

Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia* Revisited Sympathy, Science, and the Representation of Movement

Sara Newman and Sigrid Streit

"An erudite and wide-ranging study placing Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia* within its historical context, showing how it fits within developments in the art of oratory in Britain from the seventeenth century to Austin's own day. The book brings out clearly Austin's innovations. **It is a valuable contribution to the history of rhetoric**, and it shows the relevance of Austin's work on gesture to contemporary issues in the emerging discipline of 'gesture studies.'" —**Adam Kendon**, author of *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*

A lasting framework for the delivery of rhetoric

This first book-length study of Irish educator, clergyman, and author Gilbert Austin as an elocutionary rhetor investigates how his work informs contemporary scholarship on delivery, rhetorical history and theory, and embodied communication. Authors Sara Newman and Sigrid Streit study Austin's theoretical system, outlined in his 1806 book *Chironomia, or A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*—an innovative study of gestures as a viable, independent language—and consider how Austin's efforts to incorporate movement and integrate texts and images intersect with present-day interdisciplinary studies of embodiment.

Austin did not simply categorize gesture mechanically, separating delivery from rhetoric and the discipline's overall goals, but instead he provided a theoretical framework of written descriptions and illustrations that positions delivery as central to effective rhetoric and civic interactions. Balancing the variable physical elements of human interactions as well as the demands of communication, Austin's system fortuitously anticipated contemporary inquiries into embodied and nonverbal communication. Enlightenment rhetoricians, scientists, and physicians relied on sympathy and its attendant vivacious and lively ideas to convey feelings and facts to their varied audiences. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as these disciplines formed increasingly distinct, specialized boundaries, they repurposed existing, shared communication conventions to new ends. While the emerging standards necessarily diverged, each was grounded in the subjective, embodied bedrock of the sympathetic, magical tradition.

GILBERT AUSTIN'S *CHIRONOMIA* REVISITED

*Sympathy, Science, and
the Representation of
Movement*



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Acknowledgments

1. **Austin and Elocution in Context**

This chapter examines the current state of scholarship on Austin's work as well as the scholarly concerns this scholarly work raises. It then locates Austin's efforts in the disciplinary histories of rhetoric, elocution, and science in his day, laying out the significance of sympathy and *actio* in his works.

2. **Austin's Scientific Publications in Context**

This chapter considers Austin's neglected scientific publications, his texts, and their images. In his publications on chemistry, Austin mastered the conventions of professional science of the day, which involved, among other issues, increased use of images to explain natural phenomena.

3. ***Chironomia* Revisited**

An investigation of the theoretical system in *Chironomia*'s first half. Reading uncovers *Chironomia* as an innovative treatment, one that considers gestures a viable language on its own.

4. **Portraying Movement in *Chironomia***

Chironomia's novel notation extends the static techniques Austin uses in his scientific illustration to represent the moving body on the printed page. This chapter traces how his notation, while novel to elocution, depends on other arts to represent movement on the static page.

5. **Teaching Social, Professional, and Gender Ethos**

The broader social context in which Austin discusses proper movement and comportment in *Chironomia*. In teaching multiple audiences to develop the ethos of a good rhetor, rather than a general audience as is often assumed, Austin responds to and reflects shifting cultural values about gender and involving professional status, particularly acting.

6. **Beyond *Chironomia*: Movement as *Actio***

Austin's attempts to incorporate movement within his work and integrate text and image. Austin's efforts intersect with current interdisciplinary ventures into embodiment.

Notes

Works Cited

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