



Unruly Gestures: Seven Cine-Paragraphs on Reading/Writing Practices in our Post-Digital Condition

By Janneke Adema & Kamila Kuc

Abstract

Unruly gestures presents a hybrid performative intervention by means of video, text, and still images. With this experimental essay we aspire to break down various preconceptions about reading/writing gestures. Breaking away from a narrative that sees these gestures foremost as passive entities – as either embodiments of pure subjective intentionality, or as bodily movements shaped and controlled by media technologies (enabling specific sensory engagements with texts) – we aim to reappraise them. Indeed, in this essay we identify numerous dominant narratives that relate to gestural agency, to the media-specificity of gestures, and to their (linear) historicity, naturalness and humanism. This essay disrupts these preconceptions, and by doing so, it unfolds an alternative genealogy of ‘unruly gestures.’ These are gestures that challenge gestural conditioning through particular media technologies, cultural power structures, hegemonic discourses, and the biopolitical self. We focus on reading/writing gestures that have disrupted gestural hegemonies and material-discursive forms of gestural control through time and across media. Informed by Tristan Tzara’s cut-up techniques, where through the gesture of cutting the Dadaists subverted established traditions of authorship, intentionality, and linearity, this essay has been cut-up into seven semi-autonomous cine-paragraphs (accessible in video and print). Each of these cine-paragraphs confronts specific gestural preconceptions while simultaneously showcasing various unruly gestures.

Keywords: Reading/writing Gestures, Gestural Agency, Corporate Gesture Control, Textual Media, Cutting, Iteration, Media Archaeology

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Fig.1 *Unruly gestures* (10 min). By Janneke Adema and Kamila Kuc. The video can be downloaded via this link: <https://cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/article/view/255/2577>



Fig.2 Still from *Unruly gestures*. The video is available on page 191 and at: <https://cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/article/view/255/2577>

preamble

This performative essay originated in images. Cut out of various publications, downloaded from the Internet, eventually these images made their way to the floor of our studio. There, analysed, stared at, re-arranged, repeatedly stepped over (by creatures human and otherwise), some eventually discarded, we first made our kinship with images of reading/writing gestures. These gestural representations then began to move as we brainstormed about different ways to perform theory with and through them – in short, beyond the normative structures that are often no more than strictures.

Suggestion for the viewer/reader: *Unruly gestures* presents an essayistic intervention by means of video, text and still images. The text you are viewing is divided into seven paragraphs, which correspond with the seven film sections in the video available on page 191 or at: <https://cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/article/view/255/2577>. Together with the images that accompany this text, these form an essential component of this performative essay. To ‘perform’ this essay, we suggest watching the video as a whole first, or, alternatively, a pause-and-play method in which the viewer/reader begins by watching a section of the video and then turns to read the corresponding section of the written essay.

Unruly gestures aspires to break down certain preconceptions about reading/writing gestures – about what these gestures are and what they do. Indeed, our aim in this essay is to identify various dominant narratives that relate to gestural agen-cy, to the media-specificity of gestures, and to their (linear) historicity, naturalness

and humanism, among others. This essay aims to disrupt these preconceptions, and by doing so it unfolds an alternative genealogy of ‘unruly gestures’, gestures that do not fit in with the narratives we identify or that challenge how gestures are being conditioned through particular technologies, cultural power structures, hegemonic discourses and the biopolitical self. We will focus on gestures that have disrupted gestural hegemonies and material-discursive forms of gestural control through time and across media.

Informed by Tristan Tzara’s cut-up techniques, where through the gesture of cutting the Dadaists tried to subvert established traditions of authorship, intentionality and linearity, this essay has been cut-up into seven semi-autonomous cine-paragraphs (accessible in print, online and via the vimeo platform). Each of these cine-paragraphs confronts specific gestural preconceptions while simultaneously showcasing various unruly gestures. Our efforts at cutting up this essay and as part of this to ‘cut-well’,¹ have been guided by Karen Barad’s posthumanist reformulations of agency. In Barad’s account agencies and ‘differences’ are entangled phenomena, where ‘agential cuts’ cut things together and apart. In this sense ‘[...] cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility’ (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012: 52).² The way we have cut-up this essay represents such a condition of possibility, where through the specific cuts we have made in and through texts, film and still imagery, we aim to complicate linearity, intentionality, print-hegemonies, originality and individual authorship where it concerns our reading/writing gestures.

Inspired by media-archaeological methods, we focus on ruptures that subvert dominant teleological narratives about reading/writing gestures.³ Seen in this context, our contribution is also very much a ‘doing’, a creative intervention (Emerson 2014: xiii; Huhtamo & Parikka 2011: 325). In this fashion, as Erkki Huhtamo has argued with respect to media art, this essay ‘could be ... seen as a form of spatialized, conversational “historical writing”, as a way of maintaining a dialogue with the technological past’ (Huhtamo 2014: 199). We combine media archaeology’s focus on ‘variantology’ and alternative genealogies concerning the becoming of ‘the matter of media’, with new materialist extensions of agency and materiality to include discursive or semiotic aspects, which are seen to form an intrinsic part of a medium’s constitution (Zielinski & Wagnermaier 2006). Following feminist theorists such as Barad and Donna Haraway, we see dominant narratives related to what gestures are and do as directly materially influencing reading/writing gestures (controlling and conditioning them to some extent) (Barad 2007, Haraway 1988). These discourses are therefore performative, they are reality-shaping and go beyond a mere representation or a mirroring of objective knowledge. At the same time, this performativity offers us the possibility to put forward alternative discourses, to impose different, potentially more ethical

cuts. As such the disruptive rather than representationalist approach we wish to exercise here, can itself be seen as an unruly and transgressive gesture.

With our focus on reading/writing gestures, we reflect on Lori Emerson's terminology of *readingwriting*, which she defines as 'the practice of writing through the network, which [...] is itself constantly reading our writing and writing our reading'.⁴ Taking this out of an exclusive digital context, we argue that readingwriting practices relate to the intra-actions⁵ and relations between gestures and other material text forms too. Reading practices, through forms of gestural, technological and cultural mediation, impact directly on meaning production and can thus themselves be seen as forms of writing, as we will explore more in depth in this essay. We further connect Emerson's terminology to Lawrence Lessig's focus on 'Read/Write (RW)' culture (RW access includes the possibility to reuse, adapt, modify and remix material, as opposed to 'Read Only (RO)' access), which allows creativity and performance, instead of mere consumption (Lessig 2008: 28).

In these cine-paragraphs on reading/writing practices in a post-digital context, we thus explore how gestures in specific can contribute to our understanding of media and mediation. We therefore ask: how are our reading/writing gestures implicated in meaning-making and knowledge production? What role do gestures play in intra-action with interfaces, media and human intentionality? How are gestures structured and what are their potentialities? Where does gestural agency lie within apparatuses of control (be they cultural, technological or discursive)? Breaking away from narratives that see gestures foremost as passive entities — as either embodiments of pure subjective intentionality, or as bodily movements shaped and controlled by media technologies (enabling specific sensory engagements with texts) — we aim to reappraise them. Hence this essay is a material-discursive and performative experiment to explore and produce unruly gestures, gestures that try to visualise, expose and disturb these controlling mechanisms. We explore and experiment with reading/writing gestures to examine their importance as part of an entanglement of media technologies, bodies, texts, readers, and writers, which dynamically and iteratively reconfigure each other in a continuous manner (Barad 2007, Kember & Zyliniska 2012).

cine-paragraph one: beyond intentionality

****marking, erasing, scribbling, annotating, underlining, highlighting, closing, opening, juxtaposing, paging****

Curiously, in his study of gestures of writing *Vilém Flusser* does not so much focus on the gesture itself, but on the intentionality (or the ‘inner voice’, ‘inner reading’ or ‘inner experience’ as he calls it) that lies behind a gesture and that directs it (Flusser 1991). Flusser’s main interest is to examine how this ‘inner voice’ meets resistance through the surfaces, media and cultures upon which inscriptions are being made (e.g. when ‘expressing’ a thought through writing on a piece of paper). As Flusser writes: ‘To write is to change one’s thought in consecutive steps under the pressure of objective resistance of various ontological levels’ (Flusser 2014: 8). The gesture itself remains passive here, it does not form a layer of resistance but a mere action in between human intentionality and technological potentiality, dangling amid active meaning-making entities: the self and the object upon which it imposes itself. Flusser further predetermines gestures of writing here as linear,



Fig. 3 Medium Etta De Camp being visited by author Frank Stockton

historical, intentional and medial. Thus ‘true writing’, for him, is subjective and intentional, and the further away we get from our intentions the less ‘true’ writing gets. As Flusser argues, ‘this subjective sense is what counts in phenomena like gestures’, the intention or subjective experience of writing forms ‘the inner core of that gesture’, it is ‘an expression of something within me’ (Flusser 2014: 6–7). The medium, interface or layers upon which one writes informs the gesture of writing (next to our intentionality) in this account, but there is no space here for any gestural agency itself as part of our acts of writing and as part of meaning production. Gesture itself is not seen as a constraint to the writing process.

Current research in dance, performance and theatre studies tends to study gestural agency more on its own terms. Dance scholar Carrie Noland shows that beyond gestural control – through signification, power structures and conditioning – variation, innovation and resistance through and with gestures do occur. These gestures are of course embodied, but

bodily motility puts them to the test at the same time (Noland 2009a: 1–2). Noland therefore wants to move away from models of subjective agency (such as Flusser's) that either emphasise in a deterministic way how the self and its movements is acted and inscribed upon by culture, or that stress subjective intentionality in gestural expression and communication.⁶ Interestingly for us, she argues that it would be more absorbing to focus not on culture or gestures as being oppositional, but to see them as differential and to focus on deviations from normative (gestural) behaviour – which is also at the same time differential and complex. This forms an important step away from thinking the body as merely a surface of inscriptions. Instead Noland explores how bodily motility filters our interactions with the world, to assess how humans are embodied within their world. Our 'motor decisions' as Noland calls them, influence and challenge cultural meaning and knowledge production. Culture conditions and disciplines the body through a repetitive regime of gestural and postural norms, but gestural performativity, Noland argues, also introduces variation, change and resistance and with that 'the possibility of realizing a potential beyond them' (Noland 2009a: 14).

cine-paragraph two: beyond print versus digital

****Clicking, tapping, hyperlinking, browsing, scrolling, copying, pasting, inserting, swiping, bookmarking, mouthing, touching, vocalising, kissing, moving (one's body) performatively****

One opposition that continues to be reintroduced in discussions on gestural agency is that between print-based and digital gestures. Narratives on reading/writing gestures have a tendency to generalise and overemphasise media specificity, especially in a context in which the digital is afforded the potential to make our gestures more dynamic and interactive (and less 'supressed' than print, see for example Angel & Gibbs (2013) or Norland (2009b)). Here a technological determinism tends to be introduced again, one in which technologies are seen as prime movers in shaping or enabling certain gestural and sensory engagements with texts. Notwithstanding the fact that the digital does indeed have this potential to make our reading/writing gestures more dynamic and interactive, it also has the potential to control them to an ever-increasing extent. We see this setting up of print and digital-based gestures as *oppositional* as not constructive in this context and believe instead that both print *and* digital have the potential to promote dynamic gestural engagements, as well as quiet and still ones. We thus argue for the need to move away from a simplistic focus on media affordances, to a perspective that explores gestures as part of a larger apparatus of media and bodies, technologies

and cultures, processes and discourses. Out of this entanglement both gestures and these processes, technologies and discourses, arise simultaneously (there is no prime mover). To shift the focus away from media affordances, we explore gestural control (e.g. normative bodily behaviour) and agency across media fields and technological platforms, to show how ‘unruly gestures’ (be they dynamic or still) operate across these landscapes.

Maria Angel and Anna Gibbs (2013) make the claim that corporeal performance is increasingly characterising acts of reading and writing in digital contexts. In opposition to this, they state that bookish reading and writing is a relatively



Fig. 4 Bookwheel, from Agostino Ramelli's *Le diverse et artificiose machine*, 1588

quiet and ‘still’ engagement. They argue that new media technologies reintroduce dynamism, re-engaging the body’s movements and gestures as part of our reading/writing practices, making them explicitly performative and involved in the generation of meaning. Notwithstanding the fact that all gestures (even relatively still ones) are agentic and performative, Angel and Gibbs furthermore overgeneralise the homogeneity of print, where not all print forms afford quiet reading. They similarly exaggerate the dynamism of the digital, focusing not on digital reading as such (which, one could argue consists predominantly of reading from a static webpage or a PDF), but on a very specific subset of digital media, e.g. experimental digital poetry.⁸ We on the other hand, are not interested in the potentialities of specific

media for our argument here and argue that each medium has the potential in its own differential way to elicit dynamic, open and expansive gestural interactions. What we wish to explore instead, is the structures that impose normativity and control on these gestures (be they discourses, power structures, or social conditioning – but also technologies) whilst pinpointing how at the hinge of the gestural, both agentic opportunities for iteration and transformation occur.

Literary scholar Mark Amsler has shown how in the Middle Ages reading practices and gestures came about out of an entanglement of books and bodies. In the early Middle Ages certain gestures were anxiously cultivated, maintained and controlled, but they could not withstand the emergence of more transgressive and

unruly practices. In a context where reading aloud was normative, silent reading – or reading without ostensive affect – provoked suspicion, where it was seen to sever the connection between the text and the senses (where *vox* was absent). This connection was actively structured through the prescription of suitable somatic gestures that would incite the appropriate Christian ‘affectiones’ (Amsler 2001: 99). Reading practices were thus very much forms of disciplining, of bodily regulation. Amsler notes how these orthodox norms of acceptable reading and writing were challenged by later medieval practices and reading gestures, as part of the emergence of a more active, textually-immersed reader, whose interactions with new formats and textual divisions (table of contents, indices, marginalia) enabled rapid silent reading, skipping and skim-reading. Even more, Amsler shows how the emergence of certain forms of ‘affective literacy’ – which incorporates a broad range of somatic, emotive responses to reading a text: from vocalizing it, to kissing it to being aroused by it – created interactive textualities beyond the materiality of the page, challenging the assumption that medieval reading is consumption (i.e. not dynamic or interactive) and a text a discrete object. Reading gestures can here be seen to break down these barriers between subjective intentionality and objective technology, between the material page and the reading body (Amsler 2001: 84). Furthermore, as Amsler has shown, both silent and more affective forms of reading were potentially disruptive gestures, able to destabilise literate consensus and authority on good reading.

cine-paragraph three: on iteration

****read-later, tweeting, sharing, skim-reading, posting, leafing,
parsing, imprinting, typing, writing with pen, pencil, feather, stylus,
wax tablets, dragging, liking****

Iteration and performativity are quintessential aspects of reading/writing gestures. As Noland makes clear, gestural challenges to acculturated behaviours, although iterative, remain contingent, idiosyncratic and potentially subversive, as they are repeated over time and space and over gendered, classed and raced bodies (and, we might add, in intra-action with the gestural apparatus). In this differential constellation, change and new gestural routines occur (Noland 2009a: 6). Performativity encapsulates both iteration and transformation, and as an iterative doing it produces both signification and material effects. Iterative gestures can thus produce difference and (re)configure patterns, making it an emancipatory concept in its performativity, through which we can enact change and interventions, even when constrained by socio-cultural formations (Butler 2006: 178). Following the

insights of feminist new materialist theorists, this performativity also extends to our discourses, which either have the potential to enact gestural change, or to further constrain these gestures materially (Barad 2007, Haraway 1988).

cine-paragraph four: natural and invisible gestures

****close-reading, memorising, social reading, reading aloud, copying, vox, sonus, rumination, scratching, printing, scanning, transcribing, eye-moving****

Lori Emerson's critique of the ideology underlying 'invisible' interfaces and ubiquitous computing is highly relevant in the context of so-perceived 'natural gestures'. In this vision certain gestures are seen to be intuitive, automatic, easy, innate and instinctive to human beings. In reality though, these 'natural' gestures are inherently controlled and ideological, part of a complex apparatus of practices, cultures, economies, politics and technologies.⁹ Perceived invisible and immediate, gestures such as handwriting are very much a result of bodily submission. Educational and didactical gestural controls have conditioned us how to interact with writing technologies in order to promote 'correct' and disciplined writing and reading (Noland 2009b: 221–222). Beyond this disciplining, Emerson professes a need to be able to devise and experiment with our own gestures of reading and writing, instead of consuming prescribed gestures (Emerson 2014: 191). She explores and advocates examples of what she calls an 'activist media poetics', which enable gestural interactions with media that are open, active, generative and processual. This also includes an experimenting with the limits and possibilities of our reading/writing gestures and with that of media and interfaces (Emerson 2014: 22). Unruly gestures are inherently part of such a wider media poetics. Enabling creative, dynamic, interactive and open gestures, also aids in exposing controlling structures as well as the ideologies underlying 'invisible' interfaces. Furthermore, unruly gestures also have the potential to expose the hegemonic discourses that underlie and have shaped gestural control. In this respect this text itself can be seen as an unruly gesture.

Paul Soulellis and Benjamin Shaykin's influential artworks *Apparition of a distance, however near it may be* (2013) and *Google Hands* (2009), respectively, are based on found images of hands in books, which were accidentally digitised as part of the *Google Books* project. These works have been incremental in revealing the multiple disruptions, glitches and errors that are introduced during Google's scanning and digitisation process. The found images show a variety of reading/writing (or scanning) gestures, including hands flipping, turning, bending and holding books. These glitches showcase the human gestural agency un-

derlying digitised images, making visible the material tactics and the ideologies behind Google's digitisation project.¹⁰ These works clearly demonstrate (quite literally in these examples) how reading/writing gestures interfere in, influence and shape knowledge transmission and production. As Soulellis emphasises, they are 'permanently altering the viewer's perception of the content' (Soulellis n.d.). Even more these specific gestures show a glimpse into the workings of neoliberal capitalism, and into the pervasive manual character of the human labour behind Google's digitisation effort. Indeed, this gives us more insight into the racialised, segregated and unseen nature of this labour, revealing, as Soulellis states, the 'anonymous workers that are typically flattened or hidden behind digital production' (Soulellis n.d.).

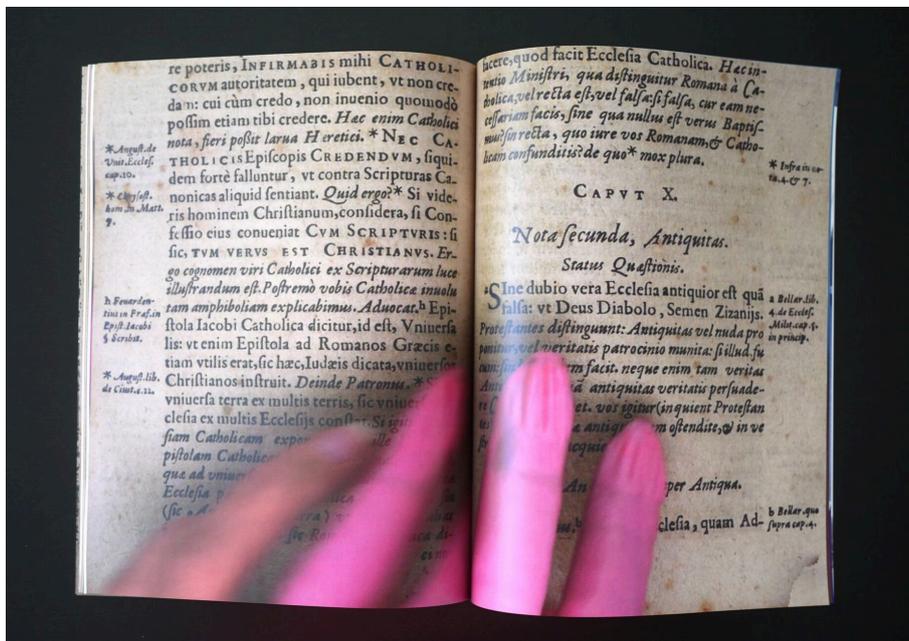


Fig. 5 Paul Soulellis - *Apparition of a distance, however near it may be* (2013). New York: self-published, 2013. 42 pages, print-on-demand, unlimited edition.

cine-paragraph five: corporate gesture control

**** braille, punching, pinning, gluing, decoding, abbreviating, trying again, pressing, letting go (of buttons) ****

Gestures have long been theorised from a semiotic perspective as a form of bodily communication more 'traditional' and direct than verbal, speech-based language. Brian Rotman for example suggests, in an attempt to move beyond the hegemony of writing, that a new gesture-based language could free human communication from the alphabet as a mediating layer between human expression (where the alphabet notates the signifying sounds produced by the organs of speech). Instead of such a mediating layer, a sampling or capturing of gestures might be a more direct way of communication (an asymbolic mediation instead of a symbolic representation). Motion capture, a non-notational digital medium capable of reproducing the kinematic, would open up bodily communication beyond the oral-vocal apparatus, Rotman (2002: 427) argues. Notwithstanding the importance of challenging the normativity and hegemony of writing, the question is how motion capture technology in specific would be a more 'direct' interaction, as it forms again a mediating performative layer, one that is neither more nor less neutral than writing, and neither more nor less capable of gesture control. Would this new order of body mediation really be able to afford more freedom and potential to the body and gestural communication? Indeed, doesn't every representation or mediation impose its own controlling structures?

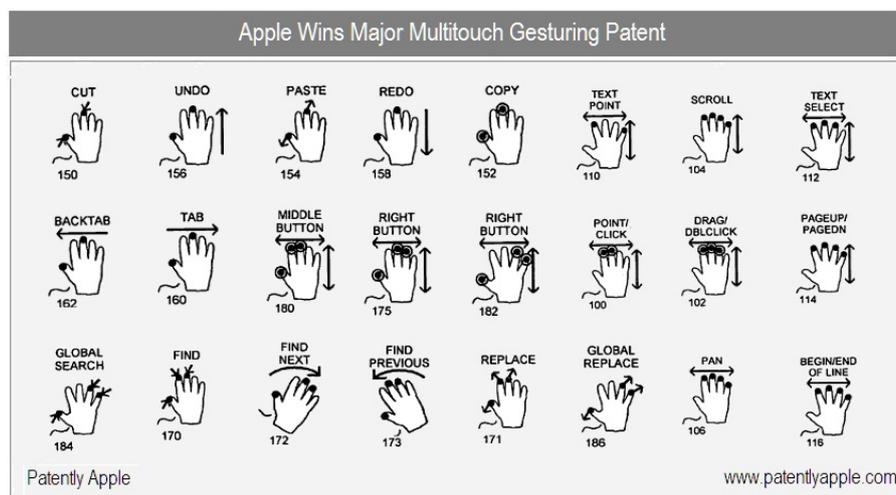


Fig. 6 Illustration from patentlyapple.com

Might it not be more important to explore how, in a potential move from alphabet based to gestural forms of communication and interaction, new forms of control might develop, and from there, how new potentialities for unruly gestures could arise? Shouldn't we instead try to figure out how we can give more importance to gestural agency, notwithstanding whether and how it is represented or mediated?

One could argue that gestures, in a Foucauldian/Deleuzian sense, are moving from discipline societies, where gestural control is enacted directly on the body (conditioning postures and gestures, e.g. handwriting), into control societies, in which bodies are abstracted into data, after which control of the movements of these bodies is commanded by capturing, reproducing and manipulating their data (Deleuze 1992, Foucault 1991). For example image capture, as Rotman argues, makes gestures generatable and parsable. Increasingly however these captured and reproduced gestures are patented by technology companies such as Apple, Microsoft and Xerox, turning bodily movements into a language of patented gestures inscribing capitalist discourse on bodies. What does it mean for reading/writing practices if gesture capturing will take place in such a closed corporate context, in which our gestures will be read (data-mined) and we will consume gestures but we won't have the opportunity to create gestures ourselves or to creatively interact with interfaces? What kind of RW access do we still have in these environments and what does this mean for gestural agency? Increasingly our gestural interactions with corporate interfaces are copyrighted, patented and owned. Individual gestures are locked into specific devices, brands, apps and technologies (the iPhone's 'slide to unlock feature' is a patented gesture for example). Even our personal or custom-based gestures are being patented.¹¹ Gesture control is here usurped into data-driven economies, focused on collecting information about what and how we are communicating, to be able to then sell this on.¹²

cine-paragraph six: R/W gestures

****marking, erasing, overwriting, cutting, silent reading, collating, favouriting, punctuating, curating, remixing, bookmarking, curating, collecting, pirating****

Arguably, one of the main gestures used in academic knowledge production (in print and digital contexts) is the gesture of copy/cut and paste – exemplified by the quote, the reference and the footnote – in an effort to juxtapose and connect different texts. The physical gesture of copying and pasting (by pen, pencil, scissors and glue, pushing shortcuts on keyboards, inserting carbon paper, using scanners and copiers) is essential to rearrange and revise academic work. Where the copy/

paste shortcut as a gesture in a digital context would potentially enable us to interact with documents more efficiently, in reality this is one of the gestures that (mainly due to copyright concerns), is often restricted. For example both Google Books and Amazon prevent readers from using the copy/paste shortcut, where in preview mode content is only visible as an image on both platforms (i.e. not OCR-ed or converted into editable and searchable data) and they thus only enable RO (Read Only) access and search.

Activist art projects such as Amazon Noir and AAAARG have been incremental in making gestural restrictions on commercial book platforms visible through direct artistic interventions. Amazon Noir 'liberated' 3000 books from Amazon.com by making use of the 'Search Inside the Book' feature. As an interface this feature only allows search as a gesture (on a limited set of non-machine readable pages) delimiting other reading/writing gestures. Amazon Noir's robots used 'Search Inside the Book' to access Amazon's library and to download snippets of text which it then logically reassembled into PDFs using the SIB-Book-Generator. Through this process Amazon Noir not only made the full contents of these books available, they also made them machine-readable (OCR-ed) and with that enabled RW (Read/Write) practices (copy/paste and print).¹³ Shadow library AAAARG has similarly used pirated content to experiment with new gestural interfaces on top of scanned and OCR-ed content, creating interfaces that aim to aid academics in their gestural interactions with digital texts. In 2013, they collaborated with Berlin-based K-Verlag to create a digital 'Common Place Book' out of excerpted and copied passages of thematically relevant publications on AAAARG.¹⁴ Interestingly, this 'reader' was created with the help of a visually-based compiler, which, although basic, allows a variety of gestural RW interactions with the scanned texts, enabling readers to select, recombine and save quotations and excerpts. The reading/writing gesture of copy/paste becomes a political gesture in this respect, where it again enables users to become producers of text (enabling remix and reuse) instead of only consumers (in a context where RW access is essential to academic communication). Sean Dockray, AAAARG's founder, has said that he is curious to find out what effect the library has had on peoples' writing, where, as he points out, 'reading and writing do adapt to the particularities of the searchable library'. The new 'additive' reading/writing gestures (highlighting, notating, juxtaposing), he states, might have the potential to create new practices of reading (Springer et al. n.d.).

cine-paragraph seven: machinic gestures

****cutting-up, speaking, hearing, viewing, tracing, earmarking,
distributing, executing, running, skipping****

When we move away from theories that define gestures in relationship to subjective intentionality, the question arises whether we can also move beyond a connection of gestures to human bodies (without again conflating them with tools or technologies as prime movers). Could we connect gestures to alternative embodiments: technological, machinic, animal, virtual or organic ones? The iterability of gestures makes them akin to mechanical movements, to pulsating electronic systems. In what sense, as Carrie Noland argues, does some form of sensory feedback from a machinic or virtual gesture to a human body remain necessary for gestures to evolve and adapt to new situations (Noland 2009a: 110)? In digital reading/writing gestures, programming and executing code – and with that machinic and virtual movement – is essential to the production of meaning. In this respect we suggest a move away from human intentionality and from the idea that agency is something that a subject or object has, to instead explore gestural agency within a distributed, performative and posthuman context. In this context intentionality is attributed to a complex network of human and nonhuman agents. As Barad has argued, materialization is an iteratively intra-active process of mattering, of movement and becoming (Barad 2007: 210). Gestures then arise out of the intra-actions between bodies, machines and discourses. How gestures are embodied matters (of course), but, following Barad, there is no deterministic causality here (there is not one entity that is the prime mover in enacting gestures). In this respect, we align ourselves to Sha Xin Wei who thinks of gesture ‘not as an entity in itself but as a relation, as an open entity’ (Wei 2002: 462).

final cut

In 2010, during an interview for *CTheory*, Jussi Parikka asked media artist Garnet Hertz the following question: ‘What if one of the tasks of media arts – and media archaeology – is to continuously renegotiate the definition of a medium?’ (Hertz & Parikka 2010). With our specific focus on unruly reading/writing gestures and, indeed, on creating an unruly gesture here, now, in the form of this multimodal essay, we have tried to do exactly this: to renegotiate what a medium can be or what it does. As such we have highlighted various ways in which gestural performativity and agency has been suppressed as part of our reading/writing practices, and with that has been sidelined as a meaningful agentic force or constraint in knowledge production. Instead of seeing gestures as simply embodiments of media technologies and/or human intentionality; as so-perceived more ‘natural’

forms of embodied mediation; as developing in a linear way towards a future of more direct, a-symbolic and interactive communication; and as human-originated and centred – we have aimed to resurrect them, to re-incise their neglected histories into these hegemonic narratives. By re-appraising gestures within these settings, focusing on their performativity and their potential towards unruliness, on their agentic role in processes of mediation and knowledge production, and on our own becoming with technology through them, it has been our intention to contribute to this ongoing renegotiation of what counts as media (Kember & Zylinska 2012: 24).

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Kamila Kuc is a filmmaker, writer and curator. Her films have screened in venues and at film festivals nationally and internationally. She is the author and editor of numerous books and articles on experimental media, and is the co-founder of Disasters of Peace – a creative international initiative that encompasses research, writing, making and curating.

Notes

¹Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska argue in this respect that ‘a good cut is an ethical cut, whereby an in-cision is also a de-cision. Cutting well therefore means cutting (film, tape, text) in a way that does not lose sight of the horizon of duration or foreclose on the creative possibility of life enabled by this horizon.’ Where Kember and Zylinska focus on photography to work through the ethics of cutting-well, we similarly have cut-up text, video and still images in a specific way here as part of our ‘practice of working through the cut, of re-cutting and re-cising things “for good measure.”’ (Kember & Zylinska 2012: 81–82)

²The ‘agential cut’ is not enacted by individual entities that have agency, but by ‘the larger material arrangement (i.e., set of material practices), which ‘enacts an agential cut between “subject” and “object”’. The agential cut is thus what enacts a causal structure (Barad 2007: 139–140).

³We would like to reiterate here that whereas much has been done about gesture in cinema for example, and here we note works such as Harun Farocki’s *The Expression of Hands* (1997) or Pasi Väliäho’s in depth study *Mapping the Moving Image: Gesture, Thought and Cinema Circa 1900* (2014), in this piece we are concerned specifically

with reading/writing gestures.

⁴Readingwriting is a term used by Lori Emerson to complicate the distinction between reading and writing practices (Emerson 2014: xiv).

⁵Barad argues that the concept of intra-action introduces a more complex view of causality and affect, where 'interaction' assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, 'intra-action' focuses instead on the relationality or co-constitution of entities. Here 'distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action' (Barad 2007: x, 33).

⁶Noland explains this as follows: 'I offer a model that is capable of navigating between the two most influential theories of subjective agency in circulation today: on the one hand a determinist, constructivist theory that depicts subjects as pliant material on which culture inscribes and on the other a neovitalist approach that tends to exaggerate the subject's capacity to express and fashion itself' (Noland 2009a: 8).

⁷See the following references that explore haptic sense in modernist and print-based writing, for example Garrington (2013) or Lee (2014). Alessandro Ludovico even argues in his chapter 'The Touching Charm of Print' that, in comparison, 'classic printed publications are using a much richer sensorial environment, providing inputs for multiple sensory modalities' (Ludovico 2016).

⁸Even Noland, who states she is wary of oppositional discourses, opposes print to digital poetry in her research on digital gestures, highlighting the potential of digital animation (Noland 2009b).

⁹Emerson quotes Donald Norman: 'Most gestures are neither natural nor easy to learn or remember. Few are innate or readily predisposed to rapid and easy learning. Even the simple headshake is puzzling when cultures intermix' (Norman 2010).

¹⁰Even more, so do the nonhuman machinic gestures involved in digitisation, visible in glitches created in the iterative scanning process, from folded and flipped pages to pages copied through transparent paper—fixated evidence of the gestural dynamics of digitisation.

¹¹A Microsoft patent application shows custom Kinect gestures have been created by roaming user profiles (Wollman 2011).

¹²Facebook, Apple, Microsoft and Intel all purchased gesture-control start-ups within the past several years (Lorenzetti 2015).

¹³Alessandro Ludovico calls these specific kinds of print gestures 'subversive gestures' (Ludovico 2016).

¹⁴Commonplace books are a type of scholarly scrapbook used to compile knowledge by excerpting, cutting, copying and pasting snippets of texts and keeping them for future purposes such as reference and quotation.

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