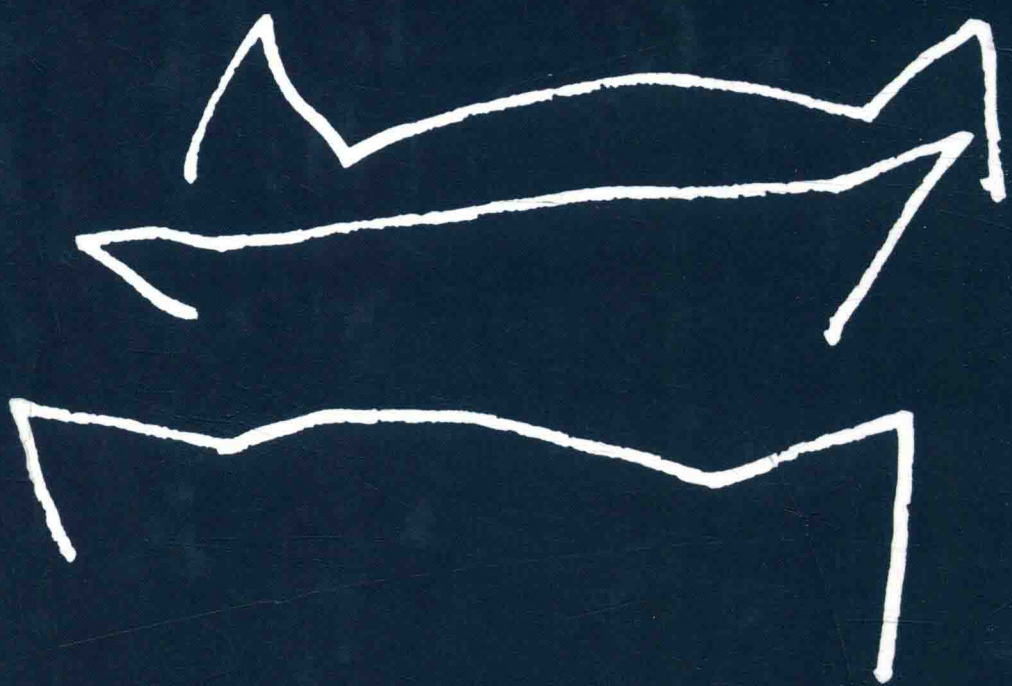
From Gesture in Conversation to Visible Action as Utterance

EDITED BY

Mandana Seyfeddinipur & Marianne Gullberg



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From Gesture in Conversation to Visible Action as Utterance

Essays in honor of Adam Kendon

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From Gesture in Conversation to Visible Action as Utterance

A foreword

This volume was born on a warm afternoon in July on a bench in front of a fountain in Lund. The Fifth Conference of the International Society for Gesture Studies in Lund was in full swing. We were musing about what Adam Kendon had meant to us individually as well as to us as a research community.

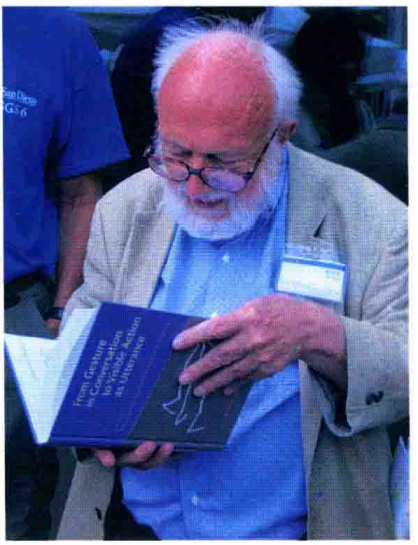
One of us remembered a first encounter that involved an abysmal curry at a university canteen accompanied by interested and interesting questions which encouraged the (somewhat nervous) novice to continue on the gestural path. Another remembered the professor who rather spent time with students than with other professors at a summer school in San Marino, the summer school where a pact was made that resulted in Adam's book in 2004. The afternoon musings also included anecdotes about editing felines (the collaborator Oscar Gatto), Jabberwocky recitals, discussions about must-see films, Indian food (Adam Kendon is known in certain circles as Mister Vindaloo), and the art of making proper tea. But the conversation was mostly concerned with gestures, utterance visible actions, long, exhilarating data sessions where videos were played and replayed, and analyzes characterized by rigour mixed with laughter.

To many of us Adam is a generous colleague, mentor, and friend. To the research community he is the source of many of our key notions and he has laid the foundation for rigorous research on the body in communication. He has thought and written about almost all aspects of this domain. An experience many of us share is that when you decide to embark on a new topic in the area, you discover that Adam has already published a groundbreaking paper about it complete with a sound methodology. Indeed, he has often addressed major issues that the field has only later picked up on. Many of us also share the happy experience of spending hours with Adam when he, generously, has discussed our work, often finding relevant and illuminating examples in his own data and butterfly collections. In his work on the journal *Gesture* he has guided our writing and our theoretical approaches with incredible patience, leaving his mark on many of us. Indeed, for us it was time to show him what his legacy means and we hope that this volume will show him some of the ways in which his influence is visible in contemporary research.

When the idea for this volume was born on the bench in Lund, we received incredible support by all authors in this volume who without hesitation agreed to contribute to it. Their support is a reflection of their dedication to Adam Kendon and his work. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all the contributors who generously and cheerfully met tight deadlines and made the work on this volume a delight.

We are also deeply grateful to Seline Benjamins and Esther Roth and all colleagues at Benjamins Publishing Company for their unfailing support for this enterprise. We would also like to express our sincere thanks for generous financial support to the Faculty of Languages and Culture, SOAS, University of London, and to the Research Committee for Linguistic Studies at the Centre for Languages and Literature at Lund University.

Marianne Gullberg and Mandana Seyfeddinipur
Lund and London, Spring 2014



For all of my life I have suffered distraction
From Utterance-Dedicated Visible Bodily Action.
In Australian deserts, in Northamptonshire's midlands,
In the streets of Naples, in the New Guinea highlands,
In Oxford or Pittsburgh or New York City,
This monster's pursued me without any pity,
With movements fantastic, it keeps me enraptured,
Yet try as I might, it cannot be captured.
With windmilling arms, its shape ever changing,
We never can know what aims it's engaging!
Is it trying to enhance communication?
Or is it just busy with cogitation?
Is it fishing for words to assist a poor speaker?
Or is it just active when words become weaker?
Is it setting in order some thoughts to express?
Is it showing us concepts which, nevertheless,
Are beyond what a person might be able to say?
Or is it just calling itself in to play
For questions, assertions, performative themes,
For parsing and distinguishing themes over rhemes?
And when, as can happen, it is off on its own,
It takes over completely and serves, all alone,
To tell stories, give lectures, recite beautiful poems,
It is ready for anything, wherever it roams!

All my life, as I've said, I have had this distraction
From Utterance Dedicated Visible Bodily Action.
Bur I'm happy to see that it's not only me
Who's inexorably, unavoidably, obsessively enraptured
By this protean monster who cannot be captured!

Those here who have given me this beautiful book
And everyone else, at who I can currently look,
They also must suffer from this dreadful distraction
From Utterance Dedicated Visible Bodily Action!

So I am very happy!

Adam Kendon, July 2014

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION

From gesture in conversation to visible action as utterance

Mandana Seyfeddinipur and Marianne Gullberg
School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London /
Lund University, Sweden

Language use is fundamentally multimodal. Speakers use their hands to point to locations, to represent content and to comment on ongoing talk; they position their bodies showing their interactional orientation; they use facial displays commenting on what is being said; and they engage in mutual gaze establishing intersubjectivity. Over the past five decades investigations into the nature of multimodality of language use have increased dramatically in different scientific areas like linguistics, sociology, psychology and cognitive science. One person who has played a major part in the development of this area of study is Adam Kendon. Kendon's work – always many years ahead of time – has laid the theoretical and methodological foundations for the study of multimodality. This volume brings together work by junior and senior researchers on the fundamentally multimodal nature of the human capacity for language. The papers highlight how Kendon's work has provided the foundation for modern rigorous research into the multimodal nature of human language. The papers also report on contemporary research in different areas from linguistics to social psychology to conversation analysis.

Kendon's investigations and the resulting publications have become seminal in many areas of visible action in utterance. His work addresses different aspects of social interaction like the spatial configuration of speakers in interaction, the use of gaze and facial gesture in conversation, and the form and function of manual gesture with a cross-cultural twist, comparing behavior in the UK and in Southern Italy. But he has also provided descriptions of a local sign language in Papua New Guinea and an alternate sign language of the Warlpiri in Australia. He has published on language origins, and on the history of gesture research, and he has translated the work by de Jorio, a priest, archeologist and gesture scholar in 19th century Italy. In all these diverse areas his work has been ahead of its time. His work continues to be of the utmost relevance for research today. His studies on

manual gesture, for example, have shown how speech and gesture contribute different types of information ranging from semantic meaning to pragmatic structuring and speech act marking in collaboration with speech. His detailed analyses have put the study of manual gesture on a rigorous empirical and methodological footing, leading away from impressionistic descriptions and interpretations and towards verifiable analyses of the phenomena at hand.

Kendon's work unites three major theoretical strands and approaches: structuralism, interactionalism, and ethnography. Uniting these strands has led him to conduct analyses of how the body is deployed in providing different kinds of meaning in conjunction with speech in everyday interaction in different cultures. Kendon has developed a **structuralist** analysis of form and function of posture and spatial organization, gaze, and manual and facial gestures in everyday interaction. His analysis involves a minute description of the temporal unfolding of the gestural movement in relation to speech units. The temporal integration and the form-function analyses are grounded in Birdwhistell's outlook and methodology in his development of kinesics. Inspired by Birdwhistell's observations on the systematic way in which visible body motion was organized in relation to speech (see Birdwhistell 1970, for example), Kendon worked on pieces of film that Birdwhistell had made available. This is what led to the paper "*Some relationships between body motion and speech*" (Kendon 1972), a paper which was to lay the foundations for the later development of 'Gesture Studies'. To this day, it remains one of the most complete attempts at addressing the issue of the organization of the flow of bodily movement and its tight fit with the structuring of associated speech.

The second characteristic of Kendon's work from the earliest days is his focus on how speakers coordinate their activities in everyday face-to-face **interaction** as the site of human communication. He conceived of and understood the spatial organization of episodes of interaction, and the criteria for defining interaction episodes, the structuring of the 'social occasion, and has discussed different 'behavior systems' (talk, gesture, posture, orientation, jointly constructed spatial-orientational systems) in terms of how they are articulated in relation to one another. In his work on greetings, for example, he came to see that the cooperation that participants enter into to create the spatial-orientational frame for the close salutation could be viewed as a naturally bounded unit of interaction. Subsequent spatial-orientational frames created in relation to other kinds of interaction 'projects' (such as conversations of various types or conversations about different topics) provided criteria for establishing further units of interaction. This work showed how units or episodes of interaction could be defined, but also the importance of distinguishing the different levels of behavioral organization in terms of which different interactional episodes, often overlapping with one another, can

be defined. Kendon applied this context-anchored approach to the study of gaze, facial and manual gesture in natural interaction, thereby providing the analytical framework for many researchers to come.

The third strand which characterizes Kendon's work is the **ethnographic approach**. Inspired by David Efron (1941/1972) and Wilhelm Wundt (1921/1973) Kendon turned his attention to the question of which factors determine cultural differences in manual gesturing. In his research on Neapolitan gesturing he attempted to understand why a particular tradition of gesture use in communication, a gestural profile, is maintained and where it comes from. His work on the gestural profile of Neapolitans took into account historical resources such as the work by de Jorio (Kendon 1995a), as well as the actual everyday use of gesture and the local affordances of communication. He suggests that one first has to look at what the modality of gesture affords its users as a means of communication. He therefore considered in detail the circumstances of its use, its ecological circumstances of daily interaction. Second, the prevailing norms for what governs behavior in co-presence have to be taken into account in order to describe the micro-ecology of everyday interaction which in turn determines gestural conduct and the resulting cultural differences.

The combination of these three strands has further informed Kendon's most recent work in which he considers how multimodal interaction, and specifically the deep intertwining of modalities in interaction, might be at the heart of the **evolution of language**. Contrary to much current theorizing, but entirely in line with his views from the earliest days, he considers speech and gestures to have co-evolved. The conviction that face-to-face interaction is the natural habitat of communication and that modalities co-perform is again central to his research.

Gaze and face

Kendon pioneered the study of the face in interaction in his 1975 paper "*Some functions of the face in a kissing round*" (Kendon 1975b). In this study he criticized studies of the face at the time for focusing primarily on the expression of emotion at the expense of the role and function of facial patterns in social interaction. He shows in his paper how facial gestures serve as a "delicate tuning device" (1975b, p. 330) regulating the interaction. In Kendon's tradition **Bavelas, Gerwing & Healing** present a careful analysis of facial gestures in speech gesture ensembles showing how facial gestures take on different functions in dialogue parallel to the functions of manual gestures described by Kendon. The paper exemplifies that facial gestures can serve referential as well as pragmatic, interpersonal, and interactive functions in conversation. The study highlights – even after Kendon's

groundbreaking work – how the study of the face continues to focus on emotion expression and neglect the social function of facial displays in interaction. In addition, the analysis takes into account the intricate temporal integration of the modalities, again following Kendon's work.

In 1967 Kendon published a paper on gaze in interaction, *"Some functions of gaze direction in two-person conversations"*, which became a seminal study on gaze in interaction despite the fact that a substantial body of literature on gaze already existed. As often, Kendon was years ahead of his time, pioneering the investigation of gaze in conversation. He overcame the technological limitations of his time by setting up a mirror next to one speaker reflecting the face of the second speaker. The camera placed opposite took one picture every second and with the resulting photographs Kendon was able to relate the gaze direction of both speakers in time. This enabled the detailed temporal coding of gaze withdrawal and gaze return showing that the patterns of gaze withdrawal and gaze return are systematically distributed between speaker and interlocutor.

Streeck's paper builds on this work and on recent work by Rossano on mutual gaze in conversation. Using a micro-ethnographic approach to the phenomenon and drawing on examples of naturally occurring interaction, Streeck shows how gaze is deployed. He proposes that mutual gaze is a primitive form of the social contract between interlocutors. Streeck shows that mutual gaze displays the act of recognition and ratification within an action sequence. He argues that gaze shifts should be looked at as components of actions and that mutual gaze should be seen as part of sequence organization of interaction, going beyond the role of gaze in turn taking.

Manual gestures – Quotable gestures and pointing

A major part of Kendon' work has investigated spontaneous manual gestures. But he has also devoted his time to what he called quotable gestures (Kendon 1992) or emblems (Efron 1942). Morris et al. (1979) conducted an areal linguistic study of 20 conventionalized gestures – such as the thumbs up gesture – looking at their meanings and use all over Europe. This work drew Kendon's attention to such conventionalized movements.

Kendon labeled these gestures *quotable gestures* since they are repeatable, listable, and reportable. Speakers use these conventionalized gestures with and without speech and can be held accountable for using them. Kendon (1992) discusses how communities share repertoires of these fully conventionalized gestures. He points out that most studies only provide word list style accounts of the gesture forms and their associated meanings. At an early stage he called for the need

to study conventionalized gestures in their context of use. He provided such an analysis in his work on pragmatic gestures (Kendon 1995b) analyzing the use of some of these gestures in Italian. He showed how these gestures mark the speech act of the utterance while others mark discourse structure.

Kendon's call for studies of use in context was taken up by the work of Brookes who studied the use of emblems by young males in South African townships (Brookes 2001; 2004). Following in Kendon's tradition she extended her study by taking into account the social relationships, cultural notions, and identity shape forms of gestural use and behavior among black urban South African males. In the present paper **Brookes** explores Kendon's concept of a communicative ecology of a community and how communicative profiles are shaped through the physical environment and cultural norms. She analyses the profile of communicative behavior in South African townships by studying gesture in natural interactions and the underlying cultural norms, the physical surroundings, and their social meanings. She then adds a comparative analysis of the communicative profiles found in Naples and in South African townships.

In his paper **McNeill** similarly addresses quotable gestures and focuses on the Neapolitan quotable gestures described by Kendon (e.g. 1995b). He provides a detailed discussion of the underlying metaphoricity of these gestures. He argues that speakers use gestures created on the fly which are based on metaphor or metonymy. These root metaphors then undergo a conventionalization process through use within particular communities, thus creating particularly stable quotable gestures compared to spoken words which undergo drastic changes over the centuries.

In contrast to studies of highly culture-specific gestures such as the quotable gestures described above, other studies focus on claims of universality. Pointing is the best example of this. Contrary to such claims, Kendon's work on pointing in Naples (Kendon & Versante 2003) has shown how the pointing form (hand shape, orientation, place of articulation and trajectory) is systematically deployed to express different semiotic functions. Kendon & Versante had observed that when people engaged in what was generally recognized as pointing to something, they did not always use the same hand shape to do so. They collected examples of pointing to compare and contrast their contexts of use in terms of the hand shapes employed. Speakers can use different hand forms to provide an interpretative 'frame' to the verbal discourse it accompanies. In these uses of different hand shapes in pointing, then, the speakers are showing something about the type of discourse act they are engaging in even as, at the same time, they are engaging in an action of pointing at or indicating something.

Mondada, in the tradition of conversation analysis, expands the analysis of pointing by examining the organization of actions in which a speaker mobilizes

pointing and establishes joint attention with co-participants towards an object. In detailed analyses she shows the complexity of the act of pointing which affords high coordination between participants. While preserving the specificity of the ecology of action in its complexity, she at the same time demonstrates that the methodical mobilization of resources in interaction can be generalized.

Manual gestures – Their nature and relationship to language

As already mentioned, a core aspect of Kendon's work on manual gestures is the formal and structuralist approach by which he examines the temporal unfolding of gestural movements in relation to speech units in detailed form-function analyses. As a part of this enterprise, Kendon has kept returning to how it is that we define and recognize gestures. He addressed these questions already in his earliest studies, *"Some relationships between body motion and speech,"* published in 1972, and *"Gesticulation and speech: Two aspects of the process of utterance"*, published in 1980. In the latter paper in particular, he explored the idea that interlocutors are able to recognize movements as being deliberately expressive even when they do not understand the spoken language that accompanies them based on formal kinetic features, rhythm, etc., combined to create the impression of deliberate expressiveness.

Müller's paper elaborates on Kendon's structural and formal focus on movements displaying articulatory "features of manifest deliberate expressiveness" (Kendon 2004, pp. 13–14) and his interactionally grounded view that interlocutors can identify gestures into an argument for how linguistic structures can emerge from bodily movements. Müller discusses the relevance of Kendon's combined focus on form, context-of-use, and meaning as reflected in his notion of gesture families, which are form-meaning clusters. Müller expands on Kendon by discussing the dynamic embodied conceptual processes through which gestural forms come to mean and the modes of representation that result from these processes. She suggests that this overall approach points towards a grammar of gesture which reveals the potential of gestures to evolve into language.

Andrén similarly delves deeper into the question of how we identify gestures and distinguish them from other forms of semiotically relevant bodily behavior. Inspired by Kendon and discussions of the upper limits of gesture trying to distinguish gestures from the signs of sign language, Andrén explores what he calls a lower limit of gestures to distinguish, for example, gestures from practical actions. Moving away from the tradition of binary distinctions and building on Kendon's comparative semiotic approach (Kendon 2008), Andrén instead suggests that

distinguishing a continuum of communicative explicitness from a continuum of representational complexity can help us investigate complex interactions that help us define gestures in terms of family resemblance. He also suggests a continuum of conventionalization as being relevant.

Language evolution

The role of gesture in the origin of language and language evolution has occupied researchers over many centuries (Kendon 1991). As often before, Kendon was ahead of his time and discussed these issues already in the 1970s in the paper "*Gesticulation, speech, and the gesture theory of language origins*" (Kendon 1975a). Over the years he has criticized theories of language evolution that advocate a 'gesture first' explanation (Kendon 1975a; 1991; 1993; 2010) and propose that human language evolved through communicating through manual gesture first and then switched to the oral and auditory modality to facilitate communication over long distances. Kendon has questioned these theories on the grounds that it remains unclear why there should have been a switch of modality rather than a continued parallel use of hand and mouth.

In his paper, **Corballis** takes up this discussion and presents a 'gesture-first' position – albeit one that allows for a gradual shift of balance. He outlines arguments in its support drawing on comparisons with nonhuman primates, focusing on vocal and manual asymmetries where the greater degree of intentional and flexible use of manual actions suggest a more primary mode of expression which may have evolved into pantomime with gradual conventionalization into arbitrary symbols. Corballis's position contrasts in interesting ways with Kendon's and the engaged argumentation across the positions is clear and enlightening.

In contrast, **Goodwin** argues along the same lines as Kendon in his paper proposing that gesture is not sufficient as co-operative action but that the core of human language use requires the full multimodal power of speech and gesture. Goodwin draws upon interactions of an aphasic man to demonstrate how communicating for action moves from ambiguous gestures to speech through the development of arbitrary signs. Using examples from interactions between scientists he also shows how subsequent action is accumulatively built by performing structure-preserving transformations of the materials provided by a prior action. The complexity of the expressions speakers create by exploiting the available modalities forms the core of human communication.

Sign systems

Kendon was planning to study courtroom interactions in the Enga province of Papua New Guinea when he met Imanoli, a young deaf woman who was using a local sign language. The sign system sparked his interest and he embarked on the investigation of Enga sign language. He provided a detailed description of all of the signs in the repertoire of Imanoli, a detailed exploration of the "iconic devices" employed in Imanoli's signs, and the way in which discourse was constructed in this sign language – effectively a kind of syntactic study (Kendon 1980).

This work directed Kendon's attention to sign languages in general and he came to focus on the alternate sign language used by hearing Warlpiri speakers in Yuendumu, a Warlpiri community in north central Australia. His work resulted in the only book-length work on the topic available to this day, *Sign languages of Aboriginal Australia: Cultural, semiotic and communicative perspectives* (Kendon 1988). It presents a history of the study of sign languages in Australia, extensive ethnographic background to their use in the north central desert region of Australia, detailed discussions of the relationship between the structure of these sign languages and the structure of the associated spoken languages, and comparative analyses of the sign languages of six different Aboriginal groups. He also discusses kinship and sign language, and the relationship between alternate sign languages and primary sign languages. Finally, he also provides an analysis of the social and ecological circumstances that appear to favor the use of sign languages among Australian aborigines.

Green has continued this unique line of research. Her paper focuses on Kendon's question of how speakers utilize different modalities as a semiotic resource for expression in communication. Green analyses Arandic sand stories, a traditional form of verbal art uniquely mastered especially among Arrernte women in Central Australia. In this form of verbal art speakers draw in the sand, speak, gesture and sign. In a detailed analysis Green illustrates the temporal and semantic integration of the modalities, exemplifying the mastery of this Aboriginal art form.

Kendon's description of the hierarchical organization of body movements with respect to discourse units (1972) showed the temporal coordination of all bodily actions, ranging from body posture to head movement to manual gesture. His work provided a first detailed account of the syntagmatic organization of manual gestures through a functional analysis of manual movements. He showed that they could be distinguished into different movement phases with the stroke being the semantic nucleus of the gesture. He characterized manual gestural movements into hierarchically organized units characterizing the form features of each phase. This seminal work laid the foundation for studies of the temporal coordination of speech and gesture. **Haviland** uses Kendon's description of