The Performance of Gesture
Musical Gesture, Then, And Now
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Preface

During the last ten years, I have read numerous articles, essays, and books that treated as their subject matter some aspect of composing, performing, or listening to music. The majority of these writings dealt with pitch relations. A few dealt with notation, with performance problems and interpretation, and even fewer with rhythm, musical dynamics, or timbre, and the list dwindles on.

Lots of the writing, even that which was comprehensive, dealt separately with each parameter of music. Very little of the writing made any attempt to deal with the structure of relationships created by interacting parameters. That writing which did make an attempt usually resorted to clumsy phrases and an abundance of hyphenated adjectives. Only after searching for better terminology did I develop an understanding of the predicament: an actual lack of terminology useful for speaking of relationships between parameters. That prodded me to investigate one I had occasionally come across in my reading and in discussion: the term ‘musical gesture.’

Whenever I encountered the term, I figured out some meaning for it that, at least in the context, fit. Having collected various meanings, each context-bound and different, I began to wonder how they could be reconciled with one another. At the same time, I noticed the term ‘gesture’ popping up with increasing frequency, particularly in discussions of new music, where, however, it still seemed stuck in a region of fuzziness. I wondered whether I had understood the term too soon, and whether it could be given its distinction at all: that is, I wondered whether the term ‘musical gesture’ might be used to find or make a distinction or distinctions, which, hitherto nameless, escaped analytical attention.

This paper presents an initial report on my attempt to show those distinctions that I think can be made only with the term ‘musical gesture’. I now think the term can serve, both in my composing and in my attempts to respond to the work of other composers, as a required term that can be used to speak of relationships created by interacting parameters and to speak of the relationship between events in different media, a term that makes a distinction which shall become indispensable to me and, I think, to other listeners, performers, and composers. The term ‘musical gesture’ is meant to be taken as an offer.

1. Prologue

“One of the functions of gesture is to point at something. If, like a pointing finger, one looks at the gesture, instead of what it’s pointing at, then it loses the function which distinguishes it. Analyzing gesture, in this sense, is related to another problem: Looking in a mirror to find out how one looks with one’s eyes closed.”

Mark Sullivan "Gesture and Music"

Everyday usage links gesture with bodily movement, not with acoustic events. Usage has it that gesture occurs in movement—only in movement. The tag phrase "only in movement" underlines the assumption behind most attempts to come to grips with the concept and the phenomenon of gesture: each of them takes for granted, or tries to show, that gesture is something which can happen only in movement. I shall neither take this for granted, nor try to show it. I no longer reserve the word gesture only for those times when I wish to refer to those movements that people make instead of, or while, speaking. Nor do I anymore reserve it only for events in those composed works that make use of movement. Instead, I now reserve it for events that are given a certain function, a certain role to play, both in discourse and in composed works: I look at gesture as something that happens in movement, in speech, and in music.

Unheeded Precedents

I do not claim to make this turn in usage without any precedents. Precedents for the use of the term ‘musical gesture’ can be found scattered throughout the writings of several composers. These precedents do not com-
pletely agree with one another, nor are they all consistent with one another. But each has found it necessary to introduce and apply a concept of gesture to music.

“... Now, as is well-known, music lacks all capacity for psychological or characterizing effect. Instead, music possesses one capability which is of decisive significance for the representation of man in the theater: it can reproduce the gesture which elucidates the events on stage. It can even create a type of fundamental gesture which prescribes a definite attitude for the actor and which eliminates any doubt or misunderstanding about the respective incident. In the ideal case, it can fix this gesture so powerfully that a false representation of the relevant action is no longer possible... Music has the potential to define the basic tone and fundamental gesture of an event to the extent that at least an incorrect interpretation will be avoided, while it still allows the actor abundant opportunity for deployment of his own individuality of style. Naturally, gestural music is in no way bound to a text, and if, in general, we perceive Mozart’s music, even the non-operatic compositions, as “dramatic,” we do so because it never abandons its gestural character.”

Kurt Weill Concerning the Gestural Character of Music

“Manner is the scar which expression leaves behind in a language that is no longer sufficient for expression. Mahler’s deviations are speech gesture’s next of kin: his idiosyncracies cramp themselves together, like in jargon. In the major key section of the fifth symphony, many of the repetitions of motives are paradigmatic, moving convulsively back and forth, at the same time vehement and restrained. Sometimes — by no means merely in recitative — Mahler’s music has made itself resemble the speaking gesture so thoroughly that the music sounds as if it literally speaks, as was once promised by Mendelssohn’s title ‘Songs Without Words’.”

T.W. Adorno Gustav Mahler — A Musical Physiognomy

“The reign of a time beating image can be sustained only over partial contents lacking autonomy and profile, and Wagner’s melodic weakness, often complained about, does not have its foundation in the simple lack of “a striking idea” but in the beating gesture that dominates his work.”

T.W. Adorno, About Hauer

“Of the ‘themes’ in Schoenberg’s final tonal works — and these were the last in which it is possible to speak of themes at all — only the gesture of those themes has survived, and even then, they have been detached from the material prerequisites of the gesture. This gestural force is allegorically charged with the realization of that which is denied them within the tonal structure: stress and direction, the very image of eruption. This is indicated in the designations ‘driving’ (schwungvoll), ‘with energy’ (energico), ‘impetuously’ (irrepetuous), and ‘lovingly’ (amabile).”

T.W. Adorno The Philosophy of New Music

“Stravinsky is drawn in that direction where music — in its retarded state, far behind the fully developed bourgeois subject — functions as an element lacking intention, arousing only bodily animation instead of offering meaning. He is attracted to that sphere in which meaning has become so ritualized that it cannot be experienced as the specific meaning of the musical act. The aesthetic ideal is that of unquestioned fulfillment. For Stravinsky — as for Frank Wedekind in his circus plays — bodily art’ becomes the watchword. Stravinsky begins as the staff composer of the Russian ballet. Since Petrouchka, his scores prefigure gesture and step, thus...”

T.W. Adorno, The Philosophy of New Music

“If played and heard often enough, every musical gesture is prone to be interpreted,
by musicians and listeners, as a gesture of musical speech.

As the gesture becomes familiar, and thus recognized by society, the composed structure, in which the context generates the meaning of its components, will be misunderstood, instead, as one in which the components give meaning to their context.

In order to retard this development, this visitation of communicative familiarity, for as long as possible, I have attempted, in several of my compositions, to anticipate the gesture-forming tendencies within the composed structure and to reduce each of them ad absurdum by way of a non sequitur. I wanted, thereby, to rob trivial perception and partial recognition of the paralyzing effect that all too commonly is mistaken for the understanding of music.”

Herbert Brün, “Program Note for String Quartet No. 3”

“The category of gesture is bounded on the one side by the category of signal and on another side by the one of character. Signal is pre-gestural, that is, the concept and category of gesture is derivable from the concept and category of signal. Character is post-gestural, derivative of gesture conceptually and categorically. Characters are developmental complexes of gestures just as in theater, mime, or readings. Gesture, loosely speaking, is the musical equivalent of such bodily and vocal gestures . . . it is more closely related to the bodily gestures that accompany speech than to speech gestures themselves, except as these latter are understood as referring, to the inflections of the voice rather than to the words and sentences vocally articulated…”

Richard Herbert Howe, “Gesture”

“Strict or varied repetition of a rhythmic gesture tends to establish the identity of the gesture. The use of similar durations, pitches, textures, timbres, etc., tends to establish the cohesiveness and unity of a rhythmic gesture; the use of strong contrast in any musical aspect tends to establish the separation of one rhythmic gesture from another.”

Alan Winold, “Rhythm in 20th Century Music”

“. . . a melodic motif is in essence and origin a vocal gesture; it is a vocal movement with a clearly defined and therefore clearly expressed profile. And . . . it too is sensitive to initially delicate nuances of tension and relaxation, as these are embodied in the breathing which animates the vocal gesture and shapes its contours.”

Roger Sessions, The Musical Experience of Composers Performer, Listener

“In music, the gesture and the inflection are definite; the sense in terms of images and associations is free; the inflection and gesture are perhaps the more definite for being given the full weight of the expression.”

Roger Sessions, The Musical Experience of Composers Performer, Listener

“Since Ph. E. Bach, gesture has come to the forefront of music. Gesture loans music the context which music has been able to bring into actuality by itself less and less. Thereby it becomes understandable that since 1750 music has been notated more and more precisely. Every legato bowing signifies a gesture. It is as if the bowing must hold together tones that by themselves no longer hold together.”

Dieter Schnebel, Studies of the Dynamics of Arnold Schoenberg’s

Although these statements have yet to budge usage, they provide precedents that I shall take as points of departure.

No Precedents?

Although most literature requires a reading informed by a specific acoustic image of the writing, there has as of yet been no treatment of the relationship between linguistic gesture and literature. For the term ‘linguistic gesture,’ there are few precedents. In the field of linguistics, a basis for creating a precedent can be found in work done on the prosodic and paralinguistic features of language. But even there, the term ‘linguistic gesture’ has as of yet been provided no explicit precedents.

Reorientation

Much of the writing which treats gesture as something that happens only in movement itself provides precedents
for speaking of acoustic gesture. If the reader reorients some part of a passage, it often reveals a compatibility with concepts of linguistic and musical gesture.

“Gestures of the head can indicate humility, haughtiness, languor or rudeness. . . . The face can be suppliant, menacing, soothing, sad, cheerful, proud, humble. . . . With your arms and hands: ask, promise, threaten, supplicate; show fear, joy, grief, doubt, acknowledgement, penitence; indicate measure, quantity, number, time . . .”

Quintillian, *Institutio Oratio*

“. . . with your hands, plead . . .” is a phrase that has two instructions embedded in it: Use the medium of movement. Evoke a connection with an acoustic medium — in this case, the voice — and one of its distinct acts — pleading.

The reader could reorient these instructions by imagining how they could be used to tell someone, not how to make movement gestures, but how to make linguistic gestures:

With your voice, shrug; use loudness and the contour of your pitches to indicate astonishment, doubt, dejection, disgust, elation, surprise; with your rhythm jump or glide, rush, snap to a halt.

Thus might a reader orient the passage to linguistic gesture. The phrase “. . . with your voice, shrug” reorients the embedded instructions: Use an acoustic medium — in this case, the voice.

Evoke a connection with the medium of movement and one of its distinct acts — shrugging.

Along these lines, a reader could orient the passage to musical gesture, imagining instructions given to a performer by a conductor:

Make your phrase dance a bit, come to a halt, and then trudge off. Those notes are just a cough. It has to be a shout — use the crescendo to make it a shout. The flute here has to imitate the attack of a trumpeter — play it as the opening to a fanfare.

To show that gesture happens only in movement, one must show that a movement becomes a gesture under conditions not applicable to acoustic events.

I have not found any such conditions: Each formulation of the conditions under which a movement becomes a gesture turns out to be a formulation of conditions applicable to acoustic events.

2. A Medium

It preserves traces. It wipes out traces. A composer turns to a medium with an idea, and wants the idea to leave traces in it. The composer wants the traces preserved. Not wiped out. The composer turns to a medium that both preserves and wipes out traces. But the traces it preserves are not those it wipes out.

A composer wants to know whether a medium will wipe out the traces an idea leaves or preserve them.

Each medium, in relation to others, has its order, its ordering behavior. Distinguished by the kinds of traces it preserves and wipes out, distinguished by the ways it wipes out or preserves them, a medium shows the consistency of its constraints. The idea that leaves the traces and the traces left neither budge the constraints of a medium nor change its consistency. A medium is a resistant whole: it provides the perfect resistance to a composer’s intentions. Not the complete resistance, the perfect resistance.

One From the Other

A medium limits the field of response with the consistency of its constraints.

Obviously, one medium wipes out and preserves traces in sounds; another, traces in movement and sound; and so on. A respondent will not confuse one medium with another. A medium created by combining media will not have two consistencies but rather one: Theater does not have at the same time the consistency of a medium that preserves and wipes out traces in movements and the consistency of a medium that preserves and wipes out traces in sound; it has the single consistency of a medium that preserves and wipes out traces in movement and sound.

There are traces that a medium cannot preserve. There are traces that a medium can preserve but, under certain conditions, won’t. A medium is distinguished by the kind of phenomena it offers to the composer who wants to create an order in it and by the way it prevents the composer from creating some orders.

Traces

A choice creates an order. In a medium, a composer, by choosing, tries to create an order that does not coin-
cide with the order offered by the medium’s behavior. If the choice doesn’t, then the order created by the composer is indistinguishable from that which the medium offers anyway: all traces left by the composer’s choice are wiped out; if the choice does, then traces of the composer’s choice are preserved in the order created which is distinguishable from that offered by the medium anyway. Were it not for the medium’s ordering behavior, there would be no way to detect the order created by the choices of the composer. A medium preserves its order within that which it offers to be ordered.

A composer turns to a medium if its constraints and its consistency appear, to the composer, as an offer.

A composer wants an idea to leave traces that can be preserved in one medium and not in any other and wants the traces preserved to be required by an idea that could not leave traces in another medium.

One idea requires that there be music sounding. Another, that there be someone moving. Another, that there be someone speaking while moving. And so on.

The Second-Nature of a Medium

But the offer made by a medium draws the composer into a confrontation not only with nature, but also with history and society. In a medium, a composer confronts nature’s devastating impact on traces and the historical consequences of the orders composers have already created to thwart the devastation of traces, historical consequences that stem from the history of practices that have grafted a second-nature onto nature and have created yet another trap through which no trace can now pass without being caught up in the affirmation of what’s already been done.

“The supposition of a historical tendency of musical means contradicts the traditional conception of the material of music. This material is traditionally defined — in terms of physics, or in any case, in terms of the psychology of sound — as the very substance of each of the sounds at the composer's disposal. But the compositional material is as different from that as the language is from the stock of its sounds. It doesn’t only increase and decrease in the course of history. All of its specific characteristics are marks of the historical process … Music recognizes no laws of nature and that is why all psychology of music is so questionable. This psychology — in its efforts to establish an invariant ‘Understanding’ of the music of all times — assumes from the beginning a constancy of the musical subject. This supposition is more closely related to that of the constancy of the material of nature than psychological differentiation would like to say is the case. What this insufficiently and inadequately describes is to be sought in the knowledge of material’s own laws of motion. Following these laws, everything is not possible at all times … The requirements placed on the subject by the material are a consequence of the fact that the “Material” itself is sedimented intellect, something socially preformed throughout by human consciousness. As the subjectivity of a previous time — now forgetful of itself — such an objective intellect of material has its own laws of motion. Of the same origin as the social process and continuously penetrated by its traces, what appears to be mere self-propulsion of the material runs its course, in the same sense as the real society, even where the two no longer know about one another and oppose one another. Hence, the composer’s dispute with the material is the dispute with society precisely insofar as this dispute migrates into the work and does not stand in opposition to the production as something merely external, heteronomous, as a consumer or opponent. In immanent reciprocal action the instructions constitute themselves: the material gives to the composer instructions which he, in that he follows them, transforms.”

Theodor W. Adorno, The Philosophy of New Music

The composer has to create, by choosing, an order in a medium that coincides neither with the order offered by the medium anyway nor with the orders that have already been created by other composers. The second nature of a medium is the historical residue that effectively simulates the ordering behavior of a medium by wiping out traces, unless a composer’s choice leaves traces that create an order which neither coincides with that of the medium nor with that of its second-nature.

The Power of a Parameter

When some trace is not left which a composer thought would be, the trace has often been wiped out by the ordering behavior of the medium (or its second-nature).
In music, this happens, for instance, when traces are wiped out by some property of an instrument:

Each sustained note on the piano has the dynamic shape:

The dynamic shape of sustained notes on the piano cannot change, and thus, cannot be composed. The notes do not have that dynamic shape if the composer so chooses, but have it already, whether the composer so chooses or not. The composer cannot, even if he so chooses, give the sustained notes any other dynamic shape and where the composer cannot choose, he leaves no traces.

Of course, the traces that can’t be left are not a problem, if the composer’s idea does not require that traces be left in the dynamic shape of sustained notes. And the traces that can’t be left may be a solution, if the composer’s idea requires that traces not be left in the dynamic shape of sustained notes.

But, if the composer’s idea requires that traces be left in the dynamic shape of sustained notes, and the composer turns to the piano (or, in a more complex case, is told to choose the piano by a set of rules governing the selection of instruments in an ensemble, a set of rules which prior to that point had always delivered for his selection instruments that were able to change their dynamic shape) then the composer confronts a medium that wipes out the required traces.

A composer might place one ordering behavior in conflict with another. Noticing that within a periodic structure an emphasis is placed on the first duration of a group, the composer might place the upward peak of a contour on the last duration of the group, thus placing the ordering behavior that assigns emphasis within periodicities in conflict with the ordering behavior that assigns emphasis within a contour.

What the result will be, and whether one ordering behavior overrides another, depends not only on the laws of nature that affect the medium. It is also dependent on the power of the second-nature that has attached itself to the medium. The power of each parameter in relation to all the other parameters has not been constant throughout the history of music, and the powers of all parameters are not equally distributed now.

Turning to a Medium

To acquire an image of how his idea would be affected by a medium and an image of how his idea requires a medium, the composer answers a group of questions:

Of all the traces that an idea can leave, which can a medium preserve? None? Some? All? Which?

Of all the traces that a medium can preserve which are required by the idea? All? Some? None? Which?

Are there traces among those that a medium can preserve which are required by an idea that could not leave traces in any other medium?

Is there an idea that can leave traces which can be preserved in one medium and not in any other?

Are there traces that a medium has not preserved before that are required by an idea? Is there an idea that has not left traces in a medium before which requires one medium and not any other?

These questions are representative of those faced by the composer who has an image of how an idea can require a medium and of how the ordering behavior of a medium (and its second-nature) can interfere with the leaving of traces.

A Problem

Under certain conditions, choosing a medium presents a problem.

It is a problem that confronts a composer who has not yet formed a distinct image of a medium’s resistance, of its ordering behavior. It is a problem that plagues the early stages of a search for a formulation which would show that a composer’s idea requires a specific medium — a problem in the application of what the composer knows of the relationship between a specific idea and a medium. And, it is a problem that confronts a composer who needs to gain information about how his idea will be affected by a medium — for a composer who has a concept of what is experimental now. Either the composer can not yet make relevant the criteria he has or the composer has no criteria to help him choose one medium rather than any other.

But a composer might not treat any of these conditions as a problem: they might all be considered desired states. A composer might like to think that an idea is new enough, or powerful enough, or general enough, to render the choice of medium trivial.
Once a composer ignores the medium’s interference with the leaving of traces, then he has no further choice: He can not choose the turn to a medium. He just turns, and no matter to which he turns, he just turns to any medium. The turn is insignificant, even if some of its consequences gain significance only later.

**A Hybrid Medium**

If a composer has a formulation of an idea that shows that a specific medium is required by it — either a medium created by combining media (such as opera) or not — a formulation that shows the idea can govern the making of choices which create an order that does not coincide with the orders that composers have already created, then no further decisions about the medium must be made. If the order created by the composer in the chosen medium turns out to have a relationship with parts of an order that can be created in another medium, then the composer can only in vain deny that the relationship exists, or admit that it exists and insist that it was not intended.

If, while investigating the requirements of an idea, a composer finds that nothing speaks for a required relationship between the characteristics of the events that the composer needs to create part of the order in the required medium chosen and the characteristics of events that create part of the order in other media or in another medium, then the idea as formulated either requires no relationship, or does not require a relationship, and whatever relationship is created is unintended, even if not inconsequential.

If the composer finds that something does speak for a required relationship, then the medium required by the idea is a hybrid.

The kind of phenomena in which a medium manifests its ordering behavior determines what traces can be left in events. The kind of ordering behavior that a medium manifests determines what traces can be left of events. In the events that can be created in a medium can be preserved traces of events that can not be created in the medium.

*Movements can not be created in music, but traces of the characteristics of movements, under certain conditions, can be preserved in musical events. Thus, for instance, composing for an acoustic medium does not ensure that the medium (and its second-nature) will not preserve the traces of the characteristics of events that occur in the medium of movement, even though events that occur in the medium of movement do not occur in an acoustic medium.*

Each medium is distinguished as a whole. Some characteristics of the phenomena in which a medium manifests its ordering behavior and some characteristics of the ordering behavior which it manifests can be found in, transferred to, or shared with other media. But no medium can be preserved whole as traces left in another.

A hybrid medium does not combine two orders as wholes, creating another, new whole, one that is not equivalent to the two that combined to produce it. A hybrid medium creates its wholeness from those parts of some order that another order cannot preserve as a whole.

A hybrid medium has a name: gesture.

**Gesture**

I turn to it when I want an idea to leave traces in a hybrid medium — traces that will be distinct from those left in the medium of gesture by any other idea.

When composing gesture, I create intended links. By way of a configuration embedded in an event in one medium, I link it to a configuration in another medium, and thus, to the characteristics of an event in another medium, the characteristics of a class of events in another medium, or the characteristics of a class of events that span several media.

The establishment of a hybrid medium’s consistency of constraints requires the collaboration of the composer. The composer’s idea and the hybrid medium are not simply compatible. They are made compatible: According to the requirements of an idea, the composer creates links between one medium and others. When the composer creates a new domain of gesture, he creates a new medium.

Instead of combining media, to make a medium, the composer combines configurations shared between media.

**Borrowed Distinctions**

Gesture works with borrowed distinctions, with distinctions on loan.

Under certain conditions, an event in one medium lends some, or at least one, of its distinctions to an event in another medium. If the composer wants to choose the time of those conditions, and thus, the distinctions lent, then the composer faces a group of questions:
Which characteristics of one medium can be preserved in another medium? Of the characteristics that can be preserved, which do I want to preserve? Are there characteristics which can be preserved in a medium that indicate not only the medium from which they are borrowed but also the event in that medium from which they are borrowed? Which characteristics of an event must be preservable and preserved in another medium so that the gesture be the gesture of that event and not of any other?

These questions are representative of those faced by a composer who wants to compose a hybrid medium, in order to compose gesture.

The Relationship Between One Medium and Another

The composition of gesture is inextricably bound up with the creation of intended relationships between one medium and another. A medium can be looked at as a system. Thus, it is possible to look at the relationship between one medium and another as a relationship between two systems, and to look at the composition of gesture as the creation of intended relationships between two systems. In the case of gesture, the intended relationships are varieties of the relationship of analogy.

A System

When, in accordance with some set of purposes, I can conceptually separate some whole from an environment — when I can describe the whole's consistency of behavior by referring to a set of states of the whole that are created by a set of interacting elements — when I can describe each state of the whole as a consequence of the configuration of states attained by each element — when I can describe what each element preserves under the change from one of its states to another and how each of its states is different in relation to its other states, in short, the kind and number of states attainable to each element — when I can describe the relationship between the states of the whole and the states attainable to each element so that no change of state of the whole occurs without a change of state of at least one element and no change of an element's state occurs without a change of state in the whole — when I can describe what the interaction of the elements does, how it functions, then I will speak of a system.

I use the term 'element' when referring to something as a whole, which I do not consider something as made up of a set of elements. It depends on my purpose whether I regard something as an element or system: At one time I regard pitch contour as a system which can adopt as many states as its elements allow, each of which can be "on" or "off" at least. At another time, I regard pitch contour as an element which changes the state of a system called 'gesture.'

Dependent on the number of elements in a system and on the number of states which each of these elements can attain, each system has a definite number of states in which it can appear.

A system is defined by the number of possible states it can be in and by the sets of instructions that will control the changes of state in the system. Two systems are compatible with each other when they are similarly defined. The degree of compatibility of two systems is the degree to which they can simulate each other, the degree to which one system may behave in analogy to another.

Analogy

One relationship that can hold between two systems is that of analogy. I speak of analogy when an event in one system is equivalent to an event in another system, even though the two systems are not equivalent.

A rising pitch contour might be treated as an event analogous to the raising of a limb of the body, even though the system of movement is not equivalent to the system of sound.

The speed of successive pitches might correspond to the speed of the movement, the distance between pitches might correspond to the size of change from one position of the body to another, the degree of loudness might correspond to the force of movement, and so on.

It may turn out that the movement is produced in a system with only two perceptible differences of speed whereas the musical event is produced in a system with six perceptible changes of speed. In this case, several of the states of the element speed in music can be in relation to one state of the element speed in movement.

Intended and Unintended Gestures

Since gesture is a hybrid medium, it is a medium, and thus, gesture can wipe out traces.

The composer has to figure out how the traces left by the required idea are to be protected from the ordering behavior adopted by the chosen medium of gesture — a hybrid medium created to leave traces in configurations that preserve the characteristics of events in other media. The preservation of the characteristics of the events of one system in the events of another system (and thus, in
this case, a medium) is dependent on the degree to which the number and kinds of states of the one system can be in the relationship to those of the other system.

All the states of system A may be placed in the relationship of analogy to all the states of system B, and the other way around; all the states of system A may be placed in the relationship of analogy to all the states of system B, but only a few of the states of system B can be placed in the relationship of analogy to the states of system A; and so forth.

Applying these notions to that of a medium renders: One medium can preserve all, or some, or none of the characteristics of another medium.

A specific movement may be looked at as one state in the system of movement which is brought about by the interaction and current state of a number of elements that include speed, size of change, force of movement, and so on. Characteristics of this movement might be preserved in music by establishing correspondences between the states its elements are in and the states into which elements of the musical system will be brought.

**Turning To A Hybrid Medium**

The composer faces a problem: The very medium of gesture required to leave traces of an idea in configurations may wipe out other traces that have been left.

Again it may be a problem of criteria: it may be that I have no criteria to consult when deciding which hybrid medium to choose. Maybe I have no distinct image of gesture’s resistance to my idea, and maybe I just haven’t reached that state yet where I can formulate the requirements of my idea so that I can see that it requires a specific hybrid medium. And, of course, I might like to think I don’t have a problem. I might like to think that my idea is new enough, powerful enough, or general enough to make trivial the choice of a hybrid medium, to make trivial the choice of gesture.

Nothing prevents gestures from making it appear that the composer had an intention even though he didn’t. Nothing prevents the gestures from creating the impression that the composer had an intention that required the gestures he in actuality just got. Thus, the composer may have the liberty of not choosing the gestures he gets, but he does not have the liberty of not getting any.

*It may be difficult to get the gestures I want, but next to impossible to get none.*

The composer who constructs a piece according to a set of rules (using algorithms) may wind up with gestures he doesn’t want — even though his wanted rules delivered them.

The performer may wind up playing gestures he doesn’t want — gestures which are not required by the composition — even though he is following the score.

The listener may wind up listening to and following unintended gestures, even though this activity was initiated by questions formulated in relation to answers that the composition provides.

These are the sorts of problems that can befall the composer, or performer, or listener who neglects the treatment of gesture.

A hybrid medium limits the field of response with the consistency of its constraints. The composer chooses to preserve one set of borrowed characteristics instead of another. The significance of the choice is a function of the chosen set’s power to limit the interpretations available to the respondent. If a change of the set of borrowed characteristics would elicit a change of interpretation, the gesture has the power required to limit the field of response.

Gesture limits the interpretations available to a respondent.

In discourse or in a composed work, gestures are made in anticipation of response. Unless the addressee gathers something that requires interpretation, the gesture will not function. An addressee has to gather something that requires interpretation before he can become a respondent.

**3. Formulation: The Procedure of Distinguishing**

It is indispensable to gesture. It does not just put into words what gesture does anyway. It carries out the cognitive mapping initiated by gesture.

Formulation is part of what gesture does.

Seeing or hearing a gesture, we start and carry out a search for a memory, for some image of a correspondence, for the distinguishing description of a set of dynamics. Without formulation, gesture doesn’t happen.

We try out terms and concepts, and we transform them: Terms are proposed, discarded, combined, rearranged; concepts are bent, refigured, extended, translated, imitated. It is at the same time the search for a concept and the search for a name.

In one passage of Theodor Adorno’s writings about Wagner’s music, he uses a phrase that can be rendered in English as “the gesture of striking a blow.” The phrase points at something important — characteristics of an action without an agent — autonomy of agency. Along
with other formulations found in the literature that treats the subject of musical gesture, this formulation helps understand how a gesture can be given a name: A statement about gesture cites a characteristic of an action without naming the agent. Looking closely at these other passages, it becomes possible to extend the formulation. This yields: A statement about gesture cites a characteristic of an action without naming the agent, a characteristic of an event without naming the medium, a characteristic of a way of doing something without naming the one who does it. A formulation about gesture, thus, stops short of description, supplying neither motivation nor detail. It leaves out all traces of plot.

The Term 'Musical Gesture'

The term 'musical gesture' is relatively new. The phenomenon is not. Gesture in music has no history. Only a past. Its history has not been documented; the relationships in its past that bear on its present have yet to be articulated. In many passages that employ other terms — terms like motive, gestalt, leitmotif, cell, each of which can be given its precise distinction, a distinction that would not be equivalent to that made with the term 'musical gesture' — one can find observations and insights that apply to musical gesture. In some cases, one would now prefer to substitute the term 'musical gesture' for the term used.

Thus, I prefer to reserve a term like 'melodic motive', or more precisely, 'pitch motive', for the time during which I do not want to speak of any corresponding ordering of rhythm, of loudness, and so forth. It is a term I reserve for the order created in one parameter.

Gesture, in contradistinction, I reserve for the time in which I wish to speak of configurations, that is, an ordering that cannot be found by examining each parameter, one at a time.

Musical gesture cannot be found by looking at pitch sequences alone, or by looking at dynamic constellations or timbral groupings in isolation. It is found in configurations created jointly between parameters.

‘. . . Thus we see that the old Italian terms seemed to Beethoven ‘nonsensical’; they now indicate only a tempo and no longer the ‘character’ of a piece. The categories are separated . . . The discrepancy between the sense of the Italian terms and the new ‘character’ of the pieces for which they are still used as tempo indications is clearly felt.

This discrepancy sometimes becomes an actual contradiction. But the metronome has made these old ‘barbarous’ signs superfluous. The categories of tempo and character may be expressed independently of each other; tempo absolutely and exactly by a metronome figure; character through the really adequate and discriminating terms of the vernacular . . . We see that Beethoven felt the existence of the problem very clearly and drew the necessary conclusions from it.

He was conscious of tempo as an essential part of his language, co-ordinated with that mysterious category which he himself termed ‘character’. A wrong tempo would change the character, and for each character there is an appropriate tempo . . .”

Rudolph Kolisch, “Tempo and Character in Beethoven’s Music”

One can read in the literature and know for every statement about character that gesture is included: couched within comments about character, one finds implications that bear on gesture.

Two Phrases

If a gesture seems to be embedded in an event, then I say that the event has a gesture. There are aspects of the event, details, that are not part of the configuration of distinguishing components. If a gesture becomes identical with an event, then I say that the event is a gesture. All other aspects of the event seem to have been minimized so that its gesturality can become the message: the gesture becomes the event.

Contextual History

In a context, there may be a continuous stream of gesture, a stream of different kinds of gestures, movement gestures and acoustic gestures, gestures with different functions, gestures that establish an emphasis or that mark an emphasis, that interrupt, that set the field of meaning for something that follows, or that retroactively modify the meaning of a previously made movement or phrase, gestures that point or that help make a pointed address, gestures that mark the opening or the closing or that make the link, gestures that emphasize an articulation or that articulate a relation, gestures that overlap with one another, that interrupt, complete, close or initiate one another.

In discourse, the continuity of a spoken utterance may be deftly torn by a series of articulating movements, or by
a long drawn-out “er”, or the noise of a purring buzz of the lips; a movement gesture may prolong the duration of something that would have passed quickly had it been spoken; the noise of an exaggerated sigh or a quickly said phrase or sentence might attach a significance to the unfolding of a movement gesture, creating a meaning that the movement gesture could not create alone (since the performer cannot make two movement gestures at once and cannot interrupt the one movement gesture with another and then complete the first).

In a music composition (or, the necessary changes being made, in a movement composition), there might be different kinds of musical gestures, some that preserve characteristics of movements, some that preserve characteristics of speech gestures, some that preserve characteristics of musical events; there might be sequences where gestures that refer to movement follow gestures that refer to linguistic situations, linguistic gestures and behaviors of speech; various kinds of musical gestures may alternate with one another or several musical gestures may work together to form the musical gesture of a whole series of events; a musical event which has a gesture may be punctuated by something that is a musical gesture; a musical gesture might be repeated to show how its context changes. Or, to the contrary, a context may hold still so that changes in musical gesture come to the fore.

Looking at the roles played by any one musical gesture in a context, it may be transitory, breaking the continuity of something else, coming and going, changing slightly but never losing its identity; it may undergo a development and be subjected to a process of transformation that turns it eventually into another musical gesture; or it may, in one form or another, always be present, functioning as part of the noise factor of the composition, that is, that which does not change so that the changes in something else can be noticed; at one point it may stand alone as a gesture, at another it may become part of a musical gesture.

Contexts left, approached, and present are pointed at by gesture. Context refers to the conditions under which something will manifest more than its mere sequence, its mere syntax. Without the clues provided by the context, the respondent would be unable to determine the function of gesture; without the clues provided by gestures the respondent would be unable to determine the context.

Gesture creates the context that creates it.

With gesture, from case to case, the generalities hold, even though the specifics don’t. Context is the situation in which specifics arise to confront their partnership with generalities.

None of the forms of gesture are mere illustration. Nor are they mere creators of redundancy, although sometimes they may provide the indispensable degree of redundancy.

Two Histories

Two histories are linked in the formation of a gesture: one is the history of contexts in which a gesture has been made, the other is the history of gestures made in a context.

I notice a specific configuration and remember the string of contexts in which it has appeared. I notice a specific context and remember the string of configurations which have appeared in it. These two strings and their relations to one another constitute the contextual history which along with the specific configuration and context noticed establish a gesture.

I shrug in various contexts: Someone has made a statement to which I am indifferent — I shrug; I want to indicate that something was so ridiculous that I was helpless — I shrug; I don’t know any answers to a question — I shrug.

In a context, I make various gestures: Asked about something — I shrug; asked about something — I nod ‘yes’; asked about something — I stare away, feigning boredom; asked about something — I throw up my hands, eyelids, and brows in exasperation.

5. Address

(Throughout this passage, the intended emphasis is address.)

Among the limitations created by the medium of gesture can be found the limitations placed on an address: an address that can be created in one medium may not be one that can be created in another.

Address refers to dynamics which issue from processes that relate two images: the image of the message and the image of the intended recipient. The recipient, either a person or a group, is indicated by a mark on the message. A mark is that trace left on a message to indicate the intended recipient.

In discourse, imagine that three people face each other, momentarily silent. Slowly one leans his body towards, raises his arm and points at, one of the other two. With hesitant accusation, he begins speaking of . . . This is a sketch of a moment in which an address is created. Both a movement and a linguistic gesture help establish it: the lean forward marks the message and the tone of hesitant accusation marks the message.
Place the sketched scene on stage in a play and the audience will be addressed. But not by a finger pointing at them, not by a tone of hesitant accusation directed to them.

Initially, an audience member enters into an agreement that he will be addressed by a composition. In the course of a composition, a composer can attempt to turn that general address into one made to that specific audience member.

Gesture is one way of pointing an address: By composing gesture, the composer can create a pointed address. A viewer or listener is the intended addressee of a movement or music composition. The composer can choose the address she wants a piece to make. A composed work can be made to imply an image of an addressee: someone to whom the piece would now have something to say, to show, to hear, in short, something to offer now. Gesture helps draw the respondent’s attention to some things and away from others. The composer anticipates which configurations will seduce the listener into glossing over components and which will draw the listener into thinking about the components, into grouping some events with others into configurations, into looking for emphasis within one set of bounds instead of others, and so on. Through the composition of gesture, the composer interferes with the respondent’s inclination to recognize some configurations and provokes the respondent to cognize other configurations that cannot be recognized since they appear for the first time. By avoiding affirmative gesture, recognizable configurations or configurations that have not been changed by the composer, the composer addresses the respondent, insisting that thought be given to the naming of configurations, to the relationship of configurations in two different media, and to the roles that the piece has created for the configurations to play.

No Address

If the composer forgets to include an address, the results are usually disastrous. The respondent flounders around, picking up on whatever unintended address happens to attach itself to the composition. The composition without an intended address cannot articulate or convey its intentions.

The performer shapes the address of a composition by choosing, from the intended addresses that a piece can create, the address to make now. If a performer neglects to shape the address created by the piece, the composition will be opened up to the unintended address from which it was protected, and thus, the composition will be falsified.

If the respondent neglects to search for an address, or assumes that the composition has no intended address when it does not articulate its address the way compositions did in the past, then the composition will be falsified by the respondent.

The Means of Address

The means of address that can be created in composed works are relatives, not copies, of the means of address that can be created in discourse. Even though the address starts with the composer, in composed works, it is mediated by the composition, by the score (if there is one), by the performer, and by the listener.

In a musical composition, many things allow the listener to make inferences from which he constructs an image of the listener addressed. The gestures of the composition shape these inferences. From the restrictions a composer places on a respondent’s interpretations, the listener can infer the respondent the composer anticipated.

At any time, from the beginning of the performance of a composition to some subsequent moment of reflection on the performance, I can figure out that it offers me something, and thus, find it directed particularly at me. Finding my response has been anticipated, and restricted, I have to make another response. If the network of restrictions has been carefully laid out, I eventually find that I have to make a response I have not made before. I decide that I correspond to my image of the listener addressed.

The perception of address is the first moment in the process of becoming a respondent: It is the prerequisite of any search for formulations that correspond to what has been said to me, formulations that could not have been made without what was said to me.

The perception of address turns me, the addressee, into a respondent.

Responding to a composition, I shape the image of the address made by articulating the address taken.

In that I correspond to an image of the listener addressed, I am a correspondent, in that I respond to a composition which itself is a response, I am a co-respondent.

6. Performance

The time of no gesture is noise.

Biological existence. Merely. Or necessary movements: made just to get somewhere or to do something else. Accidentally made sounds: Chairs squeaking. A music stand clanging. Coughs. Prerequisite movements: The
bow has to be lifted. A breath has to be taken.

Such noise is not the composition’s noise. It is not the composed noise factor of a piece, a factor required so that a signal be noticed. Nor is it a part of a carrier-and-signal relationship. It is environmental noise, to be kept below the threshold of the piece’s significance. In this environmental noise, there is no gesture.

Within a composition, there is never no gesture. Gesture is either intended or not. There is no keeping it out. For the performer, this means that there is no getting around it or out of it: gesture has to be performed.

For the performer, the question is whether or not the treatment and performance of gesture bears out traces of the composer’s intent, is required by the composition, and leaves traces of the performer’s intent in interpretation. An intent in interpretation — an interpretation, not just one of submissively obedient execution’s mere results — provokes the performer to search for and find at least one interpretation which allows the composition to be performed with a minimum of falsification.

Performance articulates intent and the relationship between the significant and the insignificant: doing this requires that a performance articulate the relationship between one gesture and another, between gesture and whatever is not only gesture, and between gesture and whatever is not gesture.

Gesture is not notated by the composer separately: there are no specific notational elements reserved for musical gesture. Musical gesture in a score is implicit.

Implicit and Explicit

What the composer makes explicit while composing a piece becomes implicit in the score. Going on what is made explicit in the score, the performer decides what is implicit. No matter whether the performer faces descriptive or prescriptive notation or a combination of the two, the performer has to interpret. What the performer makes explicit for herself while rehearsing a composition and while developing standards for a performance, becomes for the listener, implicit. In the process of practicing and rehearsing a composition, the performer must make explicit for herself the gestures implied in the explicit notation of the score. In the performance, then, and implicit in the performer’s treatment of gesture, the listener can find and discover what the gestures have rendered explicit.

Since the composer wants to limit the listener’s interpretation, that is, what the listener can find implicit in the performance of a composition, the composer has to limit what the performer (or a score-reading listener imagining a performance) can find implicit in the score.

Notation

It has often been observed that for the last two hundred years musical notation has become increasingly specific: more and more explicit instructions have been given to performers about how to treat loudness, stress and rhythmic functions, phrasing, articulation, and timbre. This tendency reflects the composers’ desires to protect their compositions from commercial performance practices, from unwanted understandings and unintended messages, and it reflects the desire of composers who wanted to choose the gesture. Conversely, it reflects each parameter’s loss of the power to imply gesture. Less and less have composers been able to treat gesture as a concomitant of pitch, rhythm, or of any other parameter, even articulation.

Unwarranted treatment of gesture, once invited by the lack of explicit instructions, by now ever so often appears invited by the abundance of explicit instructions. No notation can prevent treatments that knowingly abandon gesture to accident.

Part of a performer’s interpretation involves deciding how the composer wanted the notation in a score treated. There are two kinds of notation, descriptive and prescriptive: the former is analog to the desired result (and only implies how to get it); the latter is analog to the desired execution (and only implies the result). Either or both, of course, may occur within any single composition. Both kinds of notation can be so densely loaded with instructions that they obscure the configurations embedded in them.

If the notation is required and desired, then it presents a problem to be solved, not eliminated, and makes up part of the offer made by the composer to the performer: an offer to collaborate in finding a solution for a problem. The performer’s interpretation of the notation becomes an indispensable part of the composition’s social function.

If the composer, working with algorithms, finds that his wanted rules deliver unwanted gestures, then the problem is not for the performer, but is the composer’s. In this case, it may be necessary for the composer to add to his set of rules those which will not deliver unwanted gestures, or maybe even to add to his set of rules those which would deliver the gestures desired.
Carrier or Signal

Both the performer and the listener make a decision: One part of interpretation involves deciding what is carrier and what is signal.

A carrier is something composed that does not change so that the changes of something else can be noticed (through it) — namely, the signal, that is, that which is to be noticed changing.

Whenever changes in that which the performer has decided to treat as a carrier must occur, the performer has to keep them below the threshold of significance, in this case, the threshold of significant change established by the composition.

Whenever the performer turns the carriers of a piece into signals, this disturbs the intended relationship between carrier and signal, and thus, falsifies the piece. 

Gesture gets involved in the relation between carrier and signal. To avoid playing unintended gestures, the performer must decide how the gestures of the piece are to be treated: Is gesture a carrier or a signal? Does gesture change from being a carrier to being a signal, or vice-versa? Are there some gestures that function as carriers and others that function as signals? These questions are representative of those a performer must answer.

Disfigured Gestures, Withered Gestures

In performance, how close one gesture is to another and what kinds of gestures there are depends on the number and kind of distinctions the performer makes available to the listener. The perceptible differences generated in performance lead or mislead the listener as he infers the network of distinguishing components from which configurations are created.

The configurations embedded in events, the configurations in which distinguishing components show the traces of the network of distinctions from which they were created, have consequences on the respondent’s perception of events, of configurations, components, and all details. Decisions taken in relation to configurations carry over into all other decisions. If no decisions are taken, that carries over. Conversely, decisions taken in relation to details affect configurations. Performances based on standards that were not developed for the composition frequently generate perceptible differences that take no heed of the role those differences play in creating configurations, and thus, the performance of standards leads to the disfiguring of gesture.

“Performance standards are to be created in order to help achieve a goal for a performance. Every consideration of performance standards must begin by considering the performance in question. — The goal of the performance, not the goal of performance. When consideration is given to performance standards as if there were a goal for (all) performances, there the performance will be a performance of standards rather than a performance of the piece…”

Richard Herbert Howe, “Standards For Performance and The Performance of Standards”

Every decision that takes into account the consequences of performance on detail must at the same time take into account the consequences of performance on the configuration. Otherwise, gestures will be disfigured or wither.

Slowing down at the end of each phrase does not simply mark out the phrases, it invites in an unrequired family of gestures that have as their distinguishing component the retarded end.

Unrequired changes of tempo destroy the proportions that are one component of gesture.

An unrequired crescendo gets rid of two composed gestures and replaces it with one that wasn’t even wanted by the composer; or one composed gesture is turned into lots of precious fragments by dynamic changes intended to “bring out” certain notes, and to wipe out the composed gesture of an outburst by replacing it with several gestures of hesitation.

Unrequired restraint of dynamic levels that protects “good tone” and unrequired uniformity of timbre supplies, instead of the intended gesture, a range of cramped, awkward gestures — gestures of restraint or gestures of stifled impulses; just as a mean average dynamic level will easily turn into gestures of stasis, of inactivity, of muffled articulation.
The Listener’s Performance of Gesture

It is the listener’s interpretations that the composer wants to limit when she composes gesture: the listener is the respondent anticipated by the composer. As Herbert Brün has shown, the listener’s interpretation is an experience between cause and effect. The composer provides the listener with an offer — the musical composition. The listener creates an image of the music and responds to the created image, creating its effect. The listener creates the cause and the listener creates the effect.

The listener becomes the medium for the event to which he responds.

In the formulation of the image of the composition, the offer, the listener shows intent. Traces of the listener’s intent are left in his response to a composition, traces in his formulations: they are left in the names a respondent gives to configurations. They are left in the concept of the preserved characteristics implied in the names. And they are left in the limits he, in collaboration with the composer, placed on his interpretation. Through these traces the respondent reveals what he sought and met for the first time.

7. Configurations

Noticing the gesture of an event, a respondent does not register each component separately, but rather registers the components’ relationship to one another. The configuration registered is in an event.

Noticing a gesture, a respondent registers its distinguishing components in configuration. The distinguishing components cling to the minimum event required to present their configuration. The configuration registered is the event.

In both cases, the respondent gives the relationship of linked distinguishing components a name. The name corresponds to a single set of linked distinguishing components.

Creating a configuration requires the linking of selected components of different sets: the configuration must bear traces of the sets linked.

In an acoustic medium, several configurations could be made from the following sets of distinguishing components: a set that governs the contour created by the succession of pitches (steady upward rise to a peak or steady downward fall to a trough); a set that governs the kind of pitch movement (movement by equal increments or movement by unequal increments); a set that governs loudness (soft or loud); a set that governs changes of loudness (no change of loudness or getting louder or getting softer); a set that governs speed (slow or fast); a set that governs change of speed (no change of speed or getting faster or getting slower); a set that governs placement of a change of loudness (early in the event or late in the event); a set that governs placement of a change of speed (early in the event or late in the event).

One configuration could be made by linking the following distinguishing components: Steady upward rise to a peak; movement by equal increments; soft; getting louder; getting louder late in the event; slow; getting faster; getting faster late in the event.

Another configuration could be made from the same set by linking the following distinguishing components: Steady downward fall to a trough; movement by equal increments; soft; getting louder; getting louder late in the event; slow; getting faster; getting faster late in the event.

Obviously, the structuring of the set of distinguishing components assumes several things: there must be a succession of pitches (a single sustained pitch will not generate a contour); the pitches must be able to move by equal increments (an ordering of the pitches beforehand into a sequence of pitches that move in unequal increments would preclude creating a set that governs whether the kind of movements are equal or unequal); somewhere something loud would have to happen so that there could be soft and something fast would have to happen so that there could be slow, and so forth.

When structuring a set of distinguishing components, the composer can take into account the consequences of that structuring on the structure of other sets: It could be that pitches that get steadily higher seem to a listener to get steadily louder or that pitches that move by equal increments (the composer knows) even though it takes them less and less time to make their moves near the end of an event (the composer knows that the speed is getting faster) seem to a listener to move through greater distance at the end than at the beginning of the event (if a pulse measured the time it took to move, the distance traversed by the tones in the time of a pulse is greater).
All these kinds of considerations must be taken into account when the composer creates sets of distinguishing components, lest the composer wind up with unintended configurations.)

**A Set of Distinguishing Components**

Creating a distinguishing component requires the making of a set of interconnected components. Each component must be made dependent on each of the other components for its identity, that is, for its ability to contribute to the production of a configuration that can be given a unique name. If the speed of succession of pitches is not increasing then it must decrease or stay (the same); if the contour created by the succession of pitches is not rising steadily then it must be falling steadily, and so on. In a configuration of linked distinguishing components, each component must bear some trace of its place in the structure of the set of components from which it was chosen. After being chosen, it has to stand out as one component selected from a set of components from which any of the other components could have been chosen instead of it. A respondent should eventually be able to infer the interconnected net of components from which the one was drawn.

*In discourse, to the extent that it is not composed, a speaker creates the configurations of movement gesture and of acoustic gesture with distinguishing components drawn from the existing sets made available to performers and respondents in the society; in a composition, to the extent that it does not draw only on existing sets, and to the extent that it attempts to create new gestures, an exposition is required that establishes the structured set and the interconnections of components, that is, each component's place in the set, so that the components when chosen may function as distinguishing components drawn from created sets linked in the configurations of movement and acoustic gesture that can to performers and respondents be offered for the first time.*

Each component of a set of distinguishing components must be able to link up with each component of each set that contributes to the production of the configuration.

*The component of the set that governs the contour created by the succession of pitches, the steady upward rise, can occur in an event at the same time as the event is soft or loud and at the same time that the event is staying the same speed or getting slower or getting faster and so forth.*

Each structured set of components is distinguished from the other sets by the aspect of events that its components govern; when it is chosen, each component of a set of distinguishing components is distinguished by the characteristics it creates in the aspect of events governed by the set.

*To some extent, the choice of components that govern contour does not determine which choices of components that govern loudness are available to the composer; a steadily upward rising contour will not be confused with a steadily falling contour.*

**The Borrowed Distinctions of a Configuration**

There are yet other requirements placed on configurations and distinguishing components if they are to become gesture. To create a hybrid medium, they must be loaned a significance by their relationship to the distinguishing components of configurations in other media.

The respondent who takes in the configuration of a gesture’s distinguishing components takes in a relationship between one set of components and another, between one configuration and another. Some, or all, of the distinguishing components of a gesture come from a network of components shared by two media.

Gesture works with borrowed distinctions.

The configuration bears, at least in part, distinctions created by components that can be drawn from sets that govern aspects of events that occur in at least two media.

*Both a sequence of tones and a sequence of movements can get faster. In movement, the gesture of a certain way of walking will not be confused with the gestures of any other way of walking or any of the gestures of other types of locomotion. If a composer of music were to limit his choice of musical events to those which share some of the distinguishing components of that way of walking, and if the response to that musical event were not confused with any other musical event that shared some of the distinguishing components of some other way of walking or of moving, then I would speak of distinctions on loan and of gesture.*

For a gesture to happen, a respondent has to be able to answer the question: Which configuration made from which sets of components is it? Which interconnected network of sets shares which distinguishing components of which configurations? Answers to these questions determine the limits established by a gesture.

**Affirmative Gestures, New Gestures**

Gesture initiates cognition or recognition in several ways: It may initiate recognition by referring to sets of distinguishing components in the respondent’s repertory
without changing them, that is, by referring to sets created in other contexts. It may initiate cognition by restructuring sets (by calling on sets in the respondent’s repertory but changing them), by adding a new component to a set, or by adding a new set to a network of distinguishing components.

Since gesture is a hybrid medium, it is a medium, and thus, gesture can wipe out traces.

Affirmative gestures attempt to conceal the illusions they create by limiting their calling to what can be found in the respondent’s repertory. The affirmative gesture deliberately tries to make gesture seem like the second-nature of music. By exercising the power of repetition, they try to disguise their illusion as nature. The affirmative gesture is an attempt to keep cognition to a minimum.

A new gesture presents the respondent with a configuration that links a hybrid set of distinguishing components. The configuration is shaped by the composer’s intent. The intent aims at shaping the respondent’s image of what the piece offers to see or hear for the first time. A new gesture limits calls to the respondent’s repertory to the minimum required to keep cognition going as long as possible. The composer decides how the configurations of linked distinguishing components in one medium shall fertilize, shape, form, or seed those of another medium so that the respondent can encounter a configuration, a gesture, for the first time.

**8. One or Another**

If the composer has a choice, he has to create the gestures he wants. Otherwise, the whole composition may be marred by accidents that wipe out traces the composer wanted left, by unintended messages that suffocate intended ones, or by a range of reference that prevents the composition from addressing anyone with anything for the first time.

Under certain conditions, a gesture can preserve itself under change; under other conditions, it can’t. The composer has several things to figure out: what parts of a gesture can change, and how much, and when, before a gesture begins to be confused with, or becomes identical with, its closest neighbors. Along with these questions, goes another: How can the composer prevent a gesture from sharing characteristics of events to which the composer does not want the gesture to refer? Even when the composer deliberately seeks out ambiguity, control of the distinguishing components is required to create it.

**A Grid of Distinctions**

A grid of distinctions establishes, in conjunction with perceptual thresholds, the conceptual thresholds of significant difference. It establishes the kind and number of important differences. Gesture has to establish its grid of distinctions. Otherwise its grid will be articulated by something else’s. The number of sets of distinguishing components, and the number of components in each set, and the time it takes a respondent to tune to the grid, to infer the interconnected network of distinguishing components, determines the kind of grid. One piece might require configurations created from two sets, each with two components. Another piece might require configurations created from thirteen sets, each with a different number of components. The latter case would require a finer grid of distinctions: in performance, the distinctions that would have to be made so that a respondent could infer the distinguishing components would be nearer one another. It would take the respondent longer to tune to the grid.

Based on my description of the grid of distinctions I want the piece to establish, based on my description of how long it takes a respondent to tune to the grid, and based on my description of the limitations placed on the respondent by the thresholds of perception, I articulate two forms of conjecture about limits: one has to do with the limits within which each gesture can vary; the other has to do with the limits that each gesture will place on the respondents interpretations — especially with regard to limits on the kind and number of events in other media to which a gesture points.

**The Limits Established by Gestures**

The first form of conjecture is inseparably related to the second: The composer faces different cases depending on what she wants. She may have to prevent a gesture from borrowing distinctions from one medium instead of another. Or, from borrowing distinctions from one medium and from another. Or, from one medium but not another. Or yes, maybe even from either or both of two media instead of from neither or some other medium.

Depending on what she’s after, a composer of music might face the following cases: She might have to prevent the musical event from being lent the distinctions of a movement, instead of the distinctions of an event in speech. Or, from being lent the distinctions of an event in speech. Or, from being lent the distinctions of a movement, but not the distinctions of an event in speech. Or yes, again, maybe the composer has to prevent the musical event from being lent the distinctions of another mu-
musical event or from being lent no distinctions whatsoever, instead of being lent at least the distinctions of an event in speech or at least the distinctions of a movement or in the best case of both a movement and an event in speech.

Suppose the composer wants the musical event to borrow the distinctions of a movement, and not those of an event in speech (or those of an event from another musical composition). Suppose that the event is a leap followed by stumbling, and that the composer has decided what characteristics of the movement can be preserved in music and which characteristics she wants to preserve.

The characteristics of the movement are to be preserved in a configuration with three parts created from the following sets:

- A set that governs speed (fast, slow);
- A set that governs the kind of movement (step, glide, leap);
- A set that governs direction (straight, changing directions).

Any change which disturbs the configuration changes the gesture. So long as the configuration is preserved, anything can change. A change which moves away from one and towards another distinguishing component progressively weakens the gesture: the substitution of a single distinguishing component changes the gesture, and thus, changes the distinction shared with an event in some other medium. As long as a distinguishing component is preserved, the gesture will be preserved, and the relation with the event in the other medium.

*If the distinguishing component is an upward leap, then the size of the interval can vary. With regard to the configuration, it is more important that it is a leap upwards, rather than which leap upwards it is.*

### Response

Since the composer wants to choose a gesture and wants a gesture to carry traces of the intent with which it was chosen, he concerns himself with the conditions under which the respondent interprets.

Response is a historical concept. So is interpretation. The composer’s knowledge and awareness of the history of compositional efforts — the composer’s knowledge and awareness of the dynamics and history of response — the composer’s description of the respondent’s repertory and desire for connection making — the composer’s estimate of the extent of exposition and the degree of redundancy required so that the interpreting respondent can infer the network of distinguishing components that the composer requires — all of these factors condition the composer’s formulation of what can be presented for the first time. Collectively, these factors condition the composer’s image of gestures which cannot now be created without being merely affirmative of what already just happens to be the case, they condition the composer’s image of gestures which can now for a while tease or just now cannot tease, of gestures which just now for once can appear for the first time, and especially, the composer’s image of which intervention might only just now again for a while retard the decay of gestures thought helplessly lost or old.

### 9. Processes of Invention

Gesture has been, and can be, invented with several processes: imitation, translation, and extension. Looking at the history of a single gesture, I may find that these processes mingle and overlap in successive applications to movements or acoustic events that never were before, that are already, that next will be gestures.

#### Imitation

Imitation is one way of making an analogy. Imitating follows the example of something; it is copying but allows a margin of incongruity.

Imitation coaxes one event into the manner of another, into the behavior of another: it makes something a close, not a distant, relative.

Wheedling is a way of saying a set of statements. It can be imitated in movement. Take the instruction: *Wheedle with your hands.*

Pounding or shrivelling up are movements. They can be imitated in speech behaviors. Take the odd instruction: *Pound on the table or shrivel up to nothing with your voice.*

One movement can copy another. Take the instruction: *Imitate the movement of a talking mouth with a hand.*

Preserved under change are the opening and closing motion and the periodic rhythm. Lost are the syllables, the resonance — the entire production of structures created in sound, the facial expressions. A linguistic gesture that preserves the characteristics of a yapping mouth can be found in the complaint: “Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.”

A composer of music might imitate the yapping gesture of a speaker by asking a trumpet to play:
Or, take the phrase: “Aw, come on.” How could movements be used to create an imitative analogy to the semantically charged sounds of this utterance? The size of movements could correspond to the degree of change of loudness; changes of direction of movement could correspond to the rhythm; a slap of the palm on the forehead could correspond to the “Aw”; two bobbing shakes of the palm could correspond to the “come on”. Music?

Take bragging or interrupting. Or winking. What if the conductor said that the flute has to play its part as the musical gesture of one of these?

Imitation covers the ground between the unsettlingly uncanny and the elusively faint resemblance.

**Translation**

Translation seeks equivalent consequences without preserving the behavior. It does not copy. Translation completes a transfer, getting one event to speak in the terms of another. It has more to do with the preservation of neighborhoods of relations than with items.

Translation makes no attempt to correspond in performance; it only tries to correspond in consequences. It gives up the specifics of performance, foregoing the attempt to copy, foregoing the performance itself.

**Extension**

Extension is a form of close analogy. Imitation tries to preserve characteristics of something the way it is; extension tries to preserve characteristics of something the way it could be, if it kept going.

Extension requires creating something that can be referred to another phase of the process of which its analagon is an output. It demonstrates the application of a procedure in a region that carries further the range of its previous applications, it stretches the scope.

Extension creates a continuum of gesture. It doesn’t copy the event as it is, but as it could be extended. It works out a next-stepness in relation to something.

*Movements of the arm, hand, and finger used for hailing someone, performed forcefully, can be used to distract someone from what he’s doing, indicating “Come now.”  This indication can be transformed into figures of voice: “Hey” is used to hail someone, but can be used to stop someone from doing something, to indicate dismay, or to indicate both.*

*Extension: totter the head, totter the eyes, totter the pitch of a statement to indicate indecisiveness; tapping on the table moves to pounding a fist on the table to a gruff-toned voice that heavily emphasizes each word — pounding it out word by word.*

Extension often mixes with imitation, both push translation, and all three can mingle to create movement and acoustic gestures.

**10. Posture**

Historically, the concept of posture has been hound to movement. When set off from gesticulation and gesture, posture refers to the general configuration of the body and its parts. Sticking to usage or not, one thing must be added: posture is a general configuration of the body that nests the production of other configurations. Gesticulatory movements and the configurations of gesture are produced within the embracing configurations of posture. A posture can encompass a range of gesticulation and gesture.
Gesticulation

Gesticulation seems to approach a configuration even though it does not reach one, seems to have departed from a configuration even though it never reached one. Gesticulation often seems close to gesture; it seems as if it could become gesture. But it never establishes its consistency through constraints that establish a configuration. Thus, it does not limit the interpretations available to a respondent. A respondent can not detect the intended limit placed on his interpretations, and thus, the respondent is left with nothing but the awareness that an attempt to limit his interpretations was made. Gesticulation fails to articulate intended limits.

Still, that which can be changed can be composed. When composed, both gesticulation and posture become, in their moments of change, components of gesture (a sudden start and stop of gesticulations, a mighty stretch from cowering to monumental uprightness).

Body Gestures, Movement Gestures

In various forms of discourse, in movement and mime compositions, and in compositions for the theater and opera, gesture in movement flourishes, leaving and wiping out traces. Except in discourse — where they may or may not be marked by the intent of a composing speaker — these traces are marked by the intent of a composer.

The composer can work from two distinct orientations: a body gesture is a body configuration with a contextual history that is not the contextual history of the body; a movement gesture is a configuration of movements with a contextual history that is not the contextual history of the movements.

Working within one, from one or both, or between these two orientations, the composer can emphasize the configurations reached, the ways of reaching the configurations, or a relationship between the two. The composer configures movements so that they articulate ges-
tures that articulate the desired relations between movements. Thus a change of articulation frequently results in a change of movement gesture.

“...the movement notation system arose from the search for the formulation of the world of movement; this quest was primarily for a way of composing in movement ... This aim implied the overthrow of prevailing assumptions about movement; not through startling innovations, but by a radical change of concept which would make movement a material in which choices could be made without relating them to irrelevant frames of reference ... what is important is to do things which are and can be seen to have been deliberately and consciously chosen.”

Noa Eshkol, Foreword to “Language, Shape, and Movement”

Applications

Alongside the application of concepts of posture, gesticulation, and gesture to movement runs the potential application of those concepts to sound, to the acoustic universe. Although such an application produces phrases that sound ungainly in relation to usage, there is no loss of accuracy: one component of what is called 'a tone of voice' is 'acoustic posture', or 'the posture of the voice' (just as a specific body posture could be called 'a tone of body').

Acoustic posture refers to a general acoustic configuration that nests the production of other acoustic configurations. Gesticulatory sounds and the configurations of acoustic gesture are produced within the embracing configurations of acoustic posture. An acoustic posture can encompass a range of acoustic gesticulation and gesture. Acoustic gesticulation seems to approach but never reaches a configuration of sounds. And so through the formulations that apply to movement up to acoustic gesture: A configuration of sounds with a contextual history that is not the contextual history of the sounds.

Left Out

What has been, and will be, left out are the connections between configurations in movement and the preserved characteristics of events in other media — particularly speech and music. In short, the distinctions loaned to movements. Thus, the whole process of creating new gestures in movement has been left out. Other things, too: How movement gestures work their way into literature and the visual arts; a presentation of the differences between the way movement gestures function in discourse, in mime and movement compositions, and in theater, as well as how new gestures are created in each of these media. There is no investigation of how a composer of movement notates movement gesture, nor any look at how movement gestures become the basis for other movement gestures.

11. Musical Gestures and Movements

Movements and movement in discourse and in compositions are events with characteristics that the composer can preserve in musical gesture. Even though the number of distinguishing components that make up movement gestures is much smaller than the total number of distinct movements that can be made — again, differences between movements are pushed toward one structural type or another, and several movements that differ from one another (in ways that are considered insignificant by the viewer) are treated as one kind of movement, as insignificant variations of one structural type of movement — the number and kind of distinguishing components of movements and the configurations they create still provide a staggering number of characteristics which the composer could try to preserve in musical gestures. But this is not what may make the composer pause. It is rather that the components and their functions seem to be tied to the specific nature of the body and its parts as a moving system. The entire differentiated network of movement gesture seems to require the differentiated network of the body’s parts and the kinds of movements they make as its prerequisite.

The Sample as An Example

Taking movements only of the head and face region, an inventory of at least thirty or so distinguishing components is required to make a model of the system of movement gestures made with the head and face:
three ways of nodding the head
  one nod, two nods, three nods; four speeds (extremely slow, slow, fast, extremely fast); articulation (smooth, jerky)
two ways of sweeping the head from side to side
  one sweep, two sweeps; four speeds (extremely slow, slow, fast, extremely fast); articulation (smooth, jerky)
one way of cocking the head
  lift, lower, knit, move a single brow
one way of tilting the head
  maximally open, slit, closed, squeezed
four ways of moving the brow
  wrinkling the nose, compressing the nostrils, flaring both nostrils, flaring one nostrilour ways to close the eyelids
  compressed lips, protruded lips, retracted lips, apically withdrawn lips, snarl, lax open mouth, mouth maximally opened
four ways of shaping the nose
  forward, to the side
seven ways of shaping the mouth
  puffed, sucked
two ways of thrusting the chin
two ways of shaping the cheeks
Music has no eyebrows, no limbs, no torso, no physical body to move; it cannot stare, roll its eyes, shift them upward or jerk them from left to right, nor can it glare or even close its eyes.

**Characteristics Movement Loans Musical Events**

All this means is that music can not make movement gestures. Something is always given up in making an analogy. Obviously, music does not order the movements of the face, of the torso and limbs. It does not shape the external form and configurations of a moving body and its parts for a viewer. But music can shape the external form and configuration of a moving body of sound and its parts for the listener. Two questions become relevant: What characteristics of movement and movement gestures can be preserved in music? With what degree of specificity can musical gesture point to the distinctions loaned it by movement?

It has often been pointed out that music and movement approach one another by way of their relationship to time. Physical bodies are said to move through space and time, whereas music is said to move only through time. Music, in short, is said to have a temporal dimension and no spatial dimension.

But speech too moves through time and not space. Speech shares a temporal dimension with music and movement and both speech and music are cut off from the spatial dimension of movement. One consequence of this is found in a required transformation: any characteristic of a movement that is distinguished by its spatial orientation has to be mapped, when it is preserved in speech or music, into a non-spatial dimension. Thus the composer must decide into what characteristics of speech or music the spatial characteristics are to be mapped, if the composer wants any mapped, if any can be mapped at all.

A composer might decide that changes of size of movement or changes in the distance traversed by a moving limb are to be mapped into musical dynamics, shaping the contour of the changes in loudness. Some characteristics are either lost or mapped into other kinds of characteristics — the necessary changes have to be made — or are given up by the composer.

Although they could be, the temporally-oriented characteristics of movement do not have to be mapped in music or speech into a non-temporal dimension. Movement along with speech and music moves towards and away from points of emphasis, creating proportions that generate a sense of timing and redundancy which creates the appearance that events move towards emphasized moments and away from them, giving some events or moments a prominence that other events and moments don’t have.

Shifts of weight initiate movements, emphasize movements and phases of movements, moving in and out, from and towards various configurations that can be distinguished by the way weight is distributed in the body and its parts. The amount of weight shifted and the way it is shifted, and the directions in which it is shifted, the motion and energy thereby generated and the way it is stopped, repelled, thwarted or redirected provide characteristics from which music can create its mock moments of movement.

If a movement begins with a sudden and maximal shift of weight from one limb to another, a musical event can preserve the maximal change but not the sense of the limb’s...
location in relation to the other limb (the limb to which the weight is shifted). The maximal change could be preserved in musical dynamics again, for instance. If that maximal shift of weight produced a change of configuration in several limbs, then that change of configuration could be preserved in the configurations of pitch. If the shift had two distinct phases, each with a noticeable duration, and if the beginning phase had an emphasis that the ending phase moved away from, then these characteristics might be preserved in the duration and proportions of the pitch configurations and their placement within the framework of time. In such a way, a musical gesture might preserve the characteristics of a movement gesture.

Using such operations, the composer can preserve characteristics in musical gestures of movements that begin by transferring weight gradually and almost imperceptibly to some other part of the body. Characteristics of movements that lurch and teeter through a series of asymmetrical and non-periodic shifts of weight, to movements that disturb the overall distribution of weight as little as possible while transferring weight from one limb to another, characteristics of movements that end with the weight of the body lifted or of movements that generate an impetus toward motion only to rapidly thwart it.

Configurations of body parts that emerge in relation to other configurations in a periodic framework of time generated by their sequential appearance, their durations relative to one another, and by the way they are articulated can be preserved in musical configurations that govern proportion and time.

Through all these means, music approaches movement. Musical gestures can be created that preserve characteristics of running, grinding to a halt, stumbling, unhurried walking, tottering, dancing, characteristics of a slow walk, pacing, treading lightly, stomping, and of trudging — in short, to different kinds of locomotion. Characteristics of degrees of movement can be preserved: still, frantic, crowding around, thinning out. Characteristics of the degree of change of distance: inching along, leaping, lurching, grabbing. Characteristics of the forcefulness of a movement or of the pressure it exerts on something. Characteristics of ways of starting and ways of coming to a halt. Music never reaches movement, deliberately.

These are the kinds of answers a composer gets when she asks: What characteristics of movement gestures can be used to generate, form, shape, or seed a gesture in music?

But with what degree of specificity will these gestures refer to movement gestures? A composer might want to create a musical gesture that is analogous to a lurch. If so, the composer would not want that event to be confused with musical events that preserve characteristics of any other kinds of movements (a slow gradual bend or trudging). Nor would the composer want that event to be confused with musical gestures that preserve characteristics of any kind of speech events (a hesitantly asked question or a statement that is punched out) — except perhaps for linguistic gestures that themselves preserve characteristics of a lurching movement, but maybe not.

**Not the Movements of Performance**

At no point have I been referring to the movements made by performers of music. I am not speaking of what is called expressive movements, those ornamental bits of salesmanship wholly superfluous to the execution of the musical event which are the performance of the reaction the performer is trying to elicit. Nor am I speaking of movements that may be required to shape the sound of a musical event. As fascinating as it is to watch the movements of a performer whose every shift of weight is carefully chosen for the traces it will leave on the acoustic event, this is not what I am speaking of when I refer to musical gestures that preserve the characteristics of a movement — although without doubt these required movements may help the listener gather questions and formulations that apply to the acoustic events heard.

When the clarinetist leans quickly forward to begin a pitch and just as quickly pulls back as she releases the note, creating an abruptly beginning and abruptly ending sound — when the percussionist only seems to lift the falling mallets from the bars of the marimba or lets them drop deadly onto the bars, stopping all reverberation — when the string player leans all of his weight on to the bow bringing it to an abrupt halt, producing a swelling sound — when the performer is trying to elicit. Nor am I speaking of movements that preserve the characteristics of a movement — although without doubt these required movements may help the listener gather questions and formulations that apply to the acoustic events heard.

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**Dance Music?**

There is no natural union between music and dance, although the two were already closely connected even in the most ancient times. The closeness of the connection and the resilient second-nature attached to it testify to the strength of the social forces that brought the two together to keep them together. It embodies one of the most persistent attempts to overcome the unconnectedness of tones and the unbrokenness of movements: the two are simply combined so that the unconnected tones can break up the movement and so that the unbroken movement can connect the tones.

Within the history of dance, clues can be found that help locate movements that have left their mark on musical
gesture: the leap, the lift, and the glide; the step and the stretch; the throw, the skip, the lunge, and the whirl; the wrench. Each of these movements has characteristics which have been preserved in musical gestures: the skip has its set of rhythms, the lift its contours and suspended forward motion on a melodic peak, the glide its articulation and freedom from downbeats, the step its pace and degree of pitch movement, the whirl its dynamic waves and repetitions, the wrench its displacement of the pulse and dynamic surges, and so on.

Obviously, the placement of a leap within a sequence of pitches can correspond to the moment in time when a dancer makes a leaping movement, the size of the interval to the size of the leap, the dynamic shape to the degree of force with which the leap was made. But it was just this tendency towards obviousness that drove composers to protect the correspondences they invented from it. The composer’s struggle against the second-nature was a struggle against correspondences that already seem to be there.

Composers did not want to preserve easily recognized characteristics of movement but characteristics which could be observed for the first time. They began to create tension between music and dance, composing music which no longer supported the dancer, abandoning the physical constraints of the moving body, creating music which itself seemed to dance, but not according to rules that would have produced plausible or implausible sequences of movement. They rather produced musical gestures that followed the stipulated laws of musical composition. The song was separated from the dancer, the music was separated from the dancer. The preserved characteristics of movement began to serve musical ends.

By now, music’s power to measure movement, generating discrete bits that cut up the continuity of movement into music’s grid and the power of the second-naturality attached to the relationship by its historical development in spite of the extraneousness of music to movement of the human body has created a situation in which it is necessary to supply music with continuity taken from movement and to avoid providing movement with a sense of timedness taken from music.

From the time in which an entire composition could be based on musical gestures that preserved the characteristics of a single kind of dance through periods in which the characteristics of several kinds of dances were preserved in the gestures of a single musical composition, through times in which the preserved characteristics might change from phrase to phrase, or later, even within a phrase, it is possible to discern a tendency to present less and less of more and more preserved characteristics. In between the time when it took the course of a whole composition to call up the relationship between a movement and a musical event and the time when even a small slice of a musical event could call up the relationship to a movement, musical gestures emerged that were related to movement, specifically to dance, musical gestures which were fleeing the devastation wrought on traces by the affirmative gesture.

The Offer

Music does not sacrifice any of its autonomy by preserving characteristics of movements in musical gestures. In music, the characteristics are part of musical events that take their logic and their sequitorness from the requirements of the musical composition, not from the requirements of a composition in movement.

In music these characteristics go through changes that they could never undergo in a movement composition (changes from characteristics of one kind of movement to characteristics of another kind of movement are not bound by the physical constraints of the human body — that is, by the constraints of physical congruity and spatial proximity).

Musical gesture shows what movement could never show about itself.

12. A Vignette

The First: “Well?”

Head, tilting a little to the side. Pitch, gliding briefly downward and then upward quickly. Loudness, increasing slightly, gradually. Eyebrows, holding their upward arch, even after the abrupt cutoff of sound. Gaze, eagerly fixed. All signifying impatient expectancy. This one had decided to seek positive confirmation of something, after nervously deciding that it may never come if it hasn’t by now.

The Second: “Well.”

Said by the one on whom the first’s gaze had fastened, but only after allowing a few seconds of silence to intervene between the previous question and the tightening of the corners of the lips, the light popping of the tongue off of the upper teeth, and the quick sigh which preceded the response, itself accompanied by the raising of the eyes which had been cast to the side and down. Pitch, gliding upward briefly and then quickly downward.
gliss smaller, a duration shorter than the first’s. Loudness, quickly decreasing. The sound ending with the head shaking back and forth in negation. All signifying reluctant annoyance. This one hovered between not mentioning it and giving the other what he asked for.

The Third: “Well.”
A response, again after a few seconds of intervening silence, during which the mouth opened and the eyebrows arched upwards as far as possible. Pitch, without the initial upward turn, gliding downward. It was the smallest gliss, the shortest duration of the three. Breathy noise distorting the sound of the vowel. Loudness: a pop followed by the rapid dissipation of sound. All signifying astonished exasperation. This one wheeled and stalked off.

The Fourth: “Well.”
Up to this point, the fourth had been silent. Another upward glide, this time without the initial downward turn, a little longer than the first’s, but in all other respects similar to it. All signifying, not expectancy, but amused resignation. This one emphasized his shrug with extended arms, upturned palms, raised eyebrows, and a closed-lip smile, all to indicate how comfortably he was lodged between the sentences “Don’t ask me” and “What can you do?”

The First Again: “Well, well, well.”
Imitating the diminishing series of an echo with the loudness of his response and with the rhythmic shaking of his head in negation. Pitch, gliding downward only on the first word; on the next two, it continued downward, but by steps not glides. Gaze, moving back and forth between the fourth and the second. Now signifying not reluctant annoyance, but incredulous disappointment. His face arranged the display of his dismay.

The Second Again: “Well. Wha’d’you expect?”
A quick, long, downward gliss followed by a long but slower, upward one on the first word. Blasting the last five syllables with a glare. The loudest yet.

The First Again: “Well. Certainly not that.”
Breathy noise on the vowel again, after a short, downward gliss on the first word again. Contemptuously sizzling the ‘s’ sound of ‘certainly’.

The Second Again: “Well.”
His throat straining. A sort of mild growl on the vowel. The outer edge of the eyebrows pulled down slightly into a stare, a dare.

The Fourth Again: “Well. Now, hold on.”
Breaking the tempo by lengthening the duration of each succeeding word. The distance between each successive pitch increasing. Loudness unchanging. Arms extended, with the palms down, not in a shrug, but bobbing in conciliation.

13. Acoustic Gesture

A configuration of sound in sounds. Initially, a respondent registers, not the distinguishing components separately, one at a time, but their relations in configuration. The acoustic configuration is a structured set of acoustic relations that can infest different swathes of sound.

From case to case, some details and relations change, but the relations of the configurations do not. A change of the acoustic relations between distinguishing components would bring about a change from one configuration to another, and thus, the one listening would be required to interpret within another distinct set of limits. Detecting another set of borrowed distinctions and assigning another corresponding significance to the configuration, the listener would confront another acoustic gesture.

When I speak of acoustic gesture, I speak of two kinds: linguistic and musical.

I find the configurations of linguistic gesture within temporarily adopted tones of voice, that is, within temporarily adopted ways of saying something. Depending on how it is said, an utterance takes on specific functions:

Ways of saying something are required to push a statement towards one of its meanings and away from others (to belligerently state something, instead of stating it timidly or patiently);

they are required to say one thing and convey another (to say “What are you doing?” and convey “Stop that right now.”);

they are required to indicate the speaker’s attitude towards an addressee, towards an event, towards himself, or even towards the utterance itself (of contempt or indifference or enthusiasm);
just as they are required to sound surprised, bossy, or impatient, to sound rushed, to sound confused or disappointed.

The configurations of musical gesture are to be found within a temporarily adopted way of performing something. Depending on how it is performed, a musical event takes on specific functions:

Ways of performing something are required so that something seem to come grinding to a halt instead of gliding to a halt;
they are required so that something seem to shout instead of cough or sing;
they are required so that a musical event seem to hover, to plunge, climb, or stretch, to wind upwards or stumble;
just as they are required so that a musical event seem to grumble, stutter, blare, or whisper, to boom, to call or laugh.

Linguistic gesture and musical gesture are the performed distinctions of acoustic configurations that allow the listener to infer the distinctions borrowed by the configuration from an event in another medium.

14. Linguistic Gesture

“What I have tried to do is rather ambitious — namely, to regenerate the Italian opera-bouffe: I mean only the principle. This work is not conceived in the traditional form, like its ancestor — Mussorgskii’s Marriage, which is a faithful interpretation of Gogol’s play. L’Heure Espagnole is a musical comedy; apart from a few cuts, I have not altered anything in Franc-Nohain’s text. Only the quintet at the end might, by its general “layout,” its vocalises and vocal effects, recall the typical repertory “ensemble.” But except for this quintet, it is mostly ordinary declamation rather than singing; for the French language, like any other, has its own accents and musical inflections. And I do not see why one should not take advantage of these qualities in order to arrive at correct prosody. The spirit of the work is frankly humorous. It is through the music above all — the harmony, rhythm, and orchestration — that I have tried to express irony, and not, as in operetta, by an arbitrary and comical accumulation of words. I have long been dreaming of a humorous musical work, and the modern orchestra seemed perfectly adapted to underline and exaggerate comic effects. On reading Franc-Nohain’s L’Heure Espagnole, I formed the opinion that this droll fantasy was just what I was looking for. A whole lot of things in this work attracted me — the mixture of familiar conversation and intentionally absurd lyricism, and the atmosphere of unusual and amusing noises by which the characters are surrounded in this clockmaker’s shop. Also, the opportunities for making use of the picturesque rhythms of Spanish music.”

Maurice Ravel, letter to Jean Godebski

“… On the whole, this first act might serve as an essay in opera dialogue . . . Throughout I try as hard as I can to note down clearly those changes in intonation which crop up in human conversation for the most futile causes, on the most insignificant words, changes in which lies the secret of Gogol’s humor . . . ”

“I have been surveying my first act . . . If you forget all operatic traditions and admit the principle of musical discourse carried out in all simplicity, The Marriage is an opera. If I have managed to render the straightforward expression of thoughts . . . ”

Modest Mussorgskii, letter to Rimsky-Korsakov

“I am thinking of the second act . . . and observing the peasants around me. This may come in useful later. How many fresh, racy aspects, hitherto overlooked by art, in the Russian people! A few scraps of what life brought to we I have turned into musical imagery for the benefit of those whom I love and who love me, that is, in the songs . . . What I should like to do is to make my characters speak on the stage exactly as people speak in everyday life, without exaggeration or distortion, and yet write music which will be thoroughly artistic.”

Modest Mussorgskii, letter to Lulmilla Shestakova

“I am at work on human speech. With great pains I have achieved a type of melody evolved from it. I have succeeded in incorporating the recitative into melody (except,
of course, for dramatic movements, when anything, even interjection, may be used) . . . There are foretastes in Marfa confiding her grief to Dosifey, and also in The Fair.”

Modest Mussorgskii, letter to Stassov

Within a tone of voice, when is gesture?

Within a way of saying it, when is gesture?

Every utterance can be delivered in a number of ways. When it’s being said, a way of saying something takes part of its meaning from the way it is being said and part from the ways it is not being said.

A Way of Saying Something

Choosing a way of saying something creates an order in the sounds. A choice creates an order. Within the order of the sounds of a way of saying something, there are sounds of the words and their parts; and there are sounds that distinguish a speaker and groups of speakers: both of these become a noise factor when someone speaks — a personalized acoustic habit or the acoustic quirks of a mere group, they are the constants of a way of speaking — and have little to do with linguistic gesture. A speaker can not choose them. But within a way of saying something, there is an order of sounds that is not required to build up words, to break off sequences of words, to indicate the sounds of an utterance, to establish syntactic relations, and so on; there is an order of sounds that is not required to identify the speaker with a group, or even to identify the speaker.

These sounds stretch across words and are ordered by the speaker’s choice. They are built up in the midst of the order of the sounds required by everything else — words, syntax, and so on. They are distinct configurations of sound in the sounds of a spoken utterance.

A way of saying something is distinguished by the configuration it creates. The configuration emerges in a stretch of sound and attaches a significance to what is said that modifies, or changes — in short, that transforms it. The configuration indicates which transformation is to be carried out by the listener who is trying to determine which interpretations are available to him. By indicating the required transformation, the configuration limits the listener’s interpretations, and thus, the correspondences he can create with events in other media.

One Distinguishing Component

Some contours have a function reserved for them within the language: the tiered, slowly rising contour used to indicate a list, the descending contour of the statement and the rising contour of the question, and contours like the one that belongs to “on the one hand . . . , but on the other hand . . . ” Other contours can be assigned a function by the speaker.

As a component of a configuration, a contour can be assigned a function: It becomes a part of a linguistic gesture, and specifies a transformation that the respondent should make.

Several Sentences, One Gesture

A long, rising contour at the beginning of an utterance, in conjunction with other components, marks out one linguistic gesture that can be performed. Several sentences can be performed with this one linguistic gesture:
The configuration can be performed with various components added without losing its identity: it can be performed with various degrees of whisper, breathiness, huskiness, creak or falsetto, with various degrees of resonance; it can be performed through laughing, giggling, sobbing or crying — that is, the utterance can be modulated by laughing, for instance (the utterance can be performed with traces of these events in it). None of these components, however, are required by the configuration to establish its limits and none of them prevent it from establishing its limits. They may add additional limits, but their presence would not change the configuration, and thus, would not change the gesture.

But the distinguishing components of the configuration cannot be changed without destroying the identity of the linguistic gesture: If the tempo is changed from slow to fast, if the speeding up is removed or replaced with slowing down, if the initial rising glissando is removed or replaced with a descending glissando or even with a glissando that descends and then rises, if the crescendo is removed or replaced with a decrescendo, then the gesture turns into another; it becomes a gesture that limits the interpretations of the listener in another way.

The characteristics preserved in this linguistic gesture are those of a rebounding whack or of a rebounding jolt.

### Several Gestures, One Sentence

None of the sentences must each time it is said be performed with this linguistic gesture so that the sentence be understood. Each of the sentences can be performed as other linguistic gestures. Take one:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tempo: fast Accel.</th>
<th>Tempo: extremely fast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tempo: extremely slow Accel. (breathy)</th>
<th>Tempo: fast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Within Limits

Any one of these linguistic gestures can vary within its limits and still preserve its identity. Take for example, the change of emphasis within the gesture required so that a different question result:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tempo: slow Accel.</th>
<th>Tempo: slow Accel.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tempo: slow Accel.</th>
<th>Tempo: slow Accel.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are no neutral spoken utterances with respect to linguistic gesture.

**The Gesture of the Marginal Event**

In some contexts, even the single word — since it can house configurations — can be performed with different gestures. Any marginal event of speech — smacking noises, air exhaled forcefully through the teeth — if it can function as a configuration with only one distinguishing component) can in at least one context become a linguistic gesture.

The little phrases, the almost meaningless phrases are especially susceptible to the configuring that becomes linguistic gesture:

- “By the way…”
- “I don’t care…”
- “Naturally…”
- “Of course…”
- “Certainly…”
- “Hummmmmm…”
- “I think…”
- “You see…”
- “In my opinion…”
- “I disagree…”
- “Usually…”

- “…but…”
- “I can’t tell you…”
- “It’s not that…”
- “It goes without saying…”
- “As usual…”
- “In a way…”
- “It seems to me…”
- “What if…”
- “If you’d just…”
- “The fact that…”

**The System of Distinguishing Components**

The structured sets of distinguishing components from which linguistic gestures are created can be looked at as components that are created in different systems. In many ways these systems resemble the systems available to the composer of music, but, in general, the grid of distinctions is not so fine: Speaking out of tune would mean something quite different from playing out of tune. Still, the speaker who consistently misplaces emphasis can create as much havoc for a listener as can a performer who consistently drags or drops a beat. The grids of distinction are different, not unrelated.

A speaker creates the configurations of linguistic gesture using distinguishing components drawn from sets that include articulation and loudness, pitch relations of adjacency, range, and contour, rhythm, stress, tempo, and pause.

A speaker sometimes uses components drawn from other sets: one set — breathiness, whisper, huskiness, creak, falsetto, and resonance — includes distinctions that also indicate the acoustic constants of a group of speakers, the acoustic markers of a dialect, or of a single speaker; the acoustic markers of “his voice.” Under certain conditions, these distinctions can be chosen by a speaker so that timbal components shape the listener’s interpretation of the configuration.

Another set — laughing, giggling, trembling, sobbing, or crying (or even modifications of these such as half-hearted laughter or feigned laughter) — includes components that usually exist sequentially with speech, that is, we usually stop talking to produce them. Under certain conditions, these events can also become timbal components that contribute to the formation of a distinct acoustic configuration.

Thus there can be linguistic gestures related to the blast, to the giggle, the grumble, and the snarl, to the wheeze and the whimper; linguistic gestures related to dragging, to pulling and stretching, to picking at something, to coaxing, pounding, and tapping; linguistic gestures of blabbing, whining, and ho-humming. And yes, even linguistic gestures that seem to march, or dance, or sing.

In spoken language, acoustic indication allows a listener to figure out what a tone of voice is pointing at. The voice, self-referentially, creates a kind of acoustic pointing: it refers the listener to a part of its own production and uses that part to point at something else. In visual indication, the body or one of its parts points; in the acoustic indication of speech, it is the voice that points.

**Left Out**

Again, things have been, and will be, left out of this paper: the way linguistic gesture preserves characteristics of movements and music in its configurations; the way linguistic gesture works its way into representations in linguistic media and visual media. There has been no treatment of the ways in which new linguistic gestures are created. Nor has there been any treatment of the different ways linguistic gesture functions in prose and poetry, when read aloud, in discourse, or in works for theater.

**15. Musical Gesture and Linguistic Gesture**

“Music resembles language. Expressions like musical idiom and musical inflection are no metaphors. But music is not language … Whoever takes music literally as a language is led astray by it … The traditional textbook on form shows an awareness of the sentence, phrase, period, interjection, question, exclamation (or call), and parentheses;
subordinate phrases are found all over the place, voices rise and fall, and in all of this the gesture of music is borrowed from the voice, it speaks.

Theodor W. Adorno, “Music, Language, and Their Relationship in Contemporary Composing”

Speech and music share some structured sets and even some of the distinguishing components that can be drawn from those sets and linked to create acoustic configurations: While tempo is created by durations, rhythms, and proportions unfolding in movements away from and toward moments of emphasis, loudness shapes the contoured succession of pitches grouped by caesuras and silences into phrases of timbrally marked sound. But speech and music are kept apart by the components, sets, and linkages that are not shared, as well as by the functions given the configurations: Speech acquires its material, its order, its distinctions, logsics, and functions. Only by way of analogy can music take hold of the distinct characteristics of speech, of the characteristics it does not share with music.

By way of analogy, however, music shows something about speech, about linguistic gesture, that it cannot show about itself.

The Second-Nature of a Relationship

Still, this mutually transforming reflection supplied by music which contributes to the distinction of both speech and music is created within a historical context. A new musical composition cannot show something about speech that it cannot show about itself if another composition has already shown what the new one wants to show. If the new composition tried that, it would only wind up affirming what has already been shown, showing it again. The new composition has to show something else, something that has not yet been shown.

What speech cannot show about itself, and what musical compositions have already shown, together establish the historical context that faces a composer who wants by drawing on linguistic gestures to create a new musical gesture.

In the process of making an analogy, something is lost. The necessary changes have to be made. Even if music doesn’t give up anything to be like speech, it would not do to omit all restrictions. Some restrictions must be placed on musical events to preserve the characteristics of a linguistic gesture. For an intended composition, there must be some restrictions. The only question is which, and how to mark the restrictions with intent.

From all the restrictions available to him, the composer chooses those that will allow him to preserve in musical gestures the characteristics of speech required by his idea.

Some ways of preserving characteristics of linguistic gesture and some of the characteristics preserved have, as a consequence of affirmative practices, developed a power to override the composer’s intentions. The relationship between music and speech which they embody seems to have become part of music’s second-nature: They do not call attention to the differences between music and speech, but suppress attention to them, and lead to the closeness between music and speech being taken for granted.

For the composer, this second-nature presents a problem: Since the closeness seems to be there already, the composer cannot distinguish himself by putting it there.

A composer does not want to create a closeness between music and speech that exists already. That would not be creation, but mere affirmative reproduction, re-creation. A composer wants to create a closeness of relationship that without the composer’s intention would not be. So the problem of the second-nature of the relationship is one of distance. The composer has to create a distance in the articulated difference between linguistic and musical gesture so that the closeness be the one he wants, so that the closeness be one that would not just be there anyway, so that the characteristics of speech gesture preserved in the musical gesture present a relationship that appears for the first time.

Since it establishes its consistency in music, the more rigorously the musical gesture adheres to the rules stipulated by the composer, to the specifically musical logic and requirements of the chosen musical material, the more the difference is articulated between the musical gesture and the speech gesture whose characteristics it preserves, and thus, the more sharply defined is the distance and thereby the distinct closeness of the relationship. The articulated difference makes the distance.

Musical gesture is not a mere acoustic mirror of speech; it is reflective only in the most general and futile sense: the distance is created to transform what is reflected and that on which it reflects. It is not a playback. The first moment of noticing something about a configuration of speech cannot be played back.

Borrowed distinctions are characteristics transformed by the events that preserve them. At the same time, they are characteristics that transform the respondent’s understanding of the events from which they are derived and the events in which they are preserved. In a composition, borrowed characteristics become instances of mu-
tual transformation.

**Lost and Preserved**

Answers to two questions delineate the history of musical gestures related to linguistic gesture: What characteristics of speech, of linguistic gesture, can be preserved in music? Which of the characteristics that can be preserved did the composer choose to preserve?

*Both questions can apply to musical compositions that require language and those that do not.*

The first question determines what must be left out, if the composer creates a musical gesture that preserves the characteristics of a linguistic event; the second question determines what the composer chose to leave out.

In instrumental works, the treatment of musical gesture that preserves characteristics of linguistic gesture is frequently close to its treatment in works that use the voice and language. Or rather one extended period in the development of the relationship between musical gestures and speech gestures is distinguished by this kind of treatment. There are answers to the question: What characteristics of linguistic gesture did the composer choose to preserve? Within them, the history of the relationship can be found.
The Gesture of Breaking Off

The chorales of J.S. Bach’s *Saint Mathew’s Passion* preserve the characteristics of the linguistic gesture of reading something aloud. They are oriented, not to the prayer, but to the behavior of the praying person — specifically, to a group of people reading, or reciting, a text out loud. The contours of the highest placed voice preserve those that would be used by someone speaking the text.

The other three voices do not preserve this contour. Nor is the tempo of speech preserved. The tempo is that which would be used by a group of people reading or reciting together. In the highest placed voice, the placement of peaks in the contour of pitches gives emphasis to those words that would be deemed important by a person reading or reciting the prayer. Not so in all the other voices. Within the highest placed voice, each syllable is generally sung to a single pitch (three exceptions in each of the first four chorales, six in the fifth, as compared to a range from eight to eleven in the other three voices). In spite of the deviations of the other three voices, the musical gesture of the highest placed voice overrides them, and the gesture of the whole preserves that of the linguistic gesture. The final chord of the last chorale which occurs after the text has mentioned that Jesus has died, is a dominant chord without resolution and thus a musical gesture wherein the gesture of a reader is preserved who stops reading without making an end — a musical gesture which preserves the linguistic gesture of breaking off.
The Gesture of A Propulsive Sputter

In two parts of Bartolo’s song ‘The Vendetta’ in The Marriage of Figaro, Mozart has preserved the characteristics of the linguistic gesture of a propulsive sputter. The configuration is marked by a rebounding through a string of alternating pitches (in the first) and a string of repeating pitches (in the second).

The first string compresses into its rebounding pulse parts of the text that before were said separated from one another by ) and two intervals (the octave and the minor second).
The first time the text is sung, the rebound clings to two pitches; the second time, when it is repeated in its entirety, the rebounding pulse moves through a melodic sequence.

Each configuration is marked by a propulsive rebounding effect created by the repeating attacks on each pitch (two attacks per note in the first configuration, three attacks per note in the second). Each word becomes just so many pulsed syllables rebounding through the repetition of pitches in the sequence. The effect, dramatically, is that of a speaker seduced by the drive of a pulse into ignoring the way it robs what he is saying of the emphasis it requires to have an impact.

**Gesture As An Attack**

In Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, one character, as is well known, was constructed to represent the critic. Beckmesser, while marking Walter’s song, sings about how a song should be, or rather the faults he finds in Walter’s song imply what he thinks a song should be. He uses phrases that can be rendered in English as “(the song) defied the laws of metric accent,” “too short, too long, never an end,” “not one full stop, no coloratura, and not a trace of melody,” “here, the breath’s ill-managed; there, a sudden start,” “completely incomprehensible melody,” “a brew mixed from all tunes,” “faulty verse,” “clipped syllables,” “rhymes in false places,” “a patchwork song between the verses.” The text of Beckmesser’s marking ensures that what Wagner wanted to attack with the composition was in the composition, and could be recognized as the object of the attack. Wagner even went so far as to preserve — in the contour of Beckmesser’s melodic phrases — the peaks that mark the phrases with the linguistic gestures of indignation that might have been used by a critic wielding those phrases.
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36 15. Musical Gesture and Linguistic Gesture
Later in the composition, in Beckmesser’s song, Wagner has composed a musical satire of the rules and practices that Beckmesser used to judge Walter’s song. In the song, Wagner composed those linguistic gestures, those musical gestures that would show in music Wagner’s image of the affirmative practices he bitterly opposed: In the song, he composed the musical and linguistic gestures of awkward pomp and elevated clumsiness, he made gestures of the utterly predictable rhyme and the endless melodic sequence, he made a gesture of the inanely repeated ornament, and even, by way of the lute, poked at the gestures of folksy accompaniment. The commentary which would explain the faults in Beckmesser’s song marked by Sach’s tapping with the hammer, he leaves to the listener.

Perhaps to make the point unmistakeably clear, that the requirements of the composer’s idea determine what is appropriate for song, Wagner has a finale follow Beckmesser’s song that takes as its subject something which Beckmesser’s rules would utterly condemn: In the finale, the musical and linguistic gestures preserve the characteristics of a situation in which the dissemination of gossip relentlessly lashes a crowd into an uproar. The accumulation of musical and linguistic gestures contribute to the composed gesture of the whole finale: the gesture of a riot.
Musical Gesture and Linguistic Gesture
Musical Gesture and Linguistic Gesture
Musical Gesture and Linguistic Gesture
The Gesture of Calling a Name

In the first of the *Chanson Madecasses*, Ravel composed musical gestures that mark the passing of time with the repeated calling of a name.

Each time the name returns, the musical gesture preserves the characteristics of another linguistic gesture: the first is simply that of saying a word, and then, in succession, the linguistic gesture of an impatient sigh, of something said in affectionate homage, of exasperating expectation, of a tenderly asked question, of a directed address, and of an anticipating reflection.

The Gesture of a Grumbling Pout

In the opening part of *L’Enfant et les Sortileges*, Ravel creates a musical gesture that preserves characteristics of both a linguistic gesture and another musical gesture, and thereby articulates in music an ironic critique of exoticism. The composition begins with a deliberately simple tune, a fake oriental tune. It is of the sort that any listener of his day would have recognized and understood as a reference to the music of places considered to have an exotic charm.
placid song does this pseudo-exotic music introduce? The pouting grumbling of a boy who does not want to do his lessons, a boy who would rather go for a walk, eat up all the cakes, and pull the cat’s tail. The linguistic gesture of the grumbling pout is preserved in the musical gesture of the fake exotic tune. Through the coupling of the musical gesture with the preserved characteristics of the linguistic gesture, Ravel brings the listener into a confrontation with the associations attached to music considered exotic.
Later in the composition, in the Clock’s song, Ravel preserves some characteristics of the linguistic and musical gestures of the pop singer and of the pop song. The clock’s predicament is paralleled to that of the music which clings to its beat, unable to tear itself away for long from the pressing task of pounding out the beat. The Clock complains that since the boy has broken it, it can do nothing but go off and again — a comment on the gestures of the pop music. Through his choice of musical gesture, Ravel allows the text to become a commentary, not only on the Clock’s own condition, but also on the condition of the music whose gestures house the singing of the text.
16. Movement, Speech and Musical Gesture

In discourse, movement gestures and linguistic gestures interact. They modify one another, jointly establishing limits on the interpretations available to a respondent. Theater makes a medium of the interactions of this duo. Opera introduces music into the interaction — both in the form of the singing voice and in the form of instrumental music — and makes a medium of the interacting trio. Thus, there is a difference between a theatrical gesture and an operatic gesture.

They preserve characteristics that come from events in other media in two distinct media: A theatrical gesture preserves characteristics of events from other media in a medium that emphasizes relationships between movement and speech; an operatic gesture preserves characteristics of events from other media in a medium that emphasizes relationships between movement, speech, and music. Both the theatrical gesture and the operatic gesture can loan distinctions to musical gesture.

In some musical contexts, the listener detects a counterpoint of gesture in the music that is analog to the counterpoint created between speech and movement gestures. A movement gesture, or a sequence of movement gestures that modify one another, sometimes prepares the field of significance for an utterance that follows — limiting it in advance. Sometimes a movement gesture, retroactively, shifts the significance of something that’s just been said — it does not take back meanings but takes away some interpretations of what came before it. Linguistic gesture also has its ways of modifying the significance of movement gestures which preceded the utterance and of preparing the field of significance for movement gestures, or a sequence of movement gestures, which follow the utterance.

Both linguistic and movement gestures can interrupt one another, attaching limits to the significance that continues to unfold as the interrupted gesture completes itself.

17. Musical Gesture and Musical Gesture

A composer may create a new musical gesture by preserving some characteristics of an existing gesture in a new musical configuration. In this case, the listener’s interpretations are limited by distinctions on loan from another musical event.

The new musical gesture elicits a memory that it doesn’t match. The memory elicited is not only, if necessarily at least to some extent, the memory of an event in movement or in speech triggered by the presence of its preserved characteristics (at some time it became a musical gesture by preserving characteristics of speech or movement). It must also carry some preserved trace of the way something happens in a musical event.

18. Musical Gesture, Now

Gesture emerges between source and decay. In music, gesture plays its roles before the desire for detail has arisen and after the desire has been turned into a fulfillment: The sources of gesture are to be sought in the time before it can play any role at all; its decay can be found in the time in which it no longer seems to play any role whatsoever.

Between source and decay, a gesture has its history, and its history is interconnected with the history of response. Until it decays, a gesture helps the composer to elicit desired and prevent undesired responses.

In the historical development of the systems of tonality and periodic rhythm, some gestures came to seem like they belonged to the system, that is, they did not have to be created by the composer. Not only these systems, but the gestures that had been created in the systems, reached their point of decay.

The idea of parameters was introduced to composition in an attempt to construct a framework in which the composer could take decisions. The framework was set up so that composers could avoid creating structures that were helplessly delivered to tonality and periodicity and the gestures which these two bad made their own.

The parametric approach separated musical events into parameters for the purpose of taking decisions. The most powerful attack directed at this deliberately stipulated approach to decision-taking was not an attack on the approach but an attack on an argument that had been attached to the approach. This attack was based on the readily-observable fact that, in a performance, one parameter could never be separated from any of the other parameters. The parametric approach, an approach developed to organize the context in which the composer made decisions, was attacked as if it had been developed to describe the results generated by the decisions taken, as if it had argued that parameters were perceptual facts that were separated from one another.

Two tendencies developed in the works of composers who adopted the parametric approach, by composers...
who shared the desire to leave tonality and periodicity: one tendency, roughly, became an attempt to escape all gesture, and the other became an attempt to create new gestures, non-affirmative gestures. Both of these tendencies emerged in opposition to the overwhelmingly dominant tendency then, and ever more so now, namely, that of affirming what has already been created. Those who attempted to create new gestures, by using the parametric approach to composition, were accused by composers of the other tendency, of abandoning tonality and periodicity, but not its gestures. The only way out, they accusingly proposed, was to eliminate gesture.

The attempt to escape a history of response, that is, the attempt to eliminate gesture, wound up affirming whatever prevented response, and thus, left the making of the history of response, insofar as this was connected with the history of gesture, to those who would eliminate its historical aspect through affirmative practices that are limited to reproduction. The impasse reached by composers who neither wanted to eliminate gestures, nor reproduce them, was concerned with the problem of creating gestures that would limit the response in an unprecedented way while maintaining the parametric approach — an approach designed to avoid tonality, periodicity and their gestures but not to create intended gestures. With regard to gesture, the impasse implies the necessity of shift from one framework in which decisions are taken to another: a shift from a concentration on single parameters to a concentration on configurations.

An approach which organizes the context in which the composer takes decisions that bear on configurations, takes gesture to be part of the listener’s understanding response and not a mere perceptual fact. I am not joining the attack on parametric approach. It was not insufficient, but sufficient. It made no provisions for treating configurations, and thus, was designed to help avoid the gestures of tonality and periodicity, but not to help create desired gestures. If an approach would take the parametric approach as one of its points of departure, but would make the dynamics of configuration the point of orientation of the decision-taking process, this might be one way out of the impasse in which the parametric approach finds itself, a way that does force a return to the gestures of tonality and periodicity, gestures that by now have only contempt for the composer. The conscious and deliberate creation of configurations, of a hybrid medium that preserves distinctions on loan, would become part of the socially concerned behavior of the composer who refuses to affirm things the way they are, such a shift of approach would allow the composer to stand in direct opposition to all attempts to limit the power of gesture to the affirmation of things the way they are, and would, at the same time, allow the composer to oppose all attempts that would rather eliminate gesture than see its power contribute to change.

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MARK SULLIVAN

46

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