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Two Forms of Gesture: Notes on Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin

ANDREW BENJAMIN
(Monash University)
andrew.benjamin@monash.edu

Abstract. The paper both connects and disassociates the work of Walter Benjamin and Aby Warburg. There are two interrelated undertakings. The first involves the relationship between philosophy and art history and thus how art history figures within the philosophical. The second pertains to the status of the image. Part of the argument to be advanced is that an engagement with philosophical approach to art history yields a concern with the image in which it is the image's material presence that proves decisive. Indeed, it is by insisting on the object's materiality that it then becomes possible to locate the effective presence of the gesture as integral to the work of art. The contention is that gesture is the intersection of art's material presence and the concerns of meaning. The paper develops via an engagement with works by Edgar Degas and Luca Signorelli.

Key words. Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, Edgar Degas, Luca Signorelli, Gesture.

1.

The concerns of gesture open a setting in which both art history and philosophy are able to figure. These notes are situated within that setting¹. They are part of a process of giving a philosophical account of gesture². The specific project here of linking Walter Benjamin and

¹ This paper comprises elements taken from the first two lectures in a seminar held at Kingston University in the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy between September-December 2016. I wish to thank Professors Helen Hills (University of York) and Christopher Wood (New York University) for their comments on an earlier version. A further element of the seminar, on Sophocles' *Elektra*, will appear in Benjamin (2017).

² Central to the overall project is the treatment of gesture in the work of Giorgio Agamben and Walter Benjamin. In regards to Agamben his two main accounts occur in the texts *Kommerell, or on Gesture*, in Agamben (1999); *Notes on Gesture*, in Agamben (2000); *Nymphs*, in Agamben (2013). There is

Aby Warburg – a project that remains open – is orientated by two interrelated undertakings. The first involves the relationship between philosophy and art history and thus how art history figures within the philosophical³. The second pertains to the status of the image. Part of the argument to be advanced is that an engagement with the first – or rather a specific form of engagement with a philosophical approach to art history – yields a concern with the image in which it is the image’s material presence that proves decisive. Indeed, it is by insisting on the object’s materiality that it then becomes possible to locate the effective presence of the gesture as integral to the work of art. The contention is that gesture is the intersection of art’s material presence and the concerns of meaning. While the gesture can be understood as the line of colour, it is equally the case that the gesture involves bodily presence. Not the body as an abstraction but the body as that which is given within the continuity of its own self-presentation. Moreover, the significance of the concept of gesture is that it allows for the body as produced by art’s work, which is the presence of the body as the *after-effect* of the work of art, to be differentiated from the presence of the body within other domains. (Work here is limited to painting. However, painting does not delimit the domain of art’s work). It is the differentiation between the body within the work of art and other bodies that allows comparisons to be productive. Difference is only productive when maintained rather than effaced (thus where difference has both an established and insistent quality).

also an important discussion of Varro in relation to gesture in his *Opus Dei*: see Agamben (2014). The argumentation that informs this paper will serve as the basis of a critical response to Agamben and to his interpretation of Aby Warburg. This will appear as part of my: *Empathy and Gesture, Seeing Seeing: Warburg in La cappella Sasseti* (Forthcoming).

³ There have been many investigations of the relationship between Walter Benjamin and Aby Warburg. See in particular Rampley (2000), Didi-Huberman (2002), Johnson (2016). For an investigation of the link between Benjamin’s work and art history see the papers collected in Careri and Didi-Huberman (2015).

Philosophy’s relation to art history is not just the relation between two domains of inquiry. Rather the concern is to think the term *history* with the formulation *art history* as a philosophical topos in the first instant and then, in the second, to try and think art and thus art’s self presence as art also as a philosophical topos rather than as a historical or sociological one. This means allowing both of these terms – “history”, “sociology” – their own register, whilst holding them apart from the philosophical. What continues to endure is the problem of what is at stake in thinking art’s history philosophically. Integral to this project are works from the history of art. (Note again the project here is not just thinking art philosophically, which is the inevitable Hegelian legacy, but art’s history philosophically). Once there is a fracturing of time that displaces the insistence of and on chronology, and this is a position that arises, at least at the outset, as much within the work of Aby Warburg as it does Walter Benjamin, then there is no need to hold to a philosophical endeavour that would be delimited by and thus seek to fetishize the contemporary and its works. Indeed, the word “contemporary” would then begin to lose its explanatory force if it were identified with a single chronological marker. In regards to the relationship between the image and time and thus the project of thinking art history as a philosophical topos a direction is suggested by the following position advanced by Benjamin. In Thesis V from *The Concept of History* the relationship between historical time and the image is formulated in terms that give rise to a specific task:

For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably (Benjamin [2010]: 390-391).

At work here is the insistence of the past and thus a conception of the “past” as integral to the present’s constitution. The past becomes a condition of the present; reciprocally, of course, the present is defined as implicated in its own past. While this opens up the question of time such that it can be reconfigured in terms of a relation between the

past and the present as constitutive of the present – the naturalization of historical time, and by extension philosophical naturalism, are undone in advance – what still has to be addressed is the quality of the image when this image can be identified with the work of art⁴.

If there is a philosophical point of orientation that allows the particularity of the image as the work of art to be developed then, while it is not directly Hegelian if that were to mean that the letter of Hegel's position had to be followed in terms of examples or the detail of argumentation, it is nonetheless still Hegel's. Note the following claim made at the beginning of his *Lectures on Fine Art*:

What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment but at the same time [zugleich] our judgment [Urteil] also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art [Inhalt], and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation [Darstellungsmittel des Kunstwerks], and the appropriateness or inappropriateness [Angemessenheit und Unangemessenheit] of both to one another. The philosophy of art is therefore a greater need [Bedürfnis] in our day than it was in days when art by itself as art yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is (Hegel, Vol. II [1998]: 25).

What is significant about Hegel's formulation is not just the addition of judgement [*Urteil*] to the presence of what he describes in a way that is clearly meant to recall Kant as «immediate enjoyment», it is rather that the move to judgment entails the addition of criteria of judgment. (There cannot be one without the other). This, the argument will be, is a major point. Criteria of judgment are not there as an addition made uniquely by Hegel, indeed it might be argued that the pres-

⁴ While it is always possible to conceive of the “image” in its differentiation from the work of art, the history of the image as evidenced terminologically cannot be usefully disassociated from the history of art. The philosophical question therefore concerns understanding this particular nexus. For an important overview of the concerns central to this project see the texts in Alloa (2010).

ence of criteria of judgement becomes an instance of the location of evaluation within any thinking of the image that is delimited as being the work of art. Hegel's formulation is precise. They are not a mere supplement to pleasure. There is a specific thinking of those criteria. It pertains to what is described in terms of «appropriateness or inappropriateness [*Angemessenheit und Unangemessenheit*]»⁵. What is at stake here is a relation. Before pursuing this particular inscription of criterion of judgment it might be added, if only in passing, that Kant's attempt to separate enjoyment from judgment could be understood as the exception. Indeed, it might be conjectured further that the history of the image has always involved the attempt to link, perhaps to interarticulate, the image's presence with coterminous criteria of judgment. (While the content of those criteria may vary and the examples used to sustain them may be radically distinct, as an abstract immanent condition the presence of those conditions accompanies any sustained thinking of the image).

Before pursuing this point the other element of Hegel's formulation that will be central to this undertaking also needs to be noted. It is essential

⁵ A clear instance of what can be described as the conception of philosophical criticism – the thinking of art – can be located in Hegel's evaluation of Guido Renni's *Assumption of Mary*. For Hegel in this work what he identifies earlier in the *Lectures* as «mannerism» is particularized. Here it is located in the position of the eyes. She looks down. Hegel writes the following: «In Guido Reni, for instance, it has become a mannerism of his to give his figures this look and raising of the eyes. His *Assumption of Mary*, in the Munich gallery, for example, has won the highest fame from friends and connoisseurs of art, and certainly it has a supreme effect in the lofty glory of the transfiguration, the immersion and dissolving of the soul in heaven, and in the entire attitude of a figure hovering aloft in heaven, as well as in the clarity and beauty of the colour. Nevertheless I find it less satisfactory for Mary [*aber ich finde es für Maria dennoch angemessener*] than when she is portrayed in her present love and bliss as she has her eye on her child. The longing and striving in her look towards heaven borders too nearly on modern sentimentalism [*die Sehnsucht, das Streben, jener Blick gen Himmel streifen nahe an die modern Empfindsamkeit heran*]» (Hegel, Vol. I[1998]: 57-59).

to underscore that Hegel is not just concerned with criteria of evaluation or judgment. Of equal centrality is the work's presentation and then the work's «content [*Inhalt*]». That presentation, the process that is the content's presentation, is named by Hegel as «the work of art's means of presentation [*Darstellungsmittel des Kuntswerks*]» and as a result what is brought to the fore is the necessity of holding to the work as a material object whose objectivity can be redescribed in terms of the workful nature of materials. The «mittel» marks the ineliminability of material and thus materiality. The material is that through which or in terms of which presentation occurs. Emphasizing the centrality of materiality indicates, and this is fundamental to the force of Hegel's position, that there cannot be mere presentation as though all that mattered was the presence of content which would then entail that content could be held apart from its means of presentation. They are held apart in order to allow their relation to be a site of activity and a locus of judgment. An account of presentation demands that attention be paid to the «means» or *medium*. Nor equally, if Hegel's formulation were allowed to sustain the force of its original formulation, can there then be an effacing of those «means». Such a possibility is there, by implication in Kant. It inheres in the formulation of a response to the art work' in terms of the «immediate». Kant in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* when identifying the particularity of the subjective representation of the purposiveness of an object argues that it depends upon the «immediate pleasure in the form of the object in mere reflection» (Kant [2000]: 78). This is the position that reduces the object to that which is given within, and only within, a structure of pleasure. Hence it comprises the position against which Hegel is writing. Pleasure is premised on the obviation of thought as a necessary form of mediation. Hence it is premised on an impossibility. Immediacy is not just the refusal of mediation. As significantly, it is the refusal of the possibility of attributing a position within a philosophical thinking of the work of art to the *means* or the *medium* [*mittel*] as that through which, or as which, art stag-

es its own project (and thus as that within which thinking occurs. In other words, form is always informed). From Hegel's perspective, and thus *pace* Kant, content's presentation has to be thought in relation to the «means» or «medium [*mittel*]» that is art's presentation.

A number of elements are in play here. They account for the significance of Hegel's formulation. In the first instance, there is the centrality of «means» or «*medium*» as the presentation of content. Remembering that «content [*Inhalt*]» is Hegel's actual term. Then, secondly, there is the interconnection of that staging with the presence of explicit or implicit criteria of judgment. The point has already been made that these criteria need to be understood as a structural presence insofar as they are work's abstract grounds of comprehensibility; i.e. its presence as a locus of thought. Determined content and thus the specific occur within this setting. Hegel's use of a formulation that involves the «appropriate» and the «inappropriate» becomes his version of naming that content and thus giving a specific determination to those criteria. Hegel is of course not the only thinker that accords a form of recognition to the material. In the *Eikones* [*Imagines*] of Philostratus (190 CE) art's materiality is addressed in terms of its «plasticity». However, plasticity cannot be understood as an end in itself. Indeed, Philostratus distinguishes between all the different «plastic arts» in terms of their relation to specific forms of material. Painting, as a plastic art, for Philostratus, works «from colour (ἐκ χρωμάτων)» (Philostratus [1931]: 1.17). Colour therefore is that through which content is presented. Equally, that presentation is regulated by the way in which *ekphrasis* as a mode of presentation is understood and yields regulative criteria in advance. Here a place within the history of the image is again defined in terms of the recognition of the workful yet regulated nature of the work's material presence.

There is a specific conclusion that can be drawn here. Namely, that if all that were taken to be central is art's presentation of the body's movement – the movement of the body taken as an end in itself – then, as a consequence, what fails to be

thought is the interplay of presentation understood as a complex of relations in which both the material and the ideational figure. Once this complex is granted priority then the conjecture is always going to be that gesture is not just a form of presentation. On the contrary, gesture cannot be separated from its *Darstellungsmittel* and that *mittel* is always located within a complex network of signification that is bound up with criteria of judgment (the latter as an immanent condition and thus as a continual reference to the ineliminability of ideational content). It is that content that is integral to what might be described as any one art work's ineliminable potential to be judged – its *judgeability*. The work, any one work, is a network and thus it is always more than one. While a network, it is not closed. On the contrary, it is in a continual state of construction and thus always open to radical reconstruction. The static and the given cede their place to both relationality and potentiality. (This is the setting in which a work's afterlife can be located). As a result the singular – be it either the single gesture or the single work – only ever occurs within a network and thus a singularity is only ever the *after-effect* of the discontinuous processes of *coming-into-relation*. The singular is always secondary. A relation precedes it. In other words, what always obtains is relationality as an original condition. Hence there is an original relationality⁶.

2.

In order to begin with gesture, it should be clear that such a beginning means that gesture, whilst awaiting definition, is always more than the movement of hands, or the movement of the body. The question to be addressed, were this to be accepted as a point of departure, pertains to

this “more”. How is this “more” to be understood? While there is always that which is there in excess of the body's own movement – an excess located within the interplay of the ideational and the material, what can be described as the work's *mat-tering* – opening gesture up to a set of considerations delimited by the “more” will turn principally around two works of art (though each work has its own setting, i.e. context on the one hand, and relations both present and to come, on the other). As a result the “more” is the excess which allows a work's material presence not be reduced to its empirical presence. Empiricism cannot account for a work's intrinsic conceptuality and thus its capacity to be judged. Centrality will be given here to works in which what figures – though this description is far from adequate – is the body, or more exactly the body's movement. The first is a painting by Degas, *Dancer adjusting the strap of her bodice* (Figure 1). The second is a work by

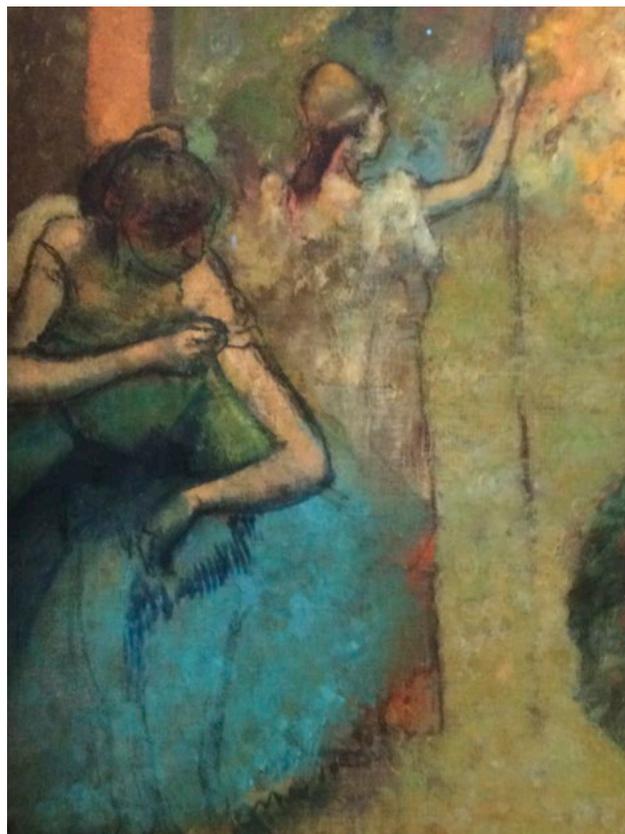


Figure 1

⁶ The concept is to think of the anoriginal as an irreducible relation that pertains originally. The anoriginal marks a sense of relationality that is always the site of a founding irreducibility. For the development of this position as general philosophical argument see Benjamin (1993), (2015), (2015a).



Figure 2

Luca Signorelli, *Comunione degli Apostoli*, currently located in Cortona (Figure 2)⁷.

While there is always historical specificity, if historical time is identified with chronology, such an insistence can be put to one side once what matters is the body's presentation. Though there is the related question of how the *mattering* of the body is itself to be understood⁸. The latter question is one that recognises that what is at stake is the work of art and thus that the body's presentation in art is an effect of the work of materials. Consistent with what has already been suggested the argument is always going to be that there is never just the body within the work of art. While it will be essential to continue to return to this

⁷ For a discussion of this work within the context of Signorelli's work as a whole see Henry (2012): 270-75. Jonathan B. Riess has written an important study of the image of the Jew in Signorelli's Orvieto Frescoes. What is significant is the link between direct and indirect depictions of the Christian presence in relation to the Jewish one. See Riess (1995).

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the concept of *mattering* see Benjamin (2015a).

position, what has to be noted is the continuity of art not just as a question but also equally as the locus of the body. Even though the paintings and drawings may be of bodies that dance and sing, thus they are presentations of the body as specific and already situated forms of movement, it remains the case that the inscription of the body, the body's presentation, is within, and as, the work of art. The body has to resist that mode of abstraction that undoes the particularity of *mattering*. Here, as an opening, the point of departure is provided by works by Degas. Art's work becomes therefore that which is present and which presents itself through the means proper to it. The point remains; propriety here is as much material as it is ideational. Their interplay is the body figuring; again its *mattering*.

To begin therefore: the history of gesture begins with the body. In Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* gesture is described as that which can convey meaning «without the hold of words». (The importance of the history of rhetoric is that integral to it is a clear attempt to define the body as a locus of meaning). The passage cited below concerning Demosthenes further reinforces the relationship between the body and gesture:

*Decorum [...] comes from gesture and movement [Decor (...) a gestu atque motu venit]. This why Demosthenes used to plan his performance in front of a big mirror, despite the fact that the bright surface reverses the image, he had complete trust in his own eyes' ability to tell him what effect he was making*⁹.

There are a number of significant elements in this formulation, and it should be remembered that it is a formulation that is fundamental to the history of rhetoric in terms of the way that «deco-

⁹ Quintilian (2001): 11.3.68. For a general account of the history of Roman gesture see Aldrete (1999). For a more precise analysis of Quintilian and his relation to the writings of Cicero on the same topic see Hall (May 2004). For an important discussion of the relationship between decorum and limits that, while engaging Quintilian's work, ranges more widely, see Platt (2014).

rum» is linked to «gesture and movement» such that it is impossible, as will be suggested, to extricate gesture from either a positive or negative relation to decorum. The next interpretive point that needs to be introduced is the following: Precisely because the media differ there cannot be a direct movement between works on rhetoric, whose locus of concern is the role of the body within speech making and the art of persuasion on the one hand, and the work of art as a material presence on the other. The language and terminology of gesture is central to the former and hence the relation between rhetoric and the work of art can be mutually informative to the extent that what is maintained is a complementarity of distance. In the rush to attribute a connection between the history of rhetoric and the history of art it may be that the defining material differences are effaced. The exigency of distance is essential in order to maintain the particularity of art's work as a locus of thought.

It is important that what is at work in this beginning, namely tracing gesture's presence within the history of rhetoric, is acknowledged. Quintilian's formulation concerning gesture yields a question: What does Demosthenes see when he looks into the mirror? Staring whilst rendered mute by a mouthful of pebbles. Prior to engaging with this question, it needs to be noted that the reception of Demosthenes was equivocal. Plutarch, for example, was highly critical (Plutarch [1919]). Quintilian however described him as amongst the best of all («inter omnis unus excellat»). What is significant in Quintilian's formulation is that what Demosthenes sees in the mirror, and this despite a form of inversion, is not just his body. There is also the capacity to see in the body's movement the effect that he wished to make. It is not just that the body is a supplement to meaning. More emphatically, it is the body and the body's movement that is the locus of meaning. What the eye sees is the body; what is felt is the body's own. One possible conjecture might be therefore that the body is all that appears and thus could be taken as an end itself. This is however the point of contestation. Since were this to be the case, were

the body able to function as an end in itself, then meaning comes to be coterminous with the body's movement because movement would have a singular quality. What is both seen and felt would be one. More significantly, it would need to be one. The presupposition there would be that both the movement and its observations would be singular. Moreover, that singularity would be presupposed if the response were to be explicated in terms of empathy.

In fact, Demosthenes was after an accord between word and body. And yet, what continues to be there is not just the question of the extent to which that movement can be taken as an end itself structured in terms of a singular presence enjoining a singular response, where the latter could be understood in terms of empathy, rather what becomes important once a turn is made to Degas or Signorelli, and thus by extension art works, is the presence of a radically different body. It is already clear that Demosthenes' body had to be the site of specific meanings and not meaning *as such*. What Quintilian recognizes is the informed nature of Demosthenes' body. It was already both itself and a site meaning. (Demosthenes, it might be conjectured, already knew this).

Demosthenes' project, as reported by Quintilian, was situated in relation to a mirror. On one level the mirror is art's phantasy; a phantasy exposed as such and then undone in advance by the necessity of meaning – what would have been reflection – occurring as an *after-effect* of the work of materials. Materials in the place of the now suspended set of possibilities, the phantasy of pure reflection, opened as much by the mirror as it does by mirroring. As though Butades' daughter had not really existed, Alberti's grounding of the inception of art in the figure of Narcissus becomes a fundamental instance of the way mirroring – one with its own set of material possibilities – plays a productive role¹⁰. And yet, there is no real sense

¹⁰ Alberti argues that Narcissus' gaze is integral to the origin of painting. In his *De Pictura* he writes the following: «Quid est enim aliud pingere qua arte superficiem illam fontis amplecti? (What therefore is painting if not to

of unanimity in regards to how reflection is to be understood. Reflection pluralizes. Rather than enjoining a structure of simultaneity it may be understood as a process of pluralization. Medea stands before the mirror¹¹. As she stands, she acts. Her body has a doubled presence. A doubling provided by a «mirror». Euripides writes that she «arranged her hair in a bright mirror, smiling at the lifeless [ἄψυχον] image of her body» (Euripides [1994]: 1162). What is reflected has become inanimate. This is the mirror's other possibility. Nonetheless, in both instances the body is now the produced *after-effect*. The body, though it is always bodies, Medea is not Narcissus, neither is she Demosthenes, are produced. The body as a figure within the history of both rhetoric and writing on art is a pluralized site. The excess, that which is there within gesture, there holding the gesture (thus the body) apart from any reduction to a singular site, indicates not only that the form, the gesture or the body as form, is always informed, it is equally the case that what the informed will acquire has a different form of presentation (the latter is, of course, Hegel's *Darstellungsmittel des Kuntswerks*) in the case of writing as opposed to art. The sensitivity within writing to colour, which is apparent in thinkers as diverse as Philostratus and Hegel, is of course sensitivity to the way that art works in its differentiation from writing. This is an instance of the differences that are essential to maintain. The play of difference brings with it an attendant risk. The differences are ground in material possibility. All of which would become ineffective were there any simple identification with the language and thought of rhetoric with art's work. The complementarity of distance needs to endure.

3.

If there were a way of locating the importance of the writings of Aby Warburg and Walter Ben-

embrace with art the surface of a fountain?)» (1.26). See Grayson (1972).

¹¹ On the more general question of mirroring in works of art see Benjamin (1993a): 4-62.

jamin within the larger concern of approaching art's history as a domain of philosophical inquiry it occurs – at least at the outset – at the precise point at which singularity and empathy as providing a way into art's work breaks down. That break arises once it can be argued that the produced nature of any singularity precludes the possibility of empathy being anything other than an arbitrary and thus inherently partisan response that while not predicated upon it, nonetheless remains indifferent to art's material presence and thus fails to think gesture's presentation as an *after-effect*.

In looking at the nature of the connection between antique imagery and Botticelli's paintings *Birth of Venus* and *Spring* Warburg argues that:

It is possible to trace, step by step, how the artist and their "advisers" recognized "the antique" as a model that demanded intensification of outward movement [äussere Bewegung] and how they turned to antique sources whenever accessory forms – those of garments and hair – were to be represented in motion [bewegten Beiwerks] (Warburg [1999]:89; [2010]: 39).

Note that what is at stake here is the presence of a «model» as a way of understanding movement; the presence of the moving body as the work of art. What reappears is the movement of the body and thus what is effected by the body's movement. Moving between antique and Renaissance images there is a type of affinity, of accord, a similarity of movement even though there could be a clash or divergence on the level of meaning. Edgar Wind in addressing this phenomenon notes that on the Donatello pulpit in the *Basilica di San Lorenzo* in Florence «the pagan figure of the dancing maenad [...] is transformed into a Mary Magdalene moaning under the Cross». Again, in Wind's formulation, what is involved here is a set up in which «similar gestures can assume opposite meanings» (Wind [July 1937]: 70-71)¹². This is a

¹² Equally, of course, Donatello created a work that is now known as the *Penitent Magdalene* (1457). See Bernay and Rafanelli (2015): 72, who describe the figure under the cross in the following terms: «a once beautiful woman

possibility of considerable significance. Two questions emerge here. Firstly, how is this transformation and thus the presence of «opposite meanings» to be understood? Secondly, and clearly relatedly, there is the question of the relationship between meaning (taken as both a singular and plural occurrence) and, to use Warburg's formulation, «motion». Wind cites, as noted, the Donatello pulpit, a work to which Warburg has already alluded¹³. Warburg argues that in works such as these, «Italian sculpture rediscovered the ancient *pathosformel* of the language of gestures [*die antiken Pathosformeln der Gebärdensprache wiederentdeckte*]» (Warburg [2010]: 282). Attention to the work's details makes it clear that her upturned arms have the effect of eroticising her body. Attention is drawn, as a result and as integral to the work's work, to the freedom of her breasts beneath her tunic. The play of light upon the work's surface facilitated by its presence as a relief underpins these possibilities. Indeed, it is possible to go further and argue that were it not for the way that light works upon the surface, thus were it not for the construction of the surface as a relief, the body's eroticisation would not have occurred. This is the work's *mattering*. In other words, it is not the presence of the gesture, nor just the informing of form, that are central. That presence needs to be reformulated. The gesture, which is also the work of materials, sustains both her presence as Mary Magdalene though equally and at the same time her presence as an erotic figure¹⁴. The body is

ravaged by her stay in the wilderness, veiled only in her long hair, nearly consumed by her own love of Christ».

¹³ For a more general interpretation of the sources for the pulpits, one that does not interpret them in terms of «the inspiration of antiquity», see Lavin (March 1959). For an interpretation of the figures that concurs with Wind in relation to Mary Magdalene but which interprets the scenes more generally in terms of the history of theatrical staging see Verdon (1986).

¹⁴ There are of course accounts of the presence of the ancient forms of figuration within Renaissance works. The face becomes more complex when it is argued that what has an after life is the ancient theatrical mask rather than a literal human figure. To this end see, for example, the argument made by Moshe Barash in relation to the

doubled. There is a complex interrelation in which one presence marks the other. This is an instance of what will continue to be developed as the doubling of gesture. Though a saintly figure the use of the «antique» model linked her directly to a follower of Dionysus. Her ecstatic presence can always resist balance. The erotic, as an inescapable possibility, inescapable as it could always have been seen, redefines her undecidability. Its potentiality is sustained. It is, of course, an undecidability that has as much an effect on the status (thus deployment) of the historical, as it works to reinforce the point noted above that there is always more than just the movement of the body. The presence of the ecstatic here cannot be singular. Hence allowing empathy to structure any response would have been undone from the start. Here it is important to note that for Warburg empathy depends upon the accuracy of Vischer's account of both the subject and the object being «a unity in multiplicity [*eine Einheit in Vielheit*]». Their relationship and thus movement between them depends upon this designation. Note the following description of the «soul» and its relation to the object:

*If the soul feels something thereby, namely, desire, aesthetic desire, it can only be because the soul itself, with its nerves and entire body, is a unity in multiplicity and it rediscovers itself where it finds the same [*eine Einheit in Vielheit ist und sich da wiederfindet, wo sie solche findet*] (Vischer [2015]: 7:4, 417-448).*

To the extent that doubling can be maintained and that doubling resists its reduction to a unity, even to a unity within a unified polarity, empathy's very condition of possibility would no longer obtain. In the *Fragment on the Nympha*, despite the complexity of both analytic discussion and biographical intrusion, the nymph is described as the one who «brought life and movement into

Laocoön: «Facial configuration of the faces in the Laocoön can be traced back to masks. Faces in this work and in them are all “animated tragic masks”. The face of the *Laocoön* becomes the model of the suffering Christ» (Barash (1991): 64).

another wise calm representation [*die Leben und Bewegung brachte, in sonst ruhige Vorstellung*]» (Warburg [2010]: 202)¹⁵. While she remains essentially at odds with her context – Warburg’s question endures: «Is this strangely delicate plant really rooted in the sober Florentine soil?» – her presence does not unbalance the given (Agamben [2010]: 203). On the contrary, it allows the *Nachleben der Antike* to account for different modalities of balance; modalities to which that «afterlife» both contributes and sustains. The nymph could never be an «indiscernible thing», as Agamben has it, precisely because the movement that she stages is itself informed and that her gestures are themselves only meaningful in their relation of non-relation to the gestures that accompanies her (Agamben [2013]). Vibrancy and calm are held together in their differences. One working with the other: again this would be the doubling of gesture. Ghirlandaio’s painting of the servant girl (as nymph) in the fresco *Birth of the Baptist* in Tornabuoni Chapel is positioned and meaningful because of the play of informed forces that hold her in opposition to the three other women directly to her left. (It might even be argued as a result that movement cannot be thought as singular). Wind will argue that «the most violent conflicts are reconciled» giving rise to what he called, in tune with Warburg, «a psychology of equilibrium [*Ausgleichspsychologie*]», and which Warburg identifies as *plastische Ausgleichformel* (plastic formulae of balance/reconciliation). To which there is a response; one that accepts the viability of their insights. The response has to concede that there is indeed a doubling. In turn this means, as a consequence, that any reconciliation is a created singularity, which, even if it pertained, would always be tenuous¹⁶. Reconciliation can be posited. Its success is always another question. A doubled presence would always endure, marking the singular from the start. Hence, again, the question returns: With what – with what singularity, the singu-

larity of art’s work – would empathy have ever occurred? The importance of this question can be found in the way the relation between subject and object – viewer and viewed – is presented by Warburg in terms of empathy.

Warburg’s formulation concerning both a rediscovery and then a form of incorporation can be further examined by returning to the opening of Quintilian’s formulation. To recall the line, Quintilian wrote: «Decorum [...] comes from gesture and movement [*Decor (...) a gestu atque motu venit*]». The point that has to be noted at the outset is that «decorum» results from their presence. What this means of course is that «decorum» is enacted. Which is to say that «decorum» is there within the «gesture and the movement». Even if in the end one absorbs the other. Gestures move, and movement figures as gesture. In other words, *decorum* is not there as an additional quality, as though there were gestures and then there was decorum. This recalls, of course, what is inherent in Hegel’s arguments concerning the «appropriate» and the «inappropriate». Value is always already at work. Criteria of judgment are inscribed from the start even if they are subject to revision. The point that is implicit in Quintilian’s formulation is far more emphatic. The gestures and the movement are not secondary. Hence there is an already present set of connections between «decorum» and «gesture and movement». As will be seen it is these connections that have to be pursued. Hence a return needs to be made both to the detail of Quintilian’s formulation and what is at work in the direct reference to Demosthenes.

The insistence of the body occurs later in the same section of Quintilian’s text when the hands are described as «the common language [*communis sermo*] of the human race»¹⁷. Within the common there are two type of gesture. The first are described as the «natural voicing of words», while the second is where «things [*res*] are signified by imitation [*imitatione*]». In both instances what is at stake are forms of expression or presentation in which, even though movement itself

¹⁵ On the problem of the particularity of nymphs and maenads in the context of Greek art see, Hedreen (1994).

¹⁶ See Wind (1993). See also Warburg (1999): 262.

¹⁷ Quintilian (2001): 11.3.87.

is the signifying element, there cannot be just movement. The question of limitations and thus the interplay of the «appropriate» and the «inappropriate», to recall Hegel, all need to be pursued. There is an interesting problem insofar as the singular status that informs Quintilian and which is in part repeated by Hegel, is that which is called into question by the impossibility of the singular gesture engendering an empathetic response. (The impossibility of the singular renders such a response merely putative).

Note the problems identified by a specific modality of bodily movement; i.e. the use of a «shrug» or the hunching of the shoulders. Quintilian wrote:

Rarely is it becoming [decens] to shrug or hunch the shoulders because this shortens the neck and produces a gesture [gestem] of humiliation or servility, because people use it when they are pretending to flatter [adulationis], admire or fear¹⁸.

Not only does a passage of this nature indicate that there cannot be such an action – or even a set of actions – that warrants, or allows for the description of gesture *as such*. (The use of the term «servility» betrays the absence of either neutrality or singularity, hence «servility» names the original inscription of value). What can be noted therefore in the use of the terminology of «decorum» or the «becoming» is what has already been identified in terms of criteria of judgment. Here the «shrug» «produces a gesture» that has to be thought as indecorous. Even if that position were contested and as a consequence it were to be argued that the «shrug» had a different quality, little changes, since such a move simply reinforces the point that the shrug is always overdetermined. Bodily movement, which is named here as «gesture», is located within a complex network of signification.

What follows from the above is that gesture cannot be understood – at least thus far – oth-

er than in terms of the presentation of meaning that brings a sense of value into play. (And here it should be added that to the extent that there is a coincidence between meaning and use, meaning is inevitable bound up with value). While the value in question – its nature, quality, etc. – may be contestable, value and thus contestability have an insistent presence *ab initio*. This form of presence calls into question both the neutrality and singularity of any gesture. Once this position is allowed then it demands that recognition be paid to what Hegel identified as *Darstellungsmittel*. Presentation, its potentially doubled quality, takes place. That in which it occurs, what allows for its occurrence cannot be separated from the process itself. Moreover, what also follows from the presence of what Warburg and Wind would have referred to as the «antique» within and as the modern is that time takes on a complex quality. In terms of its temporal nature any singular instance is always more than one. As a result, what comes to be affirmed is what has already been described as anoriginal relationality. Moreover, it is the presence of an irreducibility that pertains from the start that indicates the implausibility of assuming that reconciliation or equilibrium are unproblematic results. This mode of irreducibility and relationality opens the way towards the development of the conception of gesture that occurs in the writings of Walter Benjamin. Rather than evoke Benjamin directly, his work will emerge via a consideration of the two paintings that have already been identified, namely Degas' *Dancer adjusting the strap of her bodice* and the *Comunione degli Apostoli* painted by Luca Signorelli in approximately 1512.

4.

That Degas returned to the body both human and animal underscored his recognition that the body had a vibrancy that overcame any possible reduction to that which presented itself to mere seeing and as yielding the singular object that is empathy's precondition. His famous *Sonnet*

¹⁸ Quintilian (2001): 11.3.83. In regards to the question of flattery see the presence of the same topos of concern in Plutarch's *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur*.



Figure 3

addressed to the singer Rose Caron already staked out the force of the gesture:

Si mes yeux se perdaient, que me durât l'ouïe,

Au son, je pourrais voir le geste qu'elle fait
(Degas [1946]).

Within central elements of Degas' work the arm, its relation to the face and the hand, were a continual site of activity. An earlier work – *Studies of a Singer* (1878-80) – is a drawing (Figure 3). The work is present therefore as either preliminary or as a form of experimentation. Raised thereby is of course the question of the preliminary and thus of drawing. In the drawing the singer's arm is raised. The singer gestures. To be clear, there is a literal gesture. The raised arm is simply that. Is this the gesture *as such*? The *as such* founders once detail is allowed to insist. The creases on her palm indicate that her hand is only partially closed. Moreover, the positioning of the fingers reinforces the partiality of the closure. Drawn into both therefore is time. Time is there in the lines and the folds. The fold marks the *now* and yet folded into the lines is the tension that attends release. The raised hand draws attention to her face. It allows for the possibility that she is singing or has just

sung. The raising of her hand would therefore – as an act, as the literal gesture – move attention away from the hand and towards her face. The gesture – if the hand and arm can be understood as a gesture, remembering that what is at stake at this stage is the literal gesture there in its opening up, an opening up in which the literal gesture if taken as an end in itself, as that which is the gesture *as such*, will be shown to have been always already impossible – works to open the face. It works by moving attention from the hand/arm to the face. As the arm/hand acts, an act in which there is an interconnected upward movement, that act positions the face as a locus of activity. Her mouth is open. Held in place is the *now* in which the face sings. Taken together these elements move the eye and thus a concern with drawing towards the activity of singing. It is not, of course, reducible or explicable in terms of a space that has been created. It is there. However, it comes to be seen as a result of what began as literal gesture. This is the work of the body. Here therefore the gesture opens. Folded into its lines is time as the interplay of the now and potentiality. Now the hand also opens a space. Henceforth, the gesture cannot be separated from what it effects. The gestures become this opening up. And yet the gesture itself is not a pure allowing.

In the painting entitled *Dancer adjusting the strap of her bodice* (1885-1905) two women appear. The raised arm is there. One woman faces away from the viewer. She is standing at the back of the painting. The other, while closer to the viewer, looks down. She creates the foreground to the woman standing at the back of the painting. The woman in question looks out. Looking out into the back of the painting. Looking out, she looks into what should be understood as the painting's creation of the public realm. She gestures within it. She is gesturing to that world. This is the world that is created and recreated by a gesture that has to be seen publicly. Within the world of the painting she is being seen publicly. Her body moves therefore within a public domain. The meaning of her gesture is to be located within it. It occurs within it; occurring by sustaining

that within which it occurs. The public gesture becomes what it is because of the world that solicits and thus which the gesture then recreates.

The strip of orange behind the other dancer is the divide between the two worlds; public and private. A holding apart which allows these worlds, these worlds of gesture, to be presented together. Gesture doubles. It is a separation, thus a relation of non-relation, that sustains meaning. The separation and their connection are equally an effect of the colour orange. (This may be the presence of colour as itself a form of gesture). As a result of the spaces produced by the orange strip the public is divided from the private. And yet both are displayed. A divide occurs. There are two places. One is on the stage and the other off it. There are two modes of gesture. The first occurs on stage and is therefore public – in public it creates the public – and the other off stage and therefore private. The latter is disclosed in a world that it discloses. The public gesture therefore is the opening to the public. It is publicly open. The other however is not simply private; or, more accurately, is not just private. Indeed, its clarity allows it to evince an almost intimate air. Two distinct domains of gesture appear therefore. The woman – the dancer – at the back, who is, of course, at the front, gestures, literally, into the public realm. The other dancer, though for the painting's viewers she is far more prominent, gently moves the straps of her gown. The delicacy and intimate nature of the gesture is reinforced by the clear intensity of her stare, the way her fingers are positioned in relation to the thinness of the strap itself. Here the drawn lines mark intimacy. She is enclosed within a world and thus she has become oblivious to any other world.

Again it needs to be noted that these two worlds are produced in relation to each other. The difference between the gestures is an effect of the worlds in part created as much by the strip of orange paint as it is the movement of hands/arms. All these elements work together. Here there is a holding apart which is equally a holding together. The work does not just inscribe an irreducible discontinuity into it, that irreducibility, the inter-

ruption of singular space, which parenthetically, as has already been argued, would be empathy's condition of possibility, is its work. Here is the first opening to Walter Benjamin. It should be remembered that Benjamin's most sustained treatment of gesture occurs in his discussion of Brecht and in particular in his engagement with the particularity of Epic Theatre¹⁹. For Benjamin what is central to the latter is that the «art of Epic Theatre consists in arousing astonishment rather than empathy [*an der Stelle der Einfühlung das Staunen hervorzurufen*]» (Benjamin [1980]: 535; [1992]: 18)²⁰. The gesture is linked therefore to a form of interruption. The gesture interrupts, separates and allows. The gesture refuses reconciliation and balance. Empathy is disavowed and, at the same time, «astonishment» as creation is affirmed. One works with the other. In the realm of theatre what this means is that tragedy and its demand for catharsis have been supplanted by a different theatrical force. (The question that emerges concerns what «astonishment» might mean within and as painting).

The interruption is provided with a remarkable formulation by Benjamin. After locating breaks within movement as mere continuity there are then points of arrest, stops, interruptions, on what Benjamin calls this «rock of astonishment». After noting the interruption and its emphatic presence Benjamin continues writing that «epic theatre»,

lets existence spray high from the bed of time and stand an instant shimmering in the void in order to bed it down anew [*läßt das Dasein aus dem Bett der Zeit hoch aufsprühen und schillernd einen Nu im Leeren stehen, um es neu zu betten*] (Benjamin [1980]: 531; [1992]: 13).

¹⁹ For an examination of some of the important issues raised by Walter Benjamin's engagement with Brecht's theatre see: Primavesi (1999) and Asman (1 April 1994).

²⁰ Future references are to both texts. As opposed to Benjamin, "empathy" for Warburg is central. It should not be forgotten that the 1893 text on Botticelli opens with an evocation of empathy. His argument is that «an aesthetic act of empathy» has a determining effect of style. The footnote that Warburg adds refers to both Robert and Friedrich Theodor Vischer. See Warburg (2010): 39-40.

This formulation warrants detailed attention. It knits together elements that are fundamental to any thinking of gesture. What it interconnects are three precise aspects of Benjamin's account of gesture. Interruption is the first. The second is the process of continuity, which must be understood as a specific modality of repetition. Hence the first two elements in bringing interruption and repetition together demand an answer to the question concerning the modality of repetition that is at work within a setting created by «astonishment» and «interruption». The answer lies in the addition that the third element brings to the passage. It occasions an answer to the question. It inheres in the addition of the simple word «new [neu]». The passage allows for the interplay of «once again» and «newly [anew]» to create a setting in which the modality of repetition that enjoins alterity is at work. The contention has to be therefore that where Epic Theatre differs from tragedy (perhaps tragedy more generally construed) is in terms of a return in which the «new» is no longer a repetition of the Same. It is that conception of the «new» that sunders both time as mere passage and time as eternal return. This is precisely the point made by Benjamin when he argues that «interruption is one the fundamental methods of all form giving [*daß das Unterbrechen eines der fundamentalen Verfahren aller Formgebung ist*]» (Benjamin [1980]: 536; [1992]: 19). While this can be developed in the context of theatre, and it is decisive for Benjamin in distinguishing between tragedy and epic theatre, the question to be addressed concerns the viability of this thinking in the realm of painting. This question signals an important move. It allows art's work priority in the precise sense that material difference has to be maintained.

To return to Degas what is meant by the doubling of gesture – and this will open up the work of Signorelli to be taken up next – is linked to the creation of form. While it may involve taking Benjamin's formulation beyond its immediate context, form creation, once positioned within an account of drawing or painting, is connected to the creation of a spacing which in occurring becomes part

of the conditions of possibility for meaning. The meaning of the private arises as a result of its simultaneous presence with the literal gesture that opens and sustains the public. They are *apart* from each other whilst also being *a part* of the same work. Fundamental here is a decisive sense of *at-the-same-timeness* that sustains an irreducible spacing at its centre. A claim whose force is interpretive; a force that arises once the project of interconnecting understanding and empathy is put to one side. The work of the orange strip – which could also be understood as the work of colour as gesture – is also implicated in form creating. It works to produce a setting created by its own irreducibility. The spacing is a locus of activity that incorporates an endlessly negotiable threshold. It is an interstitial setting formed and informed by both.

5.

To continue: Signorelli's painting, which can be dated to around 1512, is linked, it might be conjectured, to a fundamental moment in the Christian Bible, namely *Matthew 26:26*. It gives it a form of visual presence. As significantly it depends upon another process of in-carnation:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said: «Take, eat; this is my body [τὸῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα μου]» (Matthew 26: 26).

The text presents, in narrative form, the division of what would have been the «bread» at the Passover feast. The bread becomes the body. One thing became another. Judas does not figure in the verse. However, what is presented as the betrayal appears²¹. The concerns of the painting therefore

²¹ The question of the betrayal is more complex than it first appears. While in this instance the betrayer is singularized. As been argued elsewhere Peter also betrayed Christ. For an interpretation of Andrea del Castagno's *Last Supper* in terms of the doubling of betrayal see Dunlop (2015): 138. While this betrayal does not deploy the same terminology, it could also be understood as an instance of the doubling of gesture.

bring a different division into play precisely because there is another staging of space in which, not only can separate textual occurrences be brought into a relation, it is equally the case that gesture and gesture's doubled presence are the result of processes of enacting – what has already been identified as the informing of form, the «more» that is always there within presentation – hence the painting demands that these relations be explored. As a result attention needs to be given to gesture and its doubled presence and thus to the way the work frames what emerges as a complex setting. Though it needs to be noted from the start that its elements – and thus the setting as a complex – pertain simultaneously, hence the centrality of *at-the-same-timeness*.

The painting stages two relations to the gift of the «host»²². Christ gives the gift – what will become the gift of his body – to one of the disciples. Its acceptance is the sign of pure receptivity. The mouth is open to receive what will be given. Here there is the miracle of the gift that depends upon the host not simply harboring the possibility of transubstantiation. The transformative has occurred. The bread has become the body. The movement of the hand, the bread as Christ's body and then the insertion of the host into the mouth of the disciple, when taken together comprise the gesture. No one element is meaningful outside a relation to another. This gesture is not simply a motif that is central to Christian religion since it is a restaging of the process of incarnation – perhaps the process in reverse – it can also be argued that what it brings with it is the question of presence, real presence and thus the relationship between the signifier and the signified. While this will be a theme that recurs, it is still possible to note that the host in its being given to the disciple stages questions and problems that remain at the very center of how the process of presentation, art included, is understood. The presence of the host stages the question of what it presents where presentation is

both of itself and that which is other than itself. It is bread and yet it is the body of Christ. It is one thing and another. (Is art's magic the magic of the host?). The relationship between the signifier and the signified while resolved in one direction, precisely because of other possibilities – one of which is there with Judas, which Judas could be taken as naming – that relationship remains an open question. Its apparent closure, the bread as host, is revealed as only ever an appearance because of Judas' refusal hence the inscription of Judas as locus of necessary disavowal.

In Signorelli's painting Judas is hiding the host in a bag²³. As a result the identity of bread as host is not longer stable. Policing will be necessary. Rather than look towards the Christ figures he looks towards the viewer of the painting; thus it is a mode of looking that defines the disciples. They become who they are as the result of a separation that imparts coherence. They are given in a relation, a relation that establishes the “brethren” and which is, of course, reinforced both by the figure of the host (thus the host as figure) as well as by its refusal. On one level access to the painting and thus to the Apostles as the companions of Jesus is via the mediating figure of Judas. At work here in this painting is a double movement that is structured around a form of exchange and thus the presence of a specific economy in which, while the bread is taken, it is not as though what is taken by Judas, as opposed to John, is the host. As has already been intimated, Judas takes the bread not the host (equally he takes the bread as the disavowal of the host). The law of identity has come undone. In this gesture *art's self staging* – the work staging itself as art – is enacted, and the world of magic exposed and thus simultaneously undone. Before pursuing the presence of this economy in Signorelli's painting another instance will be noted. In this case it is an engraving by Hendrik Goltzius of *The Last Supper* (1585) (Figure 4).

²² Judas is obviously an essential figure within the history of anti-Semitism. His disavowal of the host also has a detailed history. For an analysis of both see Rigaux (1991).

²³ Dana E. Katz argues that Judas is attempting to «pro-fane» the host. See Katz (2008): 33. For a study of the context leading up to the one in which the painting was undertaken see Todeschini (2010).



Figure 4

(The print is based on an earlier painting by Pieter Coecke van Aelst) (Cleland [2014]: 23, 49).

What is remarkable in this engraving is the presence of Judas' body. Again, the other disciples form a coherent group. How then is the incoherence, as it were, to be established? That it is Judas is clear from the pouch of money in his right hand. While he looks towards the figures at the table, none looks towards him. He is already distanced. The stool on which he leans is itself unstable. It is precarious. Then there is Judas' body. His legs are turned towards the viewer. His right arm, noting of course that the right hand holds the purse, bears his weight. His body is completely twisted. This is not an instance of the *contrapossato* that brings with it certain elegance (Summers [1977]). Here there is almost what amounts to a visual impossibility. The body of Judas is misaligned. This is his body as gesture. The misalignment compared to the other dis-

ciples who are related to each other in terms of comfort and ease means that this figure cannot be reconciled with any of the other bodies. That lack or rather impossibility of reconciliation creates a space. This is an antagonism on the level of gesture. It allows Judas' body to be the gesture. There is a literal space created by the presence of the table. A divide is created. Then there is the more symbolic division held in place by the fold in the tablecloth. It is as though the fold is the ineliminable divide in the fabric of what there is. The differences in question are not stated. They are seen. The tensions are a polarity without reconciliation because of the way interruption figures here within a singular work of art. Moreover, any reconciliation would involve siding with either Judas or the Apostles. Again empathy – or more exactly its conditions of possibility – has been rendered inoperable by the work's work. Except of course for that conception of empathy that can be had with victors (and thus never with "enemies"). To insist on empathy is to reduce the work to a series of reconciled positions. A position that can be located throughout Warburg's writings. Hence the account of Baldassare Peruzzi's fresco on the ceiling of the *Hall of Galatea* in the *Villa Farnesina* takes as its point of departure the «desire for balance [*die Sehnsucht nach Ausgleich*]» that for Warburg was dominant within the «circle of Agostino Chigi» (Warburg [2010]: 652)²⁴. The latter commissioned the painting of the ceiling. «Balance [*Ausgleich*]» is a term that has both a prevailing ubiquity within the detail of Warburg's analyses and the orientation of his more general project. While it would need to be argued in much greater detail than can be undertaken here, it can still be suggested that Warburg's conception of a polarity – the holding together of that which is there in a form of opposition – is to escape the strains of conflict occasioning dissent in the name of an established consensus which, while allowing for the oppositional holds it within a reconciled form. Or

²⁴ For a detailed engagement with the ceiling as a whole see Lippincott (1990).

at least this would be the desire, one that in the end demands a form of policing. Reconciliation based on the suppression of the friend/enemy distinction and which adopts the garb of neutrality engenders a feint that is inherently unstable. Hence there is an important link to the projected role of catharsis in tragedy; to which it might be added that for Benjamin and Brecht catharsis stands opposed to the «interruption»²⁵. This, it can be argued, is the radical point of separation between Warburg and Benjamin. This occurs of course in ways that elide the possibility of a consideration of polarities in terms of reconciliation and exposes them as sites of the triumphant and thus in relation to the construction of the enemy²⁶. Here there is a return of astonishment within the work of art. It emerges from the exposure of reconciliation's presence as putative.

Returning to Signorelli it is clear that there is a similar sense of interruption – albeit one that is the result of an act of interpretation rather than affirmed by the work itself – insofar as interruption is that which resists or refuses any form of coherence other than the one imposed by perspective. And here it is essential to insist on the role played by perspective in terms of what has already been identified as form creation. This is how here *mattering* and form creation are linked. The recess of the arches is matched by both a similarity and a simultaneity of movement and presentation in the tiling on the floor. Depth is provided in both instances. Moreover, the receding tiles with the line dividing them in the middle creating the centre of the painting and thus in positioning Christ at that centre and thus locating him within and as the focal point allow the bodies that could then be positioned along axes created by lines that could be drawn from his body to the bottom left and

right sides of the painting to be the same. (Not identical but the same). There is therefore a complementarity of position within a form that is given. This is not form creation. On the contrary this is the form that is given. Enclosed within it are the gestures of Christ giving the *host* to John and Judas hiding the *bread*. This is the point at which the relation of non-relation between the gestures becomes central. This doubling of gesture undoes the unity of the framed – to which it should be added that it is the presence, the givenness, of that unity that becomes the precondition for its undoing. *At-the-same-timeness* is the condition for showing an original complexity. It forces a reconciliation between that which cannot be reconciled other than through a forced reconciliation. There is therefore another opening thus another conception of form creation.

To insist on the interruption staged by the impossibility of reconciliation is to concede that the history that this setting has obtained is structured by a series of forced reconciliations. Harmony should be neither naturalized nor construed as benign. If there is a doubling of gesture within the work and a full explanation would need to be attentive to the operative presence of materials then that doubling signals the presence of a complex object that resists singularity except as produced. The effect of this position on an understanding of gesture involves working with the recognition that not only is there a division within a gesture, the apparently single gesture – Mary Magdalene on the Donatello pulpit – such that the truth of any one element involves both its irreducibility to the other and thus its already present relation to it, such a position has extension insofar as it also provides an exact description, at a certain level of abstraction, of the relationship between gestures within a single work or between gestures within works that are brought into a relation. What is significant therefore is the proposition that the truth of any one gesture only ever emerges in its relation, a relation of irreducibility to another gesture. Again, this is the doubling of gesture. That relation needs to be located within a setting in which forms of interruption predomi-

²⁵ On the question of the link between Warburg's art history and the historical role of catharsis within the history of tragedy see Port (2004).

²⁶ The nature of polarities is a vast topic within Warburg reception. The extent to which they are part of a process of a successful reconciliation or indicate a more complex predicament is taken up by Sigrid Weigel as part of her study of Warburg's *Schlangenritual* analysis. See Weigel (1995).

nate. Namely, that irreducibility can be thought in terms of an interruption in which what is interrupted is the singular space in which the attribution of a narrative quality to any one work of art took place.

Finally, if there is a sense of form creating here then it has a twofold quality. Firstly, what occurs in the work is the impossibility of finality or self-enclosure when the work is understood in terms of the relationship between gestures that themselves have to be understood as the interconnection of content and the means or medium of presentation identified by Hegel. Form as a quality of a work continues to be informed. (This is indetermination rather than determination). And then secondly, the way the doubling of gesture allows for other stagings of specific determinations of irreducibility. Relating one gesture to another, thus doubling as a form of continual interpretation remains an open possibility. These are relations that continue, and which are themselves allowed by the gesture's maintaining its quality of a *coming-into-relation* (this is the futurity of the image). The doubling of gesture therefore is the work's incompleting that is equally, and at the same time, its allowing.

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