Part 1

The choral conductor and gestures

Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1 Gestures in choral conducting

The linguist, Edward Sapir (1884-1939), said of conducting that it is “an elaborate code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all”. (Sapir 1949:556). This thesis will seek to question that statement, trying to determine the degree to which there is some underlying structure that can be codified and passed down as a body of knowledge from one conductor to another.

This quote implies that conducting has some mystical aspects about it – but the notion of the “elaborate code that is written nowhere” can be questioned if one looks at several books written on the topic of conducting; “known by none” implies that this mystical code cannot be learnt or taught by anyone, (and maybe that is why the notion exists that good choral conductors are born and not trained), but I question that. An ensemble and a conductor will learn from any rehearsal, assuming that both parties have at their disposal the skills they need to perform their functions.

In the same way, then, surely, it must be because the conductor, through his training and understanding of skills and conventions passed down to him, communicates this understanding to the ensemble? It is not a mystical coincidence, as Sapir would suggest.

Let us take an extract from a choral work to examine the way in which various conductors would use gesture to conduct it. The conductor has in front of him a piece of music. He needs to make decisions about the manner in which he will convey the meaning of this music, using particular gestures understood by both
ensemble and conductor, to evoke the performance he requires. A conducting gesture can be defined as a movement executed by the arms and hands of a conductor which aims at giving the ensemble unambiguous information with regard to the tempo and expressive aspects of the music.

The conductor has a choice of different movements at his disposal: these are usually presented in conducting manuals as conducting patterns. A pattern is therefore the two-dimensional graphic representation of a gesture. The illustration will therefore discern between simple time, compound time and irregular time, as well as the number of beats occurring in each of these representations.

What is the difference between a gesture and a pattern?
A gesture is a practical three-dimensional movement, whereas a pattern is the two-dimensional representation of the gesture.
In order to distinguish a gesture, a number of parameters should be identifiable.

Gestures are spatially differentiated in terms of both the horizontal and vertical conducting planes. Gestures are mostly indicated as a pendulum-type or inverted pendulum-type movement, or combinations of the two. It is possible to use both hands for the indication of gestures, and therefore aspects of ambidexterity are important. Gestures are informative, and this aspect is contained in the preparatory beat. Usually the preparatory beat is accompanied by the breath of the conductor if the music starts at the beginning of a phrase. The preparatory beat establishes the ictus as the point of rebound. The ictus will indicate the placement of either the primary, secondary or tertiary beats.
Any music starts with a preparatory gesture from the conductor to prepare the ensemble for what is to follow. So the preparatory beat is of paramount importance. It follows therefore that every beat should have a preparation, especially if any change is imminent in terms of volume, tempo, articulation, or dimension. It also follows that every beat has the potential to influence the very next beat in terms of all the above.
The preparatory beat consists of an upbeat, an ictus point and a rebound. The upbeat is the part of the gesture that prepares the ensemble to breathe, and the ictus is the point at which the rebound will start, usually occurring on the horizontal plane.

The horizontal and vertical aspects of the gesture define the gesture’s spatial area. Most gestures define the horizontal plane with the placement of the ictus, and the vertical plane with the downbeat to the first beat of the gesture and the upbeat of the first beat.

In order to perform this piece of music, then, the conductor must ensure that the gestures are visible to the ensemble; that they show clarity of intent; that they are informative with regard to tempo indication, dynamic changes and articulation; that they are predictable, that they have constant movement; that they are accompanied by the breath of the conductor; and that they are understood by all in the ensemble. These are the qualities which every gesture must contain in order to function successfully.

Musical Example 1.1 Ave Maris Stella by the Norwegian Trond H Kverno bars 72 – 75
This work starts in common time, on the first beat, with the first two bars repeated melodically. What follows is the gesture suggested by three different authors for the simple time four-beat pattern:

Hylton (1995: 6)

Willits (1993: 36 Figure 21)

Davison (1954: 15 No Figure number)
By superficially looking at only three author’s suggestion of the simple time four-beat gesture, it becomes clear that we have three very different interpretations of how the basic aspects of this gesture should be indicated to the ensemble.

In the first, the nature of the movement is mostly an inverted pendulum-type pattern, with the icti placed on different levels. The execution of the last beat adds a rebound which is not indicated for the first three beats and which may be interpreted as a 5th beat. In the gesture suggested by Willits, the basic pattern consists of movements all in an inverted pendulum-type movement. The biggest problem here might be for the ensemble to discern which beat is indicated, as all the movements emphasise the vertical plane. In Davison’s suggestion of the simple time four-beat gesture, the absence of a rebound is the characteristic feature, with the additional problem of finding exactly where the 4th beat will be indicated.

It would be fair to say that these three patterns illustrate very diverse interpretations of the “standardised” four-beat gesture. The question then remains, if one takes Edward Sapir’s at his word, as to whether these three very different gestures would be “understood by all” in the ensemble?

While observing different professional conductors in master class situations, it becomes interesting to note the differences in motivation of practical approaches to gestures. At times, the notion of “standard gestures” becomes questionable, as different conductors sometimes have totally different approaches towards the way in which gestures should be indicated. Many professional conductors work with students in a master-with-apprentice situation, where the practical aspects are not underpinned in any way by theoretical studies - only by a continuous practicum.

Christopher Koch states in Toward a Theory of Conducting Motion, that “representative motion - the essence of conducting - is a relatively new phenomenon, and has not been universally conceptualized. That is, the anatomy
of conducting gesture and the processes by which it acquires and transmits meaning remain only marginally understood and, thus, [remains] quasi-mysterious.” (Koch 2003:3) If choral conducting gestures are to be universally understood by everyone, it follows logically that certain basic principles should be observed by all conductors, and therefore evidence of this should be available in literature on gestures.

Neuen would agree with this notion, using the term “patterns” in the same sense as “gestures”, in the following way: “Over the years, conductors and teachers of conducting have come up with many different patterns. However, some patterns have proven to be consistently effective and legible to singers and players alike. Stick with these standard patterns most of the time, and every ensemble will be able to clearly understand your conducting gesture at the first rehearsal.” (Neuen, 2002: 219)

The idea that gestures are “standard” is also presented. What is not discussed here is what actually constitutes a “standard” gesture. What is it that makes the ensemble recognise the universality of a symbolically drawn path which makes them react in the same manner, irrespective of differences in manners of verbal communication?

Another author who adds his voice to this view is Garretson, who also writes about gestures in the following manner: “Each conductor would have his own methods, but the fundamental patterns are the same.” (Garretson, 1993:5). In this quotation the presumption is that the methods might differ from conductor to conductor, but the “fundamental gestures” remain the same.

These two quotations are reflective of the opinion of several authors when it comes to the basic conducting gestures. Therefore, the starting point in this field of study seems to be that authors are referring to gestures as “standard”. However, in this study it will be indicated that the perceived “fundamental
standard patterns” are in fact not the same and an effort will be made to indicate the differences in the principles behind those perceived “fundamental patterns”. When looking at several texts written on the topic of conducting gestures, it strikes one that there seems to be an array of opinions. In order to make sense of many different opinions from authors towards a theory on conducting gestures, the path which will be followed will be to ascertain from authors who have written on conducting gestures any information which might be found to be useful, in order to discover what makes a gesture “consistently effective and legible to singers and players alike” (Neuen 2002: 219).

From a cursory investigation it is clear that there should be some reference made to anatomical issues pertaining to the gestures of conductors, as many gestures suggested by authors are very different from each other. This difference in conducting stances must have certain anatomical implications for the conductor, and eventually, might have specific implications for the ensemble that need to follow a particular stance and make sense of it.

In the end, conducting gestures should be made in such a way that the musical intentions of the conductor are well understood by the ensemble. A leader needs to make his musical intentions clear, by formulating actions which are predictable in order to leave the ensemble with a sense of musical trust. The predictability and sense of musical trust are the central issues surrounding gestures which will qualify certain gestures as “standard”.

In an important comprehensive overview of literature on different issues surrounding choral conducting, Hart (1996) examined several choral conducting and secondary music education texts, published from 1939-1995, in search of any evidence of evolution in thought or recurring themes. Several recurrent ideas were highlighted, but only two issues indicated some evolution of thought, one of which was conducting gestures.
When one refers to the literature in his study, it becomes obvious that there are major differences between authors with regard to those aspects surrounding the gestures executed by the conductor: the posture of the conductor, the positioning of the arms and hands, the importance of breath, the use of other bodily aspects other than hands, gestures as non-verbal communication, baton technique, a theoretical explanation for gestures, the use of preparatory beats, basic simple time, compound time and irregular beating patterns, as well as the indication of change of dynamics and articulation.

When we observe the differences of opinion on these and other matters, we may wonder why there are no basic foundations for conducting gestures? If we look to literature on singing or vocalization, there always seems to be some reference to the anatomy of the vocal chords and the anatomy pertaining to breath. Is it possible to study tendons and muscle groups, in order to gain a better understanding of conducting gestures?

Yet, in the literature on choral conducting gestures, there seems to be very little, if any, reference to anatomical issues, despite the fact that the posture of the conductor and use of his hands and arms have a direct influence on how gestures are executed. This raises the question as to whether a knowledge base of tendons and muscle groups will make the principles of gestures clearer. These issues will be raised in Part 2.

It might be possible for a conductor to develop over a long period of time an individualistic “secret language” of gestures only understood by his own choir, where neural pathways have been laid down associating the intention of the conductor and the desired outcome. The effectiveness of the conductor’s gestures will then only be put to the test when he works with a choir which does not know his “secret language”. If this choir can respond to his gestures straight away, then Sapir will be proven to be correct: conducting could then indeed be understood by all!
It should be the universality and predictability of certain gestures used by some conductors above others, which will make one conductor more musically trustworthy and effective than another.

The major issue of this study is therefore to look at different aspects of choral conducting gestures through a literature study. Texts, articles in academic journals and theses on related topics will be studied. These topics will be identified and presented in different categories. Finally, an attempt will be made to work towards a theory of gesture.

On questioning several professional conductors about the reference material they use to learn or teach their skills, these conductors mostly indicated that they do not make use of a specific, or any, text book. This nearly standard answer from conducting teachers led to questioning the reason for their answer: Considering the broad literature available on a topic such as singing, for example, one would assume that a lot has been written which would be useful for conductors to assist them with the learning and teaching of their skills. When one starts with a basic literature search on the books written on conducting, however, it becomes clear that relatively very little has been written on the topic.

One could postulate that the reason for the absence of a whole body of literature could be that conducting makes use of “standard” gestures, and therefore that the last word on the topic has already been written. But even after a superficial investigation, it becomes clear that what has been written was done mostly from first-hand experience of conductors, mostly without accompanying reasons for their suggestions. One only needs to compare a few texts on the topic to realise that the opinions about the same aspects concerning gestures are as diverse as the number of authors who wrote them. One would assume that the description of gestures, if it is to be known and understood generally, should therefore be described by authors in a “standard” manner.
The fact that the description of gestures lacks a standard or universal method, raises the question about the principles which authors use to describe their methods. Could it be that certain authors provide better reasoning than others for their suggestions?

Hopefully, this study will contribute to the decision-making process on what constitutes effective gestures, in order for a conductor to use a universally understood code, which will be universally known, and which can be taught and understood by all professional choral conductors and singers. In this chapter I will address some basic issues, as different authors see them.

Before I return to issues specifically related to gestures, I will position my analysis in a broader conducting context, by looking at opinions on the functions of the choral conductor and the functionality and analogy of gestures. Then I will address other author’s research relating to gestures, and the research topics and questions for this thesis will be presented. Furthermore, the methodology of the literature study will be described. The books which will be presented in the literature study will be introduced, and reasons for their inclusion given. Reasons for the exclusion of other books will also be provided. Lastly, the central issues will be identified, and a description of them will be given, as well as how these issues relate to each other.

1.2 The functions of the choral conductor

Several authors have written on the relationship between the composer, the performers and the audience. This three-way relationship could be described as a creative triangle.

The analogy of the triangle can be taken to the three main role players in the life of choral music: Firstly, a work is written by a composer, it is then performed by a choir under the direction by a conductor, and the audience is exposed to this work in a performance situation.
Choral music is written mostly with the setting of a specific text in mind. The text might have been chosen by the composer because it was perceived as bearing a personal inspirational message, (for instance Brahms 'Ein Deutsches Requiem, or Fauré’s Requiem) or it could have been a once-off commission in lieu of a certain amount of money, like Mozart’s Requiem. Its existence could be justified because it was part of a body of work expected of the composer for a regular salary (Bach’s sacred cantatas, or Haydn’s masses). Once the work has been written, a choir identified who will perform it with a choirmaster who will be rehearsing and/or conducting it, and an occasion where it will be performed, the three elements of the creative triangle have been put in place. Conversely, the choir conductor might choose a specific work with a specific occasion in mind, which also fulfils the different components of the triangle.

As the second part of the triangle, the conductor rehearsing a work will do so by taking into consideration all the possible aspects which surround a work: he will convey to the choir the meaning of the text, the tradition of historical performance and practice of it, as well as any other factors such as sound production, pronunciation of the text, breathing and phrasing, all and more of which might determine the different musical aspects surrounding the work. In order to realise these functions, the conductor should have impeccable musicianship, be a teacher, an inspirer and a motivator, have a sound knowledge of the production of voices, be a sensitive leader, and an excellent diplomat! He should have a working knowledge of the performance practices of different musical styles and above all, he must have the sensitivity to work with a (mostly) amateur ensemble of musicians.

Thus the choral conductor has a responsibility which goes beyond just the mere function of beating time.

In the process of working with the choir prior to the performance, the conductor will now make his intentions with regard to the performance clear to the choir. This will happen on two distinct levels: the conductor will fulfil his role as a
teacher, and therefore use language to convey his ideas. But on the second level, through means of gestures, he will transfer his musical intentions to the ensemble.

In this non-verbal transference of musical intentions he might make use of body language, facial expression and movement of hands and arms, all of which can be broadly described as gesture. Once the rehearsals have taken place, the performance of the work follows, with the conductor now working only on the level of non-verbal communication.

In the performance situation, one of the main functions of the conductor is to indicate the tempo of a work, the dynamics and articulation by means of gesture. This means that any member of the ensemble should be able to watch the conductor at any given moment and know exactly which beat of a beating pattern the conductor is conveying. The ensemble should be able to see this from any angle in relation to the conductor.

Busch stresses the importance of non-verbal communication. The conductor must be able to act expressively without having to revert to speech all the time, balancing conducting with teaching in order to serve the music. He points out that the non-verbal communication should be able to be understood by all the musicians we deal with: “The conventions of conducting should not enslave us,” he says. (Busch 1984:113) But he also hastens to add that the conductor’s non-verbal communication technique should be comprehensible to the ensemble. “The needs of the ensemble must be met, and this demands some practical considerations. If we can in any way improve our teaching, rehearsal techniques, leadership capacity, and ability to inspire singers, we should not be so tied to the conducting conventions that we are ineffective. Our job is to make music, but we should also be sensitive enough to know when our actions get in the way of the music, the performers, or the listeners. We should only do that which we need to do and no more”. (Busch, 1984: ibid.)
Choral conducting consists of translating the movement and rhythm of music into visible signs. Ehmann speaks about “the simple down and up into little like time-beating movement as practised by cantors of the great cathedral choirs which place the initiative for creative music-making with the choir itself, thus allowing the interpretive and artistic abilities of the individual singers to come into full play.” (Ehmann 1968: 111) It is important to note that he speaks about the movement of the conductor as a pendulum - like movement. On page 109, he says that “choral conducting consists of translating the movement and rhythm of music into visible signs. That which the choral singer must frequently transmit inwardly and invisibly, the director must reveal and express outwardly.”

Communication of interpretive nuance also occurs between conductor and the choir, choral conducting rehearsal techniques affect the degree of communication, and the degree of such communication can be measured. Graves (1984) makes the assumption that choral conducting rehearsal methods provide the means of assisting choirs to communicate a specific musical interpretation to listeners. The ability of listeners to recognise intended differences in interpretative performance is used as evidence that communication of interpretative nuance occurs between conductor and performer. Graves concluded that communication of interpretive nuance does occur between a conductor and a choir, that choral conducting rehearsal techniques affect the degree of communication, and that the degree of such communication can be measured.

Conducting is about making intentions clear to the ensemble. Holden suggests there are as many styles of conducting as there are conductors. The biggest aspect of the non-verbal communication of the conductor is to make his intentions clear to the ensemble. “A member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra once remarked laconically to the present author that ‘it matters not whether a conductor stands on his head and wiggles his toes or beats time like a metronome, as long as his intentions are clear.” (Holden 2002: 3)
The primary function of the right hand is to present a consistent beat pattern while maintaining full expression and allowing the occasional cue within the context of clear, concise beating. This aspect surrounding giving “clear gestures” is one which has many members of ensembles asking the conductor during rehearsals for a “clear beat”. The question here, therefore, is which aspects of the indication of a gesture will make the ensemble permanently happy during a rehearsal and performance? Green (2004: xvii) would seem to argue that the conductor should strive towards giving “CLARITY OF INTENT as well as CLARITY OF BEAT”.

Holden quotes Bernstein when he links the preparation beat with the inhalation of breath and the communication of intent: this intake of breath “often helps to communicate the conductor's intentions to the players. Whichever approach is used, clarity of movement is essential. As the upbeat directly precedes the first sound rendered, the speed, character and direction of the movement has a direct bearing on the initial tempo of the work.” (Holden 2003:5)

The conductor should have a great mind, passion, and an effective conducting technique: Neuen (2002:201) is not interested in the differences between choral and instrumental conducting, but sees conducting as “artistic musical conducting”. He says:

“A fine instrumental conductor effectively communicates precise beats, expressive melodic lines, driving rhythms, dynamic changes and nuances, significant harmonic moments, and all other attributes of a composition. The choral conductor does exactly the same thing”. Three elements of a successful conductor should be:

- A great mind
- Passion that comes from the very depths of the soul
- Effective conducting techniques

A given beat can potentially be a cue, if directed toward specific singers or players. The right hand can, for the most part, be as expressive within a beat pattern as out of it. Beat patterns do not have to be limiting, mechanical,
awkward or pedantic. It just takes practice to incorporate expressive beauty, or exciting energy, within consistent patterns.

Neuen is of the opinion that all the passion, expressiveness, energy and power needed could, if necessary, be done with the right hand alone. Often, as in the conducting of an aria accompaniment, the right hand may be sufficient by itself. (Neuen, 2002)

In summary, then, the main function of the conductor, then, is to indicate tempo, and with that, the dynamics and articulation, by means of gesture, to the ensemble. This means that any member of the ensemble should be able to watch the conductor at any given time and know exactly which beat of a beating pattern the conductor is conveying, as well as have an indication of the tempo, dynamics and articulation of the beat. The ensemble should be able to see this from any angle in relation to the conductor.

1.3 Gestures – functionality and analogy

1.3.1 The conductor inspires, communicates and conveys emotion

Gordon makes the point that the conductor’s ability to use his right hand in order to manipulate beating patterns is not his main function, but that he needs to integrate this skill to convey expressive gestures which will "inspire performers to sing artistically and enthusiastically". At times the conductor must use other skills besides speaking and gestures, such as demonstration. Then he will “provide a model for duplication by the ensemble”. Gordon (1977:15)

Successful choral conductors, perhaps without realising it, are usually sophisticated communicators of body language. Besides achieving technically secure ensemble results through traditional gesturing, they are able to establish contrasting musical moods and elicit a more total effect from singers. Their success results from a capacity to physically show a feeling for a musical composition and an ability to communicate the performance demands while conducting.
The conductor has the task to convey with his facial expression an emotion which needs to be expressed by the ensemble. “Creating mood for the music at hand through countenance, encouraging singers at points of entry with the eyes, and prolonging alertness and vitality through personal demeanor are just a few examples of utilizing conducive use of facial expression.” (Gordon 1977:30)

Sometimes the wrong emotion can be evoked by the conductor from the ensemble which might upset the ensemble, such as a negative reaction to wrong notes, or smiling at a point where it is unsuitable. The conductor needs to be mindful of the messages his own facial expressions convey. It is through the conductor’s own posture that he can command the same response from his ensemble.

In order to promote empathy with the ensemble, the conductor should have the image that there is a physical connection between himself and his ensemble.

Gordon gives several examples where the conductor’s body language will elicit a specific response from the ensemble – what he calls an “Emphatic Technique”. A look of expectation will result in a confident entry. An open mouth when showing the preparatory beat will result in adequate being breath taken in by the ensemble. When the conductor stands with a high chest, the choir will provide good tone support.

1.3.2 Gestures save time conveying the correct musical intentions

Conductors should be focused on communicating with gestures rather than verbal communication, as this will save time during rehearsals: the more time the conductor spends talking in an attempt to convey his or her musical ideas to the ensemble, the less time the ensemble has to put those ideas into practice or turn them into art. Ford (2001)

Should the conductor’s gestures be at odds with his musical intentions, time will have to be taken by the conductor to undo verbally what the gestures convey.
When mixed messages are conveyed by the conductor’s gestures and his verbal intentions, interference can occur. But if the conductor’s gestures clearly reflect his musical requirements, the efficiency of the rehearsal and ultimately the standard of the performance, will be raised.

1.3.3 Conducting gestures can and should be practised

We already know from Green (2004:2) that gestures “speak a skilful language”. These gestures become the vocabulary of the conductor. It goes without saying, then, that “accuracy in the beginning (of the learnt gestures) pays enormous dividends in the future. The mind’s commands travel through a neural pathway that links your mind to the hands-arms complex.” She is of the opinion that the more regularly this pathway is used (i.e., when a specific gesture which has been practised, it becomes a natural conducting gesture) “the quicker the trip becomes.” Eventually it becomes instantaneous. The hands perform automatically what is in your mind”. She urges conductors to practise their skills, as this practice will strengthen the ‘neural pathway’ from brain to hands. (Green, 2004: xiii)

McElherhan (1989:9) echoes the point of view that conductors should practise their conducting, as a pianist would not only analyse a concerto, but would work daily at the playing of the work: “Conducting technique must be studied AND PRACTISED, during the entire career of the conductor”.

1.3.4 The definition of gestures as seen by the different authors

The definition of gestures as seen by different authors varies considerably. Some authors define gestures exclusively in terms of their functionality, while others use an analogy with other aspects of the arts such as the mastering of a language, the painting of a picture or the playing an instrument to define the concept. Not one of the authors gives a clear “scientific” definition such as “this kind of movement” with “that purpose in mind”.

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Some of the authors define gestures implicitly in terms of their functions – primarily as time beating, and secondarily as indicating different aspects of character in the music (change of tempo, articulation and dynamics). (Busch, Labuta).

Some of the authors differentiate between gestures and conducting, saying that conducting is the act of using gestures. Some authors make an analogy between gestures and conducting in terms of language and vocabulary: gestures as the vocabulary of the language, and conducting as the speaking of the language. (Gordon, Green, Hansen, and Neuen) Or the music is seen as a language and the chorus an exciting musical instrument, and then conducting is the “incredible art of “playing” that instrument (Kaplan). Busch talks about the conductor painting “pictures”. Neuen (2002:206) also makes an analogy with language and conducting gestures: the conductor’s language (gestures) visually expresses musical ideas. And, as with speaking, the level of the conductor’s language proficiency will either enhance or hinder his musical communication.

Some authors feel that gestures should fulfil very specific functions. Gordon, for instance, feels they should account for time and place within the music. This is achieved by the use of conducting patterns indicating movement through measures. Furthermore, they must prepare performers for musical action. Ensemble members are forewarned of attacks and entries by conducting cues. Gordon (1989: 63)

When the conducting gesture is therefore clear to the ensemble, the rebound of every beat will function as the preparation for the next beat, indicating the intentions of the conductor to the ensemble from one moment in time to the next. When this sequence of preparatory beats consistently falls into place as a sequence of events within a musical performance of a work, the ensemble will understand the intention of the conductor in a continuous situation, and his gestures will become predictable and discernible. If the idea of continuous preparation for every beat does not exist in his gestures, the conductor will
remain a mere beater of time. Gordon (1977) says that the conductor guides his ensemble in performance through the use of mutually understandable gestures. This functional sign language must satisfy the following requirements: It must account for time and place within music, co-ordinate and regulate technical aspects of the performance and inspire performers to sing artistically and enthusiastically. The conductor must develop his technical abilities beyond the manipulation of beat patterns. The mastery of conducting requires a subconscious integration of right-hand diagrams within a larger framework of expressive gesticulation.

Not all authors provide a specific definition of gesture. Some say that the student must develop readable conducting gestures that represent appropriate attacks and releases, tempo, meter, style, dynamics, balance, cueing, accentuation, phrasing and interpretation. Labuta (2000)

Labuta also lists 24 conducting techniques/gestures which he teaches in his coursework: posture and physical stance, arm and hand positioning, vertical and horizontal planes, delineation of ictus, preparatory gesture and downbeat, rhythmic breathing motion, eye contact, simple metric patterns, delineation of dynamic level, tempo, articulation; internal release and final cutoff; holding and using the baton, different styles, different dynamics, entrance on a pickup, cues, sustaining gestures, subdivision and hemiola, entrances on incomplete beats, fermatas, compound metric patterns, asymmetrical metric patterns, accents and tempo alterations. He does not offer a single definition of what “gestures” are, but from this list it is clear that gestures should give information to an ensemble in a multi-faceted approach.

For Davison (1954), Ericson (1978) and Ehmann (1968), the primary purpose of the conductor is in setting the rhythm of a work, in other words, to translate the movement and rhythm of music into visible signs. Authors use an analogy with other aspects of the arts such as the painting of a picture, the speaking a language, or the playing an instrument to define gesture.
Busch (1984) firstly uses the *Random House of Dictionary of the English Language* to define gesture as: movement of the body, head, arms, hands or face that is expressive of an idea, opinion, emotion. The function of gesture can indicate: meter and tempo, subdivisions of meter, character of music – marcato – staccato, timing and character of cues: entrances, releases, and preparation for an ensuing musical event.

Rhythmic configurations, activations of rests and phrase endings, shapes of phrases, feeling of movement and vitality, reinforcement of vocal sound, amount of sound, proportion of sound required, use of left hand and right hand to convey two independent ideas, drama indicated by the score, and the relationship between the vocal and instrumental portions of a work.

Green, Hansen, and Kaplan compare using gestures to conduct, with speaking a language, and the gestures as the vocabulary, which is used in order to speak it.

For Green (2004: xiii), conducting is a *time-space* activity. It is impossible to change the size of a gesture without first changing the speed of the physical motion between beats. She says, “Your hands-arms are your technique in conducting. They speak a skilful language. Your clear-speaking gestures are your vocabulary.”

The concept of conducting can also be seen as separate from the concept of gestures. “To obtain an artistic result the conductor must be able to communicate nuances in dynamics, phrasing, articulation (legato and staccato), and general impression. For this, mere time beating is not enough; the appropriate gesture to elicit from the players the desired response must be mastered before we can actually speak of conducting”. Rudolf (1993: xv)

And some people disagree altogether. Hansen, for instance, does not give a definition of a gesture, but speaks of the development of technique as being fundamental: “Technique – clear beats, precise cues, differentiation between the functions of the right hand and left hands – is only the basis on which the

The idea that the conductor is playing an instrument when he works with his choir is one to which Kaplan (1985: xiii) subscribes. He is of the opinion that three concepts have to be understood: the music (seen as a language), the chorus (an exciting musical instrument) and then conducting as the “incredible art of “playing” that instrument. Choral conducting must be considered as conducting into which is incorporated a thorough knowledge of the instrument (the chorus), its limitations, as well as its unending potential.

1.3.5 In summary, then, gestures should be indicated to the ensemble in such a manner that they will fulfil certain requirements. The requirements of these gestures will be that they are visible, show clarity of intent, be informative with regard to all musical aspects, are predictable, have constant movement, are accompanied by breath from the conductor and are understood by all.

Being visible implies that all the members of the ensemble are able to see the gesture from any possible angle. Clarity of intent means that the musical intention which the gesture evokes is unambiguous. Informative entails that it prepares the ensemble in terms of tempo, articulation and dynamics. Predictable concerns the “what”, “where” and “how” with regard to the shape of the gesture. Constant motion implies that the hands move continuously in order to promote vocalisation. The breath of the conductor will enhance his musical involvement with the ensemble as well as encourage the ensemble to breathe optimally in order to sing properly. Understood entails that the ensemble gathers enough information from the gesture to execute the musical intention of the composer as interpreted by the conductor to be able to project this to an audience.
Chapter 2
Previous research on the topic of gesture

In this chapter, reference will be made to research done by other authors on the topic of gesture. Six doctoral studies were found to be useful in this field. I will present each of these studies and then relate them to my own work in the summary.

In a literature overview study, Steven Hart (1996), *Evolution of Thought and Recurrent Ideas in Choral Conducting Books and Secondary Music Education Texts Published in English from 1939 – 1995* University of Colorado, has made a valuable contribution to research on choral conducting and gestures by looking at choral conducting books over the period 1939 – 1995.

The purpose of his study was to identify recurring issues in selected choral conducting books and secondary music education texts, specifically those which showed an evolution of thought. The criteria for the selection of texts were: Books published between 1939 and 1995 and published in English in the original language. The content had to be primarily on choral conducting, and available through the University of Colorado Library by 1996. Texts excluded were: Anthologies of music for conducting or method classes, instrumental conducting books, or books originally published in a foreign language.

The study revealed eight recurring issues that continued through the specific time span. The most important issue pertaining to this study was that “gesture” was identified as a recurring idea in the selected texts, and that it showed evolution of thought.

Christopher Jason Koch, (2003) *Toward a theory on conducting motion*, University of Washington, develops a theory of conducting motion. He claims that this concept of conducting motion does not claim to be the theory on conducting motion, but that it leads towards the formulation of a theory.
He does not present a definite model or method of analysis. He acknowledges this study as a subjective single perspective. The concept of current paradigm and motion theory are informed by two sources: The author’s own experience and observations and his selective writing and integration of research. Therefore the work is unabashedly subjective. The texts selected are by the following authors: Max Rudolf, Elizabeth Green, Hideo Saito, Frederick Prausnitz and Harold Farberman.

Four empirical studies were found which related to the study of gestures in general:

Fuller, Gregory (2000) *Effects of metrical conducting patterns, subdivided patterns, managed preparatory gestures, and no conducting on choral singers’ precision and expressiveness at phrase punctuation points less than the unit pulse.* University of Missouri – Columbia.


The primary purpose of her study was to examine the effect of the left hand conducting gesture on inappropriate vocal tension in singers. Six left hand conducting gestures were used: 1) left hand, no change; 2) left hand, fisted gesture; 3) left hand, palm up; 4) left hand, palm down; 5) left hand, stabbing gesture; 6) left hand, sideways phrase-shaping gesture.

The secondary purpose of the study was to determine whether singers from various groups (i.e. conductors, college singers and high school singers) or different genders, responded differently to the six conducting gestures.

The purpose of the experiments was to determine which gestures evoked evidence of vocal tension in the singers.
The use of the left hand in this case was therefore used to test specific gestures which might induce tension to a certain degree. It did not study the functionality of the left hand in a specific useful gesture such as the indication of cues, or the indication of different rhythmical patterns on basic time beating.

In *The effect of conductor verbalisation, dynamic markings, conductor gesture and choir dynamic level on individual singers’ dynamic responses* (University of Missouri-Kansas City), Skadsem believes that verbal instructions indicate the best instruction method, because this is the way most participants experience preparation in rehearsals. It might also be that choir gestures are not precisely indicated, or that the style of the gesture was simply not informative enough. (There is no indication of the height of the conducting gesture, the height of the vertical and horizontal axis, or if the hands were in a 90° or 180° pronation). Skadsem, Julie A: (1995),

Daniel Hartford Graves “set out to develop a method for evaluating the choral conductor’s effect on the interpretation of performance in a rehearsal situation, and to test the reliability of the method in an experimental setting,” in his study entitled, *The Choral Conductor’s Communication of Musical interpretation* (1984), The University of Connecticut. He found that “choral conducting rehearsal methods provide a means of assisting choirs in communicating musical interpretation to listeners. The ability of listeners to recognise intended differences in interpretative performance is used as evidence that communication of interpretative nuance occurs between conductor and performer.”

Three different kinds of rehearsal methods were used: Full, non-verbal, and non-verbal with masked facial expressions. The conclusion he came to was that communication of interpretive nuance does occur between conductor and the choir, that choral conducting rehearsal techniques affect the degree of communication, and that the degree of such communication can be measured.

To sum up, then, Hart’s thesis as a literature overview is very valuable in ascertaining recurring issues in choral conducting. His observation that “gesture”
was one of the areas which revealed evolution of thought is encouraging for this present study. What was not addressed in his study, was the differences and similarities between the ideas stated in these works. He also did not give any indication as to why certain gestures might be more successful than others. More texts since 1996 have emerged on the subject of gesture but no comparisons between any of them have been made in terms of differences of technique by authors. The notion of a theory of gestures is not offered by any authors studied in this treatise.

From Koch's treatise it became clear, in my opinion, that he based his summary of the present paradigm of thought on conducting motion theory mainly on work by the Japanese author and teacher Hideo Saito. His theory does not serve to explain the basic notion that conducting movements should be universally recognised by musicians. His idea that "velocity" (a term he borrowed from physics, but to which he applies his own definition) is zero at the point of direction change, as well as the notion that a conducting pendulum movement has "acceleration" towards the ictus, will both result in any movements unpredictably made by the conductor. Both these notions can be refuted by observing conductors who do not necessarily change direction in a 180 degree fashion, but make use of circular motion. The idea of acceleration towards the ictus point cannot be applied to all conducting motion either.

In addition, the flaw of his theory is that he used concepts from physics applicable to bodies in motion, and applied this to the movement of a hand. From a physics point of view, these two movements are completely different. Unfortunately, he mixed the definitions of harmonious movement with pendulum movement too.

In my opinion, the concept of a theory of conducting gestures should be able to explain the universality of gestures.
Koch also views the use of the hands of the conductor as an “interface”, similar to that of a pianist using his hands on the keys of a piano. This notion that the conductor’s hands become a soundless form of musical performance, equates with the idea of the ensemble as the instrument of the conductor. Koch does not believe that the sound product of the ensemble is the direct result of his technical effort. His study concerns itself with the governing principles of conducting motion – “in terms of both current paradigm and theory – not its technique, the actual movements learned by the conductor and used in the physical process of conducting, or its mechanics, which may be defined as any physical considerations not encompassed by technique. “ (Koch 2003, 30) He also does not define his ideas of what constitutes “a theory”.

Gregory Fuller’s (2000) empirical study, which tested singers’ precision and expressiveness at phrase punctuation points less than the unit pulse, indicated among other results, that at certain stages of the experiment “no conducting” was more effective than other modes of testing. (Effects of metrical conducting patterns, subdivided patterns, managed preparatory gestures, and no conducting on choral singers’ precision and expressiveness at phrase punctuation points less than the unit pulse. University of Missouri – Columbia) The shortcomings of this empirical study are twofold: numerous extraneous factors might have contributed to the results which were obtained, and the style of the managed preparatory gestures could have been wanting. The style used in the experiment in terms of hand position and use of horizontal and vertical conducting planes has not been described, but was presented as a universally accepted style of indicating gestures.

The interesting aspect about this empirical study is that the style of the conducting patterns, subdivided patterns and managed preparatory gestures are not described. One also can question the rehearsal period which was allowed for this experiment, as a particular rehearsal situation might allow enough time to lay down neural pathways sufficient to render the true testing of the different effects questionable. The conductor was videotaped, and whilst there was no face
shown, it meant that the conductor’s own inhalation, which might play a significant role in the process of indicating a gesture, was not tested. It might also be possible that the conducting gestures generally might not be consistent in terms of the style (change of ictus, change of beating on vertical and horizontal axis, change of pronated hands from 90° to 180°). There could, therefore, be several extraneous variables that entered into this experimental situation which need to be taken into consideration.

Rhonda Fuelberth’s (2001) empirical study, *The effect of conductor gesture on inappropriate vocal tension in individual singers.* (Kansas City, Missouri: University of Kansas City, Missouri) also falls short in the sense that different “standard musical gestures” were not used for the testing situation. Gestures which would most probably never be used in a conducting situation, such as stabbing gestures, were employed. These gestures were tested against a “conducting gesture”, but once again, the details of this so-called “conducting gesture” were not given.

For example, the height of some of the gestures varies from belt level to shoulder level. That itself might effect vocal tension in the singers. There could be several other extraneous variables, such of fear of higher (or lower) notes, as well as other factors which only the candidates themselves were aware of, or maybe completely unaware of. The mere fact that the testing was done on individual singers, and not in a group situation, could also have played a very important part, as many singers do not regard themselves as soloists, but as ensemble performers. At times, when good ensemble singers are exposed to solo singing situations, they will react with tension because of the mere fact that they might feel completely exposed.

As far as Skadsem’s experiment, the style of the gestures could be totally in question. If it is true that verbalization proved the most effective in some of the testing situations, it could also be argued that the singers’ experience in dealing with other instruction methods might have been limited. There could therefore be
several extraneous variables that entered into this experimental situation which need to be taken into consideration, as Skadsem herself pointed out, even after a second instruction for the same tests were given.

In Grave’s study, the actual non-verbal communication method in terms of the actual gestures of the choirmaster is not discussed, assuming once again that non-verbal communication methods are universally understood, while also giving no details of exactly which gestures were used.

In conclusion, then, in all four of the above empirical testing situations, there is no indication or description from any of the tests what the conducting gestures consisted of. The conducting gesture is taken as “standard”, and tested against an array of other, different, methods of instruction. The question here might rather be: what is the more effective way of conveying a gesture? Should the different levels of icti, conducting planes, hand positions, breath of the conductor, and other variables not be taken into consideration? In other words, when one runs an empirical test, surely it should be done for the sake of ascertaining what constitutes successful “standard gestures”, as this has not yet been ascertained by any study.

For this present study, existing published textbooks on choral conducting gestures are viewed as existing theories of conducting gestures. As such, these theories of gesture as presented in the literature study will be examined and compared in different categories. Certain principles should be established which will aid the process of deciding which gestures are more successful than others. In the final chapter the search will continue to find reasons why certain gestures can be indicated as being more predictable than others, more informative of intention than others and consequently, serving the music better during rehearsals and performances than others, as well as instilling a musical trust between conductor and ensemble in the process.
As far as the present study is concerned, areas of overlapping with two writers can be identified: The first area is Hart’s thesis, where a literature overview has identified gestures as one of the topics which showed evolution of thought. Although this present study does not continue with the idea of evolution of thought of gestures, many of the works which Hart has studied in his literature review will also be studied in the present study, although different research questions are asked of the texts.

Secondly, this thesis differs from Koch’s work towards a theory of conducting motion, as this study strives to present a theory of conducting gesture, and therefore specifically concerns itself with the technique of conducting gestures. This study will use concepts such as “ictus”, “upbeat” and “rebound”, (similar to Koch’s concepts of “beat-point”, “to-point-motion” and “from-point-motion”) but not to present a theory of motion, but a theory of gesture. As far as the quoted empirical studies are concerned, it is not the intention of this research to offer an empirical study. What has been looked for from these empirical studies is at least a definition and description of gestures. As demonstrated above, no such definitions of gesture used in any of the empirical studies were presented.
Chapter 3
Research Topics and Questions

3.1 Introduction
It is evident from a cursory investigation that authors differ enormously in their views as to how the four-beat gesture should be indicated. Neuen acknowledges the difference of indication with a mere passing observation that the conducting “styles” might be different, but the actual gestures are in fact the same (Neuen, 2002). Very few, such as McElherhan (1989) and Phillips (1997), have made blatantly critical statements that certain interpretations are simply not acceptable. And yet, despite a few lonely voices insisting that not all gestures are “standard”, the term “gesture” has generally been used as implying the “standard” gesture. This becomes blatantly clear in the reference to three empirical studies where the term “conducting gesture” remained undefined, but is referred to as though everyone generally knows exactly what is meant by the term.

As far as theory building is concerned, the most important general musical functions of the conductor have been highlighted, as well as the specific verbal and non-verbal functions, with reference made to authors who contributed to these aspects. Although the conductor makes use of verbal communication during rehearsals as part of his function as a teacher and inspirer, this aspect can become a hindrance in the actual process of working towards a performance if verbal communication is used instead of communicating effectively with gesture.

In Chapter 1.3, the authors’ perceptions of the functionality of the conductor’s gestures were examined, as well as some explicit and metaphoric definitions of gesture which followed in the literature. The conductor’s function, first and foremost, is to communicate by means of using effective gesture. This means the indication of tempo, articulation and dynamics by means of gesture.
In Chapter 2, the four empirical studies concerning aspects of gestures were discussed. It was concluded in this chapter that empirical research done by the authors under discussion tested gestures in an experimental setting against other means of non-verbal communication. No specific definitions were offered of the term “gestures”, which left the perception that the term is universally understood and used as a standard method of non-verbal communication by everyone in the same manner. These experiments did not give any sensible information about specific aspects with regard to gestures. Koch’s theory of conducting motion fails mainly because of the assumptions that gestures have acceleration, and that the conducting movement stops at a change of direction. There is thus a basic need to clarify aspects of what constitutes the technique of the conductor’s gestures. If gestures can be improved to convey a message to the ensemble, then the musical intentions of the conductor can be conveyed in a more effective and communicative manner.

As far as theory building is concerned, Koch unfortunately borrowed terms from the world of physics in an attempt to explain some aspects surrounding gestures, which are applicable to a body in motion: “acceleration” and “velocity” from physics, but associated his own definitions to these terms out of the context of their original meaning. He assumes that all conductors will use the hand in acceleration towards the ictus (beat-point), which is simply not the case. This aspect is very important, as terms needs to be presented in such a manner that they are used unambiguously, and are devoid of several differently understood meanings. The use of the term “velocity” is not applicable to conducting gestures, as the hand movement is not an entity that moves with speed and direction – the hand remains attached to the human body. The hand’s main function is to indicate tempo. The indication of tempo cannot be measured in terms of speed and direction.

Jorgensen (1992: 91) highlights the importance of clarifying terms, “because words are the vehicles for communicating ideas”. It is vital that the precision of meaning is given “by clarifying the denotation and significance of words used”.

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When this is not done, it becomes impossible to compare ideas and thoughts, and to start the basic process of developing theories.

In order to work towards the development of a theory of conducting gestures, it is an important aim of this thesis to look into what authors mean when they talk about gestures, as specifically highlighted in terms of definitions, but also in terms of general usage.

Secondly, it is important that gestures are studied in relation to functional requirements. Some of the requirements that were mentioned in 1.2 and 1.3 will be important variables in the thesis, i.e. that gestures are visible, shows clarity of intent, be informative with regard to all musical aspects, is predictable, has constant movement, is accompanied by breath by the conductor and is understood by all in the ensemble. These functional requirements will be used in the discussion and evaluation of the proposed gestures, and will be referred to in all the research questions where applicable.

Thirdly, the research questions are also posed in terms of the functional requirements of the gesture, the musical aims of the gesture, and are related to an anatomical awareness where applicable

3.2 Research topics and questions

3.2.1 The first research issue: the physical aspects of gesture.

Four research questions will be asked, of which the first two will relate to an anatomical awareness (research questions 1.1 and 1.2) and the last two to the functional requirements of gestures (research questions 1.3 – 1.4).

Research Question 1.1
What is the recommended posture of the conductor in terms of the positioning of the legs and torso, and how is this description related to an anatomical awareness? This question will be posed in Chapter 4.
Research Question 1.2
What are the recommended use of the arms and hands in relation to an anatomical awareness and the functional requirements of gestures? Does this recommendation of the position of the arms and hands have implications for any spatial reference areas such as the conducting plane and the placement of the ictus? This question will be posed in Chapter 5.

Research Question 1.3
What are the recommended functions of the left hand and right hand in relation to the indication of functional requirements which are necessary for the indication of gesture? This question will be posed in Chapter 6.

Research Question 1.4
What are the recommended uses of the baton in choral conducting, and how is the use of the baton related to the function requirements of the gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 7.

3.2.2 The second research issue: the practical indication of preparatory gestures, the simple time four-beat gesture, slow compound time gestures and fast irregular gestures.
This issue will be addressed through five research questions, which will relate to the functional requirements of gestures.

Research Question 2.1
What are the recommended indications of preparatory beats, and how do these fulfil the functional requirements of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 9.

Research Question 2.2
What is the recommended indication of the simple time four-beat gesture in relation to the preparatory beat, the style of beat, the positioning of the ictus and the motivation for the placement of different aspects of the beat; and how do
these contribute to the function and execution of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 10.

Research question 2.3
What is the recommended indication of the subdivision of simple time gestures in relation to the placement of rebounds of the subdivision; the shape of the gesture, and the placement of the icti in terms of the functional requirements of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 11.

Research Question 2.4
What is the recommended indication of slow compound time gestures in relation to the placement of rebounds of the subdivision; the shape of the gesture, the placement of the icti in terms of the functional requirements of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 12.

Research Question 2.5
What is the recommended indication of fast irregular gestures in relation to the choice of shape of the gesture, the placement of the ictus, and the accommodation of the augmented beat in terms of the functional requirements of the gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 13.

3.2.3 The third research issue: gestures that indicate changes of dynamics, tempo and of articulation.
This issue will be addressed through three research questions, which relate to the functional requirements of gestures.

Research Question 3.1
How are the recommended gestures described to indicate changes in dynamics, and how do these gestures relate to the functional requirements of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 15.

Research Question 3.2
How are the recommended gestures described to indicate change of tempo in terms of the functional requirements of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 16.

Research Question 3.3
How are the recommended gestures described to indicate legato, staccato and marcato articulation in terms of the functional requirements of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 17.

3.2.4 The fourth research issue: gestures indicating cues, fermata and release of fermata.
This issue will be addressed through two research questions, which will be related to the functional requirements of gestures.

Research question 4.1
How is the recommended gesture described to indicate cues, and how do these gestures relate to the functional requirements of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 18.

Research question 4.2
How is the recommended gesture described to indicate fermata and release of fermata, and how do these gestures relate to the functional requirements of gestures? This question will be posed in Chapter 19.

3.2.5 The fifth research issue: working towards a theory of gesture.

Research question 5.1
How can a theory of conducting gestures be developed which will hopefully become both descriptive and normative? This question will be attempted in Part 5.

3.3 The methodology of the literature study
The research presented in this thesis is theoretical, not empirical or historical. Therefore there is no hypothesis stated anywhere. I will use texts about choral conducting as study material, and describe and analyse the written material. I will look for concepts and issues, trying to understand and argue and discuss the information in the books in relation to the research issues I address.

3.3.1 Gestures and tacit knowledge

I will address four methodological issues. The first is related to the question: Is it possible to understand something about conducting gestures by reading texts on the topic?

Patrick Russill, head of Choral Direction and Church Music, Royal Academy of Music, London, (personal communication October 25, 2004) responded to the question as to what theoretical books are prescribed for the conducting course he presents at the Academy in the following way: *We do not prescribe textual pedagogical material here; indeed the English tradition (both in practice and in teaching) is not underpinned in any way by theoretical studies - only by a continuous practicum. What is central is the repertoire, and editions combining critical probity and practicality are essential.*

A similar response came from Paul Spicer, lecturer at the Royal College of Music and Birmingham Conservatoire (personal communication October 31, 2004): *The only published texts I use (and they are not prescribed) are Choral Conducting by Abraham Kaplan and Giving Voice by David Hill, (and others by) Hilary Parfitt and Elizabeth Ash (Kevin Mayhew publication). I also use a book called Unlocking your Voice - Freedom to Sing by Esther Salaman. However, I prefer not to use printed texts and really work my own syllabus out related to the needs of the students.*

It is clear that both Patrick Russill and Paul Spicer are sceptical about the need for the inclusion of books written on choral conducting. But the question that needs to be posed in this regard is: could it be that the exclusion of books on
choral conducting in coursework might be because the emphasis is based on the continuous practicum, which does not seem to be supported by theoretical studies? Or could it simply be that very few useful books (if any?) exist in the body of literature which can be used with confidence by teachers of the subject?

One needs to be sensitive about the important distinction which must be drawn between a written and an aural tradition when looking at the manner in which coursework is presented. When the issues around gestures are personally explained to students, they are in a practical situation where they can directly imitate the gestures from their teachers. When these three-dimensional gestures are drawn on paper as a two-dimensional representation, it becomes obvious that it is impossible for the student to learn all aspects with regard to gesture simply from observing the drawings and reading the “instructions” from the writer.

This difference between explicit and tacit knowledge needs to be further pointed out: sometimes not all that is written in textbooks can claim to represent complete knowledge on the issue, as some knowledge is gained in a tacit fashion. Tacit knowledge is gained through the continuous practicum – in the same way that any instrumental practical playing has a greater practical than theoretical side.

Michael Polanyi, a 20th century scientist and philosopher, argues in *Personal Knowledge*, cited by Schön (1991) that creative acts are charged with strong personal feelings and commitments. These personal feelings can all form part of exploratory acts, what he calls ‘passions’. Emotions can thus be seen as a vital part of the person’s knowledge. He wrote in *The Tacit Dimension* that “we can know more than we can tell”. Many bits of tacit knowledge can be brought together to help form a new model or theory. (Polanyi, 1967:4)

His concept of knowledge is based on three main theses: First, true discovery cannot be accounted for by a set of articulated rules or algorithms. Second, knowledge is public and also to a great extent personal (i.e., it is constructed by
humans and therefore contains emotions, or “passion”.) Third, the knowledge that underlies explicit knowledge is more fundamental; all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge. (Polanyi, 1967:27)

There are thus two levels of knowledge, which are mutually exclusive, but also at the same time complementary: “Knowledge about the object or phenomenon that is in focus is focal knowledge. Knowledge that is used as a tool to handle or improve what is in focus is tacit knowledge”.

Knowing can thus be both tacit and focal. “Skills which are very difficult to articulate and to transfer between individuals thus have a large proportion of tacit knowing, whereas a competent person must be able to focus more of his tacit process-of-knowing in order to articulate and communicate in a social context”.

In the context of conducting gestures, this concept of tacit and focal knowledge can be used to explain why one will never be able to become a choral conductor by simply reading a book on how to execute gestures, in the same way that reading about how to play an instrument will not make one a proficient performer.

In this section on knowledge, Polanyi explains the concept of tradition. Tradition describes how knowledge is transferred in a social context: “An art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice. To learn by example is to submit to authority. By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself.”

When choral conducting patterns are studied from a textbook, it is a two-dimensional drawing which suggests a three-dimensional movement as gesture. This process of conveying knowledge is already a complicated one – the physical aspects surrounding the execution of the gesture need to be kept in mind - the positioning of the vertical and horizontal axis, the pronation of the hand, the breath of the conductor, his facial expressions and physical posture – all these
aspects are part of how gestures are delivered in front of an ensemble. By simply emulating a two-dimensional drawing, a conductor cannot gain sufficient knowledge to deliver the gesture properly.

The issue of tacit knowledge is also dealt with by Donald Schön, in his book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1991: 49), in which he says that “our knowledge is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action”. This tacit “knowing-in-action” is observed when conductors teach gestures to pupils, firstly by conducting (action) and afterwards by reflecting on how the gesture was conveyed in order to bring the music to required life.

The question is whether this reflection-in-action is possible because of the theoretical knowledge, or if it is simply embedded in the practice of doing? “Although we sometimes think before acting, it is also true that in much of the spontaneous behaviour of skilful practice, we reveal a kind of knowing which does not stem from *a priori* intellectual operation”.

It simply could be that part of the tacit knowledge of conducting gestures stems from several reinforced practising sessions. The conductor is not simply born; it takes hours of practice to master the skill of indicating gestures. Green is of the opinion that the process of learning to conduct starts in the brain. When something new is learnt, neurons are connected, forming specific pathways. “When a pathway is reinforced by repetition it becomes very powerful. With several practising sessions, it becomes an automatic action”. (Green 2004:2) Schön echoes this idea of repetition when he says that “you repeat the exact same thing you did before that proved successful”. This makes one realise that what you have done was successful, and it accounts for repeating successful habits.

He indicates earlier in his book that part of the crisis of confidence in the professional world is that a student cannot learn skills of application until he has
learnt applicable knowledge. (Schön, 1991:29) The question of application of theory and technique in a practical situation is that professional practice is a process of problem-solving. (ibid, 40). “In order to solve a problem by the application of existing theory or technique, a practitioner must be able to map those categories onto features of the practice situation”. The notion is that the establishment of the theory gives the practitioner the tools to solve problems in practice.

In terms of the study area of conducting gestures, the question which needs to be answered is whether there is not a wide gap between professional theoretical knowledge and the professional practical application of this knowledge with the demands for real-world practice? If one studies texts on gesture, very few musical examples are offered dealing with music of the 20th century, for example, where the “traditional” functions of the hands cannot be successfully applied in order to solve the problems which the music presents. Composers do not necessarily write music mindful of the practical conducting problems the conductor might experience in the actual indication of gestures to the ensemble.

The question here is whether the theoretical studies which should be underpinning the practical teaching of gestures to conductors, is not totally inadequate to assist with the basic problem-solving issues of practical conducting?

In terms of the learning process, it becomes obvious, then, that numerous factors are at play when a conductor learns from a teacher. The tacit knowledge the pupil gains from working with the master is immeasurable and very complicated.

This present study is based on the writing and drawing of patterns suggesting gestures by authors on the topic of gesture. Despite the fact that not all knowledge of the subject can be communicated in the course of writing a book on the topic, the textbooks exist, and my aim is to describe and analyse them on
their own merit. I will return to the issue of tacit knowledge in the conclusion to Part 5 as part of a theory towards choral conducting gestures.

3.3.2 Theoretical research

It has already been stated that this study is theoretical and that authors’ texts will be analysed in order to form an understanding of the relevant questions.

Part of the approach of theoretical research must be the precise clarification of the meaning of words which are used. By clarifying the meaning of words, one is able to compare ideas because one has defined what is being compared. Jorgensen said “The philosopher’s function is to ensure that the house of ideas is tidy.” (Jorgensen 1992: 91). This process of clarifying the meaning of words has the effect of focusing the meaning of terms. “Understandings become more widely shared, and justifications for positions held are better defended”. In this study, the intention is that terms will be clarified in order to be able to compare theories and to develop a better understanding of the theories of conducting gestures.

Jorgensen warns the researcher against borrowing terms from different fields without clarifying their exact meaning. (A point in case is Koch’s borrowing of the term velocity from physics and applying his own definition to it, as well as his assumption that acceleration towards the ictus point increases, as mentioned under 1.4).

Jorgensen states that the theorist should expose implicit or unclear underlying assumptions by using critical and analytical thinking to reason from effect to cause: “Critical thinking involves the capacity to judge the relative worth of actions and ideas. Analytical thinking entails the ability to take a situation or an idea apart much as a mechanic takes an engine apart,” says Jorgensen (1992: 93). Analytical thinking also aids the identification of different schools of thought about the same ideas. By identifying conflicting ideas, one is able to ascertain principles in order to make better judgements about theories of conducting.
It is the function of the theorist not only to deal with implicit and explicit knowledge, but also to specifically expose the underlying assumptions and in doing so, make explicit what otherwise would have remained as implicit knowledge. This study will consistently ask for explicit motivation from authors in the field under discussion, and will also search for any implicit motivations for theories which authors do not provide explicitly.

This study will make use of analytical thinking and reasoning in order to ascertain the worth of ideas from authors. In terms of different types of theory, this study’s theoretical underpinning is axiological - it will use reasoning to pose which kinds of gesture will eventually be “better” than others.

### 3.3.3 The selection of the texts

Apart from books, which seem to come mostly from the United States of America, other sources such as research articles from journals, and the results from masters and doctoral experimental work, will also be used.

After the analysis of textbooks, and other research sources, the aim is to look for “theories of conducting”.

The following criteria have been used to search for material:

1. Books published in English, either originally in English or translated into English.
2. From a chronological point of view, all sourced books, articles and theses on the topic, irrespective of when they were published, were included.
3. All books sourced from the internet on [http://www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and [http://www.powells.com](http://www.powells.com) using the keywords “gesture”, “choral conducting” and “conducting” were included. The following have also been included: Books, masters’ and doctoral theses which came up after a search on

4. Books available through the library of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, have been considered. The South African library search “Biblioline – RILM Abstracts of Music Literature” was made, searching from 1967 to 1995. (Both dates are determined by Biblioline). Once again the same keywords “gesture”, “choral conducting” and “conducting” were used.

5. The same keywords were used to source material from Inter Library Loan, and should have been available therefore to the library of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

6. All texts which had information on conducting gestures were considered. Books specifically on choral conducting gestures were the focus, but books on orchestral conducting were not excluded, especially where authors indicated that the same principles were applicable. This included information from authors who wrote specifically on baton technique, as most conductors are of the opinion that the same gestures are used, with or without the baton. The range of information differed from books written entirely on conducting gestures to books which included a mere chapter on the subject.

The following criteria were used to define which books were included for the study:

1. Books dealing with conducting gestures, ranging from a mere chapter to books dealing exclusively with gestures. This included books dealing with choral as well as orchestral conducting, and orchestral conducting texts were used if the author indicated that the gestures in orchestral conducting would be practically the same as for choral conducting.

2. Books describing gestures executed with or without a baton.

The following criteria were used to exclude works from the study:
1. Books dealing exclusively with orchestral conducting, with no reference to choral conducting methods.
2. Books printed in a foreign language and not translated into English.
3. Books which did not include graphic descriptions (drawings) of gestures.

The following 22 books were included, and represent literature in a 64 year period, from 1940 until 2004:


Ehmann, Wilhelm (1968) *Choral Directing* Augsburg Publishing House Minneapolis, Minnesota (translated by George D Wiebe)

Ericson, Eric (1976) *Choral conducting* Sveriges Körförbunds förlag, Stockholm


Lamb, Gordon H (1983) Choral Techniques  Wm.C. Brown, Dubuque, Iowa


Neuen, Donald (2002) Choral concepts Schirmer, University of California, Los Angeles


Willetts, Sandra 1993 Upbeat downbeat basic conducting patterns and techniques Abingdon Press Nashville, Tennessee

3.3.4 Analysis of the texts

The method of reviewing the literature was from bottom to top: all the books were read, after which prevalent themes were identified and broad categories were formulated under the following headings:

- The physical appearance of the conductor, which included posture and all related anatomical issues.
- Time-beating gestures, which included simple, common and irregular time patterns, as well as subdivisions.
- Gestures indicating changes in dynamics, tempo and articulation.
- Gestures indicating fermata and release of fermata.
Of the total number of twenty-two books included in the study, the least number of books which contributed to a single category was two and the most number of books which contributed to a single category was nineteen.

Is it possible that Sapir’s “evasive elaborate code that is written nowhere” could have been contained, even in part, in some books about choral conducting gestures, and that it is a question of looking at different work on choral gestures to ascertain what aspects are really useful, and which aspects are in conflict, and why this is so? Or, is it that most of what has been written is in fact not useful, and therefore teachers of conducting should rather revert to their own aural tradition?

After the analysis of texts on the subject, the aim is to look for similar trends between the works of authors, which might assist in pointing towards a theory of gestures in choral conducting. It will be one of the primary aims to clarify the different ideas which authors present in their works. In identifying contradictory ideas, reasons for these contradictions will be sought.

Reference will be made to the descriptive research done by different authors. Critical and analytical thinking will be used to ascertain which gestures will be more useful, accurate and predictable than others. It should be the universality and predictability of certain gestures by some conductors above others, which will make one conductor more musically trustworthy and effective than another.

This study does not aim to give the final description of a theory on gestures, but aims to contribute to the decision-making process about what constitutes effective gestures, what makes gestures more predictable and clear, and therefore, which gestures will ultimately aid the ensemble and the music.

In terms of working towards a theory of gestures in choral conducting, the approach which this study will have is that of a theoretical method: twenty-two authors who contributed to the broader issues of gestures have been identified, and questions have been posed which will be asked of their work. These writings
will be regarded as theories themselves – each author has specific ideas about how gestures should be indicated, and each author comes with his own motivation as to how gestures should be indicated: some explicitly, and others implicitly.

### 3.3.5 Summary

The research presented in this thesis is theoretical. Four methodological issues have been posed. In the first, “Is it possible to understand something about conducting gestures by reading books written on the topic?”, it became clear that the issues of tacit knowledge should be understood clearly, which makes the study of this topic a sensitive one. The second methodological issue, the clarification of language to avoid ambiguity, is part of the approach of theoretical research, which has already been discussed. The third methodological issue is the selection of the texts for analysis, with reasons for the inclusion and exclusion of texts having been given. The fourth methodological issue is the manner in which the texts were studied, and it is stated that the review of the literature was from the bottom to the top: all the books were read, after which prevalent themes were identified. Broad categories were formulated mentioned in 3.3.4.

### 3.4 Overview of the thesis

In Part 2 the physical aspects of gesture will be discussed. The recommended posture of the conductor in terms of the placement of legs and torso will be researched, followed by the arms and hands in relation to an anatomical awareness and the functional requirements of gestures. The functions of the left hand and right hand in relation to the indication of functional requirements which are necessary for the indication of gesture will be dealt with. Issues surrounding the use of the baton will be discussed.

In Part 3 the recommended functions of preparatory gestures, as well as simple time four-beat gesture; the subdivision of simple time four-beat gesture; the slow compound time gestures and the fast irregular gestures in relation to the
preparatory beat, the style of the beat, the positioning of the ictus, and the motivation for the placement of different aspects of the beat will be examined.

In Part 4, the recommended expressive gestures needed to indicate changes in dynamics, change of tempo will be researched. Lastly, the indication of articulation, cues, fermata and release of fermata will be examined.