

Gesture and the Everyday
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Abstract

One way of defining a gesture is by distinguishing it from an action: while an action is performed on the physical environment, a gesture involves mental representation, expression, or communicability in addition to action. While both typically involve movement, gesture expresses an idea or a meaning, for example when it comes to pointing, taking a physical stance, or dancing. Unlike pointing, or taking a physical stance, dance performance is taken to be a paradigm case of the aesthetic experience of gesture, since it typically also involves the aesthetic sensibilities of the viewing subject and the related character of the experience. However, is gesture and the aesthetic experience of it limited to dance? Or can we aesthetically appreciate gestures that are thought to be more ordinary? Susanne Langer (1976) argues that gesture through dance creates an illusion through a combination of ordinary motion and meaning, reflecting a “vital force” that becomes “symbolic form”, ensuring its status as art. For his part, Arnold Berleant (1991) fuses its status as “the exemplary art of performance” combining creative performance with subjective appreciation that extends beyond the human to the cosmos. While this may be so, and since aesthetic experience is about the character of our representations, and applies to the natural world, just as it does to architecture, fashion, and other ‘objects’ of experience, it may well apply to ordinary, everyday, gestures. Following Dewey (1934), I argue that the nature of aesthetic experience is wider than art, just as I argue that ordinary gesture has aesthetic character that importantly relates, also, to moral value and thus human character. Thus, I consider the cultivation of habits in our motivations for understanding and open-mindedness. Here habits are “understood as pervasive features of human behaviors acquired by attuning to social environment”, as stated by Roberta Dreon (2022), to which I would add ‘attuning to the natural environment’, that can lead us to perform aesthetically pleasing and ethically just gestures in creativity and design through care and sympathetic attention (Emily Brady, 2003; Yuriko Saito, 2022).

Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003)

Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991)

John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1934)

Roberta Dreon, *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology* (NY: SUNY Press, 2022)

Susanne Langer, ‘The Dynamic Image: Some Philosophical Reflections on Dance’, *Dance* 33/34 (1976), 76-82.

Yuriko Saito, 2022, *The Aesthetics of Care* (NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022)