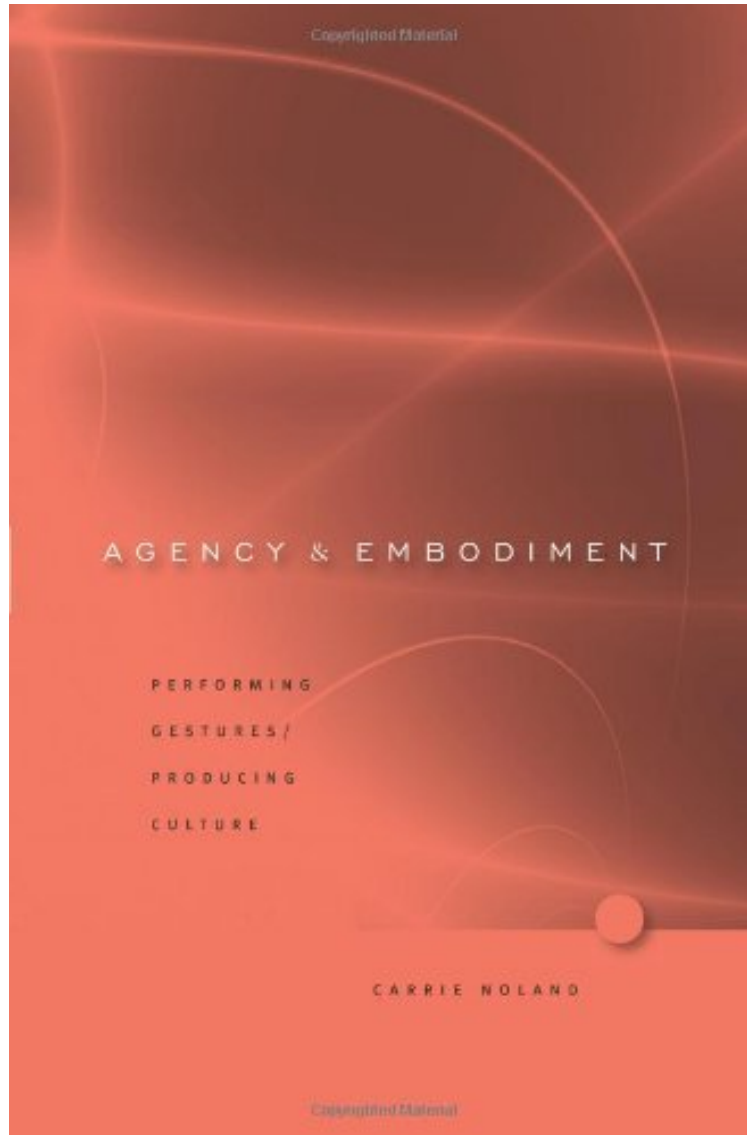


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## Agency and Embodiment

*Carrie Noland*

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**Carrie Noland : Agency and Embodiment** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Agency and Embodiment:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. To Find Freedom in the Gestural By Streetlight Reader Of the many works that have promised to bring the body back into the fold of philosophical practice, Carrie Noland's Agency and Embodiment is, without a doubt, among the best of them. Pitching itself against the prevailing post-structuralist distrust of 'self-experience', Noland argues for a much needed reconsideration of the place of kinaesthetic experience - the feeling of a body-in-motion, 'animate forms' - in our approaches to theorising agency. After

all, Noland contends, it's the experience of bodily 'interoception' (not, mind you, mental 'introspection'), that affords us our first brush with agency, the first realisation of a capacity engendered from within to resist the imperatives imposed from without. And of course, simplifying here: among the merits of Agency and Embodiment is a keen awareness of the degree to which our very physiology is saturated through and through with the ordinances of the social which shape us not simply at the level of culture, but right down to our gait, our gestures, our movements, and even - or rather consequently - our feelings. Indeed, it's just out of this paradox - wherein our most intimately felt experiences afford us a glimpse into the possibility of being otherwise - that Noland proposes to ground a theory of agency. By treating kinaesthesia as nothing less than a sixth sense - a finding affirmed by both neuroscience and anthropology - Noland proposes that attention to our respective proprioceptive backgrounds can allow us to contest and even refigure the very sensory-motor practices out of which we are composed. Central to Noland's account - one drawing on the resources of Marcel Mauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Andre Leroi-Gourhan, and Henri Michaux - is the role of gesture: residing at the intersection of movement and meaning, gesture crystallizes the manner in which meaning operates at the level of the body, crossing the threshold of both nature and culture while at the same time singularizing one's body as precisely one's own. As Noland writes, "gestures... have a definite direction, a specific velocity, rhythm, scope, tonicity" - in short, a quality of sensation whose contours are intimately felt, and consequently, available to modification. Ultimately, it's this attention to the qualitative nature of movement and sensation which allows Noland to traverse the vast expanse of trans-disciplinary scholarship that she does: from art to philosophy, performance studies to sociology, science and anthropology, Agency and Embodiment leaves few stones unturned in its quest to bring meaning back to the body, and in turn, free it from the muted half-life of meaningless corporeity so often attributed to it. If the question of freedom always seemed a little too abstract, a little too spectral, it's among these pages that its fleshy possibility is given body in spectacular fashion.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Superb. But paperback please! By Marco Polo Mint

As a researcher interested in kinesthesia and embodiment, this book is a strong attempt at connecting disparate research in philosophy, psychology and neurophysiology with performance. I had to borrow this from the library and haven't finished it yet - thought I'd order it to read through in its entirety, but there is no paperback as yet. I'm intrigued by her approach - she is able to synthesize a large body of scholarship but with a confidence and certainty that benefits her thesis. Her analysis of some artistic works (Bill Viola for example) genuinely adds to the concepts being discussed. It's written with confidence but also with a measured style, not at all flaky or insubstantial (unlike the work of, say, Erin Manning). Recommended.

In *Agency and Embodiment*, Carrie Noland examines the ways in which culture is both embodied and challenged through the corporeal performance of gestures. Arguing against the constructivist metaphor of bodily inscription dominant since Foucault, Noland maintains that kinesthetic experience, produced by acts of embodied gesturing, places pressure on the conditioning a body receives, encouraging variations in cultural practice that cannot otherwise be explained.

Carrie Noland challenges Michel Foucault's metaphor of bodily inscription by proposing gesture as scriptural, having the characteristics of writing. *Agency and Embodiment* constitutes a highly original contribution to thinking on the body, power, and culture across fields in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, from a decidedly interdisciplinary perspective. (Mark Franko, Professor of Dance, University of California, Santa Cruz)

This highly original book brilliantly rethinks one of the crucial blind spots of poststructuralist theory: the evasiveness about, or failure to resolve, issues of agency. *Agency and Embodiment* is an extremely important and intelligently articulated intervention into the profound dilemmas we face in understanding how to navigate the complexities of contemporary cultural landscapes. (Amelia Jones, Professor and Pilkington Chair in the History of Art, University of Manchester)

About the Author: Carrie Noland is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine.