INTRODUCTION: THE GESTURE OF INTRODUCING

WRITING

To do anything is to bring something about, to make possible a first meeting, if we let it be. All of Flusser’s gestures—writing, speaking, making, destroying, painting, photographing, filming, turning a mask around, planting, shaving, listening to music, smoking a pipe, telephoning, video, searching, loving—are ultimately also gestures of introducing.

We had both independently been writing books inspired by the same strange small work of fiction, and there we were at Cabinet Magazine’s Brooklyn headquarters for the second time (now as Dominic and Carla rather than Horse and Phoenix) and we had woven our two Calvino-inspired projects into a third monstrous beautiful thing and somehow people had come to hear us offer it to the room. There was something about the fact of sitting at a table in front of a group of people, and bodily bringing a thing made of language to them, and doing that together. Doing it together somehow brought something new to the pieces we were presenting and to the language itself. Writing
had become a way of introducing ourselves to Calvino, and to each other, and now to the possibility of writing together.

**Speaking**

We have to do this again!, I said. What about Flusser’s *Gestures*?, he said.

**Making**

One by one we began to read the chapters of Flusser’s book. There were no rules, except for an agreed-upon-and-highly-fungible deadline for our responses to each gesture. We’ll each take the same object as our anchor, and we’ll each write our way into engaging with the parts of it that most inspire us as individuals, and we’ll just make something, we decided, and by making and then sharing what we’ve made we’ll introduce ourselves and each other to the project. We both began to make little fictions. (We hadn’t explicitly decided to do that. It just happened that way.) And, gradually, tiny ephemeral worlds upon gestural worlds began to come into being.

And gradually our fictions began to inspire and inform each other.

**Destroying**

Sometimes I worry about the potential violence done to each gesture in the act of creating a fictional world with it. I sometimes strip Flusser’s writing to its bones and remake another text with those bones. It’s a way of getting inside a piece, destroying it in order to introduce myself to it, breaking it in order to make with it. (Mostly I don’t worry about this.)
Painting

“The gesture of painting is a form of freedom,” Flusser tells us. He urges us “to try to look at the world with fresh eyes, without the prejudicial spectacles of objectification and abstraction that come with our tradition. Then the world would ‘appear’ again, illuminated with the splendor of concrete phenomena” (70–71).

Fictioning, for us, gradually became a way of paying attention anew. It became a practice that helped us to see Flusser’s theory with fresh eyes, and to find a way across the flesh of it by creating languaged-hands to feel its languaged-body.

Every gesture is a gesture of introducing.

Photographing

Every gesture is a gesture of introducing.

So Dominic and I began to remake Flusser’s gestures, using them as a kind of material stuff to create with, reimagining our respective worlds and populating them with invented gestural beings. Sometimes Dominic and I make gods. Sometimes factory-workers, or birds, or angels, or people who can inhabit each other’s bodily experiences. Sometimes earthworms made of fingers, or storytellers who live in parks and drink green tea. Sometimes we make vampires who feed on color. Sometimes the bodies of the people we make help re-introduce me to my own body. (The woman who emerged from my response to Flusser’s “Photographing” introduced me to my fingertips anew. You’ll see what I mean when you meet her. The Mr. in Dominic’s response introduced me to my eyes anew. You’ll see when you meet him.)

Always each of us has been experimenting with fiction as part of our practice of engaging theory, and of making lives with it, individually and together.
Filming

Flusser describes cinema as “the archetypal womb” (86). Filming is a kind of bringing-into-being, a way of creating the possibility of history. It’s a gesture of imagining on a surface, which is ultimately what we’re doing as well.

Fictioning with Flusser has been a way to read ourselves into the subterranean of each gesture. (Sometime we read together, in real time, sending each other wordphotos of the bones or fossils or gems we find in the course of our digging, and sharing them, and helping each other see what we otherwise might have lost in the soil.) We then each write our own way back out again, making new surfaces to project imagination onto.

Turning a Mask Around

It’s a physical act, writing. Every time I open my file and think myself into a gesture and try to find a way to inhabit it, it becomes a way of re-introducing theory to its own latent nature as a raw material for storytelling, my own gestural body to a transcendent space of imagined sensoria, my worldmaking gesture to that of a beloved collaborator and his to mine. (Every gesture is a gesture of introducing.) It’s always a coming-together, a way of being-there and being-with.

Planting

While each of the stories in this book was inspired directly by a close reading of the corresponding gesture in Flusser’s book, the connections between the source material and the story growing from it are not always apparent. We thought long and carefully about how to approach this in the book. In making an offering of stories to you, our readers, should we be making explicit the connections between the stories and the bits of Flusser’s text that inspired them? (Should we be showing you photos of the early
budding stages of the flowers as they grew?) Should we be framing each story with a map showing you how to get (showing you how we got) from A to B?

In the end, we decided not to. True to the spirit of how we read Flusser, we are treating each of these stories as a kind of gestural act that creates its own space, its own world, and invites you to come dwell within it and see what comes. You might choose to read each collection of stories independently before moving on to the other, or you might flip the book over after each reading and experience the stories in pairs, as they were written. At the same time, there is yet another way of reading this book. You might find yourself a copy of Flusser’s *Gestures* and slowly read each gesture before turning to the two stories in this book that were inspired by it. None of these ways of reading are right or wrong: in each case, something different will grow out of the experience.

### Shaving

It is important that the stories—even as they live in different halves of the book—are in pairs. Each pair of stories—each set of gestures of shaving, or telephoning, or searching—was written in the same extended moment, springing from the same (sometimes quite brief, sometimes very extended) conversation. By binding them together in a single book, we honor the process and movements that made them. Each pair was born together, even as the stories often grew into quite different individuals.

### Listening to Music

In the stories to come in this half of the book, you’ll find common chords. Flesh will transform, bodies will come together and come apart. Much of what I drew from Flusser’s work on gesture was, ultimately, about the way movement in space makes selves, and the perceptions thereof mark themselves on the meat of us,
and spark metamorphoses, and turn the matter of us into the matter we perceive.

**SMOKING A PIPE**

Fictioning with Flusser’s work became a way to read Flusser. And so, writing became a way of learning how to read. It became a way of understanding that Flusser’s reflections on the gesture of smoking a pipe were not necessarily about smoking, nor were they necessarily about pipes. Instead, they could be about the importance of the act of recognition of the other, and of oneself in the other.

Every gesture is a gesture of introducing.

**TELEPHONING**

In fictioning with Flusser’s work — and in fictioning together with Dominic — gesture, for me, became fundamentally about physicality. To gesture was to gesture with the aid of some sort of apparatus. Sometimes, as in the gesture of telephoning, that apparatus became a “melancholy witness” to unfolding events. Sometimes we need to break off a piece from it and hold it to our ears to hear what it wants to tell us about what it has witnessed. Sometimes, when we listen, we hear our own voices. And sometimes we hear the voices of gods, be they gods already formed, or gods in the process of becoming. And thus, in fictioning with Flusser’s work, physicality became inextricably linked with the relationship between self and gods. Do not be surprised, then, if you find gods of all sorts in the stories to come.

**VIDEO**

The objects in the stories to come are troubled and troubling. They are often in the process of metamorphosis, of coming
into and going out of focus, of forming and unforming. Voices, banjos, mouths and fingers, spiders and worms, statues, plants, rocks and beds and sheets of glass.

SEARCHING

To be an object, here, is to be sought. To be a subject is to search. To search is to suffer, and it is to beckon to the distance. It is to be passionate and to perceive. It is to realize that we are all gestures, projecting ourselves into the future as it projects itself upon us.

Fictioning with Dominic and with Flusser has been a way to realize that all reading is potentially an act of searching, and all searching is an act of fictioning.

LOVING

And so, we have made beings and fashioned worlds for them to inhabit. Sometimes the entities we make re-introduce us to ourselves, or to each other. (Every gesture is a gesture of introducing.)

You’ll meet us, in a way, by meeting our gardeners and photographers and painters and lovers in these pages. (Maybe you’ll meet yourselves there, also.) Gesture by gesture, we’ll transform, and perhaps you will as well, and new introductions will have to be made. We will be planting, and shaving, and listening to music, and smoking a pipe, and telephoning, and videoing, and searching along with Flusser. We will be thinking gestures beyond Flusser, and inventing worlds with them, gestures made with ankles and elbows and eyebrows, beckonings and refusings and spinnings and offerings and brushings, or perhaps none of these at all. In the meantime, here is an ending. Here is a beginning. It’s nice to meet you.