'The Hand on the Breast'[1]

Julius Lange (trans. Karl Johns)

The proper study of mankind is man.

We are speaking here of the well-known gesture of laying a hand on our chest or 'on our heart', and its significance and use in the arts. We must begin with a few remarks about such expressive hand gestures in general.

If we feel a sudden pain in any part of our body, we immediately touch it with our hand. Our hands are our messenger, our helper and our physician. If the sensation is painful, our hand can provide counter pressure to soothe or eliminate it. When the sensation is within our body where our hand cannot reach it, we nonetheless move it to that area, hold it there on the surface of our body unless we have led our hand elsewhere for some other reason. In other words, the movement has no practical purpose, it is incomplete, but human gestures consist precisely in such unfinished movements.

The reason we put our hand to our head is that this is where our higher senses are situated, our sight and hearing connecting us to the outside world, aside from our brain as the centre of our imagination and thought as well as our organs of speech. We have a sense that the life of these faculties then becomes intensely active. The motion comes to express our feeling filled with something we either imagine or actually have heard, seen or thought. The content of this notion or thought is so vivid to our outer or inner senses that we feel as if we are living through them or sit in silence in order to linger on them. This can be expressed in many ways and degrees. During our quiet contemplation of our idea we place our index finger against our chin or lower lip. Imaginative or pensive authors might use their pen rather than the finger in a motif that occurs frequently in the wall paintings from Pompeii as well as with Bertil Thorvaldsen. If the notion generates fear, then the finger might nervously tap the lip. The index finger or the tips of more than one finger touch the cheek to express reflection or the side of the nose as a sign of doubt or dialectical thought. In a deeper state of brooding or bleak intuitions, older men

[1] [Originally published as 'Haenden paa Brystet,' *Tilskueren: Maanedsskrift for Literatur, Samfundsspørgsmaal og almenfattelige videnskabelige skildringer*, 4th year, 1887, June-July, pp. 455-471, August pp. 571-588, reprinted: *Udvalgte skrifter af Julius Lange*, udgivne af Georg Brandes og P. Købke, Andet bind, København: Det nordiske forlag, 1901, pp. 10-48.] [Plates added from my copy of Julius Lange, *Ausgewählte Schriften (1886-1897)*, II, Strassburg: J. H. ED Heitz (Heitz & Mündel) 1912. **Click here**. ED]

might touch or stroke their beards. If the thoughts are more overwhelming and as the expression goes, fill our head, then we tip to the side and support the cheek in our open hand. In ancient and modern culture, this has been the usual sign of distress. A person actively thinking might stroke their forehead or scratch their head as if to circulate the blood there more effectively. A forceful emotional pain evoked by an unbearable and inescapable thought might even bring us to pull our hair.[2]

Somebody who suddenly makes a realization and recognizes an earlier oversight can slap their forehead. The greater the realization, the more violent the motion. We can express desperation by impetuously hitting our head or holding it in both hands.

Our chest houses the organs, the lungs and heart, which by their regular expansion and contraction guide our breath, pulse, the tempo and rhythm of our emotional and intellectual lives along with our shifting conceptions of things. As long as this tempo proceeds regularly we remain unconscious of it and can concentrate on the objective content of our intellectual life. If on the other hand, there is a sudden strong disruption in the pace either by simple physical strain, or if our heart stands still and breath stops when we are surprised, or a sympathetic or objectionable impression causes us to hold our breath and then sigh slowly or breath quickly, then we feel something unusual occurring in our chest and instinctively place our hand on it.

This is when the popular expression of getting something off our chest, alluding to the life of the heart as opposed to the head (*henfører til "Hjertet", Livet i Hjertet i Modsætning til "Hovedet'*). This is presumably related to the conception of something outside of us, like a surprise coming from something objective which we experience and see with our eyes, but the effect on our physical rhythms is momentarily so strong as to stop our breath and cause us to forget our objective ideas with their content and only notice what is occurring inside of us as a result of them.[3] This why the movement of the hand to the breast appeals more to human subjectivity and the hand to the head more to objectivity or an impression of objectivity.

[2] A vividly felt and highly effective example of counter-pressure is found in the famous *Last Judgment* in Beaune by Rogier van der Weyden, exhibited in Paris, Louvre in the summer of 1878. A naked woman condemned and being dispatched to eternal hellfire is sticking four fingers into her mouth and biting on them with all her might. Such images are particularly at home in medieval art. This is because of a certain emotional crudity in a period familiar with pyres and fire while also feeling unlimited emotions expressed primarily in their paintings of the *Last Judgment*. They treat the infinite torture or infinite bliss, both of which were equally absent from ancient Greek art.

[3] This could cause us to surmise that the movement of the hand to the breast might occur not merely among human beings, but also among those animals with the relevant bodily parts, namely the apes. I am unaware if anything on this account has been observed, but it would be worth the effort.

Yet the movement of the hand to the breast also has another quite different motivation. It can also occur as a simple reference for others such as stating 'me' by way of answering a question such as 'to whom does this belong?' or 'do you mean me?' In such instances, the gesture does not accompany any process occurring within, but simply pointing to the centre of the body when referring to its entirety. There will of course be slight differences in the movement of the hand according to the meaning of the gesture, yet such distinctions can be difficult to express in words.[4]

As distinct as the two fundamental hand movements are from one another, it is remarkable that it can be nearly impossible to distinguish them in life and art. In most cases there is a bit of each in play. If we accompany the sentence 'I am the one', or the question 'Am I the one?' with a motion to the chest, it is rarely meant as a simple element of information, but is more often accompanied by a feeling of self combined with a range of possibilities extending from deep humility to the greatest pride, including fear, devotion or anything else that moves the heart. The reverse is also true. Even when the hand extending to the breast is a simple response to the turmoil within with no thought of stating something to others, the gesture is still by its nature an expression of self-consciousness. It is not a pure, direct and natural expression of an emotion in the manner of blushing or paling. It only relates emotions in a direct way as a human reaction against one of its own emotions in an attempt to neutralize it. This is the consistent reason that literary authors wishing to do justice to natural science in the sense of Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions*, or Carl Lange in Danish literature, have never dwelt on these hand gestures.[5] They are in reality not natural to humanity, or in Darwin's view, have not yet become natural.

Wherever this hand gesture occurs, its significance involves an element of self reflection, awareness of the self! As a human tool, our hands are a force directed outward, but in the gestures we shall be discussing here, they bend backward into itself, to the subject that emits them.

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As an important means of expression, this gesture deserves attention as much as the use of the conjunctive and imperative or the dative and genitive in language, and should be studied according to the same methods as similar linguistic phenomena. As such, it makes a small contribution to our knowledge of the most remarkable animal species, the human beings we are. Our observations shall be exclusively taken from primary sources in the visual arts. I have not discovered any reference in the field of literature, indeed, have every reason to believe that the

[4] Professor med. Carl Lange has drawn my attention to one difference in the mode and therefore also meaning. The left hand is drawn more instinctively toward the heart while the right is used to pound the chest rhetorically.

[5] [Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, London: Murray, 1872 originally intended as a chapter in *The Descent of Man*, Carl Georg Lange, *Om Sindsbevægelser: En psyko-fysiologisk Studie*, Copenhagen: Jakob Lund, 1885.]

sciences have not yet approached the question. Not only the overly remote topics, but also those very close at hand are often overlooked. It might appear among the 'practical instructions' about mime, written in German for actors, painters and sculptors, but I confess not to have searched there, since such instructions seem insignificant in the use of gestures. If artists cannot implement the motifs to express immediate emotion, it is better not to use them at all. Theory is apparently only interested in studying the emanations of fresh and true feelings. It gains nothing from recognizing an application of its own rules. As with everything else in the field of human expression, the gesture of the hand to the breast could be studied in actual life as easily as in works of art, not least of all since our living and our lives ultimately provide the source material for art and science. It could also be studied in the world of theatre. Nevertheless, the art of sculpture has the advantage of being monumental, that its artefacts remain the way they are, and are the common property of all humanity and can be returned to as evidence (*som man kan henvise til og beraabe sig paa*). Even if the phenomena of our lives, or in the theatrical arts, could be caught like swallows in mid-flight, it remains, unlike the visual arts, not possible to compare others as data. Aside from this, a knowledge of the past is also necessary, if historical study is in fact possible. Evidence from literature can of course also be useful, although in such questions it is usually less clear than the visual arts. We must leave that field to a literary historian. We are required to return to reliable documentation from literature in some very important segments of history, lacking nearly completely in sculpture, such as Nordic antiquity or that of the Hebrew culture.[6]

For the time being though, the art works provide a pool of evidence that tends to be overabundant rather than scarce. It might also do the history of art well to attend more to the history of motifs and less to that of individual artistic-personalities. Historical studies have moved away from a narrative surrounding human individuals and begun to emphasize history in terms of continuous conditions, yet the history of art has not kept up with this. These common conditions include precisely such motifs as we are studying, and they remained available to all painters and sculptors. They were also more than inanimate material, but harbour an active force qualifying for use. Both in time and space, the historical life of a motif is far larger than that of an individual artist. They are more like deities or spirits in some ways exercising power over the artists, yet remaining useful. Why did Raphael or Rembrandt for instance have a figure lay a hand on their chest in certain instances? Is it done with a completely independent artistic power and 'creative force'? Is it artistic originality in those instances? Those contemplating isolated examples might believe such a thing, and a great artist might themselves also believe so. Those who study the entire life of the motif can recognize how the

[6] As far as Hebrew antiquities are concerned, Franz Delitzsch, *System der biblischen Psychologie,* 2nd revised ed., Leipzig: Dörffling & Francke, 1861, includes a section devoted to 'Herz und Haupt,' pp. 248-265, skirting these questions, but of course only skirts them.

spirit of an age and the images surrounding them might suggest it for both the major and the minor artists. The greater artists are certainly able to invest the motif with originality without becoming dependent, while the lesser talents simply repeat it, thoughtlessly copying what the fashion of the time dictates.

Aside from this, our motif is of particular historical interest because it illuminates, perhaps more than any other feature, the antithesis between ancient and modern, Christian art. When I once raised the question in conversation with a well-known German specialist in classical archaeology, he was somewhat overhasty in asserting that the motif of the hand on the breast did not occur in ancient art. Even the best informed of us have moments of error, but this statement does have its value in revealing that its presence might not become apparent in a quick survey of ancient art. It is in fact extremely rare. While the duty of science is to clearly recognize the exceptions, it is more important still to distinguish between the exception and the rule. In ancient art, this motif, as we shall be seeing, has nothing whatsoever of the rich scale of connotations it develops in Christian art. In antiquity it even seems never to have gotten the connotation it later received nearly universally of 'a reassurance in religious or secular context'. When the modern Greeks today place their hand on their chest as a sign of greeting or thanks, it is apparently more of an influence from eastern cultures than the heritage of ancient Greece.

We all recall the pose of the hands on the Venus de' Medici and related ancient statuary. Either in reality or appearance, the goddess seems to be covering her breasts with the one and her lap with the other. It is a motif we might indeed discuss in our present context, but it is only peripherally related to our actual subject. Aside from this, the hand on the breast to my knowledge meant only a single thing in ancient art, and that was distress. The motif can mean this in modern art as well, but that is comparatively rare.

In antiquity, the hand on the head is far more common, at least in many works of art from the 1st century BC onward, emphasizing emotional expression or the emotional interaction of forces, as in Athenian grave *stelae* or in paintings from Pompeii and Herculaneum.[7]

On Greek graves, the movement of the hand to the head signifies mourning. It appears less frequently among the main protagonists of the composition and most rarely with the figure of the deceased themselves, who are after all shown as living. It is common on the other hand among the surrounding figures of relatives or family who are regarding the deceased with sorrow. In the paintings, the motif also has a connotation of mourning, but in numerous appealing examples it also includes an expression of clear reflection or poetic inspiration. We are led to the

[7] Adolf Furtwängler, *Die Sammlung Sabouroff: Kunstdenkmäler aus Griechenland*, Berlin: Asher, 1883-1887, includes excellent remarks about this motif in his commentaries. Remarks also in Léon Heuzey, *Monuments grecs*, publiés par l'Association pour l'Encouragement des Études Grecques en France, Paris: Maisonneuve, 1874, although I am not able to agree with his interpretation of his one example of the hand on the breast.

assumption that such motions returning the eye from a peripheral figure to the centre were originally antipathetic to the ancients who preferred a free and open rendition of the human figure. This once led to the interpretation that these movements were intended to suggest the subconscious. It is obvious that antiquity preferred a motion signifying a more objective contemplation than subjective emotional turmoil.

In a previous publication, I have briefly shown how Thorvaldsen in his place between ancient and Christian traditions, related to such movements of the hand, and on the whole, in the ancient manner, distinctly preferred the movement of the hand toward the head.[8] I would like to interject something here that might clarify the comparison between Thorvaldsen and Raphael, where Thorvaldsen shows himself embodying the ancient while Raphael displays the modern attitude. Both composed images of the Psyche theme, carried from everywhere by Mercury to Olympus.[9] Raphael shows Psyche with hands crossed over the breast while Thorvaldsen shows her looking upward with her fingers touching her chin, seized by the marvels awaiting in heaven.

The frequency of the movement of the hand to the breast in ancient art is a subject I would like to reserve for another time and place since it involves too much obscurity and uncertainty to interest the wider reading audience. By contrast, we might assume that many will find it interesting to see the great variety of this motif in modern art. If my examples are drawn primarily from the collections in Paris and London, the reason is that I pursued the question a few years ago during a trip to those two cities with such abundant museums. I have also very naturally considered phenomena in works of art from elsewhere.

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We begin with examples from the source of the motif, the feeling of pathos in the life of the heart with no demonstrative secondary meanings aside perhaps from the fact that the motion must express an awareness of our own person and the concept of the self. The hand is led to the chest to instinctively express something either awakening or leaving the life of the heart or breath.

A painting by Nicolas-Auguste Laurens depicting *Eve Feeling the First Impulse of Remorse* was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1885.[10] It is significant for us as an example of our theme, but otherwise not particularly remarkable as art. Eve stood newly created laying her left hand on the breast, her right hand over the left first experiencing the pulsing source of life with a certain eager surprise while welcoming the sense of self. A similar thought is expressed far more beautifully in

[8] Julius Lange, *Sergel og Thorvaldsen: Studier i den nordiske Klassicismens Fremstilling af Mennesket*, Copenhagen: Høst, 1886, p. 162.

[9] Raphael, Farnesina frescoes. Thorvaldsen in a small, round relief in the museum Copenhagen, Inv. 432.

[10] [François Guillaume Dumas, *1885 Catalogue illustré du Salon*, Cat no. 16, septième année, Paris Baschet, p. XXXIV, no. 1475. Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs Nouvelle Édition*, Paris: Gründ, 1976, vol. 6, p. 482.]

the marvellous statue of *Eve* by Paul Dubois (1829-1905).[11] She lays her hands on her breast, as I would earlier have described 'vaguely feeling that the source for life's joy has become almost too much for her'. In the mean time it seems possible that the artist conceived of her standing in order for the gesture to acquire a subsidiary connotation of gratitude. The element of pathos appears pure and unsullied in the statue, *Snowdrops* (*La Perce-Neige*), by the Swedish sculptor [Karl Peter] Per Hasselberg (1850-1894), with the large figure of a young girl personifying the life of the plant world slowly awakening from the winter dormancy.[12] She stands half dreaming with one hand on her heart and the other on her head, the escalating pulse of her heart evoking more vivid, alert and conscious notions. I once pointed out that this statue includes something of a reminiscence of the younger of the two Michelangelo sculptures of *Prisoners* in the Louvre who also leads his hands to the chest and head while his restless soul seems to be struggling through dark dreams toward freedom and consciousness.[13]

In this figure by Michelangelo, the motif we are discussing is actually rendered in the most pristine and elementary way. It simply shows man awakening to freedom and consciousness, something named in mythology and symbolism. We could also imagine the figure by Prometheus laying a hand on its breast while Athena places a butterfly on its head. I cannot recall any example in art of the motif being depicted in this way.

The sense of life draining or disappearing also leads the hand to the breast. This can be found in the modern sculpture division of the Louvre, in the statue of *Biblis* by Charles Dupaty, the figure transformed into a spring. It is the figure of a young girl lying on the ground, feeling that she is losing her heartbeat. In the future, the stream of her life will no longer follow the warm, pulsing rhythm of living beings, but instead the even uninterrupted flow of a wellspring. She says farewell to her human self.[14]

In these works, the imagination of the artists has led past the bounds of reality to imagery that cannot possibly be derived from life. For instance, Eve is born as a grown person. The use of the motif in such a theme is based on the thought that it refers to an awakening to a more refined state of emotional life such as the first experience of love. In François Gérard's painting of *Amor and Psyche* in the Louvre [Inv. 4739], we see Psyche as a 14-year old girl being first kissed on the forehead by Amor while hers are folded one over the other on her breast and she looks dreamily straight ahead. Gérard's theme is of course also ideal, but does not transcend human experience. We can observe it in life just like the hovering heart throb of the first love. Our first consciousness of religious feeling can elicit a similar expression if we recall Jean-Louis-Nicolas Jaley's statue *La prière* in the Louvre.[15] This motif is

[11] Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek [Bénézit, vol. 3, p. 689].
[12] Shown at the Nordic exhibition, Copenhagen 1883 [Bénézit, vol. 5, p. 427].
[13] Julius Lange, Ude og Hjemme: Nordisk illustreret Ugeblad, 6th year, 1883, no. 313.
[14] [Charles Dupaty, Bénézit, vol. 4, p. 30.]
[15] [Louvre, Inv. LP 64, Bénézit, vol. 6, pp. 24-25.]

symptomatic for the transition from childhood to mature youth, but is actually rare in the age of childhood. Its combined connotation of awareness and sentimentality does not match the purely naïve nature of children, and this might even be an indirect reason that it occurs so rarely in ancient art. There are of course examples of even the greatest artists using it with figures of children, but it remains a moot question whether that choice was a good one. We might mention *The Age of Innocence* by Joshua Reynolds in the Tate Gallery in London [Inv. 307]. A very small girl is kneeling on the ground with hands crossed on her chest as Psyche does in the painting by Gérard. It is a misguided expression. Childhood has an innocent heart, but this is precisely because it does not yet know or take account of anything of the heart.

A hand can be led to the heart to express not merely the beginning or end of a feeling, but also a sudden arousal or change. It can among others result from surprise, indignation, anger, pain, sorrow, reluctance, powerlessness, yearning, pleasure, enjoyment, jubilation or delight. There would be no point in listing all of the various qualities and feelings that might lead to this motion, and too much of a digression to name examples from the world of art for each since they are inspired by the intensity rather than the quality. The essential thing is that the impression affects the spirit so directly that it does not seamlessly enter into its stream, but our spirit militates or hesitates, and its regular movements are disrupted for that reason. This is why such a movement of the hand as an expression of emotion always involves an element of suffering even if otherwise showing pleasure or enjoyment.

With vigorous men hardened by the school of life, the impression must naturally be all the more forceful to upset the natural rhythm, express suffering or even threaten the person completely. This is perhaps best illustrated by a marvellous passage in *The Odyssey*, at the beginning of Book 20, 6-27, where Odysseus rests unrecognized in his own hall and overhears the servant women courting the suitors of Penelope:

> And there Odysseus lay plotting within himself the suitors' death
> awake, alert, as the women slipped from the house
> the maids who whored in the suitors' beds each night
> uttering, linking arms and frisking as before
> The master's anger rose within his chest
> Torn in thought, debating, head and heart
> Should he up and rush them, kill them one and all
> Or let them rut with the lovers one last time?
> The heart inside him growled low with rage
> As a bitch mounting over her weak defenceless puppies
> Growls, facing a stranger, bristling for a showdown
> So he growled from his depths, hackles rising at their outrage
> But he struck his chest and curbed his fighting heart
> 'Bear up, old heart! You've borne worse, far worse,

that day when the Cyclops, man-mountain, bolted
your hearty comrades down. But you held fast
Nobody but your cunning pulled you through
The monster's cave you thought would be your death.
So he forced his spirit into submission
The rage in his breast reined back unswerving
All endurance, but he himself kept tossing, turning.[16]

In this instance, hitting the breast expresses ethical self control. With the power of hindsight into the past and foresight into the future, humanity feels the possibility and necessity to suppress the momentary emotion. It calls them to order as if warning a yelping dog, and yet our heart is a loyal watchdog, intent on the well-being of its master. We imagine that Homer thought of Odysseus hitting his chest with his fist. In a statue in the Louvre, the sculptor Denis Foyatier depicted *Spartacus*, the leader of the slave revolt against the Romans, pressing his fists against his chest as they clutch the broken chains, attempting to control the passionate torrent of anger.[17]

Particularly among the female sex, youthful hearts provide a contrast to these rough-hewn male figures, are more easily moved, and provide a more sensitive organ for the life of the emotions. Less violent impressions suffice to guide the hand to the heart. The term heart is also used to designate a vivid receptivity for the experiences of others, a refined sense of sympathy, and allegorical personifications of congenial emotions or virtues are traditionally often shown with the hand on the breast. *Mansuetudo*, sociability, appears in this way on the pulpit by Niccolo Pisano in the Pisa Baptistery, while Raphael shows *comitas*, friendliness as such in his beautiful figure in the Sala di Costantino in the Vatican and *clementia*, leniency, appears in this way on tombs in Westminster Abbey. There is a very weak line here separating the natural delicacy of feeling from an unhealthy and affected sentimentality which, if depicted in allegory, would most certainly also involve the hand on the breast exactly as it does in life. This relates to the frequent use and misuse of the heart as a concept and symbol, including exchanging hearts with Jesus as it occurs in the legend of St. Catherine of Siena, the devotion to the sacred heart of Jesus since the 17th century, separate interments and veneration of the extracted hearts, most recently the heart of Jean-Paul Marat during the reign of terror in 1783, and so on.

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In a well-known painting in the Louvre, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres depicted *Oedipus* resolving the riddle of the Sphinx [Inv. R.F. 218]. He quietly stands facing the monster pointing with a finger to his chest. This is how the artist shows us that Oedipus has discovered the answer. As we know, his answer was

[16] [Homer, *The Odyssey*, Translated by Robert Fagles, New York: Viking, 1996, pp. 410-411.]
[17] [Louvre, Inv. CC 259, Bénézit, vol. 4, pp. 469-470.]

'humanity,' and his gesture relates 'I am a human being.' This is an example of the purely demonstrative meaning of a hand led to the chest, lacking any pathos in expressing an inner feeling. We have seen that this demonstrative aspect was the second wellspring for the motion. It involves one or more to be present and the person to separate their self from them.

The resolution of a riddle also provides the dramatic element for many representations of *The Last Supper*, the moment Christ speaks the words, 'one of you shall betray me,' words as incomprehensible as they are surprising to the Apostles present. They became very distressed and each of them asked 'Lord, am I the one?' Matthew 26: 21.

Paintings of this scene usually include one or another of the Apostles laying their hand on the chest while asking this or else assuring, 'I am not the one.' In most cases, this is the Apostle shown closest to Christ. In his famous painting in Milan, Leonardo da Vinci has used the motif to show a youthful Apostle, Philipp, third removed from Christ, to rise and lean toward him with the fingertips of both hands pressed against his breast. In his essay about the painting, Goethe very appropriately explains this gesture as meaning 'Lord, I am not the one, you know this. You know my pure heart, I am not the one!'[18]

Here again, the motif is exclusively demonstrative and emphasizes the self of the individual. Yet it also includes pathos at the same time and with equal intensity as an expression of unbearable sorrow and heartache, the most intimate urge to declare oneself innocent and not a vile traitor. It addresses the self in the profoundest sense of value as a moral personality, and actually presupposes what came to be generally accepted, that the heart is the seat of our conscience.

In another excellent painting of *The Last Supper*, that by Andrea del Sarto in San Salvi near Florence, it is exceptionally Judas the betrayer who lays his hand on the breast with the question 'am I the one?' and an expression of great surprise on his face that his secret has become known. Christ answers the question by passing him the bread with the other hand.

Indeed, the movement of the hand to the breast easily accompanies any emphatic expression or thought involving the concept of the self or its denial, such as I, myself, me or the like. In Raphael's *Transfiguration* in the Vatican Gallery, the moonstruck boy is led to the Apostles to be healed while the Lord has himself climbed the hill. The foremost of the Apostles lays the fingers of one hand on his chest and points to the mountain with the other, as if to say as great as my sympathy is, I cannot help, but the one on the hill can, wait for him. In this case, the movement is primarily demonstrative. The other Apostle beside him presses both hands to his chest, tormented at not being able to help in such a calamity. Pathos is the predominant meaning in this example.

[18] Goethe, [Abteilung 1 *Sämtliche Werke* 21], Aus [Über] Kunst und Altertum, vol. 3, [1816], p. 130 ['Joseph Bossi Über Leonardo da Vincis Abendmahl zu Mailand,' *Goethes Werke*, Hamburger Ausgabe, vol. 12, Munich: Beck, 1978, p. 167.]

In expressing the word 'I' in such a forceful and emphatic way with the corresponding movement of the hand, there is usually humility or pride involved, a feeling of being small, great, or possibly a mixture of the two. In the painting by Lionello Spada in the Louvre [Inv. 677], the Prodigal Son in kneeling before his father, crosses his hands over his chest in a deep recognition of his abasement, his lost rights and the urge to be accepted with mercy. In the beautiful painting of *The Visitation* by Sebastiano del Piombo in the same museum [Inv. 357], the Virgin Mary, pregnant with the Christ child, places the left hand on her breast in an apparent expression of humility, 'this is more than I deserve. How could such a thing occur?' In numerous earlier paintings from other countries, much greater joy is mixed with the humility in St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary. She lays her hand on her breast, marvelling that her family should be called to such great things. In the scene of *The Story of Psyche* in the Farnesina frescoes where, after all of her tribulations and efforts, Psyche finally brings the stern Venus the vase with the ointment of beauty, Raphael vividly and beautifully finds a very original combination of humility or modesty with pride. She is shown kneeling before the goddess, raising the jug with one hand while laying the other on her chest expressing a sincere joy at being able to obey the command, 'I have succeeded in doing this.' Another combination of the two antithetical elements can occur in a condescension of pride expressed in the same gesture, as in the large relief of *Alexander and Diogenes* by Pierre Puget in the Louvre [Inv. M.R. 2776]. The powerful king rides past the cynic philosopher in his barrel and presses his hand to his chest very theatrically and demonstratively to announce 'If I were not Alexander I would like to be Diogenes, but after all, I am Alexander.' It is an admission by the great to the small.

Then we have pure arrogance. An example of this occurs in the painting of William Hogarth's well-known series of *Marriage à la Mode* in the National Gallery in London [no. 113]. It depicts the conclusion of a marriage contract between the young lord and the middle-class bride. While the father of the bride, the wealthy burgher, examines the papers, the impoverished, unintelligent and self-important father of the groom points to his genealogy with one hand, and taps his chest with the other to say 'see what I am.'

To illustrate the peak of this sense of self, one's own rights and entitlements as felt by the ego, we must mention another recent French painting from the Paris Salon of 1895, by no means particularly remarkable as a work of art, but quite astute as an allegory, significant and essential in this context. *Le droit moderne* is a large painting by Charles Landelle.[19] 'Freedom' hovers topmost with broken shackles, 'the law' enthroned just below, 'justice' to one side at the foot of the throne, and a young man at the other representing the youth of today. He holds a scroll in one hand inscribed with the rights of man. A dignified older man of the traditional school, a judge, places his hand on his shoulder and points to a panel below held by two

[19] [*Exposition des Beaux-Arts Catalogue illustré de peinture et sculpture (Dix-Septième Année) Salon de 1895*, Paris: Baschet, no. 155. Bénézit, vol. 6, pp. 416-417.]

personifications, inscribed 'no rights without obligations.' The young man answers this admonishment with a hand laid to the chest apparently insisting on his own right as an individual. 'As a human being I carry the measure of my own right within myself.' It is a very telling use of this motif in its demonstrative context, the superlative of individualism, the condition of the self, isolated and claiming its sovereignty. The word 'I' is heavily underlined three times. We are in some ways justified in observing that the hand on the breast can denote the profoundest humility as well as the most monstrous arrogance. A long scale of transitions exists between the Prodigal Son returning repentant, and the other in our present time declaring the absolute right of the individual. The Gospel of Luke 18: 10-14 says that the tax-collector stood at a distance and could not look up to heaven, but beat his breast saying 'God have mercy on me a sinner.'

The text does not say that the Pharisee tapped his chest when thanking the Lord that he is not as other men. By our modern standards though, the gesture would be very apt.

We understand, it is not an expression of the highest sense of power beyond any responsibility. It would not be at all appropriate to a Jupiter enthroned on Mount Olympus. It is not even apt for a sovereign king. In the statue by Antoine Coysevox, King Louis XIV of France kneeling on his grave does indeed place a hand on his breast with a sense of human and religious responsibility. The demonstrative aspect of the motif would seem to presuppose that the sovereignty or majesty could feel itself infringed upon, denied or cast doubt upon, and have a need to be reinforced in the eyes of others. In such instances, the motif involves a defiant, restless and polemical element, not the pure, direct and unchallenged certainty of its self, but a denial of a denial. When two people confront one another, the one as superior, either commanding or granting something, and the other a subordinate, obedient, petitioning or receiving, it will never be the former who lays a hand to their breast.

This fundamental relationship develops in a series of individual conditions we shall now examine. The hand on the breast expresses taking something to heart (*for at lægge sig noget paa Hjerte*), receiving an inspiration, a lesson, a stimulation, an admonition, a call, a command or something of that sort. In this sense it can be completely like a reflex without consideration of whether it is noticed or not, but it can also be demonstrative and intended to be seen by others and understood as assuring acceptance.

I would like to mention a few examples where the involuntary aspect of the movement is emphasized in a peculiar and appealing way by having the person receiving the calling or teaching and leading their hand to the breast has turned their back to the source they are receiving it from. In a very original painting in the Louvre [Inv. 1738], Rembrandt has shown St. Matthew writing the Gospel. The angel dictating to him is standing behind Matthew quietly laying a hand on his shoulder and whispering into his ear.

The Evangelist is thus not seeing the angel, but staring straight ahead, moved and listening. His right hand with the pen is intermittently still while he lays his left hand on his chest. Rembrandt would not have known that Lorenzo Ghiberti conceived the motif exactly in the same way in a relief with the Evangelist Mark with the lion on the northern bronze door of the baptistery in Florence. A modern painter such as Ernest-Joseph Laurent who exhibited a beautiful painting of *The Annunciation to the Virgin Mary* at the Paris Salon of 1885, had what in this theme seems to be the original idea of showing the angel hovering behind the Virgin Mary so that she hears the words of the Annunciation like the voice of a ghost.[20] She has risen from her work, stands deeply stirred by what she has heard, pressing her hand against her beating heart. The Virgin Mary with one or both hands on or crossed at her breast has been repeated hundreds of times in earlier and later Christian art, yet when she sees the angel directly before her, the motif is liable to assume a purely ritual significance of tribute and devotion. With his conception of the subject, Laurent introduced fresh blood and a certain directly felt psychological truth.

Conversely, Raphael provides us with a remarkable example of the figure receiving and heeding the lesson shown standing behind the person they receive it from and are therefore not visible to them. In this case, the gesture of receiving is consequently instinctive and not demonstrative. It occurs in *The School of Athens*. As we know, Pythagoras is seated, writing in the foreground. A man with a turban on his head is standing behind him and leaning forward to look over his shoulder. He is consumed with reverence and admiration, and lays his hand on his chest. This is clearly intended to be a near-eastern figure, but his relation to the wisdom of antiquity also has a symbolic dimension for the contemporaries and period of Raphael, the Italian Renaissance. Spirits burned with enthusiasm for ancient literature, believed in it and did homage with religious awe. Yet it was not conceived clearly or objectively. For the time being, it appealed more to the heart than the mind. If antiquity had been viewed more intellectually, in terms of ideas, this gesture might instead have been one to the eyebrow or the lip.

There is a quite beautiful painting by Claude Lefebvre in the Louvre entitled *A Teacher and His Pupil*, [Inv. MR 1959, *Un Précepteur et son Élève*], depicting the older person speaking to the younger one who has the hand on the chest. The gesture allows us to surmise what the expressions of the two confirms, namely that the lesson is not about grammar or mathematics, but rather a moral admonition and rebuke. We feel the same with Eustache le Sueur's painting of the aged Tobias warning his son about the trip he is about to undertake. It is rather curious when an allegory by Guido Reni in the Louvre [Inv. 534 *L'Union du Dessin et de la Couleur*] depicts 'Drawing' as a young man with 'Colour' as a young woman with the latter holding a hand to her breast as if to say that colour must accept instruction from draftsmanship and accept it as the guiding master. As Jean-Auguste-Dominique

[20] [Francois Guillaume Dumas, *1885 Catalogue illustré du Salon Catalogue no. 16, Septième année*, Paris: Baschet, p. XXXIV, no. 1477. Bénézit, vol. 6, pp. 482-483.]

Ingres had said, 'Le dessin, c'est la probité de l'art (drawing is the actual virtue of art).'

In these last examples, the gesture has become demonstrative. It almost assumes a pantomime significance as the traditional sign for receiving a command from a superior, particularly from the king. King Louis XIII had commissioned the Pont au Change to be built, but it was only completed under his widow, Queen Anne of Austria during the minority of her son Louis XIV. The bronze monument of the bridge beautifully done by Simon Guillain, 1648, now in the Louvre [Inv. MR 3230], shows Louis XIII commanding the queen to have the bridge built. She stands to the side of her royal spouse, respectfully listening to his strict behest with a hand on her breast. It is a promise and a personal obligation. On her person where the hand is laid, she vouches to fulfil the command.

The gesture does not appear exclusively as a sign of acceptance where a command has been expressed, but also in instances of a benefaction or a favour, such as in the painting of a kneeling man being decorated by the king by van Loo in the Louvre. For this reason it is also a general sign of thanks. Among other examples, it occurs as such in numerous spots in the famous frieze of *The Seven Works of Mercy* by Giovanni di Andrea della Robbia on the Hospital at Pistoia.

We all recall images from life and art of a man or a woman bowing gracefully with a hand on their heart after having sung a song or something of the kind. In this way, it is possible for the motif to degenerate into a common celebratory greeting.

As we have stressed, the figure feeling subordinate is always the one laying the hand on the breast when facing a superior. Even when a virtuoso is being crowned by the public and receiving honours, he nonetheless acknowledges their sovereignty of judgment and bows to them. In the examples we have named, the subordinate was passive or receptive and the superior the active agent. Nonetheless, the movement of the subordinate can also present itself as more active. It can constitute a personal and voluntary statement of feeling subordinate and therefore as a declaration of loyalty, an oath of fidelity, a tribute. In this way, it was employed countless times in the classical age of modern monarchy during the 17th and 18th century, and extraordinarily apt for how they conceived a subject to relate to their king. It was distinct from the feeling of the slave toward their master and was based on the sense that the master was an important personality. In the Rubens painting of France presenting the royal orb to Maria de' Medici, the personification of 'France' lays her hand on her breast. She does the same in the 1693 relief by Nicolas Coustou where Apollo is presenting her with the portrait of King Louis XIV.[21]

After the artist drowned himself in Sortedam Lake, Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger said of Johannes Wiedevelt's oldest statue on the freedom column at Vesterbro 'she stares out onto the dark waters with her hand on her breast, never,

[21] ['Le Dieu de la Santé montre à la France le buste de Louis XIV, roi de France' Louvre Inv. M.R. 2735, Bénézit, vol. 3, pp. 234-236.]

never comforted'. In the eyes of the poet, it looked as if the statue were mourning the death of its maker with the hand on the breast expressing sorrow, as it can also be read. Of course, the sculptor did not mean it that way. It symbolizes fidelity to the king, not as a passing gesture of a single situation, as in the painting by Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg of peasants saluting the king on the freedom column, but monumentalized in a lasting symbol.[22] In its religious connotation, faith, 'fides,' is also often characterized in a similar way, as with a very solemn effect in one of Ingres's designs for glass paintings in the Orléans tomb chapel. There are also many examples of allegorical figures of 'Hope' and 'Love' laying their hand on the breast, but the gesture is undeniably more apt for 'Faith'.

In all of these instances, when the hand is laid on the breast it alludes to internal processes eluding the human eye. The idea is that the actual and true feelings of a human being, its own secrets not known directly to any others transpire in that dark cavity symbolized especially by the heart. In Shakespeare's Richard III [Act 1, Scene 1], Lady Anne says 'I would I knew thy heart' doubtful of the enigmatic Richard as she courts him. The breast outside does not reveal the condition of the heart within. If only it could be brought out to the light of day! This is why the heart in its own form becomes the symbol of true feeling. In the final painting of Rubens' series of the life of Maria de' Medici, we are shown the reconciliation between the queen and her son Louis XIII. The king presents his mother with a heart which as a sign of his disposition is burning and lays his own hand on his heart.[23] The idea might not be completely successful, but its meaning is nonetheless easily understood. The burning heart illustrates the condition of his own. Exposing the heart is a condition for true friendship. Cicero says 'nothing in friendship is secure or reliable without the one friend seeing into the heart of the other and showing their own.'[24] This seems to be the statement translated into the plastic medium, in a very tasteless way, in Pietro Paolo Olivieri's 16th century statue of *Friendship* in the Louvre. It shows a naked female figure with a large open wound on the left side of her chest as if a large piece of flesh were missing, but we unfortunately still do not see into the hollow.[25] She pushes the edge of the wound aside in order to reveal the 'open heart.' This is a strange variation of the motif of the hand on the breast. Within such a string of ideas, the motif assumes the meaning of the heart never being untrue, and becomes an expression of affirmation and assurance accompanying a declaration, almost with the quality of an oath, 'hand on my heart.'

[22] On the tomb of Henri Ier d'Orléans, duc de Longueville by François Anguier, now in the Louvre [Inv. M.R. 1746, 1750-52, 2669-70] and generally providing the model for the Freedom Column of Vesterbro, the personification of *Justice* with her *fasces* and *secures* holds a hand to her breast. Unless it is entirely coincidental, he must have had the personal commitment of the judicial profession to the authority in mind.

[23] [Not actually the case. Referring perhaps to 'The Arrival of Marie de' Medici'.]

[24] Cicero, Lelius, 26.

[25] [Presumably Cristoforo Stati, *L'amitié*, Paris, Louvre, Inv. N 15051.]

For a gesture to assume a certain binding meaning as an oath, it will naturally only be used in a religious sense. This is true of the Christian tradition of the sign of three raised fingers, as we find it for instance in Gerard Ter Borch's famous small painting of the 1648 Peace of Münster in the National Gallery London [no. 896]. By contrast to this, a gesture interpreted in such a variety of ways as the hand on the breast cannot bear the legal implications of an oath.

This gesture nonetheless appears as a very solemn confirmation and is prominent in earlier paintings commemorating the conclusion of treaties and the like. It occurs in the painting by Marcus Gheeraerts in the National Portrait Gallery London depicting the ratification of a treaty between England, Spain and Austria [unattributed, *The Somerset House Conference, 19 August 1604*, NPG 665, National Maritime Museum no. BHC2787], and on a bronze relief of a peace treaty on Martin Desjardin's monument to Louis XIV now in the Louvre.[26] Among 19th century artists, Édouard de Bièfve did not omit it in his well known painting of the compromise of the Dutch nobility of 1565.[27] In the large composition begun by Jacques-Louis David of *The Oath of the Tennis Court*, June 20, 1789, one figure appears hitting their chest with their hands in a state of revolutionary enthusiasm.[28] This brings out the element of pathos in the pose. A person is experiencing the moral excitement rioting within them as suffering or inner turmoil. Along with all of the others in this composition, this motif reveals qualities very much at odds with the reliable and conscious tranquillity required for an oath to be trustworthy. These figures have spirits gyrating like a volcano.

Of course, the form of a personal assurance remains the same whether its content is true or not. Untruth assumes a mask of truth. In a good painting by one of the Le Nain brothers in the Louvre [unattributed, Inv. MI 1450], St. Peter denies Christ. When the maid accuses him of having been in the company of the fettered Galilaean, he lays his hand on his chest and assures that it was not the case. The Gospel states that he not only denied his Lord but swore on it. In Luca Signorelli's figure of the Antichrist preaching in the days before the end of the world, the motif appears with a demonic and consuming force. This is the lying prophet similar to Christ in his appearance, mendaciously imitating his works and words. The devil stands beside him, whispering into his ear, telling him what to say while laying his hand on his chest and assuring the populace that he is authentic. If he were in fact authentic, he would not place his hand on the breast. That is a gesture very inappropriate to Christ as a preacher and will be difficult to find in any such images of his person. It is most apt in situations where Christ ingratiates himself before

[26] [Possibly Martin van den Bogaert called Martin Desjardins, *La Préséance de la France par l'Espagne, 1662*, Louvre, Inv. MR 3381.]
[27] [Musée des Beaux-Arts de Liège.]
[28] [Julius Lange, *Menneskefiguren i kunstens historie fra den graeske kunsts anden blomstringstid indtil vort aarhundrede*, Copenhagen: Det Nordiske Forlag, 1899, pp. 490-491, Lange, *Die menschliche Gestalt in der Geschichte der Kunst*, Strasbourg, Heitz, 1903, p. 422, fig. 173.]

others, such as where he receives the baptism as in Sansovino's bronze group on the baptistery in Florence or in washing the feet.

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Religious life, the relation to the deity, expresses itself in the same ways as secular life, the relations to human beings, and can only distinguish itself by a greater degree of intimacy. We have already seen religious faith as well as political loyalty expressed by a hand laid on the breast. If we transfer what is an oath of loyalty or homage from the secular to the religious context, it becomes a profession or denomination. This is among the most common connotations of the hand on the breast in Christian art. An example is *The Conversion of St. Hubert* by Gaspar de Crayer in Brussels.[29] During a hunt leading him through a forest, Hubert confronts the miraculous stag with the crucifix within its horns. He bends his knee and lays a hand to his heart, acknowledging a faith in Christ on the Cross. This expressive device of momentary spiritual excitement became typical in countless works of sculpture and painting for figures professing faith in Christianity, particularly the saints of the church when facing the deity revealed to them. Beautiful examples are Raphael's three quarter-length figure of *St. Catherine of Alexandria* in the National Gallery London [no. 168] or Alonso Cano's *St. Agnes* in the Berlin museums [Inv. 414B].[30]

In the history of Christian art, we can trace this motif further back than any other with examples from the Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic periods. In the earliest Byzantine and Romanesque works the pose suffices to suggest devotion or avowal in and of itself when the figure remains completely straight or even stiff. The period was still determined by the moribund traditions of antiquity, and had very few original expressive means. A hand on the breast was adequate to indicate that the actor takes the divinity to heart, grippingly concerned and deeply serious in their conception. The more the gesture was used without any corresponding details in movements, facial expression or the eyes, the more likely it could lose its clarity, so that we must take great care in our interpretation. There is often no doubt that the artist intentionally chooses to show the hand pressed to the breast, but in other examples it can also be coincidental.[31] This form of art then slowly developed, and

[29] [I believe he refers to their Inv. Nr. 6148 attributed to Theodoor van Loon and called 'De bekering van de heilige Hubertus'. KJ]

[30] A unique and exquisite example is the figure of the Apostle John in Raphael's painting of *St. Cecilia* in Bologna. In hearing the song of the angels from above, his eyes meet St. Augustine standing opposite to him, 'do you hear it is what we spoke of.' He lays his left hand on the chest in a gesture of confirmation, also feeling his heart burning within. I had described the motif in this way, long before conceiving the idea of writing about the gesture in general.

[31] In the well-known Byzantine ivory relief in the Cluny Museum in Paris with Christ standing between the Emperor Otto II and Empress Theophano and his hands on their heads, the other two both lay their right hand on the breast. The authenticity of this carving has been unjustifiably questioned. Through the connection with Christ, it is most likely to

the gesture came to involve the entire figure so that the hand on the heart became the central and most prominent element in its eloquence. This is the spirit in which St. Francis of Assisi is often shown with a hand held to his heart, as in Correggio's *Madonna di San Francesco*.[32] The vogue of religious sentimentality then kept rising, on into the 17th and even into the 18th century. An example striking as a sort of culmination of this trend, we might take an excellent small painted wooden figurine from Spain now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, depicting *St. Francis Xavier* as a young priest wearing a long black gown. He stands with his head bent half-agonizing to the side, pressing both hands to his chest, one higher than the other as if he were highly tormented by the sweet heavenly pain.

In this figure, as in others we have already mentioned, the motif is intensified by the use of both hands pressed against the breast. This is not quite the same as crossing the hands or more properly the forearms with the hands lying flat against the breast, a gesture with a more distinctively ritual quality and hardly ever a spontaneous expression of emotion like the simple movement of one or both hands. To our knowledge, the crossed arms only arise at a later historical date, in Christian art beginning around the 13th century. From that point on it appears throughout the history of art, predominantly as a Christian religious, purely devotional sign like the folded hands, but with a peculiar grand solemnity. When it occasionally appears in mythological subjects as in Raphael's figure of Psyche being led by Amor to Olympus, it includes an element of reverence clearly derived from the Christian context. This gesture is used particularly with figures such as the Virgin Mary receiving the annunciation from the angel or the Magi kneeling at the manger of Christ. In Ribera's excellent painting of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Louvre [Inv. 939], one of them has folded hands, another one hand on the chest, and a third both hands crossed. In this case, all three have the simple connotation of devotion without a particular distinction between them. We must leave it to others to decide whether this crossing of the forearms over the chest might be a gesture to have reached Europe from the near-east, especially since the great lack of pictorial imagery there means that such a study does not belong within the history of art. We shall elsewhere discuss the fact that this motif occurs in ancient, particularly Egyptian art.

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On tombs, the actual contemporary personalities were already being depicted with a rough portrait likeness in the early medieval period. Since this

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express devotion. Yet another ivory relief carved around the same time showing the Greek Emperor Romanos IV and Empress Eudokia, both of them stretch their hands toward Christ, each from their own side so that one appears flat against the chest, the right hand of Romanos and the left of Eudokia. Even by analogy to other Byzantine work, it is at least improbable that the hand here is intended to depict the hand laid on the breast. There are many such cases. From the Romanesque, we can mention five figures on the Shrine of the Magi in Cologne where the intention is clear.

[32] [Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Inv. 150.]

category of art was at home in churches, the recumbent figures on tombs include the usual gestures of devotion, usually folded hands, but occasionally the hands crossed at the breast or a single hand on the breast as in the case of Constance d'Arles from the later 13th century at St. Denis. Actual portraiture as an autonomous secular genre of the arts only arose during the 15th century, approximately contemporaneously in the Netherlands and Italy, and has consistently remained among the most important branches of the visual arts since that time. It is very interesting to observe the use of the hand on the breast in this context.

The motif is not at home in the earliest 15th century portraits. This includes the splendid early Netherlandish portraits such as those by Van Eyck and Memling, and by way of transition to the Italians, Antonello da Messina and the earlier Italian Renaissance both in sculpture and in painting. It was also employed in the depiction of historical figures witnessing sacred actions such as *The Last Supper* or scenes of the Passion, with donors, the artist themselves or other figures placed in the presence of the Virgin Mary. This follows from what we have observed about the religious use of the motif. However, this period was still too naïve and simple to depict the human figure alone in an art work devoted exclusively to it where the hand on the breast would have made a personally ambitious, self-confident, demonstrative impression.[33]

On the subject of portraiture we must distinguish between those cases where the hand is seen before the breast for purely extrinsic reasons, and then the significant motif we have been elucidating. In the case of a chest-length portrait, the artist might have included the hand to somehow enrich our impression of the image. The early Netherlandish painter Jan van Eyck and his followers liked to show the person placing their hands, one over the other, on a rail or windowpane. Others had the sitter hold a piece of paper with their name or suchlike before their breast while holding a fold of their clothing or fiddling with a suspended string or tassel.[34] A beautiful female bust in the Bargello in Florence by Andrea Verrocchio shows both hands before her body so that one of them is actually touching the

[33] A very early example of a portrait with the hand on the breast is all the more remarkable since it is the portrait of a man who more than any other consecrated late medieval and Renaissance religious feeling and modern ardency, namely St. Francis of Assisi. It is a fresco in the Sacro Speco in Subiaco, done in 1228, two years after his death and before his canonization. We should note that Francis was immediately viewed popularly as a saint. The portrait is reproduced among other places, by Henry Thode, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien*, Berlin: Grote, 1885, p. 81. As in most of the art from this time, the meaning of the hand gesture is not completely unequivocal since the entire expressiveness of the figure is so stiff. It might also be interpreted as speech, but the religious avowal is the most likely.

[34] Aside from this, there are a number of more specialized motifs suggesting that they are instigated by other considerations. A chest-length portrait of King Richard III in the National Portrait Gallery London [no. NPG148] dates from the end of the 15th century. He holds his right hand before his breast with the fingers on the lapel. His left hand is placing a removing a ring on or from the right.

breast.[35] Yet this hand is holding a bunch of flowers, lending the motif a completely different, more naïve sense than if it were simply touching the breast. In addition to this, when a person is shown isolated and not involved in any action it can become an awkward question of where to place the hands. This leads men in our time, and unfortunately also our art, to place fingers between the buttons of their vest or even in their trouser pockets. Such motifs, which already recur in ancient southern European art, arise from an awkwardness, and can in most cases be distinguished from those actual 'motifs' expressing a genuine intuition.

In some areas, and particularly in the earlier periods, this can become a difficult distinction to make. Albrecht Dürer's famous *Self-Portrait* from the year 1500 in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich [Inv. 537(239)] shows the hand held to the breast. I would tend to interpret this in terms of the incomparably naïve self-idolatry of this particular portrait. It appears here more subdued and careful than in 17th century portraiture. The motif cannot be said to have peopled the portraits of the High-Renaissance, those of Leonardo, Raphael, Titian or Dürer and Holbein. I have searched a large amount of this material in order to make this statement. Undeniably though, certain exceptions are found. It is unusual in certain portraits of female beauties by Raphael and Titian where the linear play leads to the breast. In Raphael's famous portrait known as the *Fornarina* in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome, the way in which the hand touches the breast certainly involves an erotic connotation. Such paintings generally belong to a completely different category since the motif here related more closely to the Venus de' Medici than to the rest of modern art. We shall reserve the development of this motif for another time and place.

The image of the hand on the breast only becomes clear and modern in intention around the mid-16th century. It then assumes an ever greater prominence.

To our knowledge, the motif occurs early on in Italian art in a purely secular context, primarily as a sense of self, still somewhat subdued at the moment. We find it in two small modelled and painted Venetian reliefs in the Louvre. The one is a female portrait, and the other from the Dalillier Collection a male portrait, around the same time as the attractive male portrait attributed to Pontormo in the National Gallery in London (no. 1323, now as Bronzino). Lorenzo Lotto, the painter of a refined nervous feeling, became one of the earliest painters to include the motif in portraits. We find the portrait of a judge by him in Rome in the Palazzo Doria, with the left hand laid upon the breast to express the scrupulous sense of responsibility and conscientiousness we also see in his face. An excellent portrait in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is attributed there to Correggio, but might also have been done by Lorenzo Lotto [Inv. 92 Gal. Nr. 220]. From what we can tell, it depicts a goldsmith with the intention of the right hand on the breast apparently

[35] [Charles Seymour, Jr., *The Sculpture of Verrocchio*, Greenwich CT: New York Graphic, fig. 133 as attributed to Verrocchio.]

the same as in the *Portrait of a Judge*. This would be to declare his own honesty and that the gold he uses is pure and unalloyed.

In the 16th century art of the Netherlands and the rest of northern Europe, it is clearer to see how the motif originally derived from church customs, expressing a religious avowal and not surprising in a period when religious denominations were the burning question in life. Before that, in the 15th century, it had been customary to portray individuals, members of a family or corporation, kneeling before the deity all of them with their hands folded. It is a custom that survived long into the later periods. In the course of the 16th century however, we find family portraits as wings of altarpieces with the father of the family laying his hand on the breast while the mother and children fold their hands. It appears in paintings by Anthonis Mor in the Duchatel gift to the Louvre and Marten de Vos in Brussels.[36]

In tombs of this period showing a husband and wife kneeling, examples both in Germany and England include the wife with folded hands and the husband laying the one on the chest. In a later group portrait of a corporation kneeling before the Virgin Mary, painted by Gaspard de Crayer (Brussels Inv. 273), the head of the group places his hand on his chest while the other members fold theirs.[37] It is clear in all of these examples that the hand on the breast signifies that the person places their own self ahead of the others, as the one assuming a more independent and personal responsibility. In the earlier period, the general medieval movement of devotion had seemed more appropriate to subordinates and followers.

It would be exaggerated to claim that the hand on the breast became the general gesture of portraiture for any particular period. It is too forceful and pretentious for that to have occurred. It might be said though that it became extremely widespread in the course of the 17th and 18th century toward the revolutionary period. It is undoubtedly a sort of fashionable spirit, appearing even with such great artists as Frans Hals or Anthony van Dyck, and then imitated relatively thoughtlessly. Originally though, the fashion arose to satisfy an intellectual trend seeking its expression, continued with the persistence of the prevailing mood and then stopped with its dissipation. This lends it its own significance as historical symptom, as a measure of the modern trend to assert the self and the willingness of the period to accept such an emphasis. What we learn from the use of this motif in portraiture corresponds completely to its general history. If it were possible to establish an exhaustive chronological statistic of its use,

[36] Jan Gossaert, *Portrait of a Man*, National Gallery London no. 656 is approximately the earliest ambivalent example of a man with his hand on his breast, apparently, as the catalogue also stresses, in a religious connotation, and did not presumably stand alone. The *Female Portrait* in the same collection [no. 722 now as Swabia, 15th century] formerly attributed to Siegmund Holbein, is also among the earliest examples of the motif, but apparently more secular.

[37] [Apparently the present inv. 689, Wings of a triptych, Southern Netherlandish beginning of the 17th century.]

there can be no doubt that all of its connotations flourished most strongly in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The motif entered into the exclusively secular artistic genre of portraiture. Its only connection to the church and religion can be felt in the fact that it frequently occurs in portraits of male priests, mostly preachers. This is true of a number of interesting tombs of priests in Roman churches from the period of quietism [1670's-1680's] where the portrait of the deceased is carved from the marble in half-length exactly as they would be seen delivering a sermon from their pulpit. An excellent example is the monument to Walter Slusius in Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome, made by Ercole Ferrata in 1687. As heated as denominations could confront one another in those times, they shared both the heat of their opinion and tended to emphasize their word by laying their hand on their chest, something that points to a great psychological agreement beyond all dramatic distinctions. By way of examples from other denominations, we might recall Rembrandt's portrait of the preacher Eleazar Swalmius in the engraving by Jonas Suyderhoef [Wurzbach 84] or Pieter van der Plas's portrait of John Milton as a Christian poet, now in the National Portrait Gallery in London [no. D30117].

The gesture occurs equally often however with entirely secular personalities and assumes a nearly loud, declamatory quality. By its nature, we would call it more sentimental than naïve [in the terminology of Friedrich Schiller]. During this period though, it was often employed in a way that was naïve enough, since the person is using the hand to swear that their heart is in the right place. This does not provide any greater certainty, and sometimes degenerates to mere publicity. At the beginning it was meant well and contemporaries could not have raised any objections, but for us living a few centuries later, there can be suspicions in light of the shifting values of those times.

The various artists and schools did not all enlist the motif in the same way. It was promoted most strongly by the Flemish school in the period of Rubens and Roman art in that of Bernini. These were the schools enlisting the most forceful expressive devices. One of the most striking examples of a boisterous ostentation in the hand on the breast is Jordaens' portrait of a corpulent man in the Louvre [Inv. 1408]. Brilliant examples are found in the portraiture of Van Dyck and Philippe de Champaigne, but with more sentimentality mixed into the ostentation. In leafing through Van Dyck's famous collection of *Icones principum virorum doctorum*, etched and engraved by the greatest artists of the time, we can see a number of excellent illustrations of the motif. Of the sitters, it seems to be the artists, as Jan Snellinck for instance, who are most usually shown giving themselves a healthy slap on the chest.

It also occurs frequently in Dutch portrait painting. An unusually refined example is the excellent small half-figure of a man standing *en face* in a silk doublet by Aert Mytens of 1650 in the Royal Collection.[38]

Both Frans Hals and Bartholomaeus van der Helst use the motif unflinchingly. Rembrandt less so. If I am not mistaken though, Rembrandt created the most beautiful and intimate example of this motion in any portrait, in the marvellous knee-length portrait of his wife Saskia in Dresden [Inv. 1562]. As a sort or erotic vow, in her right hand she extends a carnation toward her husband who is painting her, while laying her left hand on her breast as a sign of complete and warm loyalty, pulsing also in her soft facial expression and twinkling in her clear eyes. As in all of her portraits, she is a very simple, small person, not in any way genteel, but a person of the heart who can justify laying their hand on the breast.

While the motif flourished everywhere in 17th century art, including Spain, we might emphasize that the proudest portraitist of the century, Diego Velázquez was certainly the most reserved in using it. It seems to have contained something that did not appeal to his unusually dignified, sober, honest and unsentimental character. I doubt that his portraits include a single example.[39] French portraiture from the reign of King Louis XIV and XV set the tone for all of Europe the gesture is very widespread, but flatter in its effect than earlier.

As the French revolution approached, the gesture became palpably less common and soon disappeared completely from male portraits. In female portraiture it survived approximately for another half-century.

I have been able to verify this in traversing two large collections of portraits, the National Portrait Gallery in London and the large *Exposition de portraits du siècle*, held in Paris during the summer of 1885. Both revealed the same results. In the just over five hundred portraits from the previous century on display in Paris there was not a single male figure with his hand on his chest. In female portraits by contrast, the motif was not exceptional until around the year 1830.[40]

When the motif first emerged in portraiture during the 16th century, the precise opposite was the case. At that time, we have seen that it was primarily men

[38] [The portrait Lange ascribes to Aert Mytens and then gives a date 40 years after Mytens died involves an error between the original text, the reprint in the collected edition and then in the German translation.]

[39] *A Monk* with a hand on his chest, Louvre Inv. 553, is certainly attributed to Velázquez incorrectly. It bears no comparison to his manner of painting.

[40] The fact that two portraits of actors of the Comédie française in the costumes of their main role include men with a hand on their breast cannot of course tell us anything about the portrait fashion of their time. An attractive motif in the portrait of Charles Gounod by Delanney shows the composer holding the score of Mozart *Don Giovanni* to his chest with the book and not his hand touching his chest. This is comparable a portrait of the actor David Garrick in the National Portrait Gallery London, no. 1779. He is seen seated with a copy of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, points to it with his left hand while holding his right fist against his chest as if to say 'I swear by this book' or the like.

who laid a hand on the breast. In the course of time, the motif underwent changes. After originally expressing a feeling of responsibility, it gradually became a sign of refined sentimentality more appropriate to the female than male character. It later disappeared completely from female portraiture, and in an exhibition of actual portraits today would be a pure phenomenon. It is a currency that once traded with a high value, but has now vanished from the actions and activities of daily life and in the arts, and is viewed with mistrust. It is easily taken as rhetorical, and on the stage is usually used to characterize the words of a false hero, much as the photographer Hjalmar Ekdal appears in *The Wild Duck* by Henrik Ibsen. After never completely disappearing from our lives, it is valued more in life than in art. It is used unusually often in ordinary conversation by French and southern Europeans more generally. There is a variant of portraiture where it is still now consistently used as in earlier times, and this is public monuments. It has always been considered particularly apt for statues of prime ministers and other leading statesmen and speakers. In the monumental context, where a figure is generally expected to summarize the content of their lives, it speaks a different language, in a 'more elevated style' than quotidian portraiture and maintains a rhetoric that has justified itself through centuries of adaptation. Yet the difficulty for art is to bring people to again believe in this hand being laid on the breast. Antoine Coysevox was not quite successful in doing so in the kneeling figure of Cardinal Mazarin on his tomb, now in the Louvre [Inv. LP 548]. We have an impression that the cardinal knew well that we would not be inclined to believe him, and for this reason his assurance of the sincerity of his intentions does not have the proper effect when he lays his hand on the breast. Many such monumental figures are present in the public squares of large cities, even made in recent years. Very recently, a statue of Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Beaconsfield, has been erected in Westminster Abbey, in the garb of the Knights of the Garter with a hand on the chest as if to assure that in spite of his undeniably unclear facial expression, he must be regarded as upright. In comparison to such statues, it is a pleasure to recall Thorvaldsen's monumental statue of the Duke of Leuchtenberg on his tomb in the Church of St. Michael in Munich. The left hand is lightly touching the breast, a detail intended here to illustrate his motto, '*honneur et fidelité*'. It truly illustrates these words. I can hardly think of another comparable work where this much misused motif has such a quality of credibility and conscientiousness as here.

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