

The Book of a Hundred Hands



KUHL HOUSE POETS edited by Jorie Graham and Mark Levine

The Book of a Hundred Hands

POEMS BY COLE SWENSEN

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for Claude Royet-Journoud

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If you do know that here is one hand, we'll grant you all the rest.

-Wittgenstein, On Certainty

ONE The History of the Hand

THE HISTORY OF THE HAND

Once thistle, once fissure, once a lamp in fog

and so on

Once convinced, we agreed to hold

which used to mean to anoint before it meant to bless or lessen or whiten the sky

"Hands appear in the earliest" (framed, sized) and overflowing the margins, the man born with two left hands was born a grown man.

The man born with his hands full of hands later died. There's no mystery to this. You listen, looking down, counting, thinking *And?*

Assyrian hands were carved of stone.

Egyptian hands were the point of the tale.

The Gothic hand, like no other, launched, while that of the Renaissance, both early and late, fragile and breaks, a wave on light. Ghirlandaio had hands of willow, and every hand that Dürer ever drew thrived. Most hands are startlingly small, like eyes.

THE PREHISTORY OF THE HAND

The hand began an animal, and from thereon filled

some folded mile, that soft plural kite

in flock did herd who thus did shard

comes to mind first

you will note the exploded stasis used to mean star or halt

in every native language you hold it straight out. Stark. Startle. Harp.

When you hold out your hand and the whole world stops and you find yourself looking at the back of your hand, which, the longer you look at it, looks starved.

THE HAND THINKS

There's a hand that thinks, that lies inside, that lines the hand that moves

and it thinks: "While tying a knot, you can utterly forget, you can think (can be thinking of something else at the time)

that muscles have a memory all their own

that lives again a braided time

alive

I tie.

Watch

what without you lives. The life of fingers

harbors

mutiny that doesn't even bother.

The hand, ever prior

avatar of architecture: archlessly, each one

is a frame.

There's an empty frame on the wall

and the hand is the sky

that opens the wall.

THE HAND DEFINED: I

As with any word, where does it begin? an elbowful of muscle fine as an inner ear

Those who say the definition of the hand begins in the shoulder say those who say between 3.9 and 4.2 million years ago, *Australopithecus anamemsis*: To find. Fossils of the hands and feet are so much rarer than those of skulls. Filed down to filigree

a brittle hearing

with the fingertips all those singly, millions of early braille, caressing an armful of dirt as they fell

are falling still

entire

systems in the back and shoulders and enormous parts of the brain.

THE HAND DEFINED: 2

As what will not relent: The felting delta mapped in the mind

with its boundless arboretum of neural withins:

the witness: to insist it

is equally infinite out there in its fingers

a port city in a blizzard.

THE HAND DEFINED: 3

A hand is anything that augments,

is the exponent of its own extent.

Look again. Nothing looks stranger

than a hand after time, its several failures sequential, enabled and hold that wronged until it's just that much

fish-hook, borealis,

and/or burial mound come other unto some

not yet arrived. Can meanwhile

calibrate a fly, my alluvial spire.

CHIROLOGIA, OR THE NATURAL LANGUAGE OF THE HAND

after John Bulwer, 1644

That He appeared unto Him

and asked what do you have in your hand

precedes thought, was thought to abide within this gift

is the sign, alit, and thus aligned, and thus which tide will twin? Much less graceful, then, is the clumsy tongue, that shapeless intention devoid of self-difference, compared to the dexterous multitude of poise: fingular fan on table

chair or cheekbone, speak volumes

into voiceless air, the gesture

(We seek forbearance) (Watch our patience)

against all excess of ideation (the hand is pacing).

(The hand - by its very nature, a thing in the world,

a worldly thing, a veritable map (or planet or lens) — note: even in its shape, its marvelous extent, which each time it flexes, expands, becomes an increasing part, a dominant trend, and so (fewer and fewer can now be spoken) silent that it cannot help but see: feather: feature: words when early

are bone

said the boneman, unsaid, said the

one among

the fled.

OF AN ALPHABET OF STEPPES

after the finger alphabet of George Dalgarno, 1680

But after he was gone, I began to consider that the "I" floats above the middle finger and the deaf with their kites

and the "O" above the next

who touched

the "E" above the index — note it's the vowels that live in air and the continents distributed rationally across extremity.

Readiness is distillation among strangers.

BY THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Helvetius, 1758, when writing on the mind, says, for example, wrists, or man would have wandered, for example, islands at the ends of the arms, among the animals, is defenseless and depictions of the hand began with thousands of fingers, then hundreds, then ten, then how have we come to this who once wandered confusing stars.

A HISTORY OF THE HAND

Just walk on in and you end:

Arch, and the window flies open; splay, and the house falls down. Streets that seem silent only now.

Walk on (says a voice at your spine). Light the lamps that hang. The light is long and swings from

what lines an avenue? and what had to change to make that shine?

or that one run?

and at every corner, an ark on fire - a hand and its menagerie, visible for miles.

THE HAND AS HISTORICAL

A fossil hides time — and thus hides from itself, that else is the human compass is the hand — and sows

a composite home, its only hour,

and that, in fact, the graph is a palm — just look what falls within

(and lands, it's said, and knows its way) was day before the latter was invented — all is lost it's said: what spine is this? or better put, what animal

with five spines. (Who survived?) A fossil is a photograph of chance.

A HISTORY OF THE HAND

Skip a stone across a water. Your eye will unfurl you, counting and counted on whoever also

learned the names (then matched them

to a face or other lighted surface). What do you have in your

You'd think that now, with all this space within, they'd be less empty now

you'll remember

them all.

Two Positions of the Hand

As the hand carved first its arc in air, a corresponding sweep through the brain made aviary spaces a little like airplane hangars in their relative dimensions and thus the impression of standing under a sky you can see.

The supple wrist, as it turned, turned too in the mind and acquired

all we can do, for instance, with the thumb and a single finger. What can you remember doing first thing this morning among the answers and the liquid trees

Who picked this fruit of just

the key in the door got there by itself. The lights just grew on the trees.

Species of when, that outward cliff

heart-shaped under everything left. It was a compliment: the hands of a surgeon or those of a gift. It was hot that summer and every day thereafter

gripped the sleeves. The vanes of a fan are often made from bone she said I own this one

of painted air paired

where air spears

and folds into ribs turned to leaves turned to hands, those veils that arrange the face. Summer gate. Sun made of gave.

The intricate isthmus of the wrist made initial

right below the skin, its glazed mosaic cradles

a glint

as the hand swings down, we hear a slight clock and another era finds

radial and ulnar and deviant

continental plates that drift into place. It took a million years

to pick up a hammer or a cane, and each time you do you forget another million years. The cup the hand becomes

a bell

is first a shape, and then there's something old in your hand.

The held being

a function of the inverted arch and ease of vault when looking up, an immense

Walk backwards from here to the sea

until serial, this shell

is what surrounds, is all that might be
the connection between tool use, language, and the spiral gene determining
twenty-one muscles set out to sea
on a perfectly lovely day.
The hand is a boatless sail.

You pass your hand over your eyes.

There are two ways to do this — palm in or palm out. Try it. Pass your hand over your eyes first with the palm facing out (you're tired, my

then

with the palm facing in, the hand can barely pass, is too exact; it clicks

in traces

to bitter palace

to stay

means siege

you say,

throwing back your head. You could be acting. We could be watching you from the other side; you could have forgotten that.

The sky is the constant, and against it slides a planet

is anything that moves

across

we look all arc.

(I practice each trick

behind a curtain where it's warm

eye: hand hand: calibration through

a practiced "We

tend to forget what the hand cannot do without." "I see each move clearly in my mind,

and it's fine." Look away. Carry

the brimming teacup across the crowded station. Watch

my hands. Said the multitude: Memory

is every muscle's sovereignty; eternity is a thumb.

TRAVELING

As it carves its world from the aerodrome of nerve and dream, additional dimensions and projections of the thing, enormous, internal and verdant becomes this

acreage paced, this mile after mile that the hand each day travels as it waves, or covers a yawn, or sweeps, or puts down a baton. The orchestra conductor wears an odometer instead of a watch.

GLOVE

Wore the middle ghost.
Click of needle-on-sun
who runs
out ahead of the oncoming

who runs out into

forest after forest, the lamp on the table that fits.

THE MECHANICS OF THE HAND

Some natural ways it lies, for instance on a desk, are due not so much to mental states as to the mechanics of the hand.

Locked in.

While your face was taught

to hold itself, the hands, electric, spread. While speaking always stands outside, *instinctive* means it angles toward

the natural inheritance of all beautiful things: balance,

precision, and extremes: These

innate positions including

(in adversity)

a wholly involuntary outward mobility

(the whole body tends to move out

of limb and feature -

Picture

A woman fleeing a burning building A man with his hands on fire

The basal knuckles are always more likely to bend forward. We close in, understanding like phantom pain can lodge itself in any finger and wait.

THREE Professions of the Hand

CASE HISTORIES: PHYSICAL APHASIA

"We can't be sure what the child, though watched, was really doing with his hands . . ."

and the next phrase is "before he was"

there are

enormous gaps in the planet — they usually occur

in the vast

sense of touch, so often

fields. The

lifted sense.

The sixth What are you doing

expects to be empty, or oceans. Now they've got oceans

And the child reached with the half that saw

and touched half a giving saved some image that walks through walls and owns this older orbit

flailing sheaves.

THE HAND AS LAMP

Can cause a street;

it's from the shape — held straight up, you can't help but see.

And those who have chosen to live in the dark, equally happily the hand burns on:

Whole forests bequeath:

Lantern! Lantern!

gone all out of range

And we who believe in cause and effect,

whose trees thrive in the falling sun,

should learn a little more about fire, which I hear is not hard to do.

THE HAND AS ANCHOR

Raked sun.

Or there did it lodge. Or rock. Or did it stone? It to stone. The scarred just that yet insists: follow this who still believes the architecture of a ship is derived from that of the human body or perhaps only the hand caught, and the whole body stopped. It's a shame.

THE HAND THAT CARESSES

after Alphonso Lingis

Glean sheet

that's soft and flees gliding just above the surface constructs a second skin of close attention.

The hand cannot tire in the face

of another, a hand hovers or floats detached from the wrist, my hand fits your face precisely *What recognizes* the suffering of the other is a movement in one's hand. He points to the plane, which is landing, which is the same.

THE HAND AS ORIGAMI

First Position: Crane

Second Position: Freighter. The winged lion comes later.

This is the church

and this is the people who

walked across a land bridge and ever since

however flesh, there's a turning in the bird,

a burning egg

I thin with sandpaper; that's land down there,

liminal.

THE HAND AS 19TH-CENTURY HARBOR

That would be the harbinger hand

and so I'll stay here. And of the flocks full forth on the gale, a hand is every one. Broke, and vague, and starfish will, like a watermark on a letter, splay across the window. Don't say omen, there are too many ships. They are alight, and they write vile things in the newspapers like "All hands on deck" and "All hands were lost" and "Every hand becomes a ghost, so do the math. It's a little hope. It means we outnumber them, until they outnumber us forcing her eyes down the list in the morning paper.

THE THEATER OF THE HAND

Chart it on a staff, both the shape of the note and that of the hand of the music therein. Marinetti wrote a play composed entirely of hands that waved above a sheet when the lights came on.

In another (whose?) a mime stood alone on stage and when the lights went down, all that remained were his hands gloved in something that glows in the dark. Such as will not spread in the dark

such as five years. Arrange them as you like.

THE HAND AS IDEOGRAM

In a dark purple sky behind the lightning field, alive Michaux, *Later the signs spoke to me*And they were hands

murmur without end

The hand is not human and no word adheres

held out, half a million that half-ended in bright migration. We once recognized them.

THE HAND AS WINDOW

in which the panes infinitesimal. By the thousands, the armies of the ancient world got older. A sweeping sensation mistaken for wind. You opened the window. You thought that would do.

This is not so different from certain congenital conditions in which

You open the window. There is more you can see through. For instance, if the body is 98% water and the window looks out on an ocean is the hand in all its facets a latch.

THE HAND AS MANSION

When you first walk in, all you see is the view — a huge sweep across rolling green with here and there a stand of cypress, outcroppings, single oaks, all in varied shades and endless under light, ridge, bird, ridge, and on the farthest ridge, though small at this distance, a huge white house with its turrets and wings and enormous windows so positioned that you look right through it.

THE HAND AS SUN GOD

The term "pillars of the wrist" was engraved upon the lintel through which one enters

the deeply placed. We want the neural point.

There is a pause

in the curve that resists

gravitation,

that suspends

a glass gyroscope on the windowsill; one has invisible friends that turn on a central axis

like a revolving door,

hands are a form of wind.

THE HAND POLISHES

This is now uncommon. And therefore brittles:

To polish is to raise the carapace, the doorknob, the letterbox, the concierge, who, gleaming in the sun, turns to steer. This gilded bone. All things in which

Did not reflect our faces. Or those of any we knew.

This is a nameplate. Affixed

to a doorway. No, to a door. Answer: there's no one there.

This is decor; a thin layer of gold

that shines in tune. A leaf on which is added one to one and one.

It's a name "scratched"

"thereon"

if I raise

a finger and say I'm not at home, please; I may for once

Please show me home.

When gold leaf crumples, it disappears. There's no one at the door, but we told you this already, there is

the door. The man who polishes it was born with a missing hand. Whose? he says, and laughs at the joke, but we told you this already.

EXPRESSION

Where the bones form a scape

out there beyond the trees. Great wind will make the creases deeper. The tendons rise and the knuckles spread. A range of hills becomes the focus of involuntary waking dreams. Modern psychology tells us that it's modern, that it glows red when happy, that it exceeds itself.

THE HAND AS STAIRCASE

Or as sunlight on a stair

Follow the curve

across a brow. Later a film still in which a Venetian blind, a streetlight outside, and the face climbs, one at a time, spiraling outward as the flight turns

we revert

to the brow. The shadows thrown by the streetlight are not quite parallel, a city on a hill.

And how happy we are here! On a corner about to cross the street and enter the park

at the top of the hill, from which you see the tops of dozens of hills.

THE HAND AS NEST

What caress?

and who

of slate who made

this flute, you

hollow out a bone with a smaller bone.

You choose a fruit the size and shape of a heart.

THE HAND AS MANGO

Rounded the corner, and I always bet on horses in alphabetical order. Take it home to light the corridor, or carry it with you, just slip it in your pocket. You have no home.

FOUR Representations of the Hand

THE HANDS' TESTAMENT

The face veils and gates and the glance will enharbor,

but the thumb and forefinger could give it away entire

but will never

but remain, calmly clasped and "therein lies." It's light out. And I, nearer

No, you knew what inner

We have many versions

that require silence

differs less than one percent

(I rest my case) (as I was blessed) it is

the shimmer in the hybrid; the hand is an island oddly endless; we are it.

THE HANDS TESTIFY

As if the sun had hit

the glazing

slips

as if

there are days it all goes right

for instance:

There's a greenhouse just out of sight.

All I can see is a greenhouse, the glass in the sun, the green is somewhere else. The hand arches over the head of the child and floats down. The hand is planned as a perfect inversion of the head. Child and mine, a building of eyes. You can see through the hand or think you can to the flower of the brain, but all along it's the hand that's blooming, and the child is incidental, or at least not central to the scene.

THE HAND PAINTED IN

Is said is unhinged can drift off from is not constrained to

Though the hand, as if tethered, often stays in place

the great painters could aloft each cell where the living shifts into distance while we, the living, devise new methods: You grind down a lightbulb and paint in the hands. This, said the Renaissance, shall, in that required posture, cause them to stutter

to flicker

to rise on will. The hand is yet one more instance of the incantation of the awkward god of uneven number, of all knuckle, El Greco, my own Elba,

and all the in-between that glows in the dark. Arcen-ciel, or carved boat, or matching boats like the blue hands that saints often wear.

THE HAND SCULPTED

Gets huge. Multiplies the bone. Here, too, the sun is fundamental; it overflows and joins the vagrant rays and you say, oh yes, that one. Stronger in effort, my pyred posture arrives between sky and sky, a lithe difference I wish upon all indestructible things this freak wing.

THE HAND ETCHED IN GLASS

We knew this was coming. We always thought they were flying, but, no, it's light alone. It's morning and the light is streaming in. Blinding, you think, and put your hand up to your eyes. And stayed. We're all part window. There's someone coming in through the french window, but you don't notice him; you notice the window.

And you wonder why the pane was made; such tracery, cf. antiquity, or it could be simply in the distance. We've always thought We're all a part

streaming in in the background glass gets articulate

And you wonder why the pane was made, and you look at the pane, not at him.

THE HAND SKETCHED

By nature, will feather in disjointure

will beckon

to be the last surviving of a surviving

troupe of tangents with fog in the distance, with a stand of trees on a ridge penciled in that far away, it gains a healing force. Thus is the hand

sealed in its swift expanse, and thus impossible to photograph until quite recently, an incandescent flare orbiting an end.

THE HAND PHOTOGRAPHED

Here we tend toward particulars, though we remain black & white and/or the black before the door, the white, slipping out. We're more angular than their portraits would have led you to believe; you could live here too — we're not as poor as we look. Photographs have a way of implying that it was a little cold that day, or that we live like pets in the laps of everyone who wanted something else.

THE HAND IN FRESCO

Behind the glass block wall there walks

Put roses behind the glass block window, red ones, it's hard to tell just what's going on. There are saints coming down. And tribes that turn to chalk when the photograph strikes. He put up his hand to protect his face and the hand remained.

You can make it into a wall. All these colors into pale to whisper: "Wilt silt,

wilt sift.

Sieve.

You can see through me. I'm the one wearing ice. I have crossed my hands behind.

FIVE The Anatomy of the Hand

INTRO TO THE PALMAR VIEW

The hand that is not a small world — flexor, fascia, and fibrous expansion;

from the condyle of the humerus comes

and over the annular ligament does at the gates of

(hold this)

and the opponens muscles of the thumb. Some

dumb piano, summer drones on. Palms

and the calluses of the palm, the upper plains, ingrained,

and to this extent

its eminence

passes over,

ends in

the ability to fold a newspaper on a moving train.

THE PALMAR VIEW

Here the hand is usually bent; if at the wrist, a chiseled arc angles to an eventual middle finger is another dark they say is most often the most often curved. Darkness makes things turn on their own. I'm sure you've seen. The index and the little finger are, on the other hand, the most extreme. Things that have a light in them, things that spring up and out and seem to hold, hold on. These include small undercuts where shadows collect among the awake.

THE PALMAR VIEW, CONTINUED

There are four bones. There are fingers toward. They are fastened to the inner. There is something called interossei; we have them. Dorsal almost everywhere and when you draw in. We learned that from. Watch closely the animals; some move outward; these are called spreaders. They "draw away"; they lie deep, they.

PALMAR 3

Already interior, this is landscape

this vast of veld,

this escapes, and lintel crossed

left a letter in the dust, or as it settles, sifting through the tendons

in their numbered positions

and innumerable interstices

rising up from the sea, lonely but determined.

FINGERS I

Lattice into swallow, the fingers built in shallows; they are beyond and so the creases do not penetrate. They are beyond. Enclosed in differing lengths. Bevel. Apex of the knuckle, which point it never reaches, there being others farther on.

FINGERS 2

All belongs with them:

the plural oar the fingers when straight

really are all that palm extrapolate of frond

a portion henged

my friend goes

toward the many and the several

that geometric engine

that spelled in space

the constellation crane or ibis or heron in its length to depth ratio of one of those

things that makes you say

how on earth do they stand or how do they fly or some small unlikely anger of bones.

FINGERS: ALIGNMENT

We of the congregation do declare the constellation

I'm blind; I've always known it, but never before has it complied.

I think of the people I see every day, and then of the people I see four or five days a week. And then those I see twice, and then once. And then I know no one,

and suddenly it's crowded, integral, and just what I'd imagined I knew any section of sky. Maps of the sky date back to etc. I'm blind, thus I see with my hands, thus.

ALIGNMENT, CONTINUED

Radiate that splay from the strangely pulseless point

makes an isosceles with the index and the little finger doesn't stop.

Across the base of the fingers, draw an arc.

A boat overturned this morning in the bay. What can a hand be made to hull? What

all over the waves. Shade in the curve, in the hollow of the hand where vision gets thin; whereas, from the back one can see the tendons retrace, running parallel to the swimmers, who by then are also lost, like the ribs of a paper umbrella or lantern or any number of other things not nearly so fragile.

FINGERTIPS

In an x-ray you can tell there's an interior nail, a glitch of bone that senses hold a thousand and then we were one, or then there was only one, and that was someone else. Attention can hone down that close, and then the bone flattens out

just a bit and you can hear

what it hears, and you can hear it.

THE HAND: LOWER VIEW: OBLIQUE

Beveled from both
the dorsal and palmar approach: crisp machine of needle-bone, born to drift
horizon-ward through the hollow world
wafts an invisible globe,
on a glass spine. The hand is a wheel
that comforts none. Be mine.

THE BEVEL ITSELF

Attains an apse. Here, where a hasp is taking place into shape into gradual sense

we ascend

"To that point, which in sum" or "Once, here was a hand."

An arch is necessarily geological thus it ages; thus it ends. My friend had a hand that wouldn't stop. My reign of belief that says, "If a bevel, then a dirigible" (which was not here before).

KNUCKLES

free of muscles, most closely resemble the sun. Socket and phalanx

lock

the dome

and slip the light, diagonal through a chambered nautilus toward home, wherein you can see through the skin, when it grips and goes white

and reads like a face, so many faces line the body, or are lined up inside the body, waiting.

THE THUMB: BASED ON

the basal joint, permitting half

to that account add one

gentle swan from the neck up. This enables reaching and can only begin to map what will eventually become

a circular man. Michelangelo gave the thumb a brain rooted in opposition. In fact, those born with more than one were considered blessed, and heaven would swing down within reach, while a sixth finger (or rather, technically, the fifth) was the devil's flesh. If it lived, it caused, and caught on things in passing, but they still passed.

THE INTERN'S PROBLEM

When a baby is born with six fingers (each one wanted and wanted to be
equally perfect) a young man
cuts off the withered excesses and wonders if he'll be sued
if what becomes
a blinking wing and/or why this road

suddenly clears.

Why does everything come in shards and a body is a body until it's cut. Sculpted only doors that shut. One is forced to admit that an infant belongs to no one.

In this case, however, the mother just laughed and pointed to the scars along her own ulnar edges. Extra fingers, it seems, can be removed to a certain extent.

THE THUMB, IN SUM

cannot touch the fingers; the fingers
must bend down to touch it to bow from the waist
the average length allows it to reach each
finger intact in the shadows it forms:
the tail of a bird,

. .

a ship

below the horizon; it can barely dip to the heart-line. A star that never quite rises is measured by reflected light, that glow in the sky, the thumb never entirely sets. THE HAND: BRANCHING OUT

i.e., palmward and pulseward heading,

in the following order

we notice

that the bases of no two fingers touch, that the bases of the fingers cannot touch the wrist, that the thumb can only touch with its tip, and that in fewer places than it cannot

fold. Though you'd never describe it as folding. You'd use the word 'following,' composed of one non sequitur after another, and how soon we arrive at a century, or any one wanders from one's self every morning, and continually as the day continues, and this is as it should be.

THE HAND: BACK VIEW, FINGERS ARCHED

Each lone slight arc

morticed and

threshold me home

to a slight curve in nature

as every bone in the body is barely

an arrow, all look out the window

onto passing umbrellas,

each flying buttress, a hand

is a standing wave.

THE HAND: OTHER ARCHES

As with the foot or the cathedral, the arches cross each other rising to the final finger and finer high wire into

lofted thought, as they say of planes, and the analogy is apt — the distinct angle of the bank, the giddiness of height is grist for the aerial earth: ridge and plain and potential signs of life.

THE FIST

In utter moon, this "we" is tool and when a weapon is a closed thing it's not all that surprising

that it drives itself to dust. A radius of pain that turns away (that grinds its face) that bag of rain.

THE ANATOMY OF TREES

Note the singular. Has endless fingers, filters senses, running its appendages through the sky, distracted,

if you hold up the hand in bright daylight, it is well known

that if you hold a flashlight behind the hand,
palmar view,
in the dull red
you can see for miles and things
don't get smaller in the distance.

THE MECHANICS OF THE HAND

From the four corners of the wrist

flows the hand

In clasping bends

bends back

its whispered circle

labyrinth seed

whose broken hill

constitutes a system, adopted

this vagrant nation, tendon, and nerve

bends back

more easily into the world.

sıx American Sign Language

for Bay Anapol

Come back to their animals

holding a black veil against a white wall

which, too, you can see through

the ornamented air

pared back. My ghost migration engraved, stations

of the

brightly map. We tag the wings

and in the slip that checks and graces,

little steeples that mean.

THE MANUAL ALPHABET

Sculpts. Just look at these neighbors. Who sees with the fingers sees these things together. I once built a neighbor of light. We used to read by his skin, the whole town, reciting, "Repeat after

until we could decipher branches signing in the storm and long past the fields now speaking, walking on his hands out of town.

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Think of the space in front of the body. You can't walk in. You can't find the door. We call it the present. You don't know what to do with your hands. Whereas the past is an orchard. This is how you know the difference. Birds live in orchards but not deer. This happens behind the body.

While everything in front is overexposed or snow. You stop at the edge and wave your arms, but they get lost in the wash of diffused light, which makes it the future. You are waving goodbye.

PRONOUNS

Point to an imaginary place. It need not be specific, but huge areas are indicated and tend

no one ends

in a streak or flare. Location, which is not

exactly position each time you mention

several people form a field but must

relinquish their names at the edges; fraying *is* the body. It's just a semantic problem. A field of wheat and above it, an entire wind of bees. Take my picture. Please put the sun in the background and make it look like the wheat completely (remember several people can be discussed at once if you treat them as points in space).

THINKING AND FEELING

For instance, happy.	That's far a	way. So we	gesture a	little to	the right	of the	head
	is the se	nsation of					

I couldn't say.

A chime in a cell.

You crave

none of these.

We place

an inch and a half behind your left shoulder

a bird the size of a thumbtack.

You have to keep it happy forever.

FLOOD

Make the hand a shell saved along a sea

one sill at a time the hands rise

and alight from their eyelids every morning, place the open hands in front.

And the palms rise, and the tides, both

flora and fauna become inextricable

as you place both hands out, slightly cupped

until they overflow and here we stand convinced. We were hoping to be convinced.

GARDEN

The body is a circle, which comes home in the hands. Move out and within it

are the phyla; orbit these
(and if a sphere)
(this can also be invited)
to pool in air

all gardens are equal parts water and beyond that make a "yet"

with the right hand flowering. Plant it and beyond that, keep planting the hands in increasing circles.

RAIN

This one is complicated. You'll need a lot of hands.

You're advised to prepare them in advance.

In front of you there will be a great water. Divide by two and bring together

the tips of the fingers, which almost reach the earth, that is, they spread out from here and

Hold this (here you may insert any living object, just

use the left hand to soften the fingers of the right and sift, still softly, back and forth.

GHOST (HOLY)

Face the hands together face to face, right over left, leave

enough space. There's a charge given off

a field

changed a horizontal we

have a model in early Flemish landscape, all that sea, etc., all that sky or in Millet's *Angelus* (1857) (form this with the left hand, the horizon turning gold) the right hand will move

off on its own, tremor, and skid into cloud. Certain moments of indecision are visitations in disguise. It's this that lets the hands pass at such incredible speed. Initialize these.

The slanted, though they prefer roses, will settle the bone tilted, will

we

of the have been, please place at the eyebone, one or two thumbs, the hands will do what they do most naturally they find bone grows upward nine times out of ten.

EVENING

Arch the hand as if taking a pulse on the wrong side of the wrist and let it hover. The other,

a dim crystal transparent as early windows

were made of shell, shaved

alabaster and mica, were moving evening

is a decimal, a subtle gradation toward glass planes that become neither more nor less an ocean or an empty greenhouse in the dark: the often, sharpen, and there is no end to the refraction, nor to the scattering of rays; i.e., we who can see well at night are simply they who refuse to leave.

TO FORM THE SIMPLE PAST

If a glance over the shoulder implies we're going forward

like salt, row.

Toward something behind and the doors are all closed, and history peels a fruit open to the mind. They say there's a past that's simple as opposed to perfect. The ghost just over the left shoulder also looks different under the influence of human touch. You close it again and it reduces like a fraction, something common to every gesture, caught unaware. . . .

THE PRESENT PERFECT: TO HAVE

To have perfects the present: "to have laughed," "to have delved," "to have once it was all of us. Your hands know this and automatically explode.

Proffer both — what they can do to the self. And if the motion is absolute, it overflows its tense and is thus is in the very sense

splits. With one hand on each side of the larynx, point inward, my untoward angler, spelling "to hold" with your thumbs.

I've heard of people who've gone blind

who then begin to see with their skin;

it usually centers itself in the hands, the palms and the fingertips most particularly, who drive a car, who read the paper, who paint by number in the sand, this sculpture, carved

of instant substance is

the stated entrance; for instance, the blind who sign find that air is a face.

ANIMAL

Place all fingertips on the skin of the chest in two neat lines and arch, one above the heart; the other where no heart is, touch the skin whenever possible with bent hand rocking both hands sideways. Keep rocking.

seven Shadow Puppets

THE FIRST MOVIES

Then all hands touched. Hands shone. The hand was a public thing. A tool that rang when dropped. The two hands moved across What moves between a screen and a match awakened in the cold

(The smaller the light, the more enormous the hands will live) by a sound will be gone. Enormous trees, a castle, a pond and no sky in the broken ray into birds on the opposite wall.

Most shadow puppets are birds. This all depends on darkness. Birds prefer darkness. Cockatoo, parrot, and lark have in common you can see through them; a density based on ambient light. They must live inside any number of things. Things without number. Name them:

two flying birds

two flying birds

require both hands as

hands are more supple than the rest of the body because they don't belong to it. Behind frosted glass

grief shape

the finger tracing laterally across the back of a mirror as you might, walking down a street let your fingertip trail along the staves of passing gates

waist high the birds dissolve, brief lakes in the window of

Reflect thereon.

Therefore the reflected sun. The wound in my hand aches in weather, any weather, tattooed all the way up to the elbow. Now it's winter. Geese cross in their soft Vs, swift sign in the cirrus. The hand writes in the air; the bird stays there.

Now you'll need thousands. Evenly though rapidly dispersed every finger unfettered

any bone

can be feathered, this thousand

driven hollow

into the flock

of all things numbered

one through one hundred. Never was I so asunder, etc., so I opened the window and let in the graves.

ADVANCES IN THE FORM

The latest work in shadow puppets is being done on verbs. Make the form of a soar, of a veer. Make the tense clear. Distinguish the past perfect from the simple past. Neither was. And on into conditionals. Would have found, etc. Would have gone

myself, but I wasn't home. Birdwatchers often use sign language because, though birds are fond of the human voice, they are downright hypnotized by the swaying hands and will walk right into them.

EIGHT A Manual of Gesture:

Public Speaking for the Gentleman (1879)

for Jena Osman

RIGHT HAND DESCENDING OBLIQUE PRONE

You lower the hand more slowly Yet rose (you say, gaze lowered)

sweet dew, etc., to underscore the finality — i.e., death is, etc., untimely

so begin by raising the right hand slightly above the shoulder and then in a sweep match

the words; for instance, you wouldn't want to speak of heaven; you'd find yourself facing backward, and all your ancestors disconcertingly well prepared.

RIGHT HAND HORIZONTAL FRONT PRONE

Sometimes known as the "oncoming traffic pose," it must be accompanied by slightly glowering brow and glinting eye, which stand in for the violins, etc.

Lift off and adapt to emphatic speech

by bending slightly at the knee

as in the example: "But

the whole body angled forward.

There are

Hush!

Peace!

Seize! the fleeing angel,

sacred, solemn, awe, or the divine hand is upon you, is that curious thing you might have noticed occurring on your shoulder.

RIGHT HAND ASCENDING LATERAL SUPINE

This, too, is for speaking of the sublime, but here we add the sacred and divide by one. This requires a practiced wrist. Practice to avoid

from every mountain top, etc., shine

Of course you would.

And as the ascending stress arrives, the promontories repeat the joy of, the glory of the slightly cupped hand held out as if testing for rain or thinking the weight of an egg.

RIGHT HAND ASCENDING OBLIQUE VERTICAL

is highly recommended for dissuading ghosts (Oh! what is! this darkness! etc. coming from the east. The hand goes one way, and the glance, another, by natural magnetism shattered the challenge and wept in gesture for nought (here look slightly up) "Be gone!" Begin by sweeping the hand around from the back in a wide arc; you can, in this way, imply everything in sight.

BOTH HANDS DESCENDING LATERAL PRONE

"Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of . . .

will encompass the wheel of what can be left

and then enter

the cast of thousands: the crowd moves in a shimmer

of heat over acres

thou hast covered all (emphasize

"covered" by extending your arms floorward, hands slightly splayed and face down we hold back the rising flood

swelled to fill

an entire people marching toward

an avalanche of dust - "My sons!" and the hands are down, out flat, you sense a pushing against the earth, and the earth pushing back. Wear a suit, cite the numbers,

reveal your sources

(the manual says) (equalized

by the armload) If the fountain

heads downward, "They forthwith do." (Downplay the reverence; it is clearly implied.)

NINE Paintings of Possible Hands

Wilton Diptych, 1395

"This is your dowry, O holy Virgin . . ."

Ornate and absent: sky
while all the while
How blue the robe
How the blue robe
Here, wear blue, my
you, my oh! look at their hands, too
immaculately long, no I mean, Look
at Mary's left hand, there's something
terribly wrong, though on second thought
perhaps it's an accident of light and even the hands
of the young king of England — the fingers innumerate — is just that something
slightly infinite in hands.

FRA ANGELICO, Cell 7, San Marco, 1438-43

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Fra And
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of the Freed Hand
or of the hand in fore of wristless air
where here the sky is greener,
full of hands that, alone, break down to lust
are birds, all
lived twice, and this is his third

fair acre, lover, only here they begin to emerge, hands first.

DOMINIQUE INGRES, Venus at Paphos, 1852-53

The hand, which is disappearing
on the forearm finding
the child's fingers multiplying
the child's feathered fingers
or: the child's fingers are feathers
and the left hand of Venus
and the whole left arm, which
we can see through (rather unnerving)
is a ghost
that is also not (yet) part of the child.

AUGUSTE RODIN, Cathedral, 1908

Nested dolls.

Heart, hand, and larger churches forget to intend anything beyond. There is no door to the room; it has been replaced by a room.

MARC CHAGALL, Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers, 1912

On the left hand six fingers and a thumb is to do it well. is to do it without turning around. In the living air between heaven and hell it's the sort of miracle that does no one any good. I count with no reason, no object, I mean that there is nothing counted.

MARCEL DUCHAMP, Portrait of Doctor Raymond Dumouchel, 1910

Huge and

Shake. It will be a little gift.

What is:

1. glows

2. is

what in the night sky seems too green and keeps us up all night. My mask walks. Walk on. We are walking east. *What hand?* his own notes said what is that hand doing in the dark we're all folded across the huge red earth and here is my friend.

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN, The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicholaes Tulp, DETAIL, 1632

He is cutting off a glove.

A million leaves. Though the eyes of everyone watching are simply black dots, you can trace their precise sight-lines they are *nothing* I tell you he is cutting off a glove.

(Upper left corner. It appears incidental. It looks like a glove. It looks like he's going to cut off a glove.)

tossed his gloves on the table as he entered, they said

There is so much else going on. There are people taking notes, others mapping veins. The gloves are white. And this seems, just for an instant, cruel to them.

NORMAN BLUHM AND FRANK O'HARA, Hand, 1960

So much for the hills

that still their animal time. To geometrize in long, articulated lines. The hand upon the world bends down and down and down. "Meet me in the park." Embryonic

in its internal stair

conch

vetch

what tastes itself in sun will not climb down.

SEAN SCULLY, Landline Sand, 1999

Now I dream them.

They have no paint. They are completely raw in that way.

Just bands of anchor or in the etchings
just black and white and itinerant greys.

I send you this effort when I meant the gesture.

Every abstract is a painting of yet another
(never repeated) part of the body.

KUHL HOUSE POETS

David Micah Greenberg Planned Solstice

John Isles Ark

Bin Ramke Airs, Waters, Places

Bin Ramke Matter

Michelle Robinson The Life of a Hunter

Robyn Schiff Worth

Cole Swensen The Book of a Hundred Hands

Cole Swensen Such Rich Hour

Emily Wilson The Keep