Gestures: writing that moves between (Manchester, 15-16 Feb 2019)

Whitworth Art Gallery, Feb 15–16, 2019
Deadline: Oct 29, 2018

Alice Butler

GESTURES
Writing That Moves Between

A two-day conference to be held at the Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Co-sponsored by The Centre for New Writing and Art History and Visual Studies, University of Manchester, in partnership with University of Liverpool's Centre for New and International Writing, and the University of Salford's English Literature, Language and Creative Practice Research Group.

Keynote speakers: Renee Gladman and Maria Fusco. With a performance reading by Anne Boyer.

"We exist in a society of complex gestures," writes Renee Gladman in the 2017 Houses of Ravicka, "all running along their own time; we are all interrupting, witnessing, performing simultaneously." Gladman's invented city-state of Ravicka is shaped by these interpersonal gestures, which as they overlap, also threaten to upend the social world that inhabits it. Houses of Ravicka is ostensibly a novel, but it belongs to a broader project that combines prose, nonfiction and visual art. As in the world of Ravicka, where writing can by thought of as drawing, movement, and gesture, its author moves between multiple art forms. The past fifteen years have seen an explosion of such cross-disciplinary movement across forms: the work of Gladman, Hannah Black, Anne Boyer, Maria Fusco, Carol Mavor, Maggie Nelson, and Holly Pester. This conference, aimed at scholars, writers and artists, takes such writing as its focus, and explores the role of gesture – a term more usually associated with Art History and Performance Studies – within it.

Indeed, gesture is a term used to describe both the action painting of Jackson Pollock and the choreography of Yvonne Rainer, where the body is both subject and object. Rather than simply rehabilitate such practices, this conference asks: How does an interdisciplinary focus on gesture help us think differently about writing that moves between: creative and critical writing; prose and poetry; the visual and verbal? In doing so, this conference seeks to enliven critical debates of what has come to be invariably known as 'experimental,' 'hybrid' and 'art writing'. How might this re-thinking of 'gesture' disrupt conventional forms and ideologies, and open up new dialogues that traverse art and writing practices? How might 'gesture' help us to reconsider the relation between writing and bodies? What can 'gesture' do for multiple gender, sexual and race identities?

Such a discursive approach follows Judith Butler's recent argument that the incompleteness of

gesture should be thought of as an event in its own right, capable of disrupting fixed narratives. This conference probes the incompleteness of gesture in writing, recognising that gesture as a term provokes many meanings and connotations: expression and self-expression; acts of verbal and non-verbal communication; bodily movement and performance; a suggestion; a sign, a signal; a non-fixing; a desire that might not be wholly worked out or finished, and other related terms/-forms. Anne Boyer captures the 'unfinishedness' of gesture in the essay, "How to Go From [Poetry to Art]," when she writes that "[t]he material of the world should appear to you raw and desiring, inchoate and acquiescent, malleable and unfixed."

Our conference comes at a time when creative/critical writing is becoming increasingly attractive to publishers and educational establishments. To avoid the potential commodification and reification of such practices, this conference seeks to formulate new ways of thinking about its various experiments – which include the fragment, the nonlinear, mixed media, collage, collaboration, and more – by exploring the usages and potentialities of a term not usually considered: gesture. "The critic as gesture," writes Maria Fusco referencing Audre Lorde, "is a frustration with exhausted models of critical engagement within our elite, cultural world expressed in writerly form." Following Fusco, we are particularly interested in establishing relations between a variety of disciplines, from creative/critical writing and literature, through art practice and art history, to feminist theory, queer theory and performance studies.

We invite proposals on the topic of gesture, within writing that moves between disciplines, modes and practices. We invite papers, presentations, and performances, from scholars, writers and artists that either discuss and/or perform the motives and interests of the conference. We will place publishers alongside poets; prose writers alongside critics; artists alongside scholars, across panels that move between.

Please send proposals of no more than 300 words to gesturesconference@gmail.com by Monday 29 October 2018, 5pm. Please include a short biographical note of no more than 100 words.

This conference is organised by Alice Butler, Nell Osborne, Hilary White (University of Manchester) and Dr Alicia J Rouverol (University of Sheffield), in partnership with Dr David Hering (University of Liverpool), and Dr Ursula Hurley and Dr Scott Thurston (University of Salford).

This conference has been awarded the NWCDTP Collaborative Skills Development Fund.

Registration details to follow.

Reference:

CFP: Gestures: writing that moves between (Manchester, 15-16 Feb 2019). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 22, 2018 (accessed Nov 3, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/18963>.