story's major meaningful plot does not unfold at the story's main focus at stage center, but rather at the edge of the field of vision, in the character of the waitress and the narrator's observation of her smile. The waitress first comes to the table while "she smiles a natural, irresistible smile" (112). Later on the narrator finds an excuse to wave to the waitress to complain about the "talking fish" that refused to speak: "The waitress came over with the same irresistible smile as before" (113). At the end of her exhausting talk with the narrator "the waitress flashed a third identical smile and walked away" (114). Finally, when Ari, angry and disappointed, is about to leave the restaurant, the narrator tries "to give him one of the waitress' natural smiles" (115). It is this smile which embodies the narrator's attitude toward what he calls "this country". The smile embodies not only a crisis of confidence between the man and his country, but also the crisis inside himself, a crisis of sincerity: this is a crisis of honesty and courage, originality and creativity – the crisis of life. The smile, so winning in its sincerity, lightness and spontaneity when making its first appearance, loses its unique power on its repetition, and turns into a wrinkled, faded bill when it is "issued" (this is the word used in the original text – "nipka") for the third time and one discovers that it really never was spontaneous and "natural" in the first place. Or, even if it was, it has now lost its charm, like the sea breeze of which the narrator is so enamored that has turned into the air-conditioning inside the restaurant. In this story the dividing line between the life and death (of a unique, creative personality) overlaps the boundary between spontaneous and ceremonial gesture. The waitress' smile as the narrator perceives it augurs his own emotional and moral impotence, one of whose main features is a lack of sincerity. He does not like these "traditional" meals with Ari, yet

accepts his invitation again and again. Nor does he share his friend's happiness, yet he says the right words which one expects to hear in these circumstances. He does not love his country, but cannot bring himself to leave it. *He (and maybe everyone) is incapable of making an honest, natural, powerful and spontaneous gesture*; therefore the fish is depressed and will not speak.

A pony is born to the main character of the story "Horsie". How could this have happened? When his wife became pregnant the prospective father was beset with fears lest some "little shit" (128) would be born that he would not want at all. He asked his grandmother for advice. She told him to sleep with his head near his wife's belly so that his dreams, which were nothing but a strong expression of his desires, would be transmitted towards the fetus and shape it: "After that, he slept every night with his head right next to her belly, which was getting bigger all the time. He didn't remember the dreams, but was willing to swear they were good ones. And he couldn't remember a time in his life that he'd slept that way, so peaceful like, he didn't even get up to pee" (130). Let us leave aside the picture of the kind of man and society represented in the story, of people no longer in need of human children and incapable of giving them love; the "other" children, constituting a realization of their parents' wishes, appear in metamorphoses which would have surprised even Ovid: not mixanthropic creatures, not minotaurs descended from gods – quite average Israeli families are begetting completely normal, natural run-of-the-mill animals. Let us leave that aside as well and focus on the significant core, the story's dramatic turning point – the *posture* which changes the course of the story and the way of the world. When the hero places his head next to his wife's belly a special, mysterious yet powerful relationship is created between him, her

and the fetus. Clearly what symbolically happens is that the hero himself turns into a fetus and returns to the womb; this explains his feeling of calm. But there is another, much more important, dimension, that of *the vector of desire*. Like the hero of the previous story, Horsie's father-to-be cannot or does not know how to realize the desires stored in his dreams. His "funny position" (ibid.) is not just a position: it is a gesture marking the direction of his desire and its strength and presences his personality in the place to which he belongs. *Here again Keret's pseudo-banal myth originates in the bewitched body of a gesture.*

A similar dynamics develops in the next story, "Jetlag"¹⁶⁷ although also with a significant difference: realization of a desire is here replaced by a sterile fantasy. The narrator is saved from a crashing airplane thanks to a stewardess named Shelly who fell in love with him. The aircraft was intentionally crashed by the airline for the purpose of inculcating greater respect for safety regulations, which explains how the stewardess was able to provide her beloved with a parachute in time to save his life. Shortly after he landed the narrator watches a live broadcast from the crash site and discovers that all the passengers survived except for a criminal sought by Interpol, "so that, relatively for a disaster, the atmosphere was really very pleasant" (70). This turn of events surprises both the reader and the narrator himself. But what is even more surprising is the narrator's reaction which ends the story: "I could hear the joyful off-tone singing of the survivors [...] I could imagine myself there, too, with everyone else, with my Shelly, embraced on the bottom of a rubber boat, waving to the cameras" (ibid.). Certainly this world is crazy, but a person, now as always, only needs another person, a touch which will mark his desire, and the possibility of performing a banal and silly gesture which will declare his

existence. This is not to be taken lightly: the right to such a gesture is earned by way of torments and catastrophes which are but cruel rites of initiation. But why? Here we come once more to the issue of the mysterious bond between gesture, death and the liminal experience. The truth is that gestures are the prerogative of heroes, of those who survive. A gesture marks its performer as a focus of public interest, a pivot which creates a pole of gravitation. The reason for this is simple and complex at one-and-the-same time: (physical) presence is the victory of life over death and gesture is the myth or monument of this victory. For this reason any gesture constitutes a staging of the impossible crossing of the boundary of death, the play of the liminal crisis; it is a sacrificial gift, a prize or an atonement for the transgression, for sin of existence. The hero of this last story does not deserve a gesture – a presence. Paradoxically (or perhaps not) the stewardess' love removes him from existence, takes away his right of initiation and being. What is left for him is a “phantasm”, an image and a picture, in other words an illusion and disappointment, neurosis without the trauma. That is not so very little – it is all of civilization.

The same mechanism of the phantasm can be found in the story “Bottle”. Here the main character is getting drunk with his friend in a bar because of his unrequited love for his roommate. In front of his very eyes an anonymous man manages to put his friend into a bottle and, sometime later, to take him out again. He comes back home in the early hours of the morning:

And the college guy crawls quietly to his room, managing to get a peek at his roommate – Sivan, that's her name – sleeping under the covers in her room with her mouth half open, like a baby. She has this, like, special kind of beauty now, serene. The kind of beauty some people have only when they're sleeping, but not all of them. And for a minute, he feels like taking her, just the way she is, putting her in a bottle and

keeping her next to his bed, like those bottles of multicolored sand people used to bring back from the Sinai. Like the small night lights you keep on for kids who are afraid to sleep alone in the dark (139-140).¹⁶⁸

This, the story's main scene, is composed of two sub-scenes: in the first there is a prominent but implicit bodily representation (movement is described, without mentioning any limb) – he crawls and peeks; its crude naturalism is in sharp contrast to the romantic lyricism of the second, imagined, sub-scene, in which a beautiful girl appears asleep inside the bottle on the shelf next to the main character's bed. It need hardly be said that the latter scene is constructed on the basis of a violation of the bodily representation's reliability and probability, in contrast to the former. What links the two scenes is the gestural icon – the figure of the girl curled up like a baby or a fetus – a powerful visual-bodily mythic metaphor which appears as the object towards which the hero's vector of desire is aimed, as a center of sanctity and source of beauty and calm, a spring of life. The story's main character, like that of "Horsie", appears to be hypnotized by the fetal symbol and from it sculpts his myth of metamorphosis. *In this myth, in the icon-gesture by means of which body and will are bound together, the hero's love-vision comes into being and disintegrates as an infantile neurotic fantasy, or as a timeless legend.*

The next story, "A Visit to the Cockpit" is rich in non-verbal communication – looks, smells, laughter, weeping and gestures, which, to use Nathalie Sarraute's words, form the thin net of relations among the figures. The story begins and ends with the landing of an airplane at the end of a flight from New York, at Ben-Gurion Airport. The narrator bursts out in tears and her father tries to calm her down, explaining to the other passengers that this is her first trip abroad. The story inside this framework reveals the true reason why she is upset – her boyfriend, who is staying in New York, cheats on her. The framework

is nailed down by means of two bodily occurrences. At the beginning of the story: the father “put a hand on the back of my neck, the way you do with a dog, and whispered in a syrupy voice, ‘Don’t cry, sweetie, Daddy’s here.’ I wanted to kill him, I wanted to hit him so hard that he’d start bleeding. But Daddy kept on kneading the back of my neck” (141-142); and at the end: “As I tried to push my seat into a reclining position, he rubbed the back of my hand and said, ‘Sweetie, the red light’s on, you’d better fasten your safety belt, we’re going to land in a jiffy.’ And I fastened my safety belt real tight and felt now, in a jiffy, I was going to cry” (148). The gestures of touch which accompany the father’s words provide a framework for the story; they merely express a desperate lack of understanding, a communicative abyss that lies between the two figures. The ethical gesture, which has the purpose of originating an attitude of empathy, fails so miserably that it becomes the opposite of itself: it now does not transmit a feeling of calm and sympathy, but rather a breach through the boundary, an intrusive, violent appropriation. But is that not the essence of every gesture? The line between an ethical gesture and an owner’s patronizing one, between a gesture which constitutes the other as a personality and one which takes the other’s personality and turns it into a dog, is so very thin. Or perhaps it is non-existent? Whom does the gesture presence, its performer or its addressee? When the father strokes his daughter his words leave no room for doubt: “Daddy’s here”, I am the one who exists, and I know your personality. This knowledge is closed within itself, narcissistic; it is an illusion, not touching the other, with no expression of good-will or love. All that is left in it is a semiosis of authority and violence. The girl’s anger at her father is not just a transfer of anger towards her boyfriend. In fact it may not have anything at all to do with him, being perhaps only an

intuitive, and therefore appropriate, reaction to the hidden message in the father's message. The gesture's meaning as a sign is not misleading: the hand massaging the nape of her neck signals a beheading, the threat of castration. The only thing we do not know is who the god is to whom this Agamemnon is sacrificing his Iphigenia, to what vow did this daughter of Jephtah fall victim. *The gesture is realized once more as a minor myth with deep roots, which rather than imitate ancient myths creates, as a myth always does, a new reality.* Like all the preceding myths-gestures, it merely evokes and stages an ethical problem without providing a solution; it generates (in fact, continues) a chain of sins and punishments, sacrifices and miracles, interpretations and misunderstandings. A gesture is a transgression, trying desperately to touch the other, to break through the wall of silence and loneliness, at any price, even at the price of violence and murder, as Nathalie Sarraute writes of Dostoevsky's heroes. But all of this is to no avail. At this stage our gestural dialectics has arrived at a paradoxical conclusion: *the more a gesture is realized, the less it touches; the more it presences the other and builds a vector of desire towards him, the less ethical it becomes.* Other's gestures have built around Keret's main characters, for example the hero of the story "A Thought in the Shape of a Story", a kind of wall of non-touching: "And every time he accidentally touched one of the sides, he felt a kind of cold blast that reminded him that he was alone" (152).

Another piece of evidence for this is provided by the hero of "The Tits of an Eighteen-Year-Old", a garrulous taxi driver full of the joy of life. He enjoys staring at young women on the street, taunts them and points them out to the narrator who happens to be riding his cab. He touches his passenger, gestures with his hands and winks at him repeatedly. He smiles and winks also when he calls up his ex-wife and arrogantly makes

fun of her concern for the welfare of their soldier son who has not called home, against the background of a radio broadcast reporting a helicopter crash that had just occurred. The story ends as the taxi arrives at the narrator's home and after the driver's wife confirmed that their son was not hurt: "We were very close to my house now, and pulling into Reiness Street he saw a thin girl in a mini skirt who turned around, frightened, when he honked. 'Get a loada that one,' he said, trying to hide his tears. 'Say, wouldn't you like to stick it to her?'" (163). In the scholarly literature one can find three possible relevant explanations for this case: (a) exaggerated gestures are typical of comic characters; (b) uncontrollable gestures reveal feelings and motivations which cannot be expressed otherwise; (c) some gestures reflect personal temperament and cultural bodily habits. Our story disproves each of these possible explanations, so that each by itself cannot explain the character's overall non-verbal behavior. Leaving aside the question of whether this figure is or is not a faithful representative of a certain cultural type, what we are interested in at the moment is the question of what the figure teaches us about the poetics and dialectics of gesture. In this context we may point out two facts: the character's gestures do not reveal but rather conceal his true feelings, and they serve as a *distraction* for both himself and the outside observer. His gestures are neither theatrical nor rhetorical, neither spontaneous nor ceremonial, neither manipulative nor illustrative. They are *simulacra*, empty signs with not referents, despite the illusory wealth of juicy reality on the other side of the taxi's windscreen. These gestures create a kind of silver screen of communication for its own sake, without any connection between what is being screened on it and what is happening behind it. Like other bodily signs which mark the body but also hide it, as described by Jean Baudrillard, gestures presence the body only in that they

turn it into an object. But the body disappears inside this object, if by “body” we mean the personality, the unique and sole existential basis of the non-existent ego. Gestures as they appear in this light turn the personality into a media presentation, into a caricature. This leads us to the problem of truth in gesture, which we may formulate as follows: if a gesture, like any caricature, represents certain real traits of the personality, can one point to a sufficient basis for ensuring its truth, and if so what is it?

Let us get back to the story. In the passage quoted above there appears an implicit representation of a certain non-verbal behavior which has the purpose of hiding another non-verbal behavior: “trying to hide his tears”. How he tried is not made clear, but there can be no doubt that the sentence refers to surreptitious minor gestures such as turning the head or raising one’s hands to one’s eyes in order to hide them from view. These gestures, too, function as distractions, *but without success*. They are absent from the overt layer of representation and in fact do not constitute gestures at all in the proper sense of the word, being more in the nature of functional non-communicative actions. But it is these unrepresented movements which embody the hero’s real wishes and point, against his will, to his real feelings about what is happening between him, his son and his ex-wife. In this sense these movements, from the perspective of the narrator observing them from the side, function as true gestures. They mark the hero’s true vector of desire and create the true signifying referent beyond the false media simulation. They make his body and his personality be present. We can thus indicate a sufficient basis for determining the truth of gestures as this takes shape in Keret’s story. This indication is an important poetic mechanism in the story itself. It is part of Keret’s conceptualization of gesture and is anchored in a complex conceptual fabric and a consistent philosophy. According to this

approach, the observer (in the story in question, the narrator and the reader) is able to look into the silver screen and see the truth. *This truth is created by the very gesture of distraction which tries to hide it.* It is absent from the sign and from the representation; it is pure pointing, a vector with a direction but no magnitude, a spear whose head touches the crying body – in mourning and in joy. This gesture of distraction is the truth itself, not because it reveals some kind of “truth” about the hero but because *it originates an adequate relation between the will and its object and thus originates both the object and the will (and its movement), which cannot exist in the world of simulacra.* In other words, *this gesture again originates that existential honesty* to whose rare moments of manifestation the series of banal events in Keret’s stories are aimed.

From the paradoxical analytics of non-gesture as gesture and of gesture as non-gesture, and from the dialectics of gesture-simulacrum, we now arrive, as we discuss the story “Baby”, at the existential metaphysics of gesture in Keret’s writing. In the series of Keret’s gestural icons discussed here, the one in this story is of particular importance. On his twenty-ninth birthday the story’s main character takes a cab with his girlfriend: “And he kept his arm around her the whole way, kissed her on the cheek, the breasts, more surprised with every kiss that she wasn’t embarrassed” (171). But the girl did not get his love, even at night, when “he pressed up against her and said she had such a nice heart and he loved it” (172.). All is in vain. She is disappointed and depressed. “Their eyes were closing now, and the sea breeze cooled his face as he felt asleep beside her, curled into himself like a child, like a baby” (ibid.). The last posture, the picture of a man hugging himself like a baby, is the ultimate expression of the existential state. Its symbolic and psychological meaning is clear, perhaps too much so, almost platitudinous.

Much less obvious is the scene's metaphysical and ethical meaning not as a picture, not as a static posture, but rather as a dynamic gesture, as a last, but not final, link in a chain of proxemic movements and developments. The story presents a transition from a hug to the other and intimate contact such as a kiss on the breast, through being close, to being "next to" and hugging oneself. This entire chain looks like taking one's arms off the other, distancing oneself and hugging oneself. The process is similar to that in "Fatso", but with an important difference: in "Fatso" the touch-non-touch originates the other while here it originates the self. The infantile auto-erotic nature of the self-hug is just a shell behind which hides the kernel of its metaphysical meaning as a gesture. Kristine Santilli has pointed to the genetic proximity of the hug to the family of gestures of sweeping/pulling and described their functions, especially the function of the self-hug, based on the scene in Homer's *Odyssey* in which Odysseus curls up and covers himself with leaves. Certainly this action should by no means be interpreted in terms of the regression of the personality, just as the mysterious gesture of Elijah¹⁶⁹ is a far cry from being a symbol of a return to the embryonic state. Just as in the analysis of the biblical scene,¹⁷⁰ in the story here, too, the key to understanding the presented event lies in making the essential distinction between posture and gesture, and in understanding that the text does not represent a picture of the posture but rather activates the personality's gesture; in a certain sense the text (or the reading) performs the gesture by itself, as Santilli would have said. Thus just as in the scene on Mt. Carmel instead of a mute posture we find a speaking gesture, anchored in a dialogue with God,¹⁷¹ so also in Keret's story instead of a posture of passivity, regression and non-being we discover a gesture of the presencing of the self, defining identity without violence or transgression. If we had

claimed that the scene in question was existential in essence we would have face a considerable difficulty, since after all, despite the process of alienation and isolation the hero does not suffer from distress or pain, nor is he struck by absurdity, terror, freedom or its absence. The hero's meditation puts him in the center of a metaphysical, even religious, world picture; his gesture turns him into a temple in which he is both victim and high priest at the same time, beloved of the gods, "the hero", embraced, the "someone", the personality, the one towards whom the finger is pointed, whom God's hand touches. *The gesture is the hero's myth, in which he does not solve existential problems but rather learns to live and coexist with them by means of a metaphysical-physical procedure of transforming them into that myth itself, into a gesture.*

Gesture is myth, not only because it points to the center of meaning creation, and not only because it originates an iconic metaphor with great symbolic and archetypal power, but also because that metaphor possesses a human face, which faces in the direction of another face. Every gesture is a face-to-face situation, to use Levinas' concepts, a situation which originates time, personality, ethics, memory, language and story. Gesture is the primal sign, as Gans wrote, the sign whose creation marks the transition from pre-history to history and which is always associated, in one form or another, with violence.

The origination of such a sign is described in another of Keret's stories, "How to Make a Good Script Great". During a stroll in New York the story's main character, who dreams of becoming a screenwriter, encounters a black man on the street who sells books whose title is that of the story. The hero, who sees in this a kind of "revelation", wants to buy a copy and hands the seller a one-hundred dollar bill. The black man runs across the street to change the bill. "When he crossed the street towards us he smiled and waved a small

wad of ten-dollar bills at us. At that moment I wanted to say something nasty to my girlfriend, but in that very second a truck ran him over. He died on the spot. You could easily see that because although he was lying on his belly his eyes were looking at the sky. He also kept on smiling, which was kind of scary” (107).¹⁷² Under the effect of the revelation, the tragic accident he witnessed and the book he read, the hero wrote a “great” script in which two brothers, one white and the other black, who were separated at birth all the time felt that “they were not alone” and expected to meet one another. Forty years later the white brother ran over the black brother with a truck. “A second before the truck killed him the black realized that he had met his twin brother. That’s why he died with a happy smile, a smile which really fortified his brother throughout all those long years when they fucked him in the ass in prison” (108). Behind the irony and parody hides the same powerful primeval cultural mechanism which can be seen in epic and mythical stories, new and old. This is the myth of the Minotaur, a story about the impossible face-to-face encounter with the brother-other. The event, the revelation (any event, after all, can be a revelation) originates the sign of the smile as a symbol, as a *mūdra*, the gesture in which myth and history are identical, the seal which preserves and hints at the secret of life and fate. The gesture of the smile, like a kind of generous yet cruel oracle, a kind of hermeneutical key to the gate of life and death, points to God’s will and embodies it. It, and only it, originates the hero’s writing and his personal story – his myth. The hero’s writing is another gesture, which embodies his destiny and desire and points to the originating event itself, to the chaotic-cosmic source of meaning. I believe that these gestures are the source of Keret’s stories’ power and vitality.

Gestures thus point to other gestures more than they point to other people, wills, truths, phantasms, presences or absences. The story “Himme”, the longest in the collection, ends with a unique gesture, with which we, too, shall close our discussion. The story tells of the loves, frustrations and quests of Himme, a typical young, and unhappy, Israeli. Between him and his world – his wife and his therapist – stand gestures-simulacra: “He smiled and wiped the sweat from his face, trying not to let her [his wife] see how agitated he was” (188-189); “Once he told his therapist, ‘Maybe I’ll shut up now for a while and you can tell me something about yourself.’ And Himme’s therapist gave him the tired smile of someone who’d heard that crack more than once, but under the smile it was also obvious that he didn’t have much to tell” (191). Between him and his desires stand gestures-phantasms: “She looked sad when she sang, and it really tugged at Himme’s heart. At one point he imagined himself going up on stage and kissing her” (189); “Himme spent those fifty minutes imagining his therapist as a beautiful, voluptuous woman, and imagining what would happen if he got up out of his chair and kissed her long, smooth neck. How would she react? A slap? Maybe a half-surprised moan?” (191). After he and his wife separate his memory of her is mediated by a kind of voyeurism, a clandestine observation of his ex’s movements and bodily rituals: “After her shower, she’d stare at her figure in the mirror, pinching herself all over, and making cute faces” (199). Himme’s gestures, like the auto-erotic gestures of his wife, are closed in on themselves and strangle him with a desperate solipsism which even arouses in him a dark desire to commit suicide, itself also nothing more than an extreme solipsistic self-gesture.

The turn in the story comes when the hero's gaze is detached from his own body and his own phantasms, and takes a new course – to his father's body and how others observed it.

This happened on their trip together to India:

Turned out the Indians loved Himme's dad's stories too. They listened very closely, and usually laughed in the right places, which sometimes helped Himme forget that they hadn't understood a word. A closer study revealed that rather than listening, they were actually concentrating on his dad's glorious bare potbelly, and the way it shimmied whenever he described something particularly funny or moving. On the underside of his dad's belly there was a scar from when he'd had his appendix out, and one of the Indians told Himme in broken English that every time the scar turned red, they knew the story had taken a very dangerous turn (202-203).

But the moment another's body ("Him") occupies the gesture's center of sanctity and power (where it was at first apparently unidentified and without boundaries), the workings of psychological, semiological and anthropological laws inevitably bring about the liberation of (Him)me's body which, however, also empties and begins "floating up towards the ceiling" (210). His father's death turns his image into a mythical personality which holds in its hands the secret of the gestures of creation and non-being: "Buddha arrived to visit him, smiling and chubby as always, with the tip of a familiar scar showing on the underside of his potbelly, and Buddha even brought him a present – a wicker basket full of puffballs. He blew on one of the puffballs, and the whole world disappeared" (213). With the breathing gesture of the father-god, physical, mental and literary worlds are created and destroyed. Breath is the ultimate eschatological gesture, the final gesture with which one leaves this world, but also the initial gesture with which one comes into it. This gesture is the beginning and the end of every myth, it is the first myth and the last which always tells of the encounter between life and death. It is the gesture which first points to body, presence and being, which first creates meaning. This

gesture is the paradigmatic indicator of the presence of life. It points to the face and in particular to the mouth, and so lays a silent and solid foundation for language and speech, the identifying characteristics of humanity. It is excess, the first and last ecstasy, the first and last crossing of the borders of the self, the paradigmatic transgression which both creates and negates ethics. *This myth of gesture (or gesture of myth) is, so I believe, the Iliad and Odyssey of Etgar Keret's imaginary mythology and anthropology.*

Is Gesture Possible?

The growing interest in gestures in culture, literature and modern scholarship can be attributed to three main factors. The first involves the impoverishment of public life, as Richard Sennett wrote, reflected in the faceless equality and neutrality seen in dress and in communication in general, in the lack of clear markers of social class, and in the “expressionless visibility” character of public life. Another, related factor has to do with the cultural norm according to which expressions of feelings in public are frowned upon. Under such conditions gestures and non-verbal communications in general are transformed from a medium of expression to an object of interpretation. In an obscure, unreliable environment of deficient expressivity any slight behavioral expression turns into a code, and inter-personal interactions require an ability to decipher such codes. Public life turns into a set of observational practices. This brings us to the third factor: The culture of observation and visibility has developed for itself an entire industry of techniques and objects of observation, whose common mechanism acts to break the body up into individual signs, with an exaggerated focus on details seen from up close.¹⁷³ Finally, the last cause is associated with the nature of literary representation: Rather than the narrative sequence, it is the solitary detail which becomes an autonomous object of observation, of decipherment and interpretation, as a social and psychological symbol.¹⁷⁴

This is the cultural soil in which the new poetics of gesture grows. Its uniqueness can be clearly discerned when it is seen against the background of the use of gesture in classical literature: today a gesture will appear as an isolated, independent object of observation. But is this still a gesture? Can a gesture exist as an expressive sign in a culture of simulacra? Can gesture exist as an act in a culture of total visibility? Can gesture exist as dialogue in the absence of public man? Can gesture exist as contact with the other in a world without boundaries? The one-hundred years which separate Jacob Steinberg from Etgar Keret underscore the new poetical heritage: Steinberg's short stories are the precursors of the poetics of non-gesture which reaches its climax with Keret. Who is it that stands at the gesture's other end? Is it a living flesh-and-blood person with his own unique, unknown face, with a body and history filled with an ever growing number of wrinkles and folds the closer one gets to them? Or is it perhaps a plastic *golem*, a commercial product wrapped in nylon? Is it perhaps the gesture which turns the man into a golem? Perhaps the other disappears in the gesture itself, just as Eurydice disappeared in Orpheus' gaze? Or perhaps is it the other way around, that gesture is the last attempt to originate a public domain, the ultimate life sign in a world of imaginary symbols? If these questions have answers then the concluding discussion of some contemporary literary texts should help us find them.

A. Gesture does not express but transforms a body into discourse, thus disappearing (“Schlafstunde” by Judith Katzir).

When the body is transformed from a reliable medium of theatrical social play to a hermetically closed and mysterious store of energy, gesture is transformed from means of expression and staging to a vector of desire. From an accompaniment to or a substitute for speech it turns into speech itself; in fact it turns into a kind of speech that is perceived as most authentic and sincere, because the category of sincerity is associated with the categories of naturalness and spontaneity, which in turn are identified with a corporality which is no longer separate from privacy, and constitutes its last fortified position against the threat of the public domain which is now (actually, already from Rousseau) perceived as unauthentic, artificial and false. Yehudit Katzir’s “Schlafstunde” provides a good example of this. The story, which relates the narrator’s reminiscences about a love of her youth is full of bodily and gestural representations and presents a clear contrast between the past, full of gestures of passion and pleasure, and the present in which these gestures are no longer possible. There, in the past’s lost Garden of Eden, touch is the language of love:

Afterward we played a game of writing words on each other’s backs and trying to guess them. At first we wrote the names of flowers [...] But after a while you said that this is boring and that it’s hard to guess because of our shirts. So I took off my blouse and lay on the sofa, my face in the smell of dust, perfume and cigarette smoke which had stuck to the upholstery back there. I felt how your gentle finger slowly wrote words which we never dared say [...] And when I whispered the words in a subdued voice into the sofa’s pillows I felt how my face burned and how my nipples, which had just began growing, grew stiff into the velvet (663).¹⁷⁵

[...] And suddenly you touched my face with your fingertips, as if to wipe a chocolate moustache, and came to me behind my back, slowly wrote, word after word, I-love-you-very-much, and hugged me tight (667).

The writing/reading on the body is a transgression, a discourse of sin, of taboo, of the unpronounced; this is the ostensibly primeval language of innocence. *The gesture of touch supposedly originates the zero grade of writing. But in this origination itself the gesture ceases to be one*; it disappears when the touch is actualized, whether the boy in the story touches in order to write or writes in order to touch. Writing which has been turned into a gesture and thus came back to its bodily roots does not cease being language. True, the girl enjoys the touch of the boy's hands, but her desire moves in a transgressive movement between the bounds of the words in the space of discourse. The gesture points to the direction of the desire's movement and realizes it, but does not *express* it. The body's boundary turns into the boundary of language, and not the other way around. Yehudit Katzir's text, with all its bodily overflow, thus testifies to the victory of language and the defeat of gesture. The basis for the failure of gesture in the (narrative) present lies already in past, in the way in which the memory was originated and preserved. Still, the gesture is not completely powerless: it originates a sign, fills it with energy and points to its transgressive position at the boundary-discourse/the skin-body; it is the vector of desire. But this sign replaces the body; instead of originating the subject in the other's face, the gesture transforms the other into an object, into a discourse. Can there exist another kind of gesture? Can language turn into body? Is Katzir's gestural poetics a cultural default option and is contemporary literature doomed to continue harvesting the crop of the nineteenth century forever? Meir Shalev's poetics opens up a different possibility.

B. Non-expressive interactive literary gestures transform words into bodily reading gestures (*Fontanelle* by Meir Shalev).

In Meir Shalev's novels the human body is no longer a sign or an object of representation but rather appears as the environment for the personality's coming into being, as the *subject* of language and culture, of thought and feeling. The novel *In His House in the Desert* is a textbook example of imaginary anthropology as well as of the power of complex bodily representation.¹⁷⁶ In the novel *Fontanelle* the anthropoetic gesture's interactive power reaches its peak. This novel's imaginary anthropology classifies and catalogs events, important dates, customs, rites, fixed expressions, values, relationships, etc. All these elements are embodied uniformly, in the expressions and epithets which make up the family's unique language. Every epithet or expression is always linked to an event of naming or of an expression's origination. Language is the family's memory, and the origination of language thus also constitutes the origination of memory. The basic element in the origination of language/memory is not the word or the expression by themselves, but rather the union of a linguistic (a word or an expression) and a behavioral (an event, movement, reading) units, in other words, the union of language and its origination. The behavioral unit is associated, naturally and obviously, to characters who use language. The origination of language is a kind of bodily motion which is unified with the words. Giving a name or fixing an expression in memory appears to the observer as an anthropoetic gesture, in which the bodily and linguistic dynamics are embodied in each other. In a gesture the origination of linguistic (propositional) memory is identified with the origination of the body's memory. In the reader it may therefore activate the same cognitive mechanisms that were described in the chapters 1 and 2, turning him or

her into an active partner in an *interactive persono-dynamic system of reading*. Here is an example. Anya speaks to little Michael after she saved him from the flames:

“What’s your name?”, she asked.

I was terrified. Amuma, when she would tell me and Gabriel the story of “How Adam gave names to all the animals in the Garden of Eden”, said that this is how he imposed his mastership over them. “With the help of the name”, she laughed, and that is why I remember it well, because the expression surprised me and because Amuma at that time did not laugh very much any more.

“What’s your name?”, Anya asked again.

I remained silent. I knew that she wanted to make me her own.

“I know how I’ll call you”, she smiled, “I’ll call you Fontanelle. That’s a name that only you and me will know”.

“Michael”, I said hurriedly.

“Michael is a nice name, and that is what your mother will call you. But I’ll call you Fontanelle”.

I felt the smile in the ‘e’ sound after the second ‘n’.

“Fontanelle”, I said quietly, to myself, touching it with my finger.

It is a foreign word, not easily pronounced by a five-year-old tongue, and demands of it a certain measure of acrobatics: to touch with the teeth, tighten, loosen, caress, uvulate unto the palate. But since I first heard it, in the wadi, burnt, moist and hugged, I have said it again and again many times to myself: in the depth of my heart, as is my custom when in the company of others, and on my lips, as is my custom when alone. In the yard, in the field, when walking on the road, at night in bed, I was already able to pronounce it properly, like her, including the smile. Even then, despite my young age, I felt that in addition to the ability of names to bring order into the world and calm its denizens, this name also had love (53).¹⁷⁷

The reference to the biblical story creates a broad mythological context for the act of naming, and an analogy between the given moment in the narrator’s life (i.e., the moment of writing) and the Garden of Eden, a moment of tenderness, innocence, love and rebirth. Anya plays the male role, that of Adam, while Michael is a kind of Eve, born of Adam, although not from his rib but through being saved from fire, the new myth of transition, initiation and revival. Michael the narrator is also aware of another anthropological

mechanism involved in the act of naming, the gesture of appropriation: “I knew that she wanted to make me her own”. This event originates a kind of secret fraternity of Anya and Michael. The narrator remains loyal (“belonging”) to this fraternity throughout his entire life. Let us now inquire into the bodily dynamics in the event described above. The first bodily movement is Anya’s smile. She smiles while pronouncing the word and the smile becomes fused into the word, becoming inseparably a part of it. A strong oral element shapes the word “Fontanelle”. It is not just a word but a whole gesture, which includes Anya’s smile “in the ‘e’ sound after the second ‘n’”. This gesture embodies Michael’s name, in other words his personality, and at the same time also the trace of the movement of Anya’s mouth, the memory of her body. For the narrator pronouncing the word involves repeating the same gesture in its entirety: “I was already able to pronounce it properly, like her, including the smile”. The act of pronouncing the word is described as a bodily-gestural process. The erotic nature of these descriptions, with their profound links to the erotic aspects of the mouth and of speech itself, cannot be ignored. Learning the language in the novel thus consists first-and-foremost of learning speech, of learning a physical behavior, of acquiring the skill involved in the performance of the gesture, its preservation in memory and in its ritual repetition. When the narrator says “I felt that ... this name also had love” one of the things he means is that it is the function of a name (any name) to originate a relationship between two people, and also that this particular name embodies a specific behavior, a human practice of love, physical no less than spiritual and emotional. The origination of memory, learning a language, and speech in general, are bodily practices of meaning creation in the body, or of creating a body for meaning, to use Deleuze’s concepts in *The Logic of Sense*.

Yet another anthropological mechanism is at work in the gesture in question: imitation and substitution. Learning and memory are mimetic mechanisms. Michael imitates Anya's gesture – “Fontanelle”, including the smile – by means of his body/speech. Anya's body is no longer present in this gesture. What remains is a memory of the body, with its ambiguous referent: it is the memory of Michael's and of Anya's bodies at one-and-the-same time. The speech gesture “F-O-N-T-A-N-E-L-Le” turns out to constitute a unification or coupling event of his present body and her absent/remembered one. The name “Fontanelle” is thus a substitute for Anya. It is her symbol, and therefore the substitution itself implies not devaluation or diminution. As Losev wrote, a symbol is a living organism;¹⁷⁸ it is the only possible way for presenting the absent personality, to use Gadamer's terms.¹⁷⁹ Anya is present every time that Michael repeats the gesture “Fontanelle”. More precisely, she is present exactly in the same manner as she was present at the time she created this gesture; after all, her physical presence then was also limited just to this gesture (here I am of course isolating the naming scene from the sequence of events in which it is embedded).

Reading this text involves the cognitive representations of the pronouncing gestures described in the text, whose processing activates the reader's own pronouncing gesture planning mechanism. This mechanism attains a stage of partial implementation whose extent differs from one reader to another. Thus micro-muscular movements which imitate these gestures become an integral part, at the threshold of consciousness, of the reading experience. The author's motor-cognitive experiment is quite pristine: the text's operational power is based first-and-foremost on the silent speech during reading and on its accompanying echoing effect (an unconscious imitation of the viewed gestures), on

the unity of thought, language and movement, as described in the studies of David McNeil and his colleagues.¹⁸⁰ The echoing of phonetic gestures serves as a major language acquisition mechanism. Anya teaches Michael, and the text teaches the reader, a new word/gesture. Anya's smile from now becomes not merely a verbal sign or representation: through the decipherment mechanism, the mechanism of planning and production of gestures, and through the growth point the word turns into the reader's body movement. In addition to this process yet another effect is created in the text: the pronouncing micro-gestures are translated into the series of macro-gesture representations: to touch, tighten, loosen, caress, uvulate. These are gestures-manipulators, in the sense that they cannot be imagined with the help of the representation of a single body or organ: their processing at the level of content of necessity includes the implicit representation of another body, or of a part of it or of an object, and the representation of the relation between the two bodily representations, their unification in a single pantomime scene. At the rhythmic level this gestural series is represented as a succession of waves, as a hypnotizing dance. The macro-gestures impart a distinctly autoerotic character to Michael's phonetic micro-gestures (which are also the reader's). This autoeroticism is not only represented in the text: it is embodied in the corporality of the words and of the reading.

C. When words become gestures, and a body becomes symbol, the disappearing language is replaced by a desperate attempt to touch letters in order to make them speak (“Kitty” by Aharon Appelfeld).

Appelfeld’s words possess a body. They dance, perform gestures and thus stress very forcefully the inability of Kitty, the Jewish girl hiding from the Nazis in a monastery, to perform a gesture. Appelfeld constructs for Kitty a unique kind of consciousness whose realistic justification lies in the fact that she does not know the language spoken in her surroundings, and she must therefore perceive it with her sharpened senses. But Kitty’s sensory-bodily experience is far from its realistic base and is realized as a continuous linguistic-bodily phantasm. The bodily events which make up this phantasm create the body’s imaginary anthropology, which is characteristic of the given story and the given character. The narrator and the reader take it upon themselves to play the role of anthropologists of sorts who observe and document bodily, cultural and individual practices in a certain social group, except that this time the group consists of a single individual together with other words and objects. In Appelfeld’s anthropoetics, with Kitty at its center, the whole world is depicted as multiple sequences of bodily movements – of the body, in relation to the body or out of the memory of the body. It is almost obvious that the story’s first event is a bodily one, of reading:

She had to read slowly and memorize the sentences. She felt how the words struck the stone and returned after being cooled, calling out her name, which was rustling inside her like starched cloth dresses which make a rustling sound like a shiver [...] For a moment she would feel all the air winding itself around her neck, strangling the syllables in her mouth. But sometimes the flow would increase and the good words would remain inside her like a warm secret planting itself slowly, spreading its roots (154).¹⁸¹

So despite the strangeness of the foreign language a kind of strange, unique, impossible dialogue takes place between Kitty, who with her body reads the body of the words, and the words which read in or to Kitty's body. The words are neither expressed nor do they express; they are not signs and they signify nothing. This language is not a kind of communicative articulation, nor is it a mechanism of control. Quite to the contrary: the words live in Kitty's body as organs or senses belonging to it, and as such they are neither autonomous nor completely under control. What makes it possible for Appelfeld *to present a word as a body* on the one hand, and *to detach language from the speaking body* on the other, is that cultural paradigm in which the body is no longer a medium of expression and signification but has become a symbol and a space in which (not through which) the personality realizes its dream of individuation and control of the self. When language is transformed into body, the "real" body is no longer the human body as the boundary of the self which is actualized by crossing the boundary and withdrawing from it (to use Helmut Plessner's terms),¹⁸² that is by a gesture and a relation with the other, the external. Such an unlimited body is neither comprehensible nor controllable, and can therefore turn into a hermetic symbol, mysterious and closed unto itself, which demands decipherment and interpretation instead of excitation and contact, just as in this paradigm spontaneity is needed instead of expression, honesty instead of meaning. In this culture a consciousness like Kitty's can appear, in which alienation between language and the body/person is realized, making it possible for the language to be transformed into a body of its own. Such is the utterance of Sister Maria: "Words that for some reason took on other dimensions in the large hall, as if they were not uttered by the nun; it was as if they came forth from the filled space" (ibid.). So also Kitty's own speech: "Sometimes the

girl, trying to overcome the obstacles of language, would utter stuttered syllables, sounds which seemed not to emanate from her” (ibid.). The fantasy of the *golem* which can be discerned here is modern civilization’s sweet dream and terrifying nightmare. The fear of losing the self (identified in this paradigm with the human) drives man from the space of cultural density (“the large hall”) into nature where spontaneous and sincere expression (identified with the authentic, the human, the free) is possible. Here a gesture is possible which is perceived as a free and spontaneous (and therefore “real”) realization of the self, and not as a stylized and communicative expression of meaning:

The view was open to the distance; anyone observing from here could feel the height. There were steps which led here, something which the girl did not know, for she lived the days as in the touch of a first encounter. A tree, a stone, a wilted bush, a slowly-flowing puddle, these were continuations of the pictures on the inside, in the hall. Only outside the universe was looser. Outside she could take longer steps, to put out her hand and touch a tree.

When she returned from her walk the hall looked more beautiful [...] It was a room full of flying angels, picturesque inscriptions whose meaning she did not know, but they were in harmony with the flight of the angels, together creating a kind of flowing movement. Sometimes the voice of the organ would accompany the dance (154-155).

The alienation between body and language and the transformation of the body into a symbol enable Appelfeld to construct a contrast and parallelism between touching the tree in the garden and the dance of the inscriptions in the hall. In the narrator’s emphasis on Kitty’s ability to touch the tree there is an implicit assumption of a need and drive to extend the hand and touch. This gesture contains a request for love and attention, together with an effort at self-confirmation and acquisition of control. And of course the gesture constitutes a substitute for language, since it is but the primeval source, the originating mechanism of language. By touching the tree the girl creates a sign whose meaning and

function are unknown to her, but through this act of originating the sign she acquires for herself a place in a symbolic, psycho-cultural, ritual-magical order. She creates for herself a father, a mother and society in order not to be an orphan any more. This order is usually granted to a person by means of language, through relations among signs. For Kitty *language is the gesture with the relations among the bodies which originate it*. Kitty's gesture of touch is a kind of ritual repetition of or return to the originating event of her present existence – “touch of a first encounter”. And despite the fact that this gesture is only possible outside the walls of the monastery, in the garden, the following gestures take place inside, because their source, that mysterious “first touch”, is located inside the girl's mind; it is what structures her consciousness and her body, instead of parents and language: “Thus she began in her eleventh year to experience her first burning contact with things [...] Every month a line, a movement, a grimace were added” (156). If we take the tree in the garden to have served Kitty as a kind of axis mundi, a sacred center to which to hold on and around which to build, we shall discover the terrifying symmetry between the touch of the tree outside and the touch of the cross inside: “Only now did it appear to her. It was the face of a man; the blood drops spread down to the angels' feet and from there continued towards the windows. This was the first touch. From the picture's hidden part he came to her, not old and not young, but in pain” (ibid.). Perhaps this is just another manifestation of the hidden or lost “first touch”; but it is more likely that what is revealed here is the first touch itself. This face-to-face encounter with the suffering person is the source and model of ethics, of every other contact with things, of language, society and personality. In retrospect from this place touching the tree looks like a Christian symbol, like a substitute for touching the cross,

and Kitty fulfills the role of the crucified Christ (not surprising, in view of today's widespread conception which sees the victims of the Holocaust as a symbolic, psycho-cultural realization of the figure of Jesus). However, we must stress that it is not Christian symbolism which here explains the gesture, but the other way around, *it is the gesture which originates the symbolism*. The symbolism despite its conceptual importance is thus subordinate here to the phenomenology of the gesture. The latter is clearly the originating metaphor which activates the story's poetics. At the basis of the story's poetic imagination stands the picture of the girl touching the tree or the book, a picture which enchanted the author and fascinates the reader; *the motive for the girl's gesture of touch is identical to the motive for the author's gesture of writing and the reader's motive for the gesture of reading* – namely, an attempt to extend an arm and touch letters and words in order to make the signs speak, to revive the dead, to bring back the lost loved ones. This is possible because language has failed and the letters' corporality has remained the last bastion of speech beyond language: “When she touched the notebook the rough letters would speak to her. She passed her hand over them, trying to silence them” (ibid.). Pronouncing the words is not just another event of signification and meaning assignment but something of a purely bodily nature: “The concepts of father, mother and son are not foreign to her and when she pronounces them in her broken accent a shiver of happiness lights up in her eyes” (ibid.). Kitty uses her speechlessness, her avoidance of language, to escape domination and the attempts of others “to follow what was happening in her” (ibid.). In this way the body shows itself to be a space of self control and of the emergence of an individuality which is foreign to its surroundings and threatened by them; inside her body Kitty “weaves at the bottom a life of her own” (ibid.) and out of

her body “something foreign looks out” (157) over those around her. That is why her body will eventually turn into the ultimate object of the appropriation and the negation of individuality.

Another chapter in Kitty’s story opens when speech bursts out in her. But as we shall see, even when it comes into being her speech is not separate from her body. The author spares no effort in describing what is happening as something strange and unique but at the same time also as characteristic, in other words as an anthropoetic phenomenon:

Summer came and with it the change. Suddenly, as if in the transition from sprouting to flowering, speech burst out in her. This was a current of stormy picturesqueness which swelled and took on the garb of French words which fluttered around inside her like caged birds searching for a way out. Only with effort were they cast outside. As chirping syllables which were only granted meaning by the voice, the flow and the intonation. You could not call them words. It was as if they did not come from the speech center. Her entire being spoke. [...] The girl’s movements more than her voice contained grimaces which showed quite clearly that what bothered her was not just a lack of words (157).

Speech is thus merely the continuation of gesticulation. It is as if in a kind of absurd, even caricature-like reversal, para-linguistics gives meaning to speech. But as a matter of fact this is no caricature and there is nothing absurd here; rather, it is the solid, consistent and justified conception of the body as speaking and of the person as a speaking body. Actually we may say of any speech act that only voice and intonation give it meaning; certainly David McNeill and his school would agree that speech does not emanate exclusively from the “speech center” but from a unified “center” of speech, thought and gesture. This is of course not the main thrust of the narrator: he adopts the perspective of Maria the nun in order to contrast this conception with the other one, characteristic of the nun, who thinks that it is “normal” for speech and body to be separated and feels that their unification is an “obstacle”. The purpose of this contrast is clear: Kitty’s body

betrays her Jewishness; it is this bodily Jewishness which is the obstacle to the acquisition of the French language and of Christian culture, the culture of word (or Word) first-and-foremost. The French words are merely a “garb” put on by the flow of sounds and movements. The girl’s identity, her essence, is determined by her speaking corporality. *We must again emphasize that here the body is no longer a medium of expression and signification, but rather is itself the utterance and the sign; and since this utterance contains within itself a hidden “obstacle”, an inexplicable lack of meaning, it is transformed into a symbol, a secret, into the sacred center around which Kitty’s myth comes into being, with the gesture of the “first touch” as its originating event.*

Kitty’s bodily “speech” is merely a transformation of her bodily reading which was presented in the previous passages. Both, reading and speech, actualize the same unique kind of consciousness which has characterized Kitty from the story’s very first lines – the consciousness of word-body. This anthropological consciousness is also characteristic of Meir Shalev’s novels. Despite the differences in the two authors’ poetics, they demonstrate a profound similarity as far as their anthropoetics of body and gesture is concerned, with respect to the role played by the identity between body and speech in the figures’ origination mechanisms. Even a cursory comparison between Kitty and Raphael, the main character in *In His House in the Desert* who thinks, remembers and feels by means of the body in its most material aspects,¹⁸³ shows up this similarity quite clearly. One need only compare, for example, Kitty’s reading with her hands and Raphael’s memory tactics in the desert, or the techniques of “knowing” and “remembering” by touch used by the blind in the novel. The similarity between the two authors will become even clearer if we compare the writings of Appelfeld and Shalev to those of other

authors, even those possessing a high sensitivity to body and gesture, such as Etgar Keret and Orly Castel-Bloom. In Castel-Bloom's writings the body is reduced to a Freudian-Derridaian magic notebook in which the gesture-traces of memory and language are inscribed. Keret has the body converge into itself and vibrate at the limit of its ability to operate, to perform a gesture and to touch the other.¹⁸⁴ In the works of Appelfeld and Shalev the problems as well as the dynamics of the body/gesture are different. For them gesture is not merely possible; it is what originates the figures, their interrelationships, and reading as the nonverbal communication channel between them and the reader at deep cognitive levels. In the writings of both the body's "language" and "speech" ability is strong and open enough for the dynamics of gesture to turn into *a politics of identities*.

An additional trait which brings Kitty closer to Meir Shalev's characters is the habit of creating language, which from a cultural practice has become a physical drive. So it is with Michael, the main character and narrator of the novel *Fontanelle*, who in dozens of sentences and as many similes and metaphors describes how his family's special language was created out of desires, memories and dreams; it is the same with Kitty, who also creates a unique language of her own, except that in her case this language does not signify, having no object and no meaning except the desire and the secret which gave birth to it. Appelfeld, like Jacob Steinberg, has the body originate a symbol: "Kitty's eyes at times looked so attentive. A thin body, a startled movement, and sadness. But to elicit speech from her was impossible. The girl spoke to herself, creating phrases which the language did not possess. Only a fantasy, a hidden desire, can evoke such associations, completely without meaning. But sometimes a sound would escape from her mouth, as if called from the most hidden things" (158). This non-transparency of the body makes it

possible for symbolism to do its work, creating the disappearing line of perspective in the direction of the unknown, the attractive distance which recoils as one approaches it. Out of the body's dark depths the "secret" rises. Appelfeld uses the word "secret" in two completely disparate contexts, and so unifies them. It first appears in the context of the relations between Kitty and Maria: "But slowly the secret began to come between them. It increased as Kitty asked more and more questions. 'And my parents?', Kitty once asked" (159). Then again, in the context of Kitty's relation to her own body:

After that other feelings came over Kitty. At first these were physical feelings, not unpleasant; after that a hardening of the chest. She learned to tell that something was stirring inside her, a kind of sign whose appearance she was obliged to expect. It was so good to lie covered in a blanket, to wrap herself up over her head and feel the body's beats, to listen to the sweet stirrings. She wanted to tell this to Maria but something prevented her from doing so, and the sweet secret, to which she loved listening so, was transformed into a brooding burden which took on the shape of a nightmare between one dream and another (159-160).

What unifies the two contexts is the perception of the body as the secret and the hidden source of identity, and therefore as the sacred center of the self's/other's politics of identities and strategy of definitions. The body speaks and Kitty is busy "listening" to it; it contains within it a "sign" which she "was obliged to expect". She is "obliged" as Meir Shalev's characters are obligated to the past, to memory and to fate (or try to escape them). The secret of her identity, which lies between Kitty and her body or between her and the other (Maria) at the same time also ties her to the root of that identity by means of the obligation of expecting a sign, an explanation, a meaning. The obligation and the expectation turn the body into language, and the secret into a symbol.

At the end of the story Kitty becomes aware that she is a Jew due to a linguistic expression whose origins are in the body, an expression which comes to her in the speech

and the gesture of an other, this time Peppy the peasant girl: “‘Am I a hairy Jewess?’ Kitty asked as she suddenly heard Peppy’s voice. [...] She slid her hand over her skin and said: ‘Indeed, I am hairy’. Now she realized that already before Peppy would call her a Jewess and pinched her cheek” (164). In Kitty’s mind this linguistic expression quickly turned into an actual bodily experience, as if returning to its source: “She would feel how her hair grows from inside herself, spreading around her neck and her underarm. ‘I am truly hairy’, she said, as if confirming a fact that it was useless to deny any longer” (164-165). The confirmation of identity takes place in the myth and phantasm of the origination of the other I, monstrous, non-human. In the myth, when she speaks to the jars of beets in the basement, her personality is actualized in an unsolvable problem of oscillation between two identities: “‘Am I hairy?’ ‘You are not hairy, you are our sister, God hides us’” (165). *This bodily vacillation, these bendings and wriggles, which are gestures by themselves, originate the symbolism.* Kitty remains a secret, the mystery of the angel-or-monster from the story’s beginning to the end, when the Nazi soldiers put an end to her questioning and define her identity with finality by means of a single shot. The body’s annihilation also annihilates the secret.

D. An impossible or abortive gesture, originating in the culture of observation and visibility, constitutes memory, trauma and fear (“Mazal Hangs Laundry in Her Parents’ Yard” by Dorit Rabinian).

A tremendous thematic, cultural and poetic gap separates Aharon Appelfeld from Dorit Rabinian. Yet the anthropology of body and gesture unites Appelfeld’s “Kitty” and

Rabinian's short story "Mazal Hangs Laundry in Her Parents' Yard". Both texts arise from an impossible gesture, from the desire to touch something or someone untouchable, be it a sign, a fear or an other, absent person. Rabinian's gestural anthropoetics is similar to that of Milorad Pavić (and that of Appelfeld, as just mentioned): concepts, ideas, images, metaphors and symbols grow from the body and come back to it, receiving their vitality from bodily events – movements, postures and spatial situations; the reader's cognitive powers of endurance are stretched to the limit. This is an anthropoetics which grows out of the same cultural soil: the conception of the body/gesture as symbol, not as a means of signification and expression. This also explains her exaggerated focus on single organs and minute bodily detail, for every such detail contains within it a secret, a hermetic meaning, each organ possessing its own message. Trivial eroticism here turns into a refined, curling, manneristic poetism. In her impossible mannerism Rabinian comes much closer to Pavić than to Appelfeld, to postmodernism than to modernism. Curling organs, body fluids and movements which link all of these and turn into symbols – are the hard evidence for this. Let us look at some examples.

Inside Mazal's liver there hummed a stirring of winged activity; these were not the bees of spring, but fear. Since she was a little girl her mother told her that it originated in the liver. "There, that is where all of a person's cowardice comes from", she would rub her belly in circles in order to appease it, "and from there it goes out into all of your hands, to your tongue, to the inside of your soul [...]". Mazal touched her belly to console it. She tried to copy her mother's hand movement, but the humming inside her grated and made the loops of her fingers become entangled in each other. The more she thought about it the more she felt the weight of her worries inside her liver, and her body – a lonely and obedient child – surrendered to the commands of thought and pain (163).¹⁸⁵

The bodily conception of feeling becomes explicit in discourse and gesture, the latter constituting the main center around which all the elements of representation are

constructed, including the discourse itself. Mazal's behavior is constructed as an imitation of the originating gesture, the mother's, one could even say of the mother's (gestural) tongue. The gesture is important first of all because of its role as an object of imitation; but of no less importance is the gesture's nature – touching the self and the other. Just as in Appelfeld's story, the figure (of Mazal and of her mother) structures her other "I" which must be "appeased" and "comforted". As with Appelfeld, this other is the body. The figure of a child is, as is well-known, one of the most common representations of otherness. In the text under discussion here this figure is also justified by the mental projection of the mother's figure onto the daughter's (imitation), which leads to the projection of the figure of the daughter/girl onto the other while giving it a clearly distinctive characteristic – the gender change to masculine (grammatically justified by the fact that the word for "body" in Hebrew is masculine). The gesture of touching the self turns out to constitute a touching of the other, an ethical-communicative event (to appease, console), thus preserving *the continuity in the gesture's function* with respect to both mother and daughter. But Mazal's gesture fails in relation to its declared purpose. Yet she still manages to set up communication with the body, although what she communicates to it is pain and worry. Despite the touch and the empathy the body remains "isolated". Despite the imitation, the gesture fails in its pragmatic and expressive mission and turns out to constitute a *non-touch*. As such it originates Mazal's individuality vis-à-vis the figure of her mother, in accordance with a modern psycho-cultural paradigm: the failure in communication is perceived as a revelation of uniqueness which originates the personality vis-à-vis the untouchable other.

Yet the gesture still retains its validity and effectivity as a mechanism for the origination of the continuity of language and memory: “Mazal wrung her son’s linen with hands poisoned with fear [...] She sniffed at the sheet in search of a whiff of urine, but only her memory evoked a thin smell of it. Soapy water descended drop by drop from the crimson efflorescences to the soil. This is how Shimon used to sweat, in large drops. So much that even if she lay down on her back and did not move even her behind at all, she would be covered with his hot weather sweat” (164). The gesture establishes a network of associative ties leading from a bodily metaphor (rising from the memory of her mother’s figure) “hands poisoned with fear” (compare Anya’s “smiling hands” in Meir Shalev’s *Fontanelle*),¹⁸⁶ through a visual metonymy of soapy water reminiscent of Shimon’s sweat (and perhaps also other body fluids), to that most intimate memory presented with simulated crudeness. In parallel to this there is the thread leading from the son’s linen, through the smell and the urine, to the father and his fluids. This thread continues further on in the story, when the corporeal nature of Mazal’s communication becomes clear. The substitution of the son by the father and back again takes place in parallel with a mutual (metonymical and metaphorical) exchange of various fluids – urine, sweat, tears, blood and water. Mazal sniffs, drinks the fluids, breathes on them, listens to them. Her and her lover’s bodies disintegrate into components and combine together; the ancient myths of earth and sky copulating are realized anew in this postmodern anthropoetics. The following passage could well have been taken from one of Pavić’s stories:

When Shimon would finally fall asleep she would peel the sheet off him and breathe on it to dry out his hot weather sweat. She would blow air into his moist chest hair, shrinking with her gusts the cracks between his eyelids which looked as if they were with tears, making the hard skin of his wet testicles shiver. When he would wake up she would drink salt and water from him and raise her own blood pressure. Sometimes she thought that he was full of water, that this was why the sweat flowed so mightily from him and washed

his whole body. That if she would only listen carefully she would hear his reservoirs rumbling as he walked (165).

The words “salt, water, salt, water!” (ibid.) by their association take Mazal back to the bees and the rose bush in her parents’ yard at present, Shimon’s sheet once more turns into her son’s linen, and at the end of the story the child itself appears, uncannily similar to his father, and stops his mother who is on the verge of crying – yet another “fluid” bodily expression, and thus at one-and-the-same time both intensifies and breaks off the continuity of past-present, memory-reality, father-son: “Mazal wanted to cry but then she saw her son approaching their home, red from the sun, he was completely red” (ibid.). Mazal’s tears would appear to have dried up due to her shock at the boy’s similarity to his father, a shock which also stops the story as if in mid-sentence. The similarity may be desirable or not, but it always reveals *the innovating power of the sequence*. It is important to stress here that all the continuities and non-continuities in the passages quoted above are constructed of bodily-gestural elements. Typically, the gestures in them are *not realized*, like the tears that become stuck at the threshold (and as a result Mazal herself, her body and the narrative sequence itself all become stuck in an insoluble liminality), or they are strange and idiosyncratic, almost *impossible*, as in the expression “she would drink salt and water from him”, which is saved from metaphorical abstractness by the hint of a kiss, by her erotic touch of his sweating body. The transformation of the kissing gesture to an action of drinking (functionally and symbolically) testifies to the *gesture’s degeneracy*, to its expropriation from the communicative-expressive medium. *Bodies touch not in order to signify but to be signified, or to turn the other body into a sign, to leave a trace in it or in itself*. Compare

this case, for example, with the following text in Meir Shalev's *Fontanelle*: "I remember the shining path which father's tongue left on the murderess' [his mistress – R.K.] back, and the path of tears – shining as well – which beautiful music would mark on Amuma's cheeks".¹⁸⁷ *In this cultural paradigm touch is metaphor, and gesture is writing but not expression; it creates a sign but does not itself signify.*

Now we shall look at another example of this amazing transformation which gesture undergoes in the new paradigm. First we have Shimon's gesture which accompanies his speech. This looks like a completely run-of-the-mill gesture, a typical illustrator or emblem: "'I'm fed up to here with you, Mazal, up to here!' Shimon made a cutting motion across the width of his forehead and Mazal calculated how many days she had left until her period, because she began to feel pain in her lower belly" (164). This is what happened in April. A month later, in the narrative present, Shimon's gesture comes back imitated by Mazal, once more linked to her period: "Mazal breathed heavily, three more days until she is supposed to get it. She hung up the boy's sheet, spread the cover and held the moist cloth to her face in order to cool down the cold sweat of fear and the hot sweat of effort. They came out together from the width of her forehead, from the cut place where, when you get fed up to there, you get a divorce" (ibid.). The fluids of menstruation are somewhat mysteriously associated with the fluids of sweat, and the latter turns into a mixture of its different types, which in turn also implicitly come together in the moistness of the linen. Compare this to Pavić's text: "Then Brankovich broke out in beads of perspiration, and two streams of sweat joined together in a knot at his neck".¹⁸⁸ In both cases *the body is not a medium of gesture but the gesture itself*. By its very nature it is a gesture which points to itself, touches itself. Mazal touches herself

when she places the cloth on her forehead and thus marks it as “the cut place”. Shimon’s communicative gesture originated Mazal’s self gesture which turned her body into a place, a boundary and a sign. The power of Shimon’s gesture is of course linked to the trauma of departure, loss and pain; she cuts her body in order to turn it into a sign, to engrave the trace of departure/absence in it. Periodically Mazal’s gesture of touching her forehead reconstructs the trauma associated with Shimon’s originating gesture. Mazal’s body speaks to her through the pains of menstruation, the rivulets of sweat and the signs which are a memory of traumatic gestures.

The next text deepens and strengthens the perception of consciousness (Mazal’s in this case) as a bodily, gestural dynamics which this time reaches monstrous expressionistic proportions: ““So that’s it?” she said as if after an injection that does not hurt. Only the thought of it caused her pain. ‘Yes’, he said and took the car keys in the palm of his hand. Mazal did not look him in the eyes but saw how avid his fingers were to hold something. She saw that he crushed the bunch and swallowed it. [...] His fingernails, his front teeth and the bunch of keys wanted to devour her” (165). The importance of this dynamics is stressed by the fact that here the importance of verbal communication is minimal. Here, for example, is Shimon’s answer to Mazal’s question “What about the boy”: “Do whatever you want. Whatever you want you can do. Whatever you want” (ibid.). From a linguistic-pragmatic point of view a sentence like this can indicate uncertainty, hidden intentions or shirking responsibility. But at any rate what Shimon says has the purpose of preventing speech. His body language was strong enough so that any verbal speech at this point would be superfluous. What happens in the last scene between Mazal and Shimon constitutes yet another explication, quite clear, of *the culture of visibility* – another

manifestation of the modern cultural paradigm in which observation and visibility replace communication. Mazal does not look into Shimon's eyes. She refrains from the gesture of gazing, which differs fundamentally from observation; gazing requires an ethical face-to-face stand and thus expropriates the individual from the private domain and demands skills of control, signification and expression in the public domain. When one gazes with the eyes the body disappears in expression. Mazal, however, *observes* Shimon's body; by doing so she turns his body into an autonomous object and a subject of communication. It is expropriated from the public domain which frightens her and causes her to fail, and is closed into her own private phantasm. In this phantasm, which is dominant in the modern psycho-cultural dynamics, the body is transformed into an object by being torn up into isolated organs. Observation, like a close-up shot with a camera, isolates an organ and turns it into a subject, into the monstrous other the encounter with which takes the form of a nightmare or a myth. Hungry swallowing fingers, voracious fingernails and teeth populate a world in which fear rules, because the body is no longer transparent; it is mysterious and unexpected; it hides within itself the secret of happiness, but also a bursting, threatening chaos. The body is an oracle, a magic cave, an oedipal sphinx, a dark symbol. This conception of the body creates a poetics of visibility of its own, built on liminality, chaoticness, and negativity. In this world *gesture fails* and touch is transformed into non-touch.

¹ Andrea de Jorio, *Gesture in Naples and Gesture in Classical Antiquity (Gestural Expression of the Ancients in the Light of Neapolitan Gesturing, 1832)*, trans. Adam Kendon, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000.

² Marcel Mauss, "Body Techniques," (1935) in *Sociology and Psychology. Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, London, Boston and Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 95-123.

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- ³ Roman Katsman, "Gestures Accompanying Torah Learning/Recital Among Yemenite Jews," *Gesture: The International Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Gestures and Nonverbal Communication*, in press.
- ⁴ <http://mcneilllab.uchicago.edu/index.html>.
- ⁵ <http://www.gesturestudies.com>.
- ⁶ http://www.benjamins.nl/cgi-bin/t_seriesview.cgi?series=GEST.
- ⁷ Luce Irigaray, "The Gesture in Psychoanalysis," trans. Elizabeth Guild, *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, London and New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 127-138.
- ⁸ Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, Garden City NY, Doubleday, 1982, p. 82.
- ⁹ Donald G. MacRae, "The Body and Social Metaphor," in Benthall and Polhemus, eds., *The Body as a Medium of Expression*, p. 63.
- ¹⁰ Adam Kendon, "Language and Gesture: Unity or Duality?" in David McNeill (ed.), *Language and Gesture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 49.
- ¹¹ Mayer Irwin Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in Ancient Near East*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1977.
- ¹² Uri Ehrlich, 'All my bones shall say': *The Non-Verbal Language of Prayer*, Jerusalem, Magness, 1999 (Hebrew).
- ¹³ For a more detailed discussion see: Roman Katsman, "To the Issue of Spontaneous Gestures in the Old Testament. A Testcase for the Study of Gestural Poetics", *Mikan, a Journal for the Study of Hebrew Literature*, in press (Hebrew).
- ¹⁴ See preceding note.
- ¹⁵ Ernest Dale Saunders, *Mudrā: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture*, Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 19.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ¹⁷ Tyra de Kleen, *Mudrās: The Ritual Hand-Poses of the Buddha Priests and the Shiva Priests of Bali*, New York, University Books, 1970, p. 11.
- ¹⁸ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Mirror of Gesture. Being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikeśvara*, trans. Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1977, pp. 2-3.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

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- ²⁰ Saunders, p. 10.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Lokesh Chandra and Sharada Rani, *Mudrās in Japan*, New Delhi, Vedams Books, 1978, pp. 2-8.
- ²³ Cecilia S. L. Zung, *Secrets of the Chinese Drama*, New York, Benjamin Blom, 1964, p. 114.
- ²⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 193-197.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Eliade, pp. 367-368.
- ²⁷ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Grove Press, New York, 1964.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
- ²⁹ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator (De Oratore)*, trans. James M. May and Jakob Wisse, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, 2.188, p. 172.
- ³⁰ Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art. The Use of Gesture to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage*, New Haven, Connecticut Academy of Art and Sciences, 1963, pp. 24-25, 198.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-122.
- ³² John A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 2.
- ³³ Jody Enders, "Of Miming and Signing: The Dramatic Rhetoric of Gesture," in Clifford Davidson, ed., *Gesture in Medieval Drama and Art*, Kalamazoo, Western Michigan University, 2001, p. 3.
- ³⁴ Jacques Le Goff, *La civilisation de l'occident médiéval*, Paris, Flammarion, 1965, p. 126.
- ³⁵ Dunbar H. Ogden, "Gesture and Characterization in Liturgical Drama," in Davidson, ed., *Gesture in Medieval Drama and Art*, p. 33.
- ³⁶ Jean-Claude Schmitt, "The Rational of Gestures in the West: A History from the 3rd to the 13th Centuries," in Fernando Poyatos (ed.), *Advances in Nonverbal Communication: Sociocultural, Clinical, Esthetic, and Literary Perspectives*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 1992, pp. 78-79
- ³⁷ Enders, p.3.
- ³⁸ Schmitt, "The Rational of Gestures," pp. 80-81.
- ³⁹ Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Introduction and General Bibliography," *History and Anthropology* vol. 1, part 1 (1984), p. 4.

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- ⁴⁰ Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Between Text and Image: The Prayer Gestures of Saint Dominic," *History and Anthropology* vol. 1, part 1 (1984), pp. 127-128.
- ⁴¹ Schmitt, "Introduction," p. 5.
- ⁴² Clifford Davidson, "Gesture in Medieval British Drama," in Davidson, ed., *Gesture in Medieval Drama and Art*, p. 74.
- ⁴³ Julia Kristeva, "Gesture: Practice or Communication?" in Ted Polhemus, (ed.), *Social Aspects of the Human Body*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1978, p. 272.
- ⁴⁴ Schmitt, "Introduction," p. 3.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ⁴⁷ Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character. A Photographic Analysis*, New York, New York Academy of Sciences, 1942
- ⁴⁸ Wilhelm Wundt, *The Language of Gestures*, The Hague and Paris, Mouton, 1973, p. 133.
- ⁴⁹ Note that there exists a modern art style called "gestural" (or "action painting"), a part of Abstract Expressionism. Among the artists who represent this style are Willem de Kooning (1904-1997), Franz Kline (1910-1962) and Robert Motherwell (1915-1991).
- ⁵⁰ Wundt., pp. 134-135.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- ⁵³ David McNeill and Susan D. Duncan, "Growth Points in Thinking-for-Speaking," in McNeill, ed., *Language and Gesture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 156.
- ⁵⁴ David McNeill, *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 238-239.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189.
- ⁵⁷ David McNeill and Laura L. Pedelty, "Right Brain and Gesture," in Karen Emmorey and Judy Reilly, eds., *Language, Gesture, and Space*, Hillsdale NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1995, p. 66.
- ⁵⁸ McNeill, *Hand and Mind*, pp. 219-220.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

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- ⁶⁰ David McNeill, "Triangulating the Growth Point - Arriving as Consciousness," in Lynn S. Messing and Ruth Campbell, eds., *Gesture, Speech, and Sign*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 80.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.
- ⁶² Robert M. Krauss, and Uri Hadar, "The Role of Speech-related Arm/Hand Gestures in Word Retrieval," in Messing and Campbell, eds., *Gesture, Speech, and Sign*, p. 101.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- ⁶⁴ Pierre Feyereisen and Jacques-Dominique de Lannoy, *Gestures and Speech: Psychological Investigations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 90.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-102.
- ⁶⁶ Mark, Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. xiv.
- ⁶⁷ Paul D. Deane, *Grammar in Mind and Brain: Explorations in Cognitive Syntax*, Berlin, New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 1992.
- ⁶⁸ David F. Armstrong, William C. Stokoe, and Sherman E. Wilcox, *Gesture and the Nature of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 21-26.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-46.
- ⁷¹ William C. Stokoe, and Marc Marschark, "Signs, Gestures, and Signes," in Messing and Campbell, eds., *Gesture, Speech, and Sign*, p. 168.
- ⁷² William C. Stokoe, "Gesture to Sign (language)," in McNeill, ed., *Language and Gesture*, p. 393.
- ⁷³ Bernard Koechlin, "Prolegomenon to the Elaboration of a New Discipline: Ethnogestics," in Poyatos, ed., *Advances in Nonverbal Communication*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 1992, pp. 60-74.
- ⁷⁴ Genevieve Calbris, *The Semiotics of French Gesture*, trans. Owen Doyle, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 163.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 208-209.

⁸¹ Bernard Rimé and Loris Schiaratura, "Gesture and speech," in Robert S. Feldman and Bernard Rimé, eds., *Fundamentals of Nonverbal Behavior*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 266-267.

⁸² The model consists of familiar elements in psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology and gesture studies. Nevertheless I believe a number of clarifications to the model are in order.

The gesture processing represented in Text 1 takes place simultaneously with the reading of the text after the gesture's representation (1' – 2). The reader is therefore occupied with solving the following problems: (1) dividing his efforts and attention economically and efficiently among different tasks; (2) synchronizing or making a retrospective adjustment between the gesture's mental representation and the representing text left behind as reading continues.

The represented gesture is decoded along two channels: (1) the gesture's "content", that is its bodily and spatial components, is decoded through the "conceptual and propositional representation of the text" channel; (2) the gesture's pace, that is its temporal dimensions, is decoded through the "Syntax, Punctuation, Intonation and Paralanguage" channel.

The represented gesture activates a complex system of mental, linguistic, articulatory (phonetic) and motor processes in the reader. During the first stage of decoding these processes are only implemented at the level of planning. The reader's body and mind automatically make preparations for a tangible reaction to the gesture, as if were real and not literary. The process whereby the gesture's mental representation is created thus takes place at the same time and place, and with the same mechanism, as the reader's physical gestural activity.

Activity planning begins with information collection. The model presented here is eclectic and therefore does not provide an unambiguous explanation of how memory works. It is quite possible, for example, that in network terms a literary gesture creates a stimulus which spreads through the cognitive-neural network and activates the relevant bonds. Each of these bonds in-and-of-itself combines various threads of activity. As a result of the spreading stimulus an interaction among the bonds is created so that extensive areas of the network eventually become involved in the reaction to the stimulus. I do not insist on this version; what is important is the result of this stage: the gesture brings about an intensive processing of the gestural information, both that which is represented and that which is hidden.

The processing in question is based on three kinds of long-term memory:

1. Spatio-motor memory, on which spatio-motor thinking and memory depend, for example a person's bodily self-image, memory of the body's movements in the ambient three-dimensional space. This basic memory is responsible for the operational software which carries out ostensibly simple

bodily movements such as walking as well as very complex movements such as dancing and karate kata movements.

2. The gesture set (gestuary) that is characteristic of the reader's culture. This includes also the reader's idiosyncratic gestures and those of his acquaintances, including literary figures. A represented gesture that does not belong to the gestuary may not be perceived as a gesture, or it may be wrongly interpreted.

3. Articulatory memory, which is responsible for storing bodily performance programs for speech and other practices which demand for their performance well-internalized and usually unconscious bodily habits. Here belong also individual common or unique bodily memories which are received unconsciously and subsequently become part of an individual's everyday bodily behavior, for example the memory of the touch of a mother's breast on the cheek, which is realized through the gesture and posture of supporting the cheek with the palm of the hand.

On the basis of this long-term memory literary gesture activates the gesture planning system. I assume that the mental representation of a gesture originates as a dynamic process which in its planning stage is identical to the physical gesture production process. At that stage information units fed from various kinds of memory come together into a single operational scenario. It looks as if the reader is given the task of performing the gesture. If the gesture is part of the reader's gestuary it is retrieved from his memory as a complete frame. Often, in the case of very famous gestures, such as raising two fingers in V-for-victory, the gesture's representation may be based on a prototype, such as the figure of Churchill making his victory sign. When the gesture is unfamiliar the planning system constructs its representation out of existing frames and prototypes. In that case the processing of the gesture will quite likely take longer and may have a disorienting effect on the cognitive-emotional system, perhaps even cause misunderstanding and confusion, which will become an integral, and sometimes very important, part of the reading experience. At any rate, according to current cognitive science, planning of necessity takes the goals of the action into consideration. At this stage of literary gesture processing the general goal is perceived as an appropriate, efficient and economical execution of the gesture task. The more particular goals are related to the solution of more particular tasks such as coordinating between the literary figure, its bodily dimensions and its human, spatial and environmental relationships as these are perceived by the reader. These relationships make up to types of structures: spatio-temporal and conceptual-actional. In other words, isolated information units retrieved from long-term memory are brought together into a uniform gesture scenario organized in accordance to how the reader perceives the movement – the way the body changes form in space and time according to a certain goal, which may be hidden or overt. It is likely that the mental representation of a gesture is also influenced by the reader's conceptions, abstract ideas, beliefs and prejudices. It would appear that decoding the conceptual content of Text 1 is inseparably connected to the mental representation of the gesture in question. This unity is based on the nature of language, the

meanings of whose words are bound up with articulatory and motor features of the execution of the words in speech. The unity of language and movement at the planning level is realized in what David McNeill calls the “growth point” – the origination of thought, speech, physical and, I wish to add here as well, mental gestures.

At the growth point the gesture production mechanism is activated. In the course of reading the reader processes gestures of different kinds which are not only linked to each other but in fact originate in a single source. Processing proceeds in stages and is controlled by factors which will be discussed below. Now I shall enumerate the types of gesture themselves:

1. Mental gestures – the mental representation of the gestures described in the text;
2. Physical-iconic, prosodic and other gestures – performed in the wake of reading descriptions of the gestures or any other text;
3. Micro-gestures – tiny unconscious muscular movements caused by an echoing- or mirroring-like effect characteristic of face-to-face communication, especially the movements of the speech mechanism and braked limb movements which are an embryonic imitation of the movements of pronouncing the written words or of performing the described movements.
4. Gestures of embodiment – a dynamic, gestural visuo-spatial representation of words and expressions which do not describe the physical performance of a gesture; here belong also gestural metaphors such as “drag one’s feet”, meaning to deliberately procrastinate, with no performance of the gesture in question.

Although the entire system is fed information in propositional format (the text that is being read), the input to the gesture production mechanism consists mainly of information in figurative (or analogue) format, which comes in as the output of the gesture planning mechanism. While reading is a continuous process, mental gestures are created sporadically as a result of the processing of fragmented information units which take shape in propositional format. In other words, whenever the planning mechanism has received the minimum of information needed in order to represent a gesture, a picture of the gesture is “turned on” in the reader’s mind, a picture which fixates its meaningful center – its stroke or ending. At that moment the reader copes with the task of synchronizing this picture with the propositional information which keeps on coming in continuously and constantly. As the reading progresses and addition information is fed into the gesture production system the given gesture’s mental representation changes or, more precisely, is replaced by a new representation, a modification to some extent or other of the previous one. Such temporary representations remain in the reader’s operative memory for part of a second or for a few seconds, until the mental gesture is completed. The reader’s expectations are based on two main elements: his gestural experience which enables him to construct a mental representation of an entire familiar gesture on the basis

of just a part of it, and his linguistic experience, which he can use to predict the occurrence of different kinds of linguistic structures, among these also the structures used for representing gestures.

Mental gestures are formed in a cyclic manner: at every step, with every additional change, the system checks itself, that is it examines the extent and quality of synchronization at the level of inference – overall understanding. But before that it also checks if the temporary representations match expectations, and if it discovers an error it returns the representation to the planning mechanism where a new, corrected and improved mental representation is formed. The final, corrected mental representation is the one that will be remembered in long-term memory as the represented gesture. All types of gesture that are produced in reading go through a self-correction process. In its explicit and sometimes even conscious form it is characteristic of physical gestures: that is what the monitoring mechanism is for – the reflection of gestures in the eyes of the reader himself. All types of gesture can be coded back into the propositional format, that is to be interpreted by the reader in the form of linguistic sentences or parts of sentences, which constitute a kind of shadow-text (Text 1'') or an echo of the preliminary text in which the description of the gesture begins (Text 1). This internal text, the result of the counter-coding of gestures, comes into direct contact with the new text segment (Text 2). In short-term memory it goes back to Text 1 and at the end of the process it creates a broad, complex base for understanding the gesture and the text as a whole (from Text 1 to Text 1', with an expected effect on the understanding of Text 2).

The construction of the mental gesture and the performance of all the other gestures in question take place in four steps: (1) the reader defines the field, that is determines the virtual boundaries and the structure of the area within which the mental representation of the gesture is being, or will be created, in accordance with expectations; (2) the reader scans the area, that is actually “reads”, collecting and marking relevant data for the representation in question; (3) the reader identifies the data set (items and their characterization) as this or that distinct gesture, possessing certain definite dynamic, bodily and spatial features; (4) the reader takes control over the finished representation, checks it and if necessary goes through the entire process again from the beginning in order to correct it with the help of the gesture planning mechanism. Every mental representation comes into being as a result of a number of repeated identification (or construction) cycles. The speed of identification depends on the reader's skills and the nature of the text.

⁸³ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1975.

⁸⁴ Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1969.

⁸⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” trans. Nicholas Walker, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 3-53.

⁸⁶ Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*.

⁸⁷ Jean Baudrillard, "Gesture and Signature: The Semiurgy of Contemporary Art", in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin, St Louis, Telos Press, 1981, pp. 102-111.

⁸⁸ Kristine S. Santilli, *Poetic Gesture: Myth, Wallace Stevens, and the Motions of Poetic Language*, New York, Routledge, 2002.

⁸⁹ Mosche Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art*, New York, New York University Press, 1976; *Giotto and the Language of Gesture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

⁹⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. Catherine Porter, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982.

⁹¹ Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language. A Formal Theory of Representation*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1981.

⁹² David Efron formulated a classification system and description method for gestures which were later adopted and elaborated by many other scholars. Paul Ekman distinguishes between various body movements on the basis of their communicative function (Paul Ekman, "Emotional and Conversational Nonverbal Signals," in Messing and Campbell, eds., *Gesture, Speech, and Sign*, pp. 45-55):

1. Emblems: these are learned gestures with a well-defined meaning within a given culture, a meaning which, however, can change from one culture to another; emblems can accompany speech or replace it, imitate the signified in their iconic form or be arbitrary (pp. 45-46); examples: the "OK" sign in the United States or the "just a moment" sign in Israel.

2. Illustrators: these are gestures which accompany speech "on a moment-to-moment basis"; they can emphasize, mark the speech rhythm, stage the development of the idea, indicate present objects, present body motions or spatial relations; "to draw" a picture of an object, to "signal" the pace of events (*ibid.*, 47); for example: striking the table with one's hand while speaking. An ideograph, a classical term coined by David Efron, is an illustrator which portrays an abstract idea, like Genia's gesture in the scene described in the text.

3. Manipulators (or adaptors): gestures in which certain body parts use (touch, strike, press, etc.) other body parts or objects such as a pen, a button, a hat, and so on. They usually reflect nervousness or habit and are performed only semi-consciously (*ibid.*, 49).

4. Regulators: gestures which assist in the management of the conversation, such as asking for permission to speak, taking one's turn to speak, asking to repeat something spoken, to further develop a subject, to speak more rapidly or slowly, etc. Emblems and illustrators can also serve as regulators (*ibid.*).

5. Expressions of emotions: these are usually involuntary movements which provide others with a great deal of information, for example a smile, n mouth open in amazement (*ibid.*, 50).

⁹³ See below the chapter 5 for further discussion of these three characteristics of a represented gesture.

⁹⁴ Here I follow the interpretation of this painting as representing the Gospel account of the revelation of the angel to St. Joseph. We should point out that this interpretation is not uncontested, and others have been proposed, among them the Old Testament story of the young Samuel and Eli during the night when God revealed himself first to Samuel. This interpretation seems less valid, especially in view of the analysis of the gesture below.

⁹⁵ Adam Kendon considers Andrea de Jorio's book, published in 1832 (see above), as marking the birth of the scientific study of gesture. This work can also be deemed to mark the birth of the study of gesture in literature, since a considerable proportion of the book is devoted to a discussion of works of classical literature.

⁹⁶ See: Fernando Poyatos, *Nonverbal Communication Across Disciplines. Volume III: Narrative Literature, Theater, Cinema, Translation*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, PA, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002.

⁹⁷ See the following studies on Homer, Virgil and Ovid: James P. Holoka, "Nonverbal Communication in the Classics: Research Opportunities," in Fernando Poyatos, ed., *Advances in Nonverbal Communication: Sociocultural, Clinical, Esthetic, and Literary Perspectives*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 1992, 237-254; Donald Lateiner, "Affect Displays in the Epic Poetry of Homer, Vergil, and Ovid," in Poyatos (ed.), *Advances in Nonverbal Communication*, 255-269; Alan L. Boegehold, *When a Gesture Was Expected: A Selection of Examples from Archaic and Classical Greek Literature*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1999.

One of the earliest comprehensive works in this field was Robert G. Benson's *Medieval Body Language: A Study of the Use of Gesture in Chaucer's Poetry*, Copenhagen, Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1980. John A. Burrow, a renowned expert on medieval literature, has published an extensive work on gestures and looks in some of the period's main epics: *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁹⁸ In Fernando Poyatos, ed., *Advances in Nonverbal Communication: Sociocultural, Clinical, Esthetic, and Literary Perspectives*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 1992, pp. 272-283.

⁹⁹ Ronald Newbold, "Nonverbal Expressiveness in Late Greek Epic: Quintus of Smyrna, and Nonnus," in Poyatos, ed., *Advances in Nonverbal Communication*, 272-283.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

¹⁰² See David Bevington, *Action Is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, Harvard University Press, 1984; Terence Hawkes, "That Shakespereicherean Rag," in Sidney Homan,

ed., *Shakespeare's More than Words Can Witness: Essays on Visual and Nonverbal Enactment in the Plays*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1980, pp. 62-76.

¹⁰³ Natalie Sarraute, *The Age of Suspicion: Essays on the Novel*, trans. Maria Jolas, New York, G. Braziller, 1990.

¹⁰⁴ Helmut Schneider in his paper "Standing and Falling in Heinrich von Kleist," *MLN* 115.3, 2000, pp. 502-518, p. 503, stresses the importance of body language in Kleist's writings and discusses at length the variations they contain on standing and falling, which he believes symbolize key points in the plot and in the author's characterizations of his figures; Schneider speaks of the "bodily structure" in Kleist's texts.

¹⁰⁵ On Kleist and Kafka see David E. Smith, *Gesture as a Stylistic Device in Kleist's "Michael Kohlhaas" and Kafka's "Der Prozess"*, Bern, Herbert Lang, 1976. Smith found that Kleist anchors his descriptions of gestures within complex sentences whereas in Kafka they appear in independent syntactic structures. Kleist creates an effect of time-compression and simultaneity of gesture and speech, from the perspective of the onlooker. Kafka's narrator, on the other hand, describes action and movement moment-by-moment, from the hero's perspective (ibid., p. 125). In contrast to Kleist, in Kafka's writings one can discern the symbolic meaning of gestures and spatial patterns (ibid., p. 132). Both writers use gesture as the mechanism of characterization (ibid., p. 135). In Kafka's works gestures are contrasted with other activities (e.g. thinking and speaking), creating a vagueness arousing disorientation in the reader; Kleist's writings lack this effect (ibid., p. 127). However, gestures in the writings of both create an effect of direct presence, in that they create an immediate schema of spatial-temporal and intellectual-emotional orientation (ibid., p. 129). Malynne Sternstein writes about Kafka's "obsession with gesture" in her "Laughter, Gesture, and Flesh: Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony'," *Modernism/Modernity* 8.2 (2001), pp. 315-323, p. 317,

¹⁰⁶ Christy L. Burns develops the concept of parody as a "mimic gesture" (*Gestural Politics: Stereotype and Parody in Joyce*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2000, 12). According to her approach meaning-as-movement becomes the main esthetic and political insight in *Ulysses*. It begins with the text's physical rhythmic movement and ends up as a central element for Joyce, a vibration "between identity and disidentity" (ibid.).

¹⁰⁷ See Stephen R. Portch, *Literature's Silent Language: Nonverbal Communication*, New York, Peter Lang, 1985. Portch claims that an analysis of non-verbal behaviors in literature reveals writers' poetic techniques, exposes broad layers of hidden meaning, helps solve problems of vagueness, and contributes to the theory and historiography of genres and the study of style (pp. 150-153).

¹⁰⁸ Roman Katsman, "Anthropoetic Gesture. A Key to Milorad Pavić's Poetics (*Landscape Painted with Tea*)," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 12 (2005), <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/12/katsman12.shtml>; "Poetics of Gesture in Milorad Pavić's Writing (*Khazar Lexicon*)", *Dappim. Research in Literature*, in press (in Hebrew).

¹⁰⁹ Herbert Josephs, *Diderot's Dialogue of Language and Gesture: Le Neveu de Rameau*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1969, p. 51.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 78.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 79.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

¹¹⁵ Kristine S. Santilli, *Poetic Gesture: Myth, Wallace Stevens, and the Motions of Poetic Language*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. xiii.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 42.

¹²² Ibid., p. 108.

¹²³ Uri Nissan Gnessin, "Genia", *The Works by Uri Nissan Gnessin*, Tel Aviv, Sifriat Poalim, 1946 (in Hebrew), pp. 9-44.

¹²⁴ For the further discussion of chaotic-ethic dynamics of a literary character's origination see: Roman Katsman, *Poetics of Becoming: Dynamic Processes of Mythopoesis in Modern and Postmodern Hebrew and Slavic Literature*, Heidelberger Publikationen zur Slavistik, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang GmbH, 2005, pp. 99-152.

¹²⁵ Sandor S. Feldman, *Mannerisms of Speech and Gesture in Everyday Life*, New York, International University Press, 1977.

¹²⁶ Isaac Dov Berkowitz, "The Letter", *Works by Y. D. Berkowitz*, vol. 1, Tel Aviv, Dvir, 1959, (in Hebrew), pp. 131-134.

¹²⁷ For the discussion of gestures in "Righteous Circles" see: Roman Katsman, "Gesture in Literature: Cognitive Processing and Cultural Semiosis (With the Case Study in Agnon's Stories)", *The Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature*, (in Hebrew), in press.

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- ¹²⁸ Jessaiahu Bershadsky, "Not This One", *The Last Works*, Warsaw, Tushia, 1910 (in Hebrew), pp. 19-24.
- ¹²⁹ Gershon Shofman, "Finally", *The Collected Works by G. Shofman*, Tel Aviv, Dvir and Am Oved, 1960 (in Hebrew), pp. 44-55.
- ¹³⁰ For the further discussion of the notion of anthropoetic gesture see: Katsman, "Anthropoetic Gesture. A Key to Milorad Pavić's Poetics".
- ¹³¹ Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language. A Formal Theory of Representation*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1981, pp. 1-28; "Orinary Narrative", *Anthropoetics*, III, n. 2, Fall 1997 / Winter 1998.
- ¹³² Shmuel Yosef Agnon, "The Song that Was Sung", *Samukh ve-Nir'e*, Tel Aviv, Schocken, 1998 (in Hebrew), pp. 152-154.
- ¹³³ In the source: Babylonian Talmud, Tract Taanith, page 22, side 1. Translation: Michael L. Rodkinson, Chapter III, page 61.
- ¹³⁴ In this, as in my two previous books, the discussion is based upon the theory of myth by Aleksei Losev: *The Dialectics of Myth*, trans. Vladimir Marchenkov, New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 185.
- ¹³⁵ Haya Shacham notes a number of patterns and allusions related to a scarf and the main feminine character, including some biblical "structures" (Rahab the prostitute, the encounter between Rebecca and Isaac, the story of Judah and Tamar) and "the figure of sleeping beauty and its denial". See: "Overt and Hidden in the Realistic Story: On Structures and How They Function in Jacob Steinberg's "The Red Scarf"", *Alei Siah* 15-16, 1982, pp. 48-54 (in Hebrew).
- ¹³⁶ Milorad Pavić, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, trans. Christina Pribičević-Zorić, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1989, p. 185. See also: Roman Katsman, "Poetics of Gesture in Milorad Pavić's Writing (*Dictionary of the Khazars*)", *Dappim. Research in Literature* (in Hebrew), in print.
- ¹³⁷ Jacob Steinberg, "The Red Scarf", *Complete Works*, Tel Aviv, Dvir, 1959, pp. 173-176.
- ¹³⁸ Patrice Pavis, "Acting: Explication of Gesture, or Vectorization of Desire?" *Assaph C*, No. 8 (1992), 87-111. Patrice Pavis has constructed a model of how gesture works, in the theater as well as in a dream, using a combination of two approaches: (1) classical semiology and vector theory; (2) Lyotard's energetic theory of figurativeness *versus* discursiveness. The model interlinks two series of concepts: (1) four kinds of signs/vectors: connector, accumulator, secateur and shifter; (2) the fundamental concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis, especially two which relate specifically to dreams: condensation (the origination of relations among signs) and substitution (of one element with another, spatially or temporally related), as well as two others which have to do with understanding dreams – image examination (as a "literal" expression of the energy of desire) and secondary processing (translation from the dream's figurative

language to the rational language of discourse). The model links the act of substitution to signs, connectors and secateurs and the act of condensation to signs, accumulators and shifters.

¹³⁹ René Girard, *To double business bound – Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, London, The Athlone Press, 1988, pp. 44-45, 94-96.

¹⁴⁰ Shacham, “Overt and Hidden in the Realistic Story”.

¹⁴¹ McNeill, *Hand and Mind*, pp. 219-220.

¹⁴² On the Brechtian notion of Gestus as a bodily symbol with prominent/transparent social meaning see: Brigid Doherty, “Test and *Gestus* in Brecht and Benjamin,” *MLN* 115.3 (2000), pp. 442-481.

¹⁴³ Steinberg, “The Sick Woman in the Forest”, *Complete Works*, pp. 131-133.

¹⁴⁴ For the conception of dissipative structure as a part of Ilya Prigogine’s chaos theory see: Gregoir Nicolis and Ilya Prigogine, *Exploring Complexity. An Introduction*, New York, W. H. Freeman and Co., 1989, pp. 45-53. For the humanists oriented introduction into the theory of chaos in the broad cultural and literary contexts see: Katherine N. Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1990 (in particular, see pp. 9-15 for introductory remarks). See also the collection edited by her: *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1991. In the paper by David Porush, in the same collection, a literary text is viewed as a “biosocial phenomenon, subject to the same laws that govern certain naturally occurring phenomena (dissipative structures)” (“Fictions as Dissipative Structures: Prigogine’s Theory and Postmodernism’s Roadshow,” *Chaos and Order*, p. 62), as a system of information in more precise sense, that is as “produced by a constant exchange between the mind and hand of the author” (*ibid.*, p. 75). Porush discusses the behavior of the fiction (*ibid.*, p. 62) in Prigogine’s terms understood literally, not metaphorically: “And I also mean it literally when I describe the novel as fitting the model of dissipative structure. Traffic and fiction are true analogues of each other” (*ibid.*, p. 74).

¹⁴⁵ Israel Cohen, *Yaacov Steinberg: A Monography*, Tel Aviv, Dvir Co., 1972 (in Hebrew), p. 18.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976. Sennett describes the changes in patterns of private and social life which took place in London and Paris between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a transition from active a-symbolic public expression to passive symbolic observation. Surprisingly, the greater interest which people showed in the internal life of individuality as part of this tradition, led to a blurring of the boundaries between the private and public spheres and, as a result, to the collapse of the latter and the disintegration of the former, within a culture of total visibility.

¹⁴⁸ Jean Baudrillard, "Gesture and Signature".

¹⁴⁹ Cohen, p. 20.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵² See also: Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, New York, Farrar, Straus, 1989.

¹⁵³ It is therefore rather doubtful if this story can be viewed as realistic, or even as located at the margins of realism or as possessing psychological realism in the sense of Gershon Shaked (*Hebrew Narrative Fiction I*, Tel Aviv, Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Keter, 1977, (in Hebrew), p. 441).

¹⁵⁴ Steinberg, "Gardens", *Complete Works*, pp. 111-122.

¹⁵⁵ Roy F. Ellen, "Anatomical Classification and the Semiotics of the Body," in Blacking, ed., *The Anthropology of the Body*, p. 369.

¹⁵⁶ Donald G. MacRae, "The Body and Social Metaphor," in Benthall and Polhemus, eds., *The Body as a Medium of Expression*, pp. 59-73.

¹⁵⁷ Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1987; Paul D. Deane, *Grammar in Mind and Brain: Explorations in Cognitive Syntax*, Berlin, New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 1992.

¹⁵⁸ David F. Armstrong, William C. Stokoe, and Sherman E. Wilcox, *Gesture and the Nature of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹⁵⁹ Steinberg, "Among the White Poplars", *Complete Works*, pp. 162-169.

¹⁶⁰ For the discussion of Rousseau's conception of sincerity and authenticity as opposed to the "false" public or social existence see, for example: Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, London, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 60-61.

¹⁶¹ While Fernando Poyatos uses the term "literary anthropology" to describe the anthropological research in literary texts (*Literary Anthropology: A New Interdisciplinary Approach to People, Signs, and Literature*, Amsterdam, J. Benjamins Pub., 1988), Wolfgang Iser applies it to discerning a set of specific anthropological conditions that enable literary writing (*Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

¹⁶² Steinberg, "In the Cold", *Complete Works*, pp. 129-131.

¹⁶³ See: Mayer Irwin Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in Ancient Near East*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1977; Uri Ehrlich, 'All my bones shall say': *The Non-Verbal Language of Prayer*, Jerusalem, Magness, 1999 (in Hebrew).

¹⁶⁴ Santilli, *Poetic Gesture*, p. 25.

¹⁶⁵ Etgar Keret, *The Nimrod Flip-Out*, trans. Miriam Shlesinger and Sondra Silverston, London, Vintage Books, 2006.

¹⁶⁶ Etgar Keret, *Cheap Moon (Anihu)*, Lod, Zmora-Bitan, 2002 (in Hebrew). Here, I use the translation of my own in order to precisely preserve the original meaning. The published translation does not even save this only representation of the narrator's body: "You shift gears at the exit, in a daze" (3).

¹⁶⁷ Quotes from this story are translated by Michael Guggenheimer from *Cheap Moon*, pp. 73-77. I follow the order of stories in the original edition.

¹⁶⁸ Keret, *The Nimrod Flip-Out*.

¹⁶⁹ "And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he bowed himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees" (Kings 1, 18:42).

¹⁷⁰ See: Katsman, "Gesture in Literature".

¹⁷¹ The following story is found in three Midrashic texts (Leviticus Rabba 31, 4; Song of Songs Rabba 7, 1; Ecclesiastics Rabba 11, 1): "And why did he put his face between his knees? He said before the Holy One blessed is He: Lord of the universe, if we do not possess merit, *look at the circumcision*, and 'the sparsest hair on your head is like purple' (Song of Songs 7:5); the Holy One blessed is He said: the sparsest among you are as dear to me as is David". .

¹⁷² Quotes from this story are translated by Michael Guggenheimer from *Cheap Moon*, pp. 106-109.

¹⁷³ The most radical expression of this position can be found in the many books and articles written by Jean Baudrillard. See, for example, his *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London, Sage, 1999, where he analyses the cultural mechanism of the striptease and of the body's depiction in advertisement; or in his essay "The Conspiracy of Art", (*The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer, trans. by Ames Hodges, New York, The MIT Press, Semiotext(e), 2005, pp. 25-30), where he speaks about "the indecent trans-estheticism of visibility" and of the "deceitful clarity" of the world of pornography.

¹⁷⁴ The best-known work which stresses and analyzes this development is Roland Barthes' *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture (Writing Degree Zero)* (Paris, Le Seuil, 1953). In his discussion of poetic writing Barthes describes the transition which occurred (in the mid-nineteenth century) from writing as a sequence of transparent signs intended for inter-personal communication to writing as setting up a single word as a symbol and a mystery outside the sequence.

¹⁷⁵ Yehudit Katzir, "Schlafstunde", in Zisi Stavi, ed., *50 Years 50 Stories*, Tel Aviv, Yedioth Akhronoth, 1998 (in Hebrew), pp. 657-678.

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- ¹⁷⁶ See: Roman Katsman, “Memory of a Body: Meir Shalev’s Novel-Myth *In His House in the Desert*”, *Dappim. Research in Literature* 14-15 (2005), pp. 269-292 (in Hebrew).
- ¹⁷⁷ Meir Shalev, *Fontanelle*, Tel-Aviv, Am Oved, 2002 (in Hebrew).
- ¹⁷⁸ Aleksei Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, trans. Vladimir Marchenkov, New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 201.
- ¹⁷⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” trans. Nicholas Walker, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 35.
- ¹⁸⁰ See above chapter 1.
- ¹⁸¹ Aharon Appelfeld, “Kitty”, in Zisi Stavi, ed., *50 Years 50 Stories*, Tel Aviv, Yedioth Akhronoth, 1998 (in Hebrew), pp. 154-165.
- ¹⁸² Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1975.
- ¹⁸³ See: Katsman, “Memory of a Body”.
- ¹⁸⁴ See chapter 6; for the further discussion of other Keret’s stories see also: Roman Katsman, “Personality, Ethics and Ideology in the Postmodern Mythopoesis by Etgar Keret”, *Mi'kan* 4, January 2005 (in Hebrew), pp. 20-41.
- ¹⁸⁵ Dorit Rabinian, “Mazal Hangs Laundry in Her Parents’ Yard”, in Amnon Shamush, ed., *East West*, Tel Aviv, Aviv Publishers, 1998 (in Hebrew), pp. 163-165.
- ¹⁸⁶ Shalev, *Fontanelle*, p. 96.
- ¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- ¹⁸⁸ Pavić, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, p. 57.