

For reasons of courtesy, if for none other, a writer should define his terms. In this paper I shall do so with "Gesture", but not with "Sentimentality". I hope the reader will excuse this rudeness. My purpose in this paper is to pretend ignorance of the meaning of "Sentimentality", and to try and find out what people mean when they talk about it, by considering gestures. A sort of phenomenological effort to surprise "sentimentality" through the observation of gestures.

Let me therefore begin by an attempt to define "gesture" for the duration of the present paper. I think that most will agree that gestures are motions of the body, and, by extension, of tools attached to the body. But most will agree that not all such motions may be legitimately called "gestures". The peristaltic movements of the intestines or the contractions of the pupillae, although motions of the body, have very little to do with what we mean by "gesture". What we mean by it are specific motions of the body. We might describe that species by saying that it "expresses an intention". Now this is a nice definition: "let gestures be those motions of the body that express an intention". But it is not very useful. Because we would have to define "intention", which is a doubtful term, since it implies the problem of subjectivity and freedom, and thus will certainly lead us into trouble. However, the species of bodily motion we mean when saying "gesture" may be defined methodologically, and the ontological pitfalls just mentioned may thus be avoided. We may go about it as follows: To be sure, all motions of the body can be explained, in theory, through the enumeration of their causes. But there are some such motions for which causal explanations do not satisfy us. If I lift my arm, and somebody explains to me that I did so as a result of physical, physiological, psychological, social, economic, cultural and so forth causes, I shall, to be sure, accept his explanation. But it will not satisfy me. Because I am convinced that I lifted my arm because I wanted to, and that I might not have wanted to, and thus not have lifted it, the various and undoubtedly real causes notwithstanding. And such a lifting of my arm is a "gesture". This is therefore the definition I propose for the duration of this paper: Let "gesture" be any motion of the body or a tool attached to it, for which no causal explanation is satisfactory. And let "satisfaction" be that point in a discourse from which on a continuation becomes redundant.

The purpose of the proposed definition is to suggest that the discourse concerning gestures cannot stop with causal explanations, because such explanations do not touch what is specific to gestures. Causal explanations, ("scientific ones" in the strict sense), although they are indispensable for the understanding of gestures, do not produce such

an understanding. To understand gestures, those specific bodily motions which we perform and observe in others around us, we need more than causal explanations. In order to understand them, we must be able to interpret them correctly. If somebody is pointing his finger at a book, we shall not understand the gesture if we know all its causes. We shall understand it if we know its "meaning". This is in fact what we are doing all the time, with very great rapidity and surprising efficiency: we "read" gestures. From the slightest motion of facial muscles to the gigantic motions of masses of bodies called "revolutions". I do not know how we do it. We dispose of no theory of interpretation of gestures, to my knowledge. But this is nothing to be proud of. To be proud of some mysterious "intuition" of ours, for instance. Pre-scientific man had such an "intuition" concerning the causes of falling stones, and still, now that we can explain falling stones theoretically, we understand them better. We need a theory of interpretation of gestures.

The so-called "humanities" or "Geisteswissenschaften" seem to try and supply them. But do they? They are under the spell of the sciences of nature, and thus tend to supply us with ever better and fuller causal explanations of gestures. No doubt, the rigor of those explanations does not yet approach the one we are accustomed to in the physical sciences, and possibly it never will, but this is not what is unsatisfactory about them. The unsatisfactory aspect of those sciences of man is their approach to the phenomenon of gestures. They approach them as if they were natural phenomena only, and not also codified symbols. And even if the "humanities" do pay lip service to the interpretatory character of gestures, (to what used to be called their "spiritual" dimension), they still have a tendency to reduce that character to causal explanations, (to what used to be called "nature"). This approach justifies the humanistic disciplines, (psychology, sociology, economics, the historical disciplines, linguistics and so forth), to call themselves "scientific", but it also prevents them from elaborating a theory of interpretation of gestures.

There is, of course, that recent discipline and rapidly growing body of knowledge called "theory of communication" whose business it seems to be to elaborate just such a theory of interpretation of gestures. The semiological character of that discipline, as opposed to the phenomenological character of the "humanities", seems to suggest that communicology approaches the same phenomena as do the "humanities", but does so under their symbolical aspects. In fact, terms like "code", "message", "memory", "information" and so forth do appear frequently in the discourse of communicology, and they are indeed typical for interpretation. But a curious thing is happening, which I do not believe is being generally appreciated. These semiological terms slip

from communicology into the causal disciplines, and change their original meaning. Thus we have terms like "genetical code", "subliminal message", "geological memory" and so forth. And then those terms slip back into communicology again, but they no longer serve interpretation, having become explanatory terms. It seems that communicology, although it started by being a semiological discipline, is now rapidly becoming ever more explanatory, in its fashionable endeavor to become "scientific".

Let me resume the previous argument as follows: One way to define "gesture" is to consider it to be a motion of the body or a tool attached to it, for which there can be no satisfactory causal explanation. To understand gestures thus defined, we must discover their "meaning". This is, of course, what we constantly do, and it makes up a considerable aspect of our daily living. But we have not, so far, evolved a theory of interpretation of gestures, and are therefore restricted to an empirical, "intuitive", reading of the world of gestures, the codified world around us. And this implies that we do not possess reliable criteria as to the correctness of our reading. This must be borne in mind, when it will now be attempted to read sentimentality from gestures.

The definition of gestures here proposed implies that they are a symbolical motion. If somebody pricks my arm with a needle, I shall react by moving it, and this reaction of mine may permit an observer to say that the motion of my arm "expresses" or "articulates" a pain I was feeling. There will be a causal chain between the pain and the motion, a physiological theory to point that chain out, and the observer will be justified in considering the motion a symptom of the pain I had suffered. But such a motion is not, under the proposed definition, a "gesture", because the observer will have explained it to satisfaction. However I may also lift my arm to heaven in a very specific way if somebody pricks it, and this action of mine may again permit an observer to say that the motion of my arm "expresses" or "articulates" a pain I was feeling. This time, however, there will be no uninterrupted chain of cause and effect between the pain and the motion. A sort of wedge will have been driven between pain and motion, a codifying wedge which will have imposed a specific structure on the motion such that it now "means" the pain I had suffered for those who are familiar with the code. It is this familiarity with the code, and not some theory, that will justify the observer to say of it that it "expresses" the pain I had suffered. My action of moving my arm thus represents the pain, it is its symbol, and the pain is its meaning. And such a motion is a "gesture" under the proposed definition, because no causal theory available to the observer will satisfactorily explain it. Of course, one might argue that the motion is still a symptom of something, (for instance of the culture in which it was codified), but this is not what makes it a gesture. It

as a gesture because it represents something, because it is a symbol.

You will have noticed that the terms "expression" and "articulation" appeared in the precedent paragraph with two different meanings. With respect to symptoms it meant something like manifestation, and with respect to symbols it meant representation. In the reactive motion of my arm the pain caused by the needle became manifest, and it is in this sense that the pain expressed itself through the motion. In the active motion of my arm I represented the pain caused by the needle, and it is in this sense that I expressed it through my gesture. (Let us register, by the way, how language almost imposes the use of the word "I" during the description of the second motion, while it almost excludes the use of that word during the description of the first motion. But let us not be unduly impressed by this idealistic tendency of language.) Now during the rest of the present paper I shall restrict the use of the terms "expression" and "articulation" to its second meaning, and I shall say that gestures are expressions and articulations of what they represent as symbols. I shall do so, because I shall drive the point that "sentimentality" is the symbolical representation of sentiments through gestures, and in this sense the expression, articulation of sentiments. In short: I shall try to maintain that sentiments, (whatever that word may mean), may manifest themselves through a variety of bodily motions, but that the express and articulate gesturing called "sentimentality" is the way how they are represented.

No doubt, I shall have trouble in trying to maintain this. There is a double reason for my troubles. One has to do with the fact that it is difficult to distinguish, in the concrete phenomenon, between action and reaction, between manifestation and representation. For instance: I see tears in the eyes of another person. What criteria do I have that would allow me to say that those tears represent a sentiment, (are codified symbols), rather than being a manifestation of a sentiment, (symptoms of it)? In the first case, the person observed "acts" his sentiment, is an actor. In the second case he "reacts" to his sentiment, is a patient. But of course he may be both things, or he may be one and I may "read" him the wrong way. The second reason for my troubles is the vagueness of the term "sentiment" which covers a very broad and ill-defined region ranging from sensation through emotion and feeling to include ideas. If I am to maintain that "sentimentality" is how sentiments are expressed through gestures, it seems that I will have to know first what I mean by "sentiment", but I cannot, unless I offer an artificial definition. The reason for this is circular: one of my most important approaches to sentiments is the interpretation of gestures.

Still: the troubles I am in are not as deep as it seems at a first

ance. When I look at another person gesturing I do have a criterion to distinguish between reaction and gesture, between the manifestation of a sentiment and its codified expression. The criterion is the fact that I recognize myself in the other person, and that I know, through introspection, when I manifest passively a sentiment, and when I actively represent it. Of course: I may be wrong in my recognition and in my introspection, but the criterion is there. And as far as the term "sentiment" is concerned, I may not know its meaning, but I do know that it means something different from "reason". And since I know approximately what "reason" means, this negative understanding of "sentiment" is sufficient. I can therefore proceed with the consideration of sentimentality as sentiments gesticulated.

The two focal points around which the consideration will have to orbit elliptically have now been elaborated. They are "symbolical representation" and "something different from reason". In other words: if I interpret specific gestures to represent symbolically something different from reason, I am experiencing sentimentality. But is not the precedent sentence a description of the experience of art, and do not "art" and "sentimentality" tend to become synonymous under such a consideration? If I contemplate a work of art, do I not interpret it as a frozen gesture which represents symbolically something different from reason? And is not the artist one who "articulates", "expresses" something which discursive reason, (science, philosophy and so forth), cannot articulate, or cannot articulate the same way? Now: whether I accept, more or less romantically, that art and sentimentality are one, or whether I refuse, more or less classically, such an identification, there can be no doubt that sentimentality poses an aesthetic, (and not a moral, and even less an epistemological), question. The question is not whether to represent a sentiment is to lie about it, and even less whether a represented sentiment is true, (in the sense of "real"), but whether it moves the observer. If I accept the thesis that sentimentality is sentiment gestured, I am no longer primarily interested in the sentiment, but in the gesture, and in the effect of the gesture. Sentiments, (such as they manifest themselves through symptoms, and such as they are experienced through introspection), pose moral and epistemological problems. But sentimentality poses formal, aesthetic, problems. Through sentimentality sentiments are taken out of their original context and become aesthetic, (formal), as gestures. They become "artificial".

The reader might object, at this point, that it took me a long and round-about way to reach a very obvious conclusion. Had I not pretended ignorance of the meaning of the term "sentimentality", I could have said right from the start that it meant artificial sentiments, and thus spared

myself and the reader unnecessary complications. But the readers' objection will be mistaken. It is one thing to state the dubious platitude that sentimentality is artificial sentiment, and quite another to arrive at that conclusion through the consideration of the meaning of gestures. The difference has, of course, to do with the word "artificial". If I state, just like that, that sentimentality is artificial sentiment, I might miss that sentimentality, by rendering sentiments artificial, is in fact one of the methods by which man tries to give meaning to his life and the world he is in.

If somebody pricks my arm with a needle, and if I react to it by moving my arm, this is an absurd, meaningless process. (Unless, of course the needle itself was part of a gesture through which somebody gave the process a meaning.) But if somebody pricks my arm, and I lift it to Heavens in a codified gesture, the process acquires a meaning. It now means the pain caused by the needle, because it represents it. By my gesture I have taken the pain out of its absurd, meaningless, "natural" context, and rendered it artificial, namely inserted it in a cultural context. In this case, the pain was "really" there, although I might have exaggerated its impact. But this is not very important. The important thing is the articulation of the pain, its expression to others in the form of symbols. It is this symbolic aspect that renders the gesture an artificial sentiment, and not the "real" presence or absence of what it represents. In fact, if we are to believe Fernando Pessoa, the "real" pain is more difficult to express symbolically than an imaginary one, and therefore a greater challenge for poets: "O poeta é fingidor que finge tão perfeitamente que finge até a dôr que deveras sente = The poet is a pretender who pretends so well that he even pretends the pain he suffers in reality". It is this fictional, representative, symbolical character of sentimentality, this "artificiality", which gives sentiments, (be they real or imaginary), a meaning, and thus gives life a meaning. If you prefer: sentimentality "spiritualizes" sentiments by formalizing them into gesticulated symbols. It is in this sense that in sentimentality sentiments become artificial.

The artificiality of the sentiments expressed through sentimentality is basically an aesthetic problem. Sentimental gestures give the world and life within it an aesthetic meaning. If we want to criticize sentimentality, we must apply aesthetic criteria to it. The scale of values with which we will have to measure it will have to oscillate, not between truth and error, nor between truth and lie, but between truth and Kitsch. I think that this distinction is important. If I observe a sentimental gesture, for instance the gesture of a bad actor in a bad play which intends to mean the sentiment of fatherly love, I shall say

of it that it is "untrue". It would be however impertinent to call it "mistaken" or "lying". It is "untrue" in the sense of "bad taste", and it would still be "untrue" in that sense even if the actor were really a loving father. I think that this distinction is important, because the ambivalence of the term "truth" tends to hide it. In knowledge it means adaequation to the real, in ethics and politics it means fidelity to oneself, and in art it means fidelity to the material being manipulated. Now it is no accident, of course, that the three meanings are designated by the same term; they have what is called "honesty" in common. Still: it is perfectly possible that a sentimental gesture be epistemologically and morally honest, but aesthetically dishonest, like the gesture of the bad actor. It is then to be judged "untrue". And it is perfectly possible that a sentimental gesture be epistemologically and morally dishonest, but aesthetically honest, like the one that results in a pseudo-Greek Renaissance sculpture. It is then to be judged "true". On the scale with which to measure sentimentality Michelangelo would thus occupy a place near the "truth" end, and an actor in a Hollywood play a place near the "Kitsch" end, irrespective of the reality of the sentiment they express and of their belief in it.

It must be remembered, however, that in the absence of a theory of interpretation of gestures any such judgement remains empirical, "intuitive". There can be no objective art criticism, nor even a statistically interesting inter-subjective one, without such a theory, and as long as we do not have any, "de gustibus non est disputandum". So that what is Kitsch for one receiver, may perfectly well be true sentimentality for another. And if we were to try and obviate this difficulty by some quantification of the truth of sentimentality, (for instance by saying that it is the truer the more it moves the receiver), we might be obliged to say that Mr. Caruso's sentimentality was truer than Byron's. Statistics will objectively prove this. Still: there is a sort of "intuition" which tells us that Mr. Casuro stand nearer to the Kitsch end of the scale of sentimentality than does Byron. Theory of information, (which is a timid step in the direction of a theory of interpretation of gestures), has something to say about this "intuition" of ours.

We do not have to go into the mathematical intricacies of that theory, (which are, I believe, mostly the result of that theory's attempt to be "scientific"), in order to grasp the problem. The theory states that the more "information" a gesture transmits, the less it is Kitsch, and it also states that the quantity of "information" transmitted by a gesture has to do with the structure of the gesture. It is important to understand what is implied by such a statement. The more information a gesture contains, the more difficult it is, of course, for the receiver to read

at. The more information, the less communication, therefore the less a gesture informs, the emptier it is, it is more agreeable, "nicer", since it requires little reading effort. Thus theory of information supplies a more or less objective measure for the fact that the sentimental gestures of TV plays so powerfully move the "masses". It should be however noticed that the theory of information works far better where Kitsch than where "true" sentimentality is concerned. It can measure the banality of Kitsch but in the face of the originality of "true" art it seems to me to be just as empirical as is our "intuition". In no way does it substitute that "intuition" in art criticism, let alone supply a theory of interpretation.

However, there is an important point in that theory which may help us. It has to do with "emptiness" and "fullness". I said before that sentimentality is a way to give meaning to sentiments by expressing them through symbolical gestures. What theory of information suggests, (and therefore is indeed a step in the direction of a theory of interpretation) is that the symbol expressing a sentiment may be emptier or fuller, and that the scale to measure sentimentality with goes from fullness to emptiness, from the inexhaustible meaningfulness to the empty gesture. On the one end of the scale of sentimentality there are those few and grandiose gestures which give a meaning to our sentiments, a meaning which millenia did not exhaust yet. On the other end there is the multitude of empty gestures which we perform and observe around us, and which try to exhaust the "original" meaning given to sentiments by the grandiose gestures. The sentiment of friendship, for instance, is expressed symbolically through the gesture of Castor and Pollux and through handshaking, one being full, and the other almost devoid of meaning. In this way, I suspect, a critique of sentimentality, (and thus of art "tout court"), may become less subjective, and lead, very painfully to be sure, toward an interpretation not only of Kitsch, but also of those great moments when men gave a meaning to their sufferings and actions.

Let me resume my argument, and then lead it on to conclusion: We have sentiments, (whatever that may mean), and they manifest themselves as symptoms, and express themselves as gestures. It is "natural" for sentiments to manifest themselves, in the sense that they cause some effect in the body. As such they lack any meaning, since what defines "nature" is just that causal, meaningless order. If, however, sentiments are expressed through gestures, they become "artificial", in the sense of becoming codified symbols. Those symbols represent the sentiments, and thus give them meaning. We may call this meaningful representation of sentiments "sentimentality", and then go on criticizing sentimentality having for criterion the fullness, of its meaning. That fullness has



little to do with the reality of the sentiment expressed, or with the sincerity of those who express it, but is an aesthetic, formal aspect of the gesture. We shall thus have, on the one hand, meaningful sentimentality and on the other hand the empty sentimentality of Kitsch.

Now the purpose of this argument of mine is to draw the readers' attention to what is implied in saying that sentimentality is a way of gesturing. What is the contrary of sentimentality? Apathy and ataraxy, the suppression of sentiments, keeping them out of sight of oneself and the other. If we want to imagine sentimentality, a good way is to imagine the gesticulation going on in a Mediterranean village. And if we want to imagine its opposite, we might imagine the immobility of a Stoic philosopher or of a Puritan banker. The word "gesture" stems from "gerere", which means something like "acting", and what we call History, the Ancients called "gestured things=res gestae". Sentimentality is thus acted sentiments, sentiments in action. And the opposite of sentimentality is sentimental inaction. Now whatever "sentiment" may mean, it has to do with the concrete, human, bodily existence, as opposed to "reason" and "will", which have to do with transcending the human condition. This is the reason why he who is accustomed to live in a society of sentimentally gesturing, shouting, weeping, laughing, quarreling people has so much trouble to adapt to a society where gesturing is more restricted to the expression of wills and ideas. Where sentiments are being suppressed, where there is little sentimentality, (be it Kitsch or not), there is always the danger of an explosion of the sentiments which remained unexpressed. And in sentimental societies there is less Kitsch than in the unsentimental ones, because the constant action upon sentiments tends to keep it in limits. Possibly this is the reason for the "beauty" of the sentimentally gesticulating civilisations? I shall leave this open.

Sentimentality is acting a sentiment, thus giving it a meaning. Theatrical action. It is, of course, mostly bad comedy, but at best it may be the high tragedy of human existence. Man's answer to the absurdity of his life are his gestures. Some of those gestures change the world by imposing his will on the things that surround him. Other gestures analyze and explain the world. Still others just express sentiments on the stage man lives on. They may change nothing, and they may explain nothing. But they may make life bearable, in the form of beauty, but also in the form of mere sentimental pretending. Sentimentality is the gesture of refusing to submit to the absurdity of living.