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Visual Pedagogy and the Theory of Gestures

With online university teaching offering content – images, animations, videos – increasingly suitable to capture the interest of students, while on the other hand the attention span of users growing up with the internet is radically decreasing, face-to-face classes present teachers with the challenge of an audience getting bored within minutes, if not seconds. Enriching one’s lecture with a display of projected images is of course helpful, and indeed often absolutely called for by the logic of the argument, but ultimately the challenge remains: we have to speak in front of our students and wish to be looked at and listened to. Perhaps we need to change our speaking style. Perhaps we need to return to an ancient style of speaking, one essentially employing visual elements.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the psychological position was formulated that it is the whole body, the entire motor system, including facial expressions and bodily gestures, that underlies not just emotions, but also abstract thought, carried by and mediated, in particular, by visual imagery. Meaning, both emotional and cognitive, is primordially grounded, and ultimately embodied, in the motor dimension. This psychological perspective inspired the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century interest in the language of gestures. “Words, whenever they cannot directly ally themselves with and support themselves upon gestures”, wrote Ogden and Richards in their classic *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), “are at present a very imperfect means of communication.” Today the interest in the language of gestures is once more vivid, with research thriving. It is this research the planned talk will describe.

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Some main publications: *Tradition and Individuality*, 1992; “Electronic Networking and the Unity of Knowledge”, in Stephanie Kenna and Seamus Ross (eds.), *Networking in the Humanities*, 1995; “The Picture Theory of Reason”, in Berit Brogaard and Barry Smith (eds.), *Rationality and Irrationality*, 2001; *Vernetztes Wissen: Philosophie im Zeitalter des Internets*, 2004; “Time and Communication”, in F. Stadler and M. Stöltzner (eds.), *Time and History*, 2006; “Film, Metaphor, and the Reality of Time”, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (June 2009); *Zeit und Bild: Philosophische Studien zur Wirklichkeit des Werdens*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2012. Further information: www.hunfi.hu/nyiri. E-mail: knyiri@t-email.hu.