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HANDS *on* FILM



ACTANTS, AESTHETICS, AFFECTS

BARRY MONAHAN

ROUTLEDGE



Hands on Film



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Hands on Film

Actants, Aesthetics, Affects

Barry Monahan

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 2022 by Amsterdam University Press Ltd.

Published 2025 by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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ISBN: 9789463727716 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781041180777 (pbk)

ISBN: 9781003697206 (ebk)

NUR 670

Cover illustration: Image from *Au hasard Balthazar* by Robert Bresson © 1966 Argos Films – Parc Films – Argos Films – Svensk Filmindustri

Cover design: Kok Korpershoek

DOI: 10.5117/9789463727716

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Taylor & Francis Verlag GmbH, Kaufingerstraße 24, 80331 München, Germany

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Acknowledgements

In the first instance I would like to thank Maryse Elliott, Senior Commissioning Editor at Amsterdam University Press, for her guidance, encouragement, and patience throughout the process of bringing this project to completion. Maryse was supported by Julie Benschop-Plokker along the way, and both were indispensable supporters of my work when I most needed it.

From its early incarnations, my erratic and ambitious thinking was focused and challenged by conversations with friends, colleagues, and students. Their generous suggestions and intellectual challenges helped me to mould the idealistic dreamwork into a feasible venture. I am grateful to those in the Department of *Film & Screen Media* at University College Cork, and to others beyond that unit who had wonderful ideas that steered my thinking: these include Graham Allen, Alan Gibbs, Maureen O'Connor, and Edel Semple. I had interesting conversations with my graduate researchers about process and product, during its evolution, and I would like to thank Sandra Costello, Rachel Gough, Tadhg Dennehy, and Nicholas O'Riordan, as well as other inspiring cinema enthusiasts from the same research community: James Mulvey, Marija Laugalyte, and Loretta Goff come to mind immediately. I would like to acknowledge especially Aidan Power, Máire Messenger-Davies, John Davies, Conn Holohan and Seán Crosson for valuable recommendations offered early in the mission.

I am indebted to a large number of people in film archives, holders of private collections and – I add with encouragement but not surprise – from independent, less market-dominant distribution companies, who facilitated my use of the images in this book. Among this cohort of cinephiles are: Alexandre de la Porte (UGC), Jean-Pierre Jeunet and his assistant Marjorie Orth (Tapioca Films), Raphaëlle Quinet (Pyramide Films), Emily and Harrod Blank from Les Blank Films, Margarita Diaz (Sony Pictures), Loli Geneste and Ellen Schafer (Argos Films), Cécile Meyer-Cases (Cité Films), Anne-Sophie Mignot (Films Sans Frontières), John Henderson (Tigon Film Distributors), Jonathan Rechenstein (Pathé), Espen Bale (British Film Institute), Alexane Durand (Studiocanal), Anne-Laure Barbarit (mk2), and Mylène Bresson. Without crucial guidance from Dan O'Connell and incredible generosity of spirit and time by Barry Reilly (both from my home department), there would have been no visual component to this book: I cannot thank them enough for turning it into the final version that it now is.

Friends and family have been at hand for support and encouragement throughout. I want to mention specifically Brian, Sarina, Thomas, Liz,

Christophe, Oisín, Liz, Kevin, Dolores, Stephen, Suzy, Evelyn, Kealan, Peter, Cathy, and my parents, Christy and Etta. The younger generation of family members weren't of much academic help, but they provided a background of hilarity, naughtiness, and fun, without which I (and this endeavour) would have definitely suffered. A big thanks to John, Claire, Joey, and Jessica for abundant provision of this essential energy!

During completion of the book, our son Eliot was born. His arrival awoke in me the memory that no creativity is as wonderful, and that I am profoundly lucky to have Ciara and Clara to share the new learning curve with me. They help me through and listen to moaning, but persist in their kindness... Thank you C Major and Minor!

Introduction

It is a truism that the number of hands on the cinematic screen is approximately twice the number of characters represented in films. This vast quantity of limbs became a challenge early in the present project despite help by friends, colleagues, and students who offered lists of important examples that ultimately became an aggregate filmography of several hundred cases. Having been initially overwhelmed by this unwieldy collection, I eventually found some assurance that the research task might not be so daunting. I began to discern categorical variations on the role played by hands in the cinematic art. Hands were abundantly available for scrutiny, but the list became more manageable by concentrating on appearances that were disposed to analytical attention because of their meaningful value. As the methodology shifted from enumeration to categorisation it invited a two-sided process: by considering what cinema had to say about human hands, it was necessary to reflect upon what that limb could reveal about the art form itself.

The book in front of you uses a familiar *modus operandi*; one in which film is considered in relation to another concept – literature, philosophy, adaptation, history – or objects – cars, guns, costumes, architecture – used to chart the historical and aesthetic development of both medium and mediated. If I have achieved my objective even partially, the proposal that the hand has something of indispensable importance to add to these studies should become explicit. To offer a visual analogy: this book might be conceived as an hourglass. In the top bulb, theoretical ruminations on the cinema lie in layers with wider philosophical questions – ontological, epistemological, and aesthetic – stratified as theses and antitheses. These levels blend as they percolate through the narrow neck of the sandglass, which represents the catalyst of this study: hands. Following that theoretical amalgamation, new ideas and conceptualisations emerge synthetically to shed light on how humankind has used the cinema as a mode of artistic expression to explore what it means to be a sentient, socially participating, and creative individual. Fundamentally this study comprises a series of attempts at justifying why the hand has such a crucial role to play in this process of revelation.

The hand can be understood as an entity that mediates between the material (body) and the immaterial (mind). Consequently, it carries both literal and metaphorical potential. As an illustration of the former, explaining the evolution of our species in his detailed study *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture*, Frank R. Wilson has described the relationship between the limb and the mind and how, over millennia, the refinement in the functioning of each one contributed to the development of the intellect and capability of the other. Geoffrey Beattie has elucidated the diverse possibilities for the hand's capacity for denotative and connotative communication in his work *Rethinking Body Language: How Hand Movements Reveal Hidden Thoughts*. Both of these studies, as well as a host of other noteworthy expositions referenced in this work, testify to the critical importance of the position of the hand in human socialisation, acculturation, and intellectual development.

Two detailed interventions into the field integrate the hand specifically as performing entity within the cultural practices of theatre and film. In her study *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage: Gesture, Touch and the Spectacle of Dismemberment*, Farah Karim-Cooper considers the Bard's manual representations within the historical contexts of its cultural applications both on stage and in textual and artistic imagery. Closer to home, in his monograph *Farocki/Godard: Film as Theory* Volker Pantenburg offers innovative reflection and astute analysis of the canons of those filmmakers and dedicates a detailed chapter to how hands have played an instrumental thematic (theoretical) and artistic (pragmatic) role in their work. Both studies centralise that part of the human anatomy by justifying the importance of its role in the artists' productions and for wider questions into the nature of *homo sapiens*. These conceptual enquiries are addressed in three further works that consider the position of the hand philosophically, without addressing cultural texts specifically. John Napier's *Hands*, Darian Leader's *Hands: What We Do with Them – and Why*, and *The Hand: A Philosophical Inquiry into Human Being* by Raymond Tallis, present comprehensive narratives that triangulate the relationship between intelligence, existence, and the hand, with a view to stressing the predominant position occupied by the limb in the evolution of humankind. These studies reaffirm and demonstrate that the corporeal entity bears considerable ontological significance in its unique connection to the social, intellectual, and cultural development of the species. Karim-Cooper and Pantenburg's research further testifies to its gestural and communicative flexibilities; qualities that make the hand an ideal subject for aesthetic representation in the plastic arts, literature, theatre, and cinema. To bring the discourses full circle, we need only propose

that the framed, filmed hand might itself have something to contribute to our understanding of how the cinematic medium works.

If such a dialectic is possible then it is best sought at the representational point where unique qualities of film and the hand overlap. As distinct from other representational cultural forms, cinema is endowed with the possibility of presenting the hands both in motion *and* in close-up; characteristics that elevate them to a position of importance exclusively available to the filmmaker. In writing on film's potential to rediscover any common object anew Fernand Léger mentions the hand in passing:

Before the invention of the moving picture no one knew the possibilities latent in a foot – a hand – a hat. These objects were, of course, known to be useful – they were seen, but never looked at. On the screen they can be looked at – they can be discovered – and they are found to possess plastic and dramatic beauty when properly presented. (1974, 97)

In a different context, Antonin Artaud has used the hand as one of a set of things that become meaningfully captured by virtue of isolation within the film frame. The medium charges diurnal objects with a renewed potency and aesthetic value by creating a contextual separation from which they

obtain a life of their own which becomes increasingly independent and detaches them from their usual meaning. A leaf, a bottle, a hand, etc., live with an almost animal life which is crying out to be used. (1972, 65)

This aesthetic magnification of the commonplace article reflects the way we give prominence to the hand on a regular basis. Thus, as we explore the motivations behind our observation of the limb in routine, quotidian circumstances, and as we appreciate its capacity to hold our attention, we might discover why aspects of its cinematic mediation have drawn that subject and this medium together. A possibility emerges from the hand's 'doing and thingness' marked by its location at the point of intersection between *the active consciousness* and *the world in which action occurs*; two characteristics that are fundamentally embedded in the process of filmmaking. Elements of these cinematic qualities resonate through the film theory writing of Gilles Deleuze and find expression in a discussion of the framed hand at the transitional point between his studies *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. At the beginning of the second work Deleuze emphasises the aesthetic capacities of the hand and grants it even more potency than the framed face. Setting out the evolution

of his thesis from the movement-image to the time-image he identifies a shift in the focus from the active doer to the passive seer of the representation and points to neo-realism for his main examples. There, he finds a 'pure optical situation' (1994, 2) that indicates a 'crisis of the action-image' where 'the character has become a kind of viewer [...] the situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides' (*ibidem*, 3). Stating that 'it is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it' (*ibidem*, 4), the author concludes his introductory section to *Cinema 2* with reiterated concentration on the hand. This, he affirms,

takes on a role in the image which goes infinitely beyond the sensory-motor demands of the action, which takes the place of the face itself for the purpose of affects, and which, in the area of perception, becomes the mode of construction of a space which is adequate to the decisions of the spirit. (1994, 12)

This monograph is a comprehensive study of the history of the human hand on film. By considering hundreds of case studies, it will assess the ways in which filmmakers have framed the hand: for purposes of character and narrative development; with the intention of exploring thematic and philosophical questions; and as a part of the aesthetic construction of their works. Its primary focus is on the valuable and varied ways in which that human feature has enriched the filmic representation. It also explores the ways in which the specific framing and use of the hand in cinema has facilitated thematic interventions into several philosophical, sociological, and theoretical questions about being human. Included in the former category are analyses of how the hand is used on screen for stylistic effect in genres as differently designed as the horror and the romantic comedy; how the hand has been mobilised for dramatic effect in narratives such as the action/adventure thriller and detective film; and how it has been framed in the construction of character and in determining agency in films that, among others, have something to say about working class societies and individuals, as well as race, gender, social mores and communication. In the latter group, the book will excavate the ways in which the cinematic hand can provide inroads into ontological questions about materialism and human evolution; into debates around free will and determinism; and concerning notions of good faith and individual moral and ethical responsibility. It will analyse the cinematic use of the hands by considering five roles that they perform. Each of these categories seeks to work in a dialectical way: firstly, by considering how the hand appears and performs diverse functions on

screen for different filmmakers; and secondly, by focusing on how that cinematic framing might shed light on philosophical and physiological questions about humanity and the hand.

This methodological classification is designed with the intention of offering clarity and in the hope that it will make the book as user-friendly as possible. However, as with any taxonomy, it is beset by two main categorical complications. The first of these is an inevitable, pragmatic tautology: because recognisable characteristics determine the group into which given examples should be placed, these groups in turn come to be redefined by their constituents. An interminable dance of *a priori* and *a posteriori* selection thus produces a permanent state of flexible indeterminacy, one which can only be accepted as unavoidable with such an endeavour. The second difficulty arises when a given example exhibits qualities that might have it reasonably situated in more than one taxonomic group. In these cases, I have used the predominant aspect of the film to assign its category, or else I have simply included the same film in the alternative sections. This has led to some repetition in the films discussed across my thematic sections, however the analytical angle of attack is sufficiently different in revisited case studies and I have attempted to synthesise the key points of the film for readers who may only dip in and out of single segments or chapters. Each of my five fields of exploration is represented by a single chapter.

In [Chapter One](#) – *Themes* – I consider how directors have used the hand as primary instrument to explore key ideas in their films. It offers close readings of several films that establish human decision, desire, agency, and potency as their principal concerns, and it presents a variety of ways in which metaphysical and ontotheological questions have been rendered on screen. It looks at films that have something to say directly about the labouring human hand: whether Marxist ideas about industrialisation, Lukács' notion of reification of the working subject, or questions about the changing conditions of work in the modern age. Within the context of debates around free will and determinism, and representations of individuals who suffer manual dispossession, it evaluates films that ask ethical and moral questions about the disempowerment of suppressed, minority, or marginalised individuals and groups. In the [second chapter](#) – *Symbolism* – I analyse the hand as a tool of communication, first assessing how the creation of on-screen meaning relates to socially-established codes of expression, and then considering how filmed hands play a role semiotically in the creation of new hermeneutic possibilities. It also looks at a compilation of films that focus on manual movement as a part of denotative or connotative coding, or as it makes meaning through established social hand

gestures, signalling, or conventional sign language. This section works with a tripartite structure and divides representations of the hand into categories of the metonymic, the metaphorical, and specific cases in which both are combined. [Chapter Three – *Aesthetics*](#) – deals with pro-filmic hands as creative contributors to the filmmaking process and on-screen hands as stylistic elements. Thus, it considers the manual labour involved in certain aspects of film production as well as paying attention to the tonal qualities generated by different manual effects and designs across various genres. It interrogates some of the recurring ways that filmmakers have used the hand as a stylistic entity and analyses how framing the limb as a thing of beauty or ugliness can create an aesthetic effect that permeates the whole representation tonally. With a view to exploring theoretical writing on film studies by analysts who have considered the Camp aesthetic and the haptic effects of film spectatorship, it uses the hand as a starting point to propose new possibilities of intervention into those areas: in both cases attempting to problematise some of the existing lines of debate. [Chapter Four – *Narration*](#) – explores the relationship between the active human hand and plot progression. It considers how on-screen hands have played instrumental roles in the development or suspension of the cinematic story. A brief opening section explains the underlying distinction between the operations that hands perform in every cinematic narrative – merely by ‘doing’ and incidentally moving the plot forward – and those films in which the actions of the hands become a marked object of focus. It explores how, in a powerfully protracted way, the active hands of inactive protagonists are tied to examples of ‘slow cinema’ narration, and the section on that stylistic group uses it as a benchmark in assessing how manual activity – or inactivity – might determine narrative progression in films more generally. The [fifth chapter – *Characterisation*](#) – catalogues examples of the use of the hand in providing information for the development of character, and it considers what film personalities do with their hands and how their hands reveal psychological interiority and complexity. The section reads hands as mechanisms that expose unconscious motives, desires, and pathologies, and it scrutinises their role in character formation and revelation: as actants, or as determinants of an existential condition.

In a concluding section, I use Steven Spielberg’s 1975 feature film blockbuster *Jaws* as a case study to consider the five categories set out in the preceding chapters. By analysing it from those different perspectives I hope to show how an application of hand-centric evaluations can shed light on cinematic elements that might otherwise remain hidden. At the same time, this closing piece should expose the problematic tautological nature

of the taxonomy that structures the book. While discrete examples of how the hand is working in a single film justify my categorical distinctions, the overlapping of elements of theme, symbolism, style, narration, and characterisation testifies to the dialectical interconnectedness of manual imagery, framing, referencing, and use for a range of cinematic objectives.

Four lines of investigation are embarked upon here which, for a few reasons, are not brought to satisfactory conclusions. While I acknowledge this – and hopefully justify it reasonably – time and space, and the nature of the debates in question have not permitted fuller closure. Complex and on-going discussions about humanity's relationship with free will and determinism are not resolved in films dealing with that topic and, accordingly, my own findings stop short of a perfect denouement by proposing that cinematic texts play with the indecision rather than try to draw a definite line under the argument. Similarly, I hope that my analysis of aesthetics of Camp cinema does justice to that rich area of investigation – especially as I attempt to justify Susan Sontag's early reading of the style – and that my omitting consideration of a broader range of (contemporary) cases will not leave the reader too frustrated. On the question of how the film spectator is haptically stirred by the viewing experience, I have tried to problematise certain lines of debate without rejecting the concept wholesale. In this respect, I feel that much more must be done that might borrow from writing on the 'paradox of fiction' in elucidating what is, fundamentally, a core ambiguity around our tactile relationship with the screened world. Finally, I mention that consideration of the hand – particularly the detached and self-conscious entity – might have something to add to conceptualisations of character. Rather than propose a definite set of theses in this regard, I suggest that analysis of how the human and animal limb (as the severed but re-animated extremity) is represented might expose important qualities that have something to say about all character construction. These might include, but are not limited to, questions about the anthropomorphic form imitating physical qualities of the living being, and how identification with psychological motivations and intentions might be aroused in the viewer. In all these examples, I hope that more expert and better minds will pursue lines of study only modestly and tentatively begun here.

In considering cinematic hands and how these might inform discussions about our being-in-the-world and our (self) representation on screen, it is hoped that both researchers in film studies and those interested in ontological philosophical questions will be satisfied, theoretically challenged, and informed about a variety of topics in film themes and aesthetics. Readers will hopefully discover a variety of examples of the hand on screen with as

many questions about the ways in which the moving hand is represented and mobilised for interrogative and stylistic effect. Ultimately, readers are invited to consider the meanings offered by this set of representations as they shed light on critical aspects of our being humans who manipulate the world we inhabit.

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1. *Themes – The Framed Hand and Being*

Abstract

This chapter considers how directors have used the hand as primary instrument to explore key ideas in their films. It offers close readings of several films that establish human decision, desire, agency, and potency as their principal concerns, and it presents a variety of ways in which metaphysical and ontological questions have been rendered on screen. It looks at films that have something to say directly about the labouring human hand: whether Marxist ideas about industrialisation, Lukács' notion of reification of the working subject, or questions about the changing conditions of work in the modern age. Within the context of debates around free will and determinism, and representations of individuals who suffer manual dispossession, it evaluates films that ask ethical and moral questions about the disempowerment of suppressed, minority, or marginalised individuals and groups.

Key Words: Free will and determinism; gendered labour; creativity; origins; consciousness

Natural and Supernatural Phenomena: Matter Becoming Consciousness

Mary Shelley's *Doctor Frankenstein's Monster* and James Cameron's *John Connor's Model 101* were very much creatures of their time. As their designations – *Monster* and *Model* – attest, they were conceived and projected into science fiction contexts that reflected the contemporary states of positivistic knowledge and experimentation at the periods of their conceptualisation. But although they are separated by two centuries of scientific progress, the fundamental questions invited by both characters and by those of their diegetic and extra-diegetic inventors, have not altered much. Foremost among these are the interrelated themes of the origin of sentient life and man's relationship with, and capacity for, intervention into the process of the creation of intelligent, living beings. As much as both stories interrogate the appropriateness

of man's 'playing God', they demand reflection on the consequences of his having done so for society at large, for the designer, and for the created being.

Made at roughly the historical mid-way point between the first sound cinematic adaptation of Shelley's novel, the 1931 Universal Pictures production directed by James Whale, and Cameron's second *Terminator* film from 1991, was Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). While Kubrick's diegesis is stretched to cover an expansive period of human history and evolution, and addresses key ethical and ontological questions, in his narrative they are confronted centrally and explicitly. Character traits and the personality of the Artificial Intelligence entity HAL are designed with some degree of futuristic creative projection. However conceptual possibilities for the scope of AI consciousness were very much a part of technological debates at the time of the film's production (see Malik 2000, 294–318). From the narrative logic established in the opening sequences of *2001*, we can infer that from man's earliest stages of primal growth, his intellectual progress coincided with a developmental capacity for the creation and use of tools. The logical and teleological consequence of this, given enough epochs of evolution, was the design of an artificially conscious piece of hardware that was capable of intelligence and emotion, and some degree of autonomy in both. HAL's dying words move from expressions of enthusiasm and confidence – which we can interpret as forms of communication set in place by programmed reactions to certain stimuli – to the pathetic and emotively plaintive: 'Stop Dave. I'm afraid. I'm afraid, Dave'. Because *homo sapiens* is posited as the creative force behind this designed consciousness and self-consciousness, it is fitting that Kubrick has already shown us the dawning moment of humanity's intellectual shift when, with his hands, the primitive creature uses the femur from an animal skeleton as a tool: specifically, as a weapon.

The focus on the hands of characters at moments of their creation or dawning of intellectual capability or consciousness is a recurring trope in cinema and is evident in the *Frankenstein* and *Terminator* films. In these and in several others representing bionic, anthropomorphic, or cyborg forms of life, the framed limb is used to denote the artificial creatures' coming to life or passing away. In this recurring iconography of the anthropomorphised form, we are given framed, close-up insert shots of the still hand beginning to twitch and move, or the twitching and moving hand coming to rest. The association between the consciousness and the mobility of the living entity is set up as a triangulation between that being's design, its intellect, and its hands. This association has long roots in the discourses of Western thinking and the consequence of this longevity – and of the founding connections proposed between (divine) creation, consciousness and intelligence, and the

hand – is manifest in the significant and ubiquitous repetition of manual iconography in certain films. The themes of these stories continue to struggle with an important ontological and metaphysical question that haunts so many philosophical, ontotheological, and scientific debates to the present day: how can inorganic matter become consciousness? We find that this question had an original focus on the human hand, and the ramifications of that attention have endured across the history of artistic representation, finding a comfortable and logical outlet in cinema.

The earliest records of debates that invoke the ontological position and role of the human hand are repeated in contemporary literature concerned with arguing the supremacy of that part of the anatomy by its association with the evolution of creativity, consciousness, and culture. The original conflicting positions were taken by the Greek philosophers Anaxagoras and Aristotle, whose assertions were separated by almost two centuries. A lecturer in science and philosophy, the Athenian Anaxagoras had suffered some discrediting by the time of his death in 428BC for his proposal that the planets were not Gods in the Heavens, but solid formations of matter suspended in the distant skies. Less controversially, he claimed that hands contributed to man's intellectual evolution. Man had become a being of supreme rationality because he possessed the nimble and capable limbs. Inverting this premise, a century and a half later, Aristotle argued that man was not intelligent because he had hands, but that he had been given hands by divine design because his intellect positioned him above other creatures.

The subject matter and philosophical motivation informing this foundational debate were not consigned to history. As recently as 2007, in his book *God Is Not Great*, the polemicist and journalist Christopher Hitchens recollected a personal experience in his own atheistic awakening. Having set up the context of an informative moment from the earlier years of his education, Hitchens quotes his primary school teacher:

So you see, children, how powerful and generous God is. He has made all the trees and grass to be green, which is exactly the colour that is most restful to our eyes. (2007, 2)

In a reflection that contained resonances of the ancient Greeks' declarations, the shocked young pupil recalled his reaction:

I simply knew, almost as if I had privileged access to a higher authority, that my teacher had managed to get everything wrong in just two sentences. The eyes were adjusted to nature, and not the other way about. (2007, 2–3)

Here he explains that, for reasons of religious faith, motivated causes and effects and their teleological consequences were inverted for proselytising purposes.

This contemporary example is preceded by recurring historical philosophical interventions which have sought to explore the relationship between human agency and its corporeal manifestations. Several recent commentators summon the voices of earlier authors, and many begin their arguments with the Anaxagoras and Aristotle case. In his book *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language and Human Culture*, Frank R. Wilson quotes the anthropologist Charles Bell:

In his landmark treatise on the hand, Sir Charles Bell noted that ‘we can hardly be surprised that some philosophers should have entertained the opinion, with Anaxagoras, that the superiority of man is owing to his hand.’ Bell, taking exception to what he judged in Anaxagoras to have been excessive regard for a mere bodily appendage, opined that these hands were given man ‘because he was the wisest creature’. (1998, 290)

In her exploration of the metaphorical and practical use of the hand in Shakespeare’s work, Farah Karim-Cooper references the Greek Physician Galen, who determined ‘that the hand was a sign of human dignity and intelligent design for its ability to grasp, hold on to objects and manipulate the environment’ (2016, 13). Raymond Tallis also invokes the ancient philosophers when he considers Heidegger’s juxtaposition of thinking and handicraft:

Against Anaxagoras, however, who asserted that it is because he has hands that man became the most intelligent among animals, Aristotle argues that, to the contrary, it is because of his intelligence he has hands. This view corresponds to Heidegger’s. (2003, 246)

He quotes the phenomenologist’s work *What is Called Thinking?* in which the latter has argued: ‘Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and be handy in achieving works of handicraft’ (Heidegger 1968, 16).

Setting up the context for his informative commentary on Jean-Luc Godard and Harun Farocki’s mobilisation of the hand in sections of their filmmaking, Volker Pantenburg succinctly centralises the importance of the classical philosophers’ argument. With the locus of this historical disagreement being perspectives on the limb, Pantenburg proposes that the Anaxagoras and Aristotle debate ‘contrasts two positions’ and ‘sets

the course of the discussion for the following centuries' (2015, 223). The Aristotelian position can be found in creative reiterations, cultural practices, and representations down through the centuries. With its various expressive incarnations in different artistic forms, a sense of the supernatural found its way into generations of depictions and ritualised uses of the human hand. Karim-Cooper references *Microcosmographia*, the 1615 'Description of the Body of Man' by Helkiah Crooke, who was the court physician to King James I. She indicates by this example that the tendency to associate the physical, anatomical qualities of the human hand with the metaphysical interpolation of the divine had been firmly established in the most orthodox of contemporary scientific doctrine around the time of Shakespeare. John Napier goes as far as to focus his attention on the precision and complex role of the thumb and calls upon the writing of previous commentators in its significance:

The thumb, the 'Lesser hand' as Albinus called it, is the most specialised of the digits. Isaac Newton once remarked that, in the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince him of God's existence. (1980, 65)

Examples in support of the importance of this position abound. There was, as Karim-Cooper has suggested, a conspicuous rise in the symbolic depictions of the hand even in secular art which testify to earlier religious and supernatural connotative portrayals. One significant theme offering reflections on the nature of the infinite or sublime was evident in 'emblematic images' which 'show a saint or person placing their hand into a flame, which almost always represents constancy' (2016, 12). This idea is referenced in a scene from Martin Scorsese's 1973 *Mean Streets* when Charlie (Harvey Keitel) goes to a church to pray. In voice-over, we hear his supplication: 'Lord, I am not worthy to eat your flesh. Not worthy to drink your blood', before he repeats the second line aloud. As he stands from the altar, a second voice-over conversation continues:

CHARLIE: Okay. Okay. I just come out of confession, right?
 JOHNNY: Right.
 CHARLIE: And the priest gives me the usual penance: right, ten Hail Mary's, ten Our Father's... ten whatever. Now, you know that next week I'm gonna come back and he's just gonna give me another ten Hail Mary's and another ten Our Father's and... and I mean, you know how I feel about that shit.

With these last words, Scorsese inserts a close-up shot of the marble hand of a statue of the dead Christ figure holding some roses. Charlie's imagined dialogue goes on:

- CHARLIE: Those things... they don't mean anything to me: they're just words. Now that may be okay for the others, but it just doesn't work for me. I mean, I do something wrong, I just want to pay for it my way. So I do my own penance for my own sins. What do ye say? Eh?
- JOHNNY: That's all bullshit, expect the pain right? The pain of hell. The burn from a lighted match increased a million times. Infinite.

On Johnny Boy's line 'No you don't fuck around with the infinite. There's no way you do that', Charlie moves his finger to hold it over the flame of a candle. Again, in voice-over, we hear his interlocutor add:

The pain in hell has two sides: the kind you can touch with your hand, the kind you can feel with your heart. Your soul; the spiritual side.

The connection between the natural world and the infinite spiritual is borne out with a focus on the hand. The religious associations had become so well ingrained in rituals of faith that Jean-Claude Schmitt has identified in writing as early as the seventh century the publication of lexicographies of spiritual gestures:

liturgical gestures were codified in *ordines* and explained systematically by Amalarius of Metz. Iconography (such as that of the Utrecht Psalter or the Stuttgart Psalter) emphasized the central role of the hand of God as a pattern for human gestures and the main tool for ruling man and transforming the world. (1991, 66)

The residue of these pre-Enlightenment tendencies can be found in non-religious representations of handiness and, from the earliest days of cinema, use of the horrific or possessed hand bore the reiterated theme of the earlier association that something supernatural or metaphysical could take hold of the limb. Hands' capacity for channelling or mediating between worlds of the natural and supernatural is represented in several films that deal with curses, spells, and spiritualism. Handholding often facilitates the connection with the dead, and gestures of the moving fingers of the witch

or wizard mark the potency of that character's magic. It can happen that whole films are dedicated to the exploration of the enchanted powers of the limb. Such supernatural elements provide the initiating action and drive the plots of *And Now the Screaming Starts!* (Roy Ward Baker, 1973), *Demonoid: Messenger of Death* (Alfredo Zacarías, 1980), and the Rodman Flender 1999 slacker teenage comedy *Idle Hands*. What stands out in these films, unlike the provision of a rationalistic resolution to the narratives of the *Hands of Orlac* adaptations and many similar narratives of corporeal possession, is that there is no naturalistic scientific explanation providing plot denouement or conclusion. On the contrary: the animating force by which the human hands are seized is explained by the intervention of a supernatural power.

And Now the Screaming Starts! tells the romantic tale of recently married Catherine (Stephanie Beacham) who moves to the country residence of her husband's ancestors. The mansion is afflicted by an inherited curse that manifests itself in strange occurrences like the appearance of a detached animated bloody hand that threatens the female protagonist and lies or floats ominously around the house. The legacy of the murderous limb has its origin in a tale that is told by Catherine's husband Charles Fengriffen (Ian Ogilvy) to Doctor Pope (Peter Cushing) after the physician has examined Catherine and failed to conclude a definitive diagnosis following the onset of her hallucinations. The legend, presented in a flashback sequence, narrates how Fengriffen's grandfather (Herbert Lom), a promiscuous and extravagant character, abused the authority of his ownership of his estate. In drunken licentiousness on the evening of the marriage of Silas, one of his workers, Fengriffen assaults him and claims his right to 'take' the young man's virgin bride. In defence, Silas attacks Fengriffen and the latter says: 'Twice today you raised your hand against me... It shall not happen again'. With this he chops off Silas' hand. Speaking to the rapist as he leaves, Silas curses him with the threat that vengeance will be meted upon the 'next virgin bride' to come to his estate. In a cut to the present day, as Charles finishes his tale, it becomes clear that Catherine is the victim of the woodsman's oath.

Several horror tropes are used for dramatic and tonal affect to sustain the possibility of a rational explanation for the events depicted. Two factors are noteworthy in respect of this. First, the diegetic balance of natural or supernatural justifications for the unusual happenings is maintained until the final moments of the film. Second, most of these judiciously placed plot pieces, scenes, and sequences are based on references to hands. Early in the film but following the inexplicable appearances of the severed hand, Catherine takes a walk in the woods and stumbles across a cabin. Inside she finds the Fengriffen estate Woodsman (Geoffrey Whitehead; also cast