6. Two or Three Ways of Speaking with the Hands

> "I have sometimes wondered why we have no Treatise on the Hand, a thorough study of the innumerable potentialities of that miraculous machine which blends delicate sensibility and nimble strength. There would be no limit to such a study."
>
> Paul Valéry[1]

In conversation with Serge Daney and two other editors of the *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1982, Godard suddenly starts to talk about a fictive choice:

> If I had been condemned by a caliph with the words, "All right, you may continue making films, but you must decide between blindness or having your hands cut off. What is your choice?" I think I would choose blindness; it would interfere with me less [...]. I would be more obstructed by not being able to use my hands when making a film than by not being able to use my eyes.[2]

Godard's assertion seems absurd. It is difficult to imagine the hands being more important to a director than his eyes, and how blindness would inhibit him less than the loss of his hands. Yet this provocative preference for the hand over the eye has its parallels in Godard's films—the scene with the blind editing assistant in JLG/JLG analyzed in a previous chapter is only one obvious example. "If the skin of my hand was as sensitive as your eye, I should see with my hand as you see with your eyes; and sometimes I imagine there are animals who have no eyes, but can nevertheless see,"[3] says Diderot, in one of the reference texts for Godard's self-portrait. And Godard has in fact always linked his examination of different types of images at least implicitly to his interest in hands and their forms of expression. His films and texts are pervaded by hands and thoughts about their relation to theory and practice—most clearly in Histoire(s) du cinéma (ill. 65–70).

1 Paul Valéry, "Address to the College of Surgeons," [1938] ibid., *Occasions,* trans. Roger Shattuck, Frederick Brown (Princeton: Princeton UP 1970), 129–150, 143.

2 Jean Luc Godard, "Le Chemin vers la parole" [1982], *Godard par Godard I,* 498–519: 503f.

3 Denis de Diderot, "Addition to the Letter on the Blind" [1749], *Diderot's Early Philosophical Works*, ed. Margaret Jourdain (New York: Lenox Hill 1972), 142–157: 156.

Ills. 65-70

Hands trying to feel for each other, as in one of the first shots of La Chinoise, hands making fists to present the socialist greeting, as in Le petit soldat, hands gliding along a body, as in the opening scene of Une femme mariée: a whole catalogue of sequences can be complied from Godard's early films in which the hand is the main figure of cinematic narrative and

takes over the direction for the duration of individual scenes.[4] Narration becomes manual in a literal sense.

But Godard's interest in the motif can't be restricted to the 1960s. He has also repeatedly made hands into independent figures in more recent films. Nouvelle vague, for example, begins with the autonomous and enigmatic scene of a hand being fleetingly caressed by another, a gesture which is taken up later in the film in what turns out to be one of its central shots.[5] In an extended interview with Alain Bergala, in which he recalls his productions of the 1980s and 90s, Godard mentions the frequent occurrence of the motif: "Shots of hands repeatedly occur in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. I only noticed this afterwards. There are a great many shots of hands."[6] What Godard describes in relation to the concentrated montage of the Histoire(s), and explains as an unconscious impulse, can in fact be observed over a period of over forty years. But what pattern does this preference follow? To what discourses do these scenes allude?

Once more, the motif of the hand is a bridge to the work of Harun Farocki. As in Godard's work, hands are repeatedly seen in Farocki's films, seeming to detach themselves from their bodies, observed with great attention as autonomous figures with their own forms of expression: in Between Two Wars the fingers of the chimney baron dance a tango with those of a young woman, a metaphor for the convergence of politics and economic interests during the Weimar Republic; having received the news that nothing more stands in the way of the decisive merger of several coking plants, the baron symbolically interlocks his fingers (ill. 71 and 72).[7]

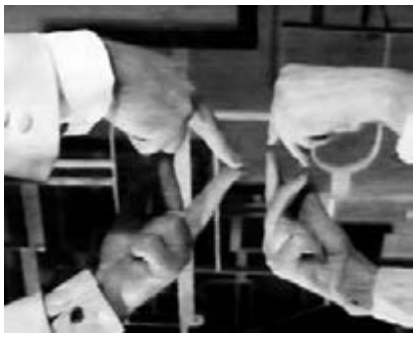
As You See often shows a robotic hand that mechanically grabs a component and carries out various grasping movements: an emblem for the shift

4 When Godard was awarded Switzerland's Grand Prix Design for his lifetime achievements in 2010, Michael Baute made Godardloop, a 27-minute compilation of visual motifs from the films of Jean-Luc Godard. One of the segments is devoted entirely to the motif of hands. Godardloop, FR/G 2010, director: Michael Baute. [https://vimeo.com/31347453, accessed July 15, 2014.]

5 Nouvelle vague, F/CH 1990, director: Jean-Luc Godard. See Elke Bippus, "'Das Wunder unserer leeren Hände.' Jean-Luc Godards Erzählmodus in Nouvelle Vague," *HAND. Medium – Körper – Technik*, eds. Ulrike Bergermann, Andrea Sick, Andrea Klier (Bremen: Thealit 2001), 285–297.

6 Godard, "Une boucle bouclée. Nouvel entretien avec Jean-Luc Godar par Alain Bergala," [1997], *Godard par Godard II*, 9–41: 30.

7 Five years after Between Two Wars, Farocki wrote as follows about a scene in Jean-Luc Godard's Passion: "The strongest and deepest connection between two hands is the interlocking of the fingers." Harun Farocki, "Passion," *Filmkritik* 7/1983, 317–328: 324.



Ill. 71 and ill. 72

from manual labor to industrial production, and later to the postindustrial processing of data rather than material.[8] Yet the clumsy, unchanging movements of the artificial hand also refer to the dexterity and complexity of the real limb; in its planned abolition through automatization, the superiority of actual manual work is revealed. The installation Interface performs a series of gestures at the editing table and repeatedly focuses on Farocki's own hand, whose movements illustrate the "gestic thinking" about which he speculated in "What an Editing Room Is." In this sense, Interface can be read as an important study for the television production The Expression of Hands, which was made in 1997 and represents a kind of metafilm on ways of portraying the hand. The fact that—as with Cine City Paris—it contains a commentary on a scene from a Godard film once again shows the close interweaving of the work of Farocki and Godard.

Before going into the subject in more detail, and in order to indicate one of the most important functions of such hand sequences, I would like to return to the photograph of the woman in Auschwitz—discussed in the previous chapter—from Images of the World and the Inscription of War. The photograph develops an unsettling dynamic through the historical knowledge of the viewer. Death and survival coincide, as Roland Barthes remarked in relation to a photograph of a condemned man: "But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *this will be* and *this has been*."[9] What Barthes sees as the defining characteristic of the photographic medium as a whole also applies to the specific photograph examined by Harun Farocki.

8 These economic and historical transitions play an important role in As You See and other films by Harun Farocki: the working title of Images of the World and the Inscription of War was The History of Labor.

9 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography* [1980], trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage 1993), 96.

Ill. 73

The image is ambiguous, as it both participates in and denies death. A production photo, taken as part of the accompanying material for Farocki's film and often reproduced since then,[10] shows the woman framed by the author's hands (ill. 73).

The hands prominently crop the picture and determine a provisional framing. Together with the scissors, which lie ready for use next to the photograph, they prepare a shot and mark it as an enlargement of the original photograph. The hands cut, but they also seem to protect the woman and shield her from her surroundings. The gesture shows the author and producer of the film literally intervening in the argumentation, and presents the production of theory as a work process. It directs the eye and the attention of the viewer. In this respect, the hands become part of the act of seeing: "The hand intervenes into the image, emulates a lens of flesh and blood, works with the eye and directs it—through the act of intervention itself—to something that is perhaps then taken up by the commentary."[11] In Images of the World there are several such scenes: we see Farocki leafing through a book of images of Algerian women photographed for the first time (ill. 74 and 75), or examining the aerial photographs of the concentration camp. The hand establishes relationships and provisionally determines viewing angles, for example to indicate what it means to subject one's face to a camera for the first time.

The interest both Farocki and Godard have in the hand has several sources in film history and wider cultural contexts. Both directors admire the films of Robert Bresson,[12] whom Pascal Bonitzer described as the inventor of a "special language of the hands": "The great cineastes have tried to show that a hand says something different from what the mouth declares. Bresson has created a special language of the hands, a form of gesture unique to him

10 For example, on the cover of the book by Nora M. Alter, *Projecting History. German Nonfiction Cinema 1967–2000* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2002).

11 Johannes Beringer, "Hand und Auge," *Zelluloid* no. 28/29, May 1989, 64–68: 64. The same issue of *Zelluloid* also includes a discussion between Harun Farocki and Klaus Heinrich that took place in Heinrich's postgraduate seminar.

12 In 1984, *Filmkritik* published two special editions around Robert Bresson's film L'Argent. They contain Farocki's text "Bresson: A Stylist" (later included in Farocki's book *Nachdruck/Imprint*) and extracts (about actors) from a long interview with Bresson conducted by Michel Delahaye and Jean-Luc Godard in 1966. *Filmkritik* 1–2/1984, 25–34.

Ill. 74 and ill. 75

which almost denounces the words of the mouth."[13] The uniqueness in Bresson's approach to the hand, as in L'Argent (ill. 76–78), lies in a radical autonomization and the resulting possibilities of creating tension from the equality of two contradictory forms of expression.[14]

The language of the hands is opposed to and foils that of the word but can also occasionally correspond to it. The discrepancy between the two forms of expression enables frequent disruption and mutual commentary. Behind this is a poetics that is contrary to the usual cinematic redundancies arising from an understanding of sound and image as a mere doubling, and instead makes use of their opposition and the friction between them.

Over and above this film-historical connection, the hand also draws attention to a larger cultural and historical framework. Farocki and Godard have had a continual interest in the economic background to filming, and in work processes and technologies. The historical background to many of Harun Farocki's films is the mechanization and automatization of increasingly wider spheres of human action, and the close connection this has to the development of technologies of image recognition and production. Whether the subject matter is the replacement of the human

13 Jean-Claude Carrière, Pascal Bonitzer, *Praxis des Drehbuchschreibens* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag 1999), 113.

14 This is taken up explicitly or implicitly by both Godard and Farocki. Farocki refers to it in his text on Bresson, and explains the attention to the hand in terms of the change it creates: "Continuously looking at the importance of speaking people (with words and with facial gestures) is unbearable, even if the camera is positioned most skillfully. Before Bresson shows a close-up of a face, he shows the close-up of a hand. Wth passion, he cuts off the head and with that the face, and concentrates on the actions of the hand (or the foot)." Harun Farocki, "Bresson: A Stylist," ibid., *Nachdruck/Imprint*,172–184, 180. See also Hartmut Bitomsky's characterization of L'Argent: "Hands that seize, hold, pass on, receive, deliver something. One could also pursue the film as a long and convoluted from one hand to the next." Hartmut Bitomsky, "Ohne Alibi sein," *Filmkritik* 1–2/1984, 17–24: 20.

Ills. 76-78

eye by image-recognition software in the productive and destructive industries (Images of the World, Eye/Machine I–III, War at a Distance) or the impending abolition of manual work by industrial manufacturing (As You See), the subtraction of the human being from work processes has been a determining theme of Farocki's films since the 1980s. Against this background, the motif of the hand makes it possible to focus these interests with an image and enables the director to raise the issue of work processes and the relationship between "immaterial" intellectual production and manual labor. The hand is a survivor of manual, non-alienated forms of production at a time when increasingly large areas of sensory experience are being delegated to machines—machines that see and grasp, machines of production and destruction. In relation to work processes, the hand stands for the concrete and individual in contrast to the interchangeable and abstract rhythm of machines.

***

Reflection on the significance of the hand goes as far back as ancient Greece, where it marks the intellectual point of departure of a European philosophy of technology. In "On the Parts of Animals," Aristotle contrasts two positions and sets the course of the discussion for the following centuries:

> Now it is the opinion of Anaxagoras that the possession of these hands is the cause of man being of all animals the most intelligent. But it is more rational to suppose that his endowment with hands is the consequence rather than the cause of his superior intelligence. For the hands are instruments or organs, and the invariable plan of nature in

> distributing the organs is to give each to such animal as can make use of it; nature acting in this matter as any prudent man would do. For it is a better plan to take a person who is already a flute-player and give him a flute, than to take one who possesses a flute and teach him the art of flute-playing.[15]

Disregarding the plausibility of this argumentation—how can someone become a flute player without first owning an instrument?—Aristotle's juxtaposition exposes two viewpoints that continue to determine the discussion of the hand during the following centuries, either seeing it materialistically as a physical a priori of reason or idealistically as preceding from the primate of reason. But the idea expounded shortly after this passage has had more significant influence: Aristotle claims that the hand "is not to be looked on as one organ, but as many," and continues to characterize it as "an instrument for further instruments. This instrument, therefore—the hand—of all instruments the most variously serviceable, has been given by nature to man, the animal of all animals the most capable of acquiring the most varied handicrafts.[16]

Various modern reappraisals go back to this position. Marshall McLuhan's proposal of understanding media as extensions of the human body, as technical "extensions of man,"[17] can be seen as a continuation of Aristotelian thought, for example. But the evolutionary deliberations of Friedrich Engels are also based on Aristotle's ideas. In Engel's concept, the human being is only secondarily a social and communicative animal. Socialization and communication can be traced back to the gestures of labor, as both developments can only take place when the hand is liberated from walking on all fours. For this reason, the hand not only participates in the "transition from ape to man" but as the organ of labor it also represents the decisive step within the process of evolution:

> Thus the hand is not only the organ of labor, *it is also the product of labor*. Only by labor, by adaptation to ever new operations, through

15 Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, trans. William Ogle (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co 1882), 117–118.

16 Ibid., 118. See also Wolfgang Krohn, "Technik als Lebensform. Von der aristotelischen Praxis zur Technisierung der Lebenswelt," *Philosophie der natürlichen Mitwelt. Grundlagen – Probleme – Perspektiven. Festschrift für Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich*, eds. Hans Werner Ingensiep, Anne Eusterschulte (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2002), 193–210.

17 See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man* [1964] (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1994).

> the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, have given the human hand the high degree of perfection required to conjure into being the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini.[18]

Where Aristotle saw reason as the decisive factor in the hand's versatility, labor was the crucial element for Engels. Surprisingly, he doesn't instance the gestures of the proletarian worker in order to illustrate his theory but the activities of painter, sculpture, and musician. He doesn't find his examples in socially useful work but in art as the complete self-realization of the hands. With his glorification of the hand as an evolutionary product of labor, Engels also enthrones art as the most consummate outcome of manual dexterity: no art without the preparatory and schooling gestures of labor.

Taken together, Engels' and Aristotle's ideas enable the concepts of labor, thought, and art to determine a wide-ranging set of coordinates within which to think about the hand. In contrast to what one might first expect, the hand is not exclusively associated with practice but equally points to reflection and aesthetics. So a hasty schematism that sees practice as concrete handiwork and theoretical thought as its abstract counterpart is inadequate and has provoked objection at various times. In the Romantic utopia of the unity of action and reflection, the opposition of hand and thought was very much called into question, and Marxism insisted on an unalienated, unified form of work, which had meanwhile been differentiated through the division of labor and the increasing alienation of manual and mental processes. "It is said that some think, the others act!" is how Denis de Rougemont summarizes the popular view of the hand in his influential book *Penser avec les mains*, only to continue with a call to overcome this dualism: "But the true condition of man is to think with his hands."[19] Thoughts from Rougemont's book regularly appear in Godard's films from the 1980s onwards and take on an almost programmatic character in chapter 4A of Histoire(s) du cinéma.[20]

18 Friedrich Engels, "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man" [1873-1883], ibid. *Dialectic of Nature* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Press 1954), 228–246: 230.

19 Denis de Rougemont, *Penser avec les mains* [1936] (Paris: Gallimard 1972), 151.

20 In chapter 4A, Le contrôle de l'univers, Godard quotes a long passage from Denis de Rougement's book: "It is high time for thought to become once more / as it is in reality / dangerous to the thinker / and able to transform reality / where I create I am real / Rilke wrote / some think,

De Rougement's appeal is more than the extension of the Aristotelian figure of thought that considers thinking and acting as two sides of the same coin. His essay, which first appeared in 1936, also politically charges the connection between hand and brain, and from this derives its call for committed, "intervening" thought. Diagnosing a split between apparently unreflecting activists on the one hand (de Rougemont lived and worked during the mid-1930s in Frankfurt and observed both the National Socialist regime and the Stalinism of the Soviet Union) and apparently disinterested intellectuals on the other, his formula is a plea for reflecting on intervention and intellectual commitment. De Rougement contrasts the intellectual and the worker in the poles of theory and practice in order, in dialectic conclusion, to derive his call for "thinking with the hands" from the two poles' apparent incompatibility, which is countered by his appeal. Numerous further distinctions are associated with this basic opposition: the difference between idealism and materialism in the history of ideas, the economic distinction between conception and execution, the topographic contrast between individual desk (or editing table) and abstract factory. In his self-description, the intellectual is in an intermediate position, as he always sees his task in giving his theories a practical function. Thus questions about the hand are also questions about action, and where necessary about agitation. A cipher like the year 1968, which for both Farocki and Godard is a crystallization point for the question of the social relevance of filmmaking, therefore also stands for the problem of how theoretical thought (of a writer, filmmaker, intellectual) can be transformed into concrete political action.[21] Against this background, the hand represents a privileged motif if one wishes to speak cinematically about the simultaneity of practice and theory. It is the hand itself that poses the question of the status of theory because it is the organ of execution but also because it has always had a connection to the complex problems of perception and

they say / others act / but the true human condition / is thinking with one's hands." Jean-Luc Godard, "chapter four (a) control of the universe," ibid., *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, trans. John Howe (Munich: ECM New Series 1999), 36–49: 38f.

21 See the important interview with Godard from 1967 in which the questions of the coming year are already formulated: Jean-Luc Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts," ibid. *Godard on Godard*, 67–104. Farocki is distinctly reserved and skeptical now about the events of 1968: "I don't want to badmouth '68, but I'm still quite hung over from it. I once read that the French people shouted 'The King shall live!' at the beginning of the revolution—this meant that they wanted to overthrow the monarchy. I have that same feeling: we said something completely different from what we meant, and nowadays it seems that our intentions were right." "Nine Minutes in the Yard. A Conversation with Harun Farocki" [2000], *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP 2004), 297–314: 314.

reason. Because of its diversity, it is the symbol of both the active and the thinking person.

Aside from the complex of labor and the problem of the oscillations between theory and practice, the hand is primarily an organ of communication. In his paleographic study of hand and word, André Leroi-Gourhan quotes the fourth-century Gregory of Nyssa:

> So it was thanks to the manner in which our bodies are organized that our mind, like a musician, struck the note of language within us and we became capable of speech. This privilege would surely never have been ours if our lips had been required to perform the onerous and difficult task of procuring nourishment for our bodies. But our hands took over that task, releasing our mouths for the service of speech.[22]

The autonomization of the hand described by Leroi-Gourhan leads to the liberation of the mouth and enables sophisticated linguistic communication. This naturally doesn't mean that all language is henceforth monopolized by the mouth. In its impressing independence, the hand is a sophisticated communicative organ in its own right. Particularly in the era of the silent film, which developed a rich visual inventory and has a strong presence in the thinking of Godard and Farocki, the gestural potential of the hand was repeatedly mobilized in order to give the "dumb" medium a language of its own.[23]

There are two sides to the conception of the hand as an organ of communication: on that of the addressee, the "expression of the hands" calls for the necessity of interpreting its gestures; for as long as there has been a physiognomic practice of reading characteristics and states of mind from faces, there has also been a practice of interpreting gestures and reading the hand—something that goes as far as gestural language and chiromancy. In recent years, due to an anthropological orientation in cultural studies and an interest in the "readability" of the body, numerous publications have appeared that deal with the hand from various perspectives.[24]

22 Gregory of Nyssa: "Treatise on the Creation of Man" [379], quoted in André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1993), 25.

23 I will return to the function of the hand in the silent film in connection with Farocki's film The Expression of Hands.

24 For an evolutionary and neurobiological perspective, see Frank R. Wilson, *The Hand. How its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture* (New York: Pantheon 1998). An overview of the various discourses on the hand is provided by Marco Wehr, Martin Weinmann, eds. *Die*

> The "tool of tools" is one of the most individual parts of the human body, so it is plausible not to attempt to read solely from faces but also from hands. Hands and arms are active as narrative agents of the body in both spontaneously individual and culturally acquired, coded gestures.[25]

Two things should be noted here: Jörg Becker, co-author of Harun Farocki's film The Expression of Hands, describes the hand both as an appeal to reading and interpretation, and as an autonomous narrative element of cinematic and other discourses. The hand occupies the interface between emotion and convention. Its special place in relation to the rest of the body has to do with both its readability and its reflective quality. "It can happen that what someone writes comes as much from the hand as the head,"[26] writes Hans-Jost Frey, provoking the question as to which of the two body parts his sentence itself came from:

> It is conceivable that writing, taken in the broadest sense, occurs as the flow of thinking into the hand, which forms the thought into words, so that an exact boundary between inside and outside, thought and language, mind and hand can no longer be drawn. The transitions become more imperceptible and, just as thinking guides the hand, the deliberation of the hand makes thought handleable.[27]

Frey goes beyond the Aristotelian idea of a mutual correspondence between mind and hand by relating the two entities closer to one another and pointing to their blending in the act of writing.[28] Furthermore, the

Hand. Werkzeug des Geistes (Heidelberg: Spektrum 1999). The conference proceedings *HAND. Medium – Körper – Technik. Zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft*, eds. Ulrike Bergermann, Andrea Sick, Andrea Klier (Bremen: Thealit 2001) address media theory from a feminist perspective. Part of the Cologne collaborative research center on "Media and Cultural Communication" examines the hand at the interface of rhetoric, iconography, and media theory: Matthias Bickenbach, Annina Klappert, Hedwig Pompe, eds. *Manus loquens. Medium der Geste – Geste der Medien* (Cologne: DuMont 2003 [= *Mediologie* vol. 7]). See also Volker Pantenburg, "Aus Händen lesen," *KulturPoetik* vol. 3,1 (2003), 42–58.

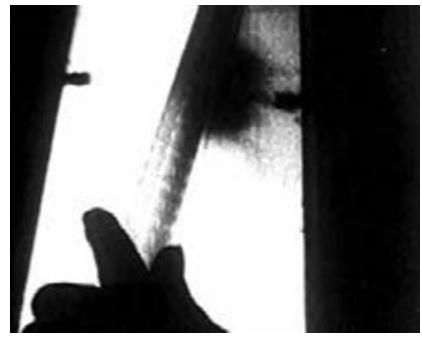
25 Jörg Becker, "Der Ausdruck der Hände. Ein filmischer Terminus," *Suchbilder. Visuelle Kultur zwischen Algorithmen und Archiven*, eds. Wolfgang Ernst, Stefan Heidenreich, Ute Holl (Berlin: Kadmos 2003), 30–45: 33.

26 Hans-Jost Frey, "Tastatur," ibid., *Lesen und Schreiben* (Basel: Urs Engler 1998), 48–53: 48.

27 Ibid., 50.

28 At this point, there should be a discussion of Heidegger's writings, and also of Jacques Derrida's reading of Heidegger, in which the hand becomes the protagonist of a poetics of offering. I will return to this in connection with Godard's Nouvelle vague. Jacques Derrida,

quotation links the problem of writing to the question of reflectivity. Gunter Gebauer formulates this in general terms: "Of all human organs, the hand possesses the widest variety of active functions. It can be applied in a great many ways to things within and out of its reach, and also to the *body*, including the hand itself."[29] Before any interpretation of its individual functions, the hand therefore stands for a multiplicity of possible applications that is also important for its deliberate use in films. Gebauer links the hand linguistically to activity (Ger. *Handlung*) and notes the possibility of a reflexive relationship of the hand to itself and the rest of the body, but in his description the hand also appears as a fundamentally open and ambiguous organ. Maurice Merleau-Ponty takes the idea of the self-reflective possibilities of the hand further, and, as I have shown, Godard adopts an important aspect of his ideas in JLG/JLG:



Ills. 79-81

"*Geschlecht* II Heidegger's Hand," trans. John P. Leavey, *Deconstruction and Philosophy. The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987), 161–196.

29 Gunter Gebauer, "Hand," *Vom Menschen. Handbuch Historische Anthropologie*, ed. Christoph Wulf (Weinheim und Basel: Beltz 1997), 479–489: 479.

> If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand. But this last-minute failure does not drain all truth from that presentiment I had of being able to touch myself touching: my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement, its sensory-motor circuits, the return ways that control and release movements, it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives.[30]

Merleau-Ponty's idea shows both the possibilities and limitations of the self-reflective potential of the hand. The mutual touching of both hands remains only the attempt at self-perception: the congruity of gesture and insight forms an asymptote that may be approached but is finally unreachable.

In the silent era of filmmaking, particular attention was given to gestures and their "language of the hands." So it is unsurprising that the theoretical concepts about the medium also speak about the hand. Walter Benjamin, for example, pursues and transforms Gregory of Nyssa's idea of a new autonomy of the hand through upright walking. In his essay on the work of art, he links the mechanization of reproduction brought about by photography to an emancipation of the hand:

> For the first time, photography freed the hand from the most important artistic tasks in the process of pictorial reproduction—tasks that now devolved upon the eye alone. And since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was enormously accelerated, so that it could now keep pace with speech.[31]

Benjamin therefore not only sees photography as the first technological medium in a chain of de-auratizing forms of reproduction that uncouple the work of art from the here and now; he also discerns a shift in sensory

30 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* [1964], trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP 1968), 3–49: 9.

31 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility. Second Version" [1936], trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn, ibid., *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge/London: Harvard UP 2008), 19–55, 20–21.

responsibilities. If previous to photography the hand had been the decisive organ of artistic reproduction, now the eye became the gage of aesthetic decision. For Benjamin, this is primarily connected with acceleration. Because the camera aperture opens and closes in an instant, the process of reproduction is not only simplified but above all considerably accelerated, with the effect of extending the pictorial universe. One theory that is at least indirectly connected to this development holds that the appraisal of this new, considerably more wide-ranging image world and its characteristics—such as the evolution of an "optical subconscious," as Benjamin suggests—requires the development of new proficiencies in reading and interpretation.

***

> But hands are a complicated organism, a delta into which many divergent streams of life rush together in order to pour themselves into the great storm of action. There is a history of hands; they have their own culture, their particular beauty; one concedes to them the right of their own development, their own needs, feelings, caprices, and tendernesses.[32]

It is not by chance that Rainer Maria Rilke describes the world, whose center is understood to be the hand, as a reflex of the encounter with a visual artist. The quotation comes from Rilke's essay about Auguste Rodin, written in 1902. It follows a catalogue-like enumeration of the wide range of hand types found in Rodin's work. Yet Rilke by no means repeats the usual topos of the "hand of the artist," from which the creativity of the master can be read.[33] On the contrary, Rodin's hand sculptures, as Rilke describes them, are almost completely detached from their owners and lead a life of their own.

A straight line leads from Rilke's essay on Rodin to his *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, also written in Paris. The image of the hand pervades Rilke's only long prose text like a leitmotif.[34] The many hand episodes include the haunting scene in which a limb "emancipates" itself from body and mind and follows its own will. A banal event—the search for a pen which

32 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin* [1902], trans. Jessie Lemont, Hans Trausil (New York: Sunwise 1919), 40.

33 Karl Riha published a collection of examples in word and image in the 1980s. See Karl Riha, *Das Buch der Hände. Eine Bild- und Textanthologie* (Nördlingen: GRENO 1986).

34 See Idris Parry, "Malte's Hand," *German Life and Letters* 11 (1957), 1–12.

has rolled off the desk—causes the young Malte to witness a hallucinatory encounter with a phantom hand that seems to grasp for his own:

> I could already make out the wall in back, which ended at a bright baseboard. I oriented myself by the legs of the table; above all I recognized my own, outstretched hand moving around down below all by itself, like some aquatic animal investigating the bottom. I looked at my hand, I still remember, almost curiously; it seemed as if it could do things I had not taught it as it tapped around there so independently, with motions I had never seen it make. I pursued it as it pressed forward, it interested me, I was prepared for anything.[35]

And indeed the now alien hand is "answered" by another one, seeming to come from within the wall: "But how could I have been prepared for another hand coming out of the wall towards mine, a bigger, uncommonly skinny kind of a hand I had never seen. It was searching around in a similar fashion from the other side, and both outstretched hands were blindly moving toward each other."[36] This excerpt from *Malte Laurids Brigge* is a particularly striking example of how far the autonomization of the hand can be taken.[37] Through the dissociation of seeing from feeling, which is entirely given over to the hand, Rilke creates an uncanny effect of alienation and estrangement. The autonomy of the hand offers narrative possibilities for presenting the familiar as foreign.

The theme of hands with a life of their own has been increasingly adopted since the early twentieth century. The horror movie in particular repeatedly took up the motif, treating it literally: In The Hands of Orlac, Robert Wiene has a former concert pianist succumb to the belief that the hands he has received in a transplant belonged to a murderer and that he must himself now murder. In The Beast with Five Fingers, Peter Lorre's hand completely detaches itself from his body and attempts to strangle its owner.[38]

35 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* [1919], trans. Burton Pike (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press 2008), 69.

36 Ibid.

37 In this, it is similar to a short prose fragment by Kafka that was given the title "The Struggle of the Hands" by Max Brod. See Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, ed. Max Brod (Boston: Exact Change 1991). For a reading of Kafka's text, see Pantenburg, "Aus Händen lesen," 42–58.

38 Also worthy of mention are Oliver Stone's The Hand (USA 1981) or Sam Raimi's Evil Dead II (USA 1987), in which hands also become independent and rebel against their (and other) bodies.

What Rilke's text achieves through narrative perspective and the dissociation of two senses is immediately suggested in film by the possibilities of the camera. Making a hand visible and placing it at the centre of a film requires the close-up, a special type of shot that Béla Balázs—in *The Spirit of Film*, written in 1930—called the "first, radical change of distance"[39] between audience and actor. For Balázs, the radical redefinition of the gap between work and viewer is the distinctive feature that distinguishes the medium of film from all other art forms, particularly from theater. Calm, distanced observation isn't possible in the cinema because the viewer's perspective on events is altered with every shot as the audience is hurled from one point of view to the next. The aggressive and violent potential of film lies in this permanent, jerky alteration of perspective, whose effect on perception was described by Walter Benjamin as *choc* and whose radical novelty was also emphasized by Rudolf Arnheim:

> For example: In scene 1 a man is discovered ringing the front doorbell of a house. Immediately following appears a totally different view—the interior of the house with a maid coming to answer the door. Thus the spectator has been jerked violently through the closed door.[40]

Only through such jumps between different shots or field sizes and the reduction of distance was the hand able to move into the center of cinematic attention and become the second lead alongside the human face.[41] The motif of the hand requires a rudimentary form of montage in order to be able to appear at all.

In the television series The Addams Family (and its cinema spin-offs), the "helping hand," which lives in a small box and comes out from time to time when needed, is a full member of the family.

39 Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Erica Carter (Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books 2010), 100–111: 100.

40 Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* [1932], trans L. M. Sieveking, Ian F. D. Morrow (Berkeley: University of California Press 1957), 8–33: 27. Benjamin makes the following remark about the *choc* effect of film: "Film has freed the physical shock effect—which Dadaism had kept wrapped, as it were, inside the moral shock effect—from this wrapping." Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility. Second Version," 39.

41 Balázs cites Carl Theodor Dreyer's La passion de Jeanne d'Arc, the most well-known film based almost completely on close-ups of faces. Today, one would also have to name Ingmar Bergman and John Cassavetes, among many others, as directors who have repeatedly addressed themselves to the human face. Significantly, they have both made films simply entitled "The Face" (Ansiktet, S 1958, director: Ingmar Bergman; Faces, USA 1968, director: John Cassavetes). For the phenomenon of the face in film, see Christa Blümlinger, Karl Sierek, eds. *Das Gesicht im Zeitalter des bewegten Bildes* (Vienna: Sonderzahl 2002); see also Joanna Barck, Petra Löffler, eds. *Gesichter des Films* (Bielefeld: transcript 2005), here particularly F. T. Meyer, "Hand," 109–120.

Overcoming the distance between viewer and action has a further consequence, which can be described as the isolation and parceling of the human body. What Rilke depicts as a disturbing effect of alienation and division is one of the most common cinematic techniques. Balázs primarily describes this in relation to the face, but his remarks can readily be applied to the hand as a filmic topos, as viewing is first and foremost the result of a technical process, independent of the filmed object:

> For the close-up does not just isolate its object, [...] it raises it out of space altogether. No longer bound by space, the image is also not bound by time. In this psychological dimension of the close-up, the image becomes concept and can be transformed like thought itself.[42]

With regard to the question of concretion and abstraction posed in chapter one, the close-up is paradoxically able to combine proximity and distance. By drawing close to the object portrayed, thus showing it more substantially and precisely than before, the camera also detaches it from all context and turns it into freely disposable material. Interestingly, Balázs describes this not as a change that is purely immanent in the image but as a categorical leap from image to concept. He thinks of the camera—and here his attitude is comparable to that of Godard and Farocki—as a research instrument, as a tool that can amalgamate art, science, and politics into a joint complex. And indeed the "intellectualization" of film, as can be seen with Eisenstein, for example, can only be achieved through deliberate montage.

At this point, it is helpful to point out a different connection between the hand and (cinematic) narration: the development from the concrete (the individual frame) to the abstract (through the linking of several images) correlates with the evolutionary development of the hand, in which the transition can be observed from the deictic gesture, which can only show the individual and concrete, to a mimetic ability to convey more abstract content: "Early on, the hand was only able to point the index finger in the direction of an object in order to indicate it. But it could only point out individual things, which, moreover, had to be present and visible. Then came the imitating hand, which created a bridge to the general, where language is located and the intelligence at its base."[43]

42 Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, 134.

43 Isabelle Létourneau, "La main humaine. Lieu de manifestation et condition d'actualisation," *Sagesse du Corps*, ed. Gabor Csepregi (Aylmer: Éditions du Scribe 2001), 174–191: 177.

Following this cursory look at some of the ways of portraying the hand and the patterns of thought to which it refers, I will now consider some hand scenes related to this tradition from the films of Godard and Farocki.

Asking Oneself: La Chinoise / Vent d'est

In Godard's film La Chinoise from 1967, the relationship between theory and practice is a central element of the plot. A group of students have withdrawn to a temporarily empty apartment in order to study the theoretical basis of Marxism–Leninism and Maoism. Through reading and discussion, they hope for clarification as to the next stage in the revolutionary struggle: how might one think about a link between theory and practice, and how can abstract thought be translated into political action? The fact that the division between intellectual and manual activity is an important part of this problem becomes clear when Véronique (Anne Wiazemsky) talks about studying philosophy at Nanterrre during one of the film's numerous interview scenes.[44] She speaks about the principles of Marxism, praising first and foremost its "lack of differentiation between intellectual and manual labor."

Even the film's opening credits have a programmatic character: instead of the title, which is never mentioned, the red, white, and blue letters familiar from Pierrot le fou appear on the screen, inserting the film into a wider project in its first image.[45] "Un film en train de se faire," we read, a film in the act of making itself; the words emerge slowly, one after the other, and proclaim the simultaneity of production and reception. The film presents itself as provisional—a contemporary example of the interpenetration of conception and realization. After the opening credits, and a scene in which Henri (Michel Séméniako) reads a passage of Marxist social analysis, we see a white wall. A forearm swings into the image from below. It belongs to a woman standing off-screen to the right. The palm is turned towards the wall, and a ring can be seen on one finger. Slowly, the fingers edge leftwards: "Un mot, qu'est-ce que c'est?" What is a word? asks a female voiceover (ill. 82).

44 The interviewer, recognizable by his voice, is Godard himself.

45 Pierrot le fou was the first of Godard's films in which the opening credits are gradually assembled from simple red, white, and blue letters—the colors that can ambivalently stand for both the tricolor and the American flag. Apart from La Chinoise, Godard returned to this technique in Made in USA and Week End.

Ill. 82 and ill. 83

The viewer initially sees nothing but the arm and hand and is compelled to turn the lack of information into a provisional whole: Who does the hand belong to? Who is speaking? To whom is the question addressed? As if in answer to the sudden question, which it almost looks as if the hand itself has posed, a man's forearm, sleeved in green, swings symmetrically into view from the other side of the screen (ill. 83).

The two hands meet in the middle of the screen, overlap, touch one another; sometimes the palms touch, sometimes a palm touches the back of the other hand. "Un mot, c'est ce qui se tait," a word is what remains silent: what we get is a contradictory intensification instead of an explanation. And without being able to see who is uttering these words, this second voice is identifiable for most viewers: it is that of Jean-Pierre Léaud, who featured in many of Godard's films during the 1960s and is one of the icons of the New Wave.[46] Here, he plays the young actor and revolutionary Guillaume Meister—the name is borrowed from Goethe—who dreams of a revolutionary theater updating the theories of Bertolt Brecht. None of this is contained in the image of the two hands: the information accumulates in the course of the film. In both form and content, it is a puzzling and enigmatic image which captures the properties of the hand in its ambiguity. Through the off-screen voices and the bodies, whose continuation the viewer automatically imagines, it is characterized in every way as an excerpt, as the germ of an action that is continued elsewhere, off screen.

46 Léaud is even more closely associated with François Truffaut, for whom he played the figure of Antoine Doinel in five films. For Godard, Léaud appeared in Made in USA and Masculin Féminin before La Chinoise.

Corresponding to the excerpt-like quality of the image, there is a short dialogue that is difficult to place and detaches itself from the figures.[47] It seems to have less to do with the story of two protagonists than with the development of practice and communication, or basic research. With her question about what a word is, Véronique raises the issue of communication in a fundamental way: How is it possible to convey political or other kinds of messages? How does one get from the concrete subject to a valid generalization? The short dialogue between Véronique and Guillaume is as follows:

Véronique.	A word: what is a word?
Guillaume.	A word is what remains silent.
Véronique.	And you?
Guillaume.	Me?
Véronique.	Yes, you. The one for the other.
Guillaume.	Me.
Véronique.	No, you. Someone who tries to tame the unforgettable other one who dares to surprise us.
Guillaume.	And me now.
Véronique.	Yes, the me of excuses, of rejection, almost always.
Guillaume.	And what are we, now?
Together:	We are the discourse of the others.

47 Along with the interest that visual artists, above all sculptors, have in the hand as an expressive medium, there is a direct line here to Richard Serra's films from 1968 and 1969. In an interview Serra tells of how, after studying in the US, he went to Paris, where he came across the films of Robert Bresson and Jean-Luc Godard. His three films Hand Catching Lead, Hands Tied, and Hands Scraping can be seen as a direct response to these cinematic impulses. It would be worthwhile to look at the explosion of film and video production in the visual arts from the mid-1960s onwards in the light of its portrayal of hands. If the hand of the artist belongs to the traditional repertoire of biographical, personalizing art, whose restrictions the art of the 1960s attempted to abolish (seriality, Minimalism, dismissal of the artwork in favor of the concept), a re-evaluation of the hand as form can also be observed in some cases. For Serrra's films, see Kunibert Bering, *Richard Serra. Skulptur, Zeichnung, Film* (*Arcus – Schriftenreihe des Forum Kunst und Wissenschaft Landau e. V.*, vol 3) (Berlin: Reimer 1998), 41–49. See also Benjamin Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film in Richard Serras's Work," *Richard Serra: Arbeiten/Works 66–77*, Tübingen: Kunsthalle 1978 (exh. cat. Tübingen March 8–April 2, 1978/Basel April 22–May 21, 1978), 228–239: 234: " There for the hypothesis can be stated that sculptural reflection reaches its most advanced position precisely at the point where sculpture as a concrete phenomenon is transcended and transformed into sculptural film, i.e. in works such as Richard Serra's early films 'Hand Cathching Lead,' 'Hands Scraping,' 'Hands Tied' (1968), which are no longer sculpture and no longer film, but induce the viewer's access to more modes of perceiving active physiological and psychological identity than the traditions of these two categories used to permit.'

The hands reach for one another during the back and forth of the words and sentences. After Véronique's question ("And you?"), Guillaume initially withdraws his hand. When he passes the ball to her with his "And me now," her hand disappears from view. During the final words spoken in unison, the two hands once again meet in the center of the frame and join together: "the discourse of the others." In this short sequence one can see a literal filming of the dialogue, a transfer of text into image, a permutation of the language of words into that of the hand. In terms of content, this corresponds to the step from an individual position, which defines itself through a power relation ("tame") and is anxious to defend itself, to a collective stance of the shared "discourse of the others." "Hand in hand" symbolizes a gesture of solidarity here, which includes "the others" who are repeatedly and representatively given a voice in the film: the Vietnamese, the Chinese, the workers, the blacks.

The ambiguity of the opening scene of La Chinoise becomes particularly apparent in a comparison with the function of the hand in Vent d'est, which was made two years later, in 1969. Between the two films lies the disruption of May 1968, which separates Godard's previous works from the more aggressive, politicized films of the Groupe Dziga Vertov. This collective, which functioned as "author" of the films, and which mostly consisted of Jean-Pierre Gorin and Godard himself[48] sought to break radically with the rules of film production.[49] The films between 1968 and 1972, more than those preceding May 1968 or those Godard worked on during the remainder of the 1970s, were intended to attack the viewer. In Vent d'est, the attacks are not only directed against the audience's visual faculties but also at the images themselves.

In political terms, the development from La Chinoise to Vent d'est can be seen as an attempt at disambiguation. It's no longer a matter of

48 Godard met Gorin before beginning to shoot La Chinoise, when he was looking for students who had been involved with the politicization of the university in Nanterre.

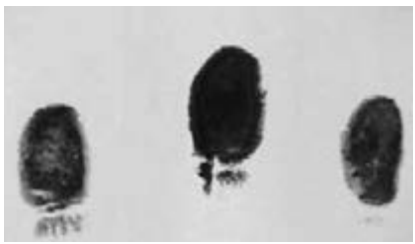
49 This implies a move away from Godard's working methods of the 1960s: away from the production and performance location of the cinema to television productions, which at least theoretically meant moving into the homes of those addressed by the agitation; away from France into various other European countries (the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia), whose national television channels he was able to gain as co-producers; and also away from a type of filmmaking that was "culinary" in Brecht's sense of being easily digestible. Thanks to David Faroult, we have a complete filmography of the group. See David Faroult, "Filmographie du Groupe Dziga Vertov," *Jean-Luc Godard. Documents*, eds. Nicole Brenez, David Faroult, Michael Temple, James Williams and Michael Witt (Paris: Édition du Centre Pompidou 2006), 132–133.

keeping questions open but of turning them into action: theory becomes didactics. This step is also readable in a scene that again shows two hands. Here they stand for a possible (and radical) answer to Lenin's famous question "What to do?" which can frequently be seen in intertitles. While La Chinoise still attempted to discuss the problem of politicization in communicative terms ("A word: what is a word?") and showed the protagonists in search of a language appropriate to describing the social situation (the language of Brecht, the language of Mao, the language of Mayakovsky), in Vent d'est politics and action are directly combined. In the second part of the film, which is conceived as a radical critique of the first part, the didactic, subversive impetus is particularly evident: Godard and Gorin disband the model-like attempt to compare the conventions of the Western with those of capitalist film production and direct their aggression against their own concept of filmmaking: "Second part of the film," declaims a voiceover, and continues, "You have shown a mechanism—the strike, the delegate, the general assembly, the repression, the police state, and so on. From a real movement, May '68 in France, '68–69 in Italy. You made a film. How did you make it? Criticize now, fight now, transform now."[50]

The criticism demanded here is not restricted to attacking the image verbally; it also affects the image itself when the film material is painted over, scratched, and replaced for long sections by a monochrome red. Godard has rarely made such extensive use of experimental techniques in order to bring about his "destruction of the forms."[51] Criticism no longer means differentiation and investigation here but the abolition of differentiation in favor of the act. There is a corresponding interest in the second part of the film in how to give instructions on militant action through flyers or leaflets. In 1968, at the DFFB film school in Berlin, a commotion was caused by the film Herstellung eines Molotovcocktails (Production of a Molotov Cocktail), which precisely shows what the title announces and ends with a shot of the Springer building, the headquarters of a right-wing news publisher—a shot that was seen by many, with good reason, as an

50 The film text is available in *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 240, July/August 1972, 31–50: 42.

51 Yvonne Spielmann adopted this term from Godard's interviews during his Dziga Vertov period. See Yvonne Spielmann, "Zerstörung der Formen: Bild und Medium bei Jean-Luc Godard," *Theater und Kino in der Zeit der Nouvelle Vague*, eds. Volker Roloff, Scarlett Winter (Tübingen: Stauffenburg 2000), 111–124. Spielmann's concept of an analytic film practice converges with the idea of film as theory proposed here.



Ill. 84 and ill. 85

incitement to violence.[52] Vent d'est seeks a similar link between film and militant action. Unlike La Chinoise, in which the endeavor to turn thought into deed leads to suicide, exclusion from the group, and an unsuccessful assassination attempt, Vent d'est no longer wishes to show a failed transition to terrorism but to terrorize in its own right. Accompanied by the words "to reflect—to be early—to be late—to think—to produce—to simplify—to construct—to wait," Godard and Gorin show the production of a bomb from simple, readily available components. The completed item is followed by a fadeout, while an off-screen explosion can be heard. The next shot shows a wrecked building, surrounded by smoke. Such a sequence contains a deliberate simplification and reduction of complexity, and the hand, as an organ of pure practice, is integrated into the logic of militancy. A didactic series of shots shows how police record-taking can be avoided: a tube of glue is enough to obscure one's fingerprints and foil investigations. "Advice to the militant: caution," Anne Wiazemsky's voice reiterates like a mantra (ill. 84 and 85).

In relation to the difference between the concrete and the abstract, these images could scarcely be further from the theoretical. They attempt to overcome the distance between image and deed as much as possible and to allow little interpretive leeway. They are evidence of the desire to speak concretely rather than abstractly. And yet even here, where the hand has an entirely executive function, an allegorical reading is possible. For the fingerprint also stands for the individual attribution of a deed, which can be interpreted as Godard's imagination as an author. If on one level the subject matter is political disguise and militancy, it certainly also refers to Godard's renunciation of "authorial politics" and his own "disappearance"

52 The film, which is generally thought to have been made by Holger Meins, a later RAF terrorist who was one of the DFFB's first students, was shown to an audience of 1,500 on February 1, 1968 at the Technische Universität Berlin at a planning event for a "Springer tribunal"; the windows of the *Berliner Morgenpost*, a Springer newspaper, were in fact smashed the following morning. See Tilman Baumgärtel, *Harun Farocki. Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm. Werkmonografie eines Autorenfilmers* (Berlin: b_books 1998), 67–72: 71.

into the Group Dziga Vertov in 1968. The person who blurs his fingerprints in order to withdraw behind the deed may be both the political activist and the auteur filmmaker Godard, who after 1968 was interested in breaking as much as possible with the conventional idea of authorship. So there are at least two types of reading: a literal one, which translates the call to violence into non-film reality, and a figurative one, which sees the sequence as an allegory. It is possible that the two types of reading correspond to its two directors—the allegorical approach would then have to be ascribed to Godard, the activist to Gorin. Vent d'est shows how the hand, as an executive organ, becomes a tool for translating political theory into militant action.

Offering Oneself: Nouvelle vague

Nouvelle vague (1990) is a long way from such a transformation of theory into practice. Here, the hand has returned to its open, ambivalent character and has been separated from the context of militant action. Following Godard's political gestures of 1968 and his tentative exploration of video during the 1970s—"My hand is a machine that operates another machine," goes a line from Numéro deux—the hand is now closely linked to the phenomenon of mercy and gains moral qualities connected to its implicit ethic of offering.[53]

Nouvelle vague is full of doublings. It begins with a road accident and the "saving" of Roger Lennox (Alain Delon) by the wealthy Elena Torlato (Domiziana Giordana). Closeness to death and the blessing, against all probability, of not dying are an important motif in what follows. After this opening, the film shows the two living as an unequal couple on Elena's estate on Lake Geneva, playing out their positions of power over one another: In the first part of the film Elena has the advantage over Lennox, who is lethargic and shows little interest in business, and she is openly dominant. In approximately the middle of the film, during a boat trip on the lake, she pulls Lennox into the water and ignores his cries for help and the pleading gesture of his outstretched hand. Lennox seems to be dead but reappears a

53 "The most important sign, the leitmotiv of the film, is the raised hand. Hands of casualties, of women, of men. The question is, will the hand be seized? And with what motivation? For the hand can also pull us into a disaster." Hanno Möbius, "Godards *Nouvelle Vague* in der Kulturgeschichte des Fragments," *AugenBlick* 34, December 2003 (special issue on "Godard and the consequences"), 6–19: 18.

Ill. 86 and ill. 87

while later—this time, as he claims, as Richard Lennox, brother of the deceased. Towards the end of the film, during a second boat ride, Lennox pushes Elena into the lake but pulls her back into the boat shortly afterwards.

While in PASSION the narration of the plot misses the point because it disregards the images, in NOUVELLE VAGUE a summary says little about the film because it can't do justice to its landscapes and gestures. NOUVELLE VAGUE ascribes more importance to the topography of Lake Geneva and the estate, which are filmed in slow, almost hovering tracking shots, and to the movements and communicative gestures of the protagonists than a conventional narrative would. Along with this, Godard extends and intensifies his already excessive practice of quotation. Almost the entire dialogue is made up of quotes from such different authors as Marcel Proust, Dante, Raymond Chandler, Friedrich Schiller, Denis de Rougemont, Karl Marx, Ernest Hemingway, Jacques Lacan, and Arthur Rimbaud, and there are obvious borrowings from the films of Murnau, George Stevens, or John M. Stahl.[54] At the press conference in Cannes, Godard maintained, not without coquetry, that the quotations served to stretch out a story that would only have lasted two minutes over a period of one and a half hours: "My assistant and I said to one another, 'Take all the novels that you love, and I'll give you mine. And take sentences from Hemingway, Faulkner, Gide.' And today we simply don't know who three quarters of it came from."[55] In fact, Godard continued, he hadn't written a single sentence of the film. A correspondence to the use of the hand motif can be seen in this radical liberation from context, which has always determined Godard's approach to images and texts. Even in the first scene of the film, a kind of prologue or motto, the hands—as

54 For the cinematic tradition of the lake motif, which Godard joins with NOUVELLE VAGUE, see Alain Bergala, "Le lac des signes mortels. Autour d'une scène de *L'Aurore*," *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 608, January 2006, 86–88.

55 Jean-Luc Godard, "Tout ce qui est divisé m'a toujours beaucoup touché…" [1990], *Godard par Godard II*, 200–203: 201.

in La Chinoise—stand only for themselves and seem to have no connection to the rest of the film (ill. 86 and 87).

Ills. 88-90

The camera initially shows an open left hand in close-up. Why it is open or what it is waiting for is uncertain. Then, just before the cut to the list of actors, a right hand clenched into a fist brushes the palm of the left hand from the same direction. Do the two hands belong to the same person? Does the second hand place something in the first? Or does it take something from it that we don't notice because of the brevity of the shot? What does this gesture stand for? Isolating the hands from the remaining image, and thus disconnecting them from the "corpus" (the human body, the body of the film), mimics the quotation with which the film begins: "But I wanted to tell a story..." says an off-screen voice, and continues, "... and I still do."[56] The conjunction "but," just like the hands, seems to come from nowhere and refer to something preceding the film. But given Godard's inclination for wordplay it is equally conceivable that he was guided by the phonetic similarity between the words "mais" [but] and "mains" [hands], thus bringing hand and action together. Godard also conspicuously splices the scene, which oscillates between giving and taking, reception and production, into the place where the name of the director usually appears. Nouvelle vague, like La Chinoise, dispenses with the name of its author, which is replaced by an empty hand: the author as receiver.

In contrast to the films of Godard I have analyzed up to now, hands don't just set a particular accent or tone of voice: hands attempting to intertwine are central to three decisive points in the film and link the various "movements" of the film like conjunctions. At the beginning, after the enigmatic

56 All film quotes are taken from the film text in *L'Avant-scène Cinéma*, 1990, vol. 396/397, 8–135.

opening scene, Lennox is met with an accident on a country road. Instead of the accident, we see a large truck approaching a pedestrian and then hear loud hoot. Elena's BMW convertible, apparently being overtaken by the truck, breaks suddenly and stops. Meanwhile, the camera has wandered several times through the branches of the tree Lennox is lying beside. Its gaze is not allocated to a particular person, but it also doesn't merely record unobtrusively. In its calm movements, it functions like a third actor.[57] After Elena has asked Lennox several times if he is in pain, he raises his hand and slowly extends it towards her. This gesture is accompanied by a short dialogue that explicitly refers to the hands: "How wonderful to be able to give something one doesn't have," says Elena, to which Lennox replies, "Miracle of our empty hands" (ill. 88–90).[58] After the exchange of words and the handshake there is a short cut to a series of blurred lights in a nocturnal city, and the film continues with the couple's life on Elena's estate.

How radical this sequence differs from the visual economy of classical narration is apparent in its composition. In terms of spatial organization and lighting, there is a clear break between the first image and the second.[59] While the first is easily recognizable as part of the narration, the composition of the second seems more like a painting. Through its shadows and the lack of a middle ground—it almost looks like a back projection, not a real background—the image is perceptible as an image. As Harun Farocki says:

> The image of Elena's and Lennox's hands reaching out to each other is shot as if it were a painting. Usually when hands are shown in close-up, the background is closed down rather than opened up. They are held against a body, or rest on a musical instrument or table. But Lennox's and Elena's hands are shot as if they were human or mythological figures in a three-dimensional space.[60]

57 Godard does in fact refer to this in the press release for the film: "The camera is one of the figures in the film. If I had done the press book, I would have listed it under the cast." Jean-Luc Godard, "Res, non verba," *Press Book for Nouvelle vague*, ed. Kinowelt (n.p.: 1990)

58 The idea of the "miracle of our empty hands" doesn't come from Godard himself but from Georges Bernanos's *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, a novel that Robert Bresson filmed in 1951. To a certain extent, the scene is a further expression of the "special language of hands," to whose grammar Bresson had contributed.

59 Here the montage produces one of the many false connections ("faux raccords") that pervade Godard's films and divert the attention from the action to the conjunction of images.

60 Harun Farocki, Kaja Silverman, "The Same, Yet Other," ibid., *Speaking about Godard* (New York/London: New York UP 1998), 197–227: 202.

To the same degree with which NOUVELLE VAGUE departs at this point from the usual cinematic portrayal of hands, film once again approaches painting here. The image takes up Michelangelo's ceiling fresco *The Creation of Adam* (1508–1512) in the Sistine Chapel and thus codes Elena's assistance as an act of creation. If the dialogue is taken seriously, this act of creation not only disrupts the economy of the narration but is also inconsistent with the usual understanding of giving and taking. The paradoxical idea of an offering of nothing is neither equivalent to an exchange nor to a classical gift, which presupposes a giver and a receiver. Rather, it recalls what Jacques Derrida describes as the "pure gift" in his critical reading of texts by Marcel Mauss and Charles Baudelaire: "But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange?"[61] Derrida pursues the aporetic structure of the gift, identifying it a little later with the figure of the "impossible." Analogous to love in NOUVELLE VAGUE, the gift can only be thought of as an aim, as a utopian place that is repeatedly contaminated by various hierarchies (male/female, rich/poor, house/nature). It belongs to this context that Godard's film is structured on almost every level by the principle of economics. Financial transactions dominate both the business contacts and the relationship between Elena and Lennox, as well as the dealings between mistress and servant. "We are poor, don't forget," say Elena's servants stereotypically in order to exhort one another to good work. "A woman can't do much harm to a man," Lennox often repeats, and the couple's conversation is full of references to the exchange rate of the dollar, company shares, business trips, and expensive cars, along with quotations from philosophical and literary works. The scenes in which hands occupy the foreground stand out from this monetized field of communication, in which kudos accumulates through the recognition of quotations.[62] They are accordingly not subject to the law of the house (*oikos*) or factory, which is featured in one of the film's first scenes, but are closely associated with landscape and nature; that is, with topographies that tend to evade human access. The first

61 Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1994), 7. Later, Derrida remarks: "From the moment the gift would appear as gift, as such, as what it is, in its phenomenon, its sense and its essence, it would be engaged in a symbolic, sacrificial or economic structure that would annul the gift in the ritual circle of the debt" (23).

62 A figure named Dorothy Parker has the function of identifying the quotes and applauding those who recognize them.

Ill. 91 and ill. 92

of these scenes takes place in a landscape of reeds and trees, the others on Lake Geneva.

Acts of rescue are shown in two such scenes in the course of the film. When Lennox and Elena drive out onto the lake on a speedboat in the middle of the film, their relationship has already cooled. Elena goes swimming and tries to persuade Lennox to come into the water as well. He repeatedly assures her that he can't swim. Finally, she pulls him out of the boat with a single jerk and ignores his drowning cries. His hand sinks. Back in the boat, Elena squints downwards and then into the sun (ill. 91 and 92).

While the film's first hand scene shows an act of creation resulting in the love between Elena and Roger Lennox, this one marks love's apparent end. The life that was "given" in an act without presuppositions is taken away here; death and the absence of the helping hand coincide. Godard summarizes the action of the film, with reference to the hinging points at which the hand is grasped or rejected, as follows:

> What happens in this film is quite elementary: there is a woman who runs into a man with her car. They clasp hands. Then you see two or three things. And then you see the man extending his hand and the woman doesn't take it. Five minutes later, the talk is of winter being over, summer having returned. This is said in a way that certain friends call poetic. And then it is the other way round: it is the woman who is drowning, or wants to drown. She extends her hand; the man hesitates for a moment and finally takes it. And then the woman says to him: "So it was you." That's it. There is nothing else.[63]

According to Godard, human beings are thrown back to basics in extending and grasping the hand: to a giving beyond giving and a taking beyond taking, in which they only give or take of themselves. This reflexive component,

63 Godard, "Tout ce qui est divisé m'a toujours beaucoup touché...," 203.

which reduces matters to their anthropological core and is central to NOUVELLE VAGUE, is also portrayed as a process of recognition in which the two people concerned—Lennox and his apparent *Doppelgänger*—are identified with one another. As in the crime novel (*The Long Goodbye*) to which NOUVELLE VAGUE refers in several intertitles and in borrowing the name of its main character from Raymond Chandler, the death is only feigned and Lennox reappears a little later. The hierarchy between the two protagonists is now reversed: he conducts the business; she lets herself go, and takes little interest in the downfall of the company and the sale of the estate.

In keeping with the mirror-image constellation there is a second boat ride, during which Lennox now pulls Elena into the water and hesitates for a long time before saving her from drowning. Only the repetition of the situation causes Elena to recognize her previous lover in Richard: a superimposition of two images (a kind of mental montage) depicts this act of perception. The two images of Lennox (as Richard and as Roger) lie one above the other, like the hand scenes, and combine into a third, in which Lennox is characterized as "the same, yet other."[64]

Expressing Oneself: GEORG K. GLASER / THE EXPRESSION OF HANDS

It is surprising that none of the prominent scenes in NOUVELLE VAGUE are quoted and commented on in Harun Farocki's study THE EXPRESSION OF HANDS. This film, made in 1997, combines film history, film analysis, and film theory and links to several other of Farocki's films, particularly to INTERFACE. Farocki's interest in hands goes further back, however. Sensitized to the motif in Farocki's work, one will also discover it in less prominent places: for example, in a short passage from the portrait GEORG K. GLASER – WRITER AND SMITH, from 1988. Farocki had conducted an interview with Glaser five years previously and contributed to a special edition of *Filmkritik* on him.[65] However, difficulties in financing the project prevented its realization earlier. In Glaser's fascinating biography, which he described after the Second World War in *Geheimnis und Gewalt*,[66] the upheavals and catastrophes of the twentieth century are reflected in unparalleled clarity:

64 This is the title that Farocki and Kaja Silverman gave to their conversation about NOUVELLE VAGUE. It derives from Rimbaud's famous "Je est un autre," which Godard also quotes in an intertitle. Harun Farocki, Kaja Silverman, "The Same, Yet Other," ibid., *Speaking about Godard*, 197–227.

65 *Filmkritik* 7/1982. The edition contains a long interview with Glaser, together with his story "Die Nummer Eins der Rotfabrik" and an extract from his autobiography *Geheimnis und Gewalt*.

66 Georg K. Glaser, *Geheimnis und Gewalt. Ein Bericht* [1951] (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld 1989).

Ill. 93 and ill. 94

early unemployment and homelessness during the 1920s, reform school, political activity in left-wing youth groups, prison, first publications in 1930 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and other newspapers. After fleeing to France, Glaser worked as a fitter in Toulouse, then for the French National Railroad. He was conscripted into the French army, then deserted, and at the end of the war earned his living with various jobs until founding his own smithy in 1949. Farocki's primary interest in Glaser, apart from his political independence, is his ability to operate on both sides of the division between manual and intellectual labor, or to disallow the distinction. Glaser is an example of the productive communication between the mental work of the writer and the very concrete work of the smith, and in this respect he is a model for Farocki's own understanding of himself as an "audiovisual artisan."[67] Farocki visits Glaser in his workshop in the Paris neighborhood of Marais. He observes the individual phases in the production of a copper bowl and listens to Glaser talking about his manual labor and his writing. The difference between individual work and factory work, between the artisanal "outsmarting of the form" through thousands of even blows of the hammer and the violation of the material by an industrial mold, are discussion topics that relate to Farocki's status as an auteur, in contrast to the industrial film business. In one of the texts, Glaser himself reads in voiceover while images of him at work can be seen (ill. 93 and 94), he describes how metalworking is only imaginable as a close combination of perception and action, of thinking and doing:

> I once described what occurs during only one of the ten thousand hammer blows that are needed to make a jug. It took days to think out sentences

67 The term is a translation of Tilman Baumgärtel's "audiovisueller Handwerker." See Baumgärtel, *Harun Farocki*, 129ff.

> that explained the interaction of brain, hands, and eyes, that illustrated the appropriate forms of the required tools, and gave an understanding of what is involved in outsmarting the original material. For although the number of hammer blows subject the piece of work to a total pressure of several hundredweight, the aim is ingenuity, not violence. Abused material takes its revenge. Reading back these sentences or listening to them took a hundred times longer than the single hammer blow to which they applied.

What is characterized here as the "interaction of brain, hands, and eyes" is expanded a little later in the formulation that the "body's knowledge" lies in this complex interplay, and in the case of the smith one would have to speak of "thinking hands." The thinking hand, which to varying degrees of explicitness has characterized the discourse since Aristotle, has to be taken quite literally with Glaser. The expression indicates an ability and a "knowledge" that is not directed by reason but is stored within the body. With every blow of the hammer, a complex calculation takes place of the various angles in which the work in progress has to stand in relation to tool and arm in order to place the strike correctly: "It becomes a skill. It is the body's knowledge," says Glaser about these sequences of movement.

The film about Georg K. Glaser is concerned with the observation and commentary of gestures that occur in a space between art and craftsmanship, and in several places it establishes relationships between the gestures of manual labor and those of writing. In The Expression of Hands, Farocki films himself at his place of work and connects the gestures of work with those of cinematic narrative. The Expression of Hands links closely to the installation Interface. "Gestic thinking," which the installation presents in the gestures of counting money, verification, and cutting, is the central focus of attention in this film. The Expression of Hands shares with Interface the basic constellation of showing the author in front of two monitors, which in this case don't serve as an editing suite or to theorize about a particular type of montage. In the slow tracking shots between the two monitors, on which scenes are played, paused, rewound, and replayed, Farocki's own hands repeatedly appear, in their turn leafing through books, imitating gestures from the films, writing key concepts on the palm of a hand, or outlining sequences on a sheet of paper. The reflexivity of the hand, which is often emphasized in the film, here consists in its role as an intermediary between the meta-level (Farocki's own work) and the object level (the work of films).

Farocki's brief analysis of a scene from Samuel Fuller's film-noir classic Pickup on South Street,[68] with which The Expression of Hands begins, makes his strategy clear. On one of the two monitors, and then, after a visible freezing of the image and a rewinding of the tape, on the other, the author—with us, the viewers—watches a pickpocket at work in a crowded tram. A man deftly opens a woman's handbag and removes her purse. As he does so, a complex pantomime of attempted closeness and rejection, seduction, and rebuff takes place between the thief and his victim, accentuated by inserted close-ups of hand and face. Fuller's montage, in its opposition of gesture and facial expression, makes what at first sight appears to be a conventionally narrated, casual event into an occurrence that requires as much interpretation from the viewer as it does from the plain-clothes policeman standing nearby. With the words "It isn't easy to grasp this sequence of images," Farocki begins his interpretation of the scene.

> The pickpocket effects a distancing, forbidding expression, while his hand tries to make contact. The hand does something entirely different from what the face shows. The thief opens the woman's purse, the woman opens her lips. It seems as though the thief has opened her lips. She seems seduced rather than robbed. The hand that commits a crime seems to engender desire.

Following this pattern, which works through and reenacts the productive friction between two types of communication, Farocki then relates a number of film scenes to one another in which the hand is variously made into the main protagonist and deployed as the "narrative agent" of the body. The selection of films is instructive, as Farocki doesn't distinguish between fiction and documentary but takes feature films—Hitchock's North by Northwest,[69] Robert Wiene's The Hands of Orlac, Robert Florey's The Beast with Five Fingers, and Robert Bresson's L'Argent—as much into account as National Socialist "Kulturfilme" or American war time propaganda. The project sees itself as an iconographic examination of the expressive forms of cinema and makes use of all imaginable films as material.

Several strands of argumentation need to be distinguished. The first is a historical examination of the status assigned to the hand in the

68 Pickup on South Street, USA 1953, director: Samuel Fuller.
69 North by Northwest, USA 1959, director: Alfred Hitchcock.

silent film, where elegant narration required each spoken word to be translated into a gesture. Here, a film by David Wark Griffith exemplifies the narrative innovation made possible by the introduction of the close-up. The Stolen Jewels from 1908, the earliest film Farocki includes in his montage, shows a thief hiding the title-giving necklace in a hollowed-out bar of soap (ill. 95 and 96). Farocki refers to the uniqueness of this shot in his commentary: it is the only close-up in the entire film, and Griffith uses it to direct the eye and make the action clear. Farocki explains this following image, in which pictorial contrast is accentuated, as follows:

Ill. 95 and ill. 96

> This woman, who will later become the thief in pajamas, has here an expression and a posture that signifies anger or even evil intentions. Today we are used to seeing and to receiving a film in fragmented images. The fragments direct our vision. Without this image-guidance and dialog it is difficult for us to understand what is going on.

Here, too, Farocki resorts to the gesture of additional framing familiar from the photograph accompanying Images of the World. His fingers show how the cinematographic arsenal of close-up, tracking shot, or zoom would direct our attention to the protagonist today. The deictic potential that Farocki's hand indicates was integrated into the formal canon of cinema soon after Griffith's film. Farocki doesn't pursue this idea further here, but Hartmut Bitomsky, who collaborated with Farocki on several films during the early 1970s and like him was one of the most influential editors of *Filmkritik*, expanded the idea of the close-up in a text on Griffith, where he also speculates about a potential background:

> Viewers apparently reacted to the first close-ups as if something had been cut away. Every close-up has an element of shameless violation, but this stands

Ill. 97

to reason. The fact that the human being can be reduced to individual parts, and that these parts, such as head, hand, and foot, can live a life of their own separate from the whole, must have been a new experience, coming directly from factory work.[70]

Bitomsky combines a thought about the technical novelty of the close-up with a surprising idea from economic history. In The Expression of Hands, Farocki soon also abandons the historical viewpoint for a systematic one. The modern viewer's incomprehension of an action narrated without close-ups leads Farocki to a general question: how did the gestural language of the silent film evolve in order to establish visual modes of expression that compensated for the lack of speech and minimized the use of the written word? The background to this is the book *Gestologie und Filmspielerei* [Gestology and Film Acting],[71] by Dyk Rudenski (ill. 97).

It was written in the year of the breakthrough of the sound film and was intended as the program for a future school for film actors. Alongside thoughts about movements and gestures adequate to the medium, Rudenski also proposes a differentiated curriculum for the school's individual semesters. Apart from "Semiotics and Aesthetics," anatomical studies in the vein of Leonardo da Vinci, and other exercises in gesture and facial expression, the curriculum also includes an introduction to "Taylorism (Economics) in Kinesics."[72] This enables Farocki to move from the development of a gestural language in the silent film to the incorporation of the hand into industrial contexts. The detachment of the hand from the rest of the body follows a different logic from that of the horror film, in which one's own hand, now alien, turns against its owner. In the industrial film, the hand is reduced to standardized procedures and thus robbed of its individuality; it becomes replaceable by machines. Increasing rationalization and de-individualization represent an abstraction of the working process and the idiosyncratic gestures of the hand, but taken alone the hand offers the possibility of self-referentiality:

70 Hartmut Bitomsky, "Die Großaufnahme," *Filmkritik* 4/1975 [special edition on David W. Griffith], 167–170: 168.

71 Dyk Rudenski, *Gestologie und Filmspielerei. Abhandlungen über die Physiologie und Psychologie des Ausdrucks*, with a foreword by Franz Blei, 2nd unchanged edition (Berlin: Hoboken-Presse 1927).

72 Ibid., 50.

> We can turn our hands and observe it from all angles. This is impossible with every other part of the body. A hand can pose before its owner's eyes, like a man turning in front of a mirror. And it can also be thought of as a mirror, a tablet, or a stage.

Ill. 98

Here, Farocki summarizes (ill. 98) the topoi that have evolved over time through thinking about the hand. The hand "speaks," can be read, and moves between artistic expression and industry, aesthetic surplus and efficient working processes. Farocki's own hand, which both analyzes and aligns itself with the hand gestures in the films he discusses, is an organ of intervention. It stands for the attempt to unite thought and action.

***

In my readings of the films of Godard and Farocki, the hand turns out to be as ambiguous a term as the concept of abstraction, from which my examination proceeded. When it is released in close-up from the rest of the narration, the hand can appear as a concrete and unique organ. Nouvelle vague or La chinoise stand for an ethics of the hand: primarily through reaching for a partner, the hand points beyond itself and stands for abstract contexts and concepts such as salvation, community, solidarity, conjunction. It is also, as Farocki's portrait of Georg K. Glaser shows, an intelligent limb, whose abilities exceed those of a merely executive organ. In Glaser's case, it represents a type of labor that resists the mechanization and automation that characterized the twentieth century. The Expression of Hands, by contrast, is devoted to two further dimensions of the hand: its potential—particularly inherent in the silent film—for independent articulation, and its detachment from its owner, which initiates thoughts about the alienation of one's own body. Inserted into standardized procedures at the assembly line—Taylorism—the hand labors at its own abolition. It would be going too far to see a link, at this cultural-critical point, between the history of labor and that of the cinema, but a closer look at Godard's Histoire(s) du cinéma might follow up the question as to whether it was not only cinema (as Godard understands it) that came to an end in the late twentieth century but also the function of the hand.