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„Anatomies of Gesture. Towards a History of the Tic“

In recent years, movement disorders have turned into objects of renewed interest within both, the medical and the human sciences. The bulk of the scholarship, however, has confined itself to only the spectacular and seemingly prototypical instances, most notably Tourette Disorder, paying only cursory attention to the wider, and far more elusive, domain of tics. In virtue of their wide diffusion and prominence in XIX and early XX-century western culture, tics provide an important historical subject in their own right. However, what makes it especially valuable as a tool for approaching and deconstructing medical knowledge is its location between the normal and the pathological: on an ideal line between these two extremes the tic has occupied virtually all positions. Moreover, the tic cuts through, and provides access to, wider issues of great prominence for the medical knowledge and, indeed, for the bourgeois culture the time, such as the control of will, the consolidation of habits, the interpretation of the gesture as a vehicle of conscious and unconscious meanings, the perception of disease and of its ways of transmission and the relationship between symptom, stigma and proper disease. This is why the history of the tic cannot be divorced from an understanding of the assumptions and concerns of fields other than the medical, such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, pedagogy and sociology. Aim of this study is to identify and bring to the fore an organic framework of converging knowledges and practices calibrating the human gesture, from its conceptual definition to its active manipulation. My aim is to tackle the multifarious processes of confrontation, negotiation and struggle among different perspectives and authorities that gave shape to this system.