

[In Search of Coherence: Introducing Marcel Jousse's Anthropology of Mimism](#) by Edgard Sienart

This book explores Jousse's writing and brings across Jousse's ideas that human's are built up of their embodied expressions which he calls gestes. Jousse believes to that as humans we cannot be separated into our mind, body and soul but rather as human's we are a compound of all three and that means we are our embodied movements and that our thoughts and ideas cannot be separated without changing the meanings. He uses the idea that water is H<sub>2</sub>O but when you separate it into the separate components it is no longer water. He argues this is true if we try to separate ourselves into parts and therefore the written word is no longer expressing ourselves but has changed the nature of the knowledge.

Jousse is an anthropologist and sees his ideas as the anthropology of geste:

'The science of the anthropos "What I bring here is a new science: the anthropology of geste." EA 05/01/41 "The anthropology of life, an awareness of the anthropology of thought elaborated by the whole body . . ." EA 12/03/51'

[Read more at location 360](#)

Jousse saw his ideas as a new methodology that was a journey for new knowledge:

'A practising methodologist is a pioneer. His scientific ruggedness stems from the newness of his discoveries and of the trails he clears to reach the eternal Truths.' HE 10/11/43 [Read more at location 409](#)

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Jousse's view was the written word which is the current method of presenting research and knowledge that has dominated the academy for years means embodied knowledge has been denied. Jousse remedy for this was:

'To counter this mind-set, I decided to change the method. Instead of restricting my field of observation to the dead letters of texts, I opt for a methodology that operates first and above all via the awareness of a living tool: the human geste. Anthropos being in essence nothing more than a complexus of gestes, the most apt and best performing tool available to analyse man is his own performance of his own gestes. This is no doubt the tool to trump all other tools, and, moreover, this tool develops instinctively within each one of us, and becomes increasingly polished as our awareness grows.' AGR 27.' [Read more at location 415](#)

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Jousse's ideas were a critique of the abstract concepts that science had been providing through the written words of the academy. Instead he offered an alternative of observation which looks for the what exists rather than inventing explanations that do not exist in the real world.

"Scientific is that what is observable, recordable, and analyzable." Labo 19/12/34 "As you know, I look here at the objective side only. I have before me the real, a real that I need to observe, to understand, to express. You do realize how complex the subject of my research is, how new it is, sensitive and fluid. What I do here before you is this one, single thing only: to try to observe, to try to understand, to try to explain as clearly as possible. And that, I believe, is science." EA 03/04/33 "I am an

anthropologist who points out a methodology: the observation of the real.” S 11/03/42  
“It is so much easier to invent rather than to observe.” EA 28/11/32 “Discovery I like  
to define as the act of seeing that what exists. Invention I define as the art of  
constructing that what does not exist. I press this point because we need to smash  
relentlessly the old metaphysics of ethereal and intangible constructs that can be  
neither observed nor recorded.” S 14/12/33 [Read more at location 420](#)

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Jousse felt his research was so new that he was unable to describe it with words that currently exist. He unashamedly created many new terms to describe his work feeling that he needed a whole new vocabulary. This is often a concern for Living Theory that the insights found from a person’s own lived experiences are difficult to capture with current language and that either words that already exist need to be given a definition from the Living Theorist or a new word is needed to name the person’s living-theory.

‘No one should be surprised when we, anthropologists, create and use new terms. The fact is that all the current words are socially contaminated. It is therefore necessary for us to recapture each of these words and to carry out a preliminary disinfection, in some way like that of Pasteur. Before we begin, we have to disinfect the vocabulary.’ GB 172’ [Read more at location 509](#)

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“New facts require new terms. I had to create a sufficiently precise terminology for these facts to be labelled without any risk of confusion.” [Read more at location 518](#)

Jousse belief was that humans are mimists. By this he means we can use our bodies to represent the whole universe of as he describes it:

“We have within us the entire universe.” EAB 03/03/48 [Read more at location 530](#)

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Jousse sees that due to our nature of being in continual movement we are part of a universal energy:

‘Our universe is energy, energy in movement, a continuous movement of energy in interaction, formulated as the triphase law of universal interaction: an acting one—acting on—an acted upon. Human beings thus find themselves in an all-encompassing universal energy that manifests itself in three spheres, each regulated by their own law: a physical sphere of ordered matter, indefinitely in physical action-reaction and governed by the law of universal attraction; a biological sphere of life, made of actions and reflex reactions, governed by the law of instinct; and an anthropological sphere of intelligent life, or consciousness, governed by the law of mimism.’ [Read more at location 550](#)

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Jousse was unapologetic that he did not understand the energy he was describing not seeing this as a barrier to discussing it or acknowledging it:

‘I admit that whenever I talk to you about energy, it is without knowing what it is, but there is nothing unusual about this; we do, after all, for example, glibly about electricity without knowing what it is, which does not prevent us from making use it. This energy we say is everywhere, we do not know what it is.’ Labo 08/12/37’  
[Read more at location 561](#)

Jousse believed that everything is interconnected not only us as a compound of body, mind and soul but that everything in the universe is interconnected as well:

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“In the universe, nothing is cut up, everything interacts.” EA 14/03/38

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Jousse’s key idea is that we have an ability to represent, react and interact with the universe in our movements, he calls this mimism. He sees mimism being on both an instinctual level and part of our ability to respond to the universe in a way that we are able to develop our intelligence. He sees our embodied expressions not only as part of our communication but also as part of our learning:

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Mimism is the human’s unique capacity to turn the cosmological unconscious action, or play, into anthropological conscious reaction, or replay. Where in the biological sphere there is reflex-action—instinct, in the anthropological sphere there is reflective-reaction—intelligence. Man’s mimismic system allows him not only to apprehend, but also to comprehend. Man is the intelligizing agent of the cosmos, obeying the law of mimism, formulated two thousand five hundred years ago by Aristotle (Poetics IV.2): “Of all animals, Man is the greatest mimer, and it is through mimism that he acquires all his knowledge.” EA 19/12/32 [Read more at location 577](#)

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Jousse sees action as fundamental – he sees movement as a key part of action and it is through the movement of all things in the cosmos that we are all interconnected and flowing together:

Pangestualism is seeing that all is in movement and explaining all movement as a partaking in the triphase interactional universe consisting of a ceaseless interconnecting of an acting one—acting on—an acted upon. Pangestualism gives cosmic action meaning by finding its cause. It is a conscienciation, a hominization of the unconscious actions of the universe. As

second one senses an ebbing of all things: leaves fall one by one like the tic-tac of a clock, dead branches hit the dead leaves with a snapping sound, pieces of bark come loose and drop with a dull thud. One gets the sensation of the pulsation of the passing of things. Among the Greek philosophers, one in particular remained famous for his perhaps unique sense of this flowing of things—Heraclites: ‘All flows’.” S 06/02/36

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Jousse thinks that our ability to replay our experiences using our embodied expressions and our language is how consciousness is brought about and by doing this we are bringing energy to the cosmos. He sees this ability as reflective and reflexive, allowing us develop our actions through experience:

Mimism is the human-specific capacity of bringing consciousness in an unconscious cosmos. The continuous cosmic interactional action—the cosmic explosion of energy—becomes a human explosion of energy—the continuous human propositional geste. Having re-made the universe in himself and so hominized the universe, Man

can, at will, ex-press and replay a real that now belongs to him.

[Read more at location 812](#)

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Conscious of the unconscious flow, he is able to apprehend, comprehend and so to conduct the real that flows in him. [Read more at location 816](#)

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In the first stage, the universe acts on Man and cosmic energy explodes in him, as part of the ceaseless universal interaction formulated as an-acting-one—acting-on—an-acted-upon. [Read more at location 857](#)

Further quotes:

“True knowledge is to be the thing and to see the thing, to be yourself and to see yourself.

[Read more at location 1114](#)

Science can only progress when moving from the lesser known to the better known—we have long since ceased to dream of knowing anything fully. Present-day science is no more than a closer approximation of a real that will remain forever unknown.”

[Read more at location 1263](#)

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“Methodology is about developing an investigation of the real in itself, and about adapting this investigation to a particular ethnic milieu. Such a milieu is always infinitely complex and it is not enough for the investigation to be right; what is necessary is for us to have before us people who resonate with the method because they are aware of it, understand it, and are therefore able to apply it appropriately.” HE 05/05/36 “If you do not place yourself inside the mechanism of a specific system that is considered to be explicative, you are bound to say: ‘But what is all this?’ EA [Read more at location 1336](#)

13/03/39 How to judge a system? If we define system as a unified interacting whole—an interactional cosmos—then coherence should be the norm against which to measure any explanatory system’s reliability and validity. For such an assessment to be fair and correct, the system needs to be taken as is, in its wholeness and on its own terms.

[Read more at location 1341](#)

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“The style is the man. It is the whole man giving himself wholly to the real, the man as a whole receiving and replaying the real. It is that, style.” HE 12/02/41

[Read more at location 1505](#)

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Man is this uninterrupted series of mimemes taken from the real that flows in him:

[Read more at location 1512](#)

To master his cosmos, Man sets himself at its center and divides continuous time in time measured, with past and future parallel to the centre; he divides space in a treble bilateralism: left-right/up-down/front-back; he creates spatiotemporal rhythmic and bilateral formulas that mould his propositions for ease of reception, memorization and transmission. With repetition, patterns or formulas take shape which make easier further storage and classification of mimemes, and hence their retrieval. Thus comes into being a style, a mode of expression obeying basic universal laws of human expression: mimism, rhythmism, bilateralism and formulism. [Read more at location 1619](#)

Rhythm is a mechanism of distribution of the flow of continuous time into measured time.

[Read more at location 1628](#)

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Rhythm provides both the flux that energises reception and integration, and the logic, the order, with which man stores and conserves the mimemes [Read more at location 1630](#)

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To master his universe, man orders it in measured time and measured space. This spatiotemporal ordering gives form to the indiscriminate messages he receives from the cosmos. By miming the message, or massaging it into a form according to his own nature and structure, he makes it his own and makes it possible to conserve, to remember and to recite: the formula is a facilitating tool for conservation, memorization and recitation.

[Read more at location 1673](#)

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Originally, the anthropos-cosmos rapport is that of a universe impressing the human being—the human compound—and the human expressing the universe, either miming with his whole body—corporage, miming with the hands—manualage, miming with the phonatory organs—language—or by projecting his expression on a fixed exterior support—any form of -graphy. Whatever the means, from mimeme to grapheme, anthropological expression remains organically linked to cosmic impression; [Read more at location 1696](#)

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