



Splendid Encounters 8

The Gestures of Diplomacy: Gifts, Ceremony, Body Language (1400-1750)

Toulouse, France

30th May - 1st June 2019

Confirmed Keynote speaker

Ellen R. Welch (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
author of *A Theatre of Diplomacy* (Penn, 2017)

In *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, Mirella Marini explains that: 'The aristocratic diplomats were not necessarily there to draft the papers. The professionals handled the legal work, but the courtiers were there to use a specific 'court language''. (99) This 'specific court language' is not only verbal, but physical and material. The 2019 edition of *The Splendid Encounters* will question the gestures of diplomacy both in their literal and symbolic forms. It will consider the evolution of the production and the reception of gestures in diplomacy from the late middle-ages to the post-Westphalian world as a part of a reassessment of the transition from old to new diplomacy. This colloquium will gather researchers in history, literature, art history, political science to reflect on the relationship between diplomacy and the body.

During the medieval era, the ambassador was considered as a human letter: he was offered as an object for the foreign master to read, to observe and to manipulate in space as well as to listen to. The ambassador as a gift and as a language is an aspect of the diplomatic activity which, albeit its self-evidence, has been left unexplored. This conference would like to bridge this gap between seminal works produced on the material economy of diplomacy such as Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani's *Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture* and the actual semiotic language implied by moving bodies in a diplomatic context. Based on Ellen R. Welch's compelling study of the use of entertainment and theatre in early modern French diplomacy in *A Theatre of Diplomacy* (2017), the organisers would like to explore the dramatic nature of diplomacy as in the physical and material aspects of the trade.

We would like to focus on the gestures of the ambassadors and their masters, but also on how they were perceived and understood by the diplomatic and non-diplomatic circles (arts, theatre, proto-journalism, travellers etc). We will thus focus on the tenets of the training of an ambassador both in theoretical treaties and in practice. The expectations regarding the material and the physical language of diplomacy will be confronted with practical examples unveiling the importance and the dangers of the diplomatic body and material language.

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Our debates will include the close observation and interpretation of ceremony, of its language and its instruments. They will also ponder on the very body of the ambassador and its significance. Besides, the scope shall not be limited to the way ambassadors use their bodies, but how they are made to use them in official and non-official spaces. This will lead us also to consider the physical organisation of diplomatic retinues and households, and their possible influence on the formation of the diplomatic corps.

The conference will also emphasise how the importance of the body and material language in diplomacy is both reflected and influenced or modified by the artistic representation of diplomacy. However, theatre, music, dance and paintings will not be limited to their purely representational function and shall be considered as instruments of experimentation as well as forms of diplomatic actions. We will examine the theatricality of the ambassador's action by focusing on the ambassador's positioning at court and in portraits, and on significant body parts such as the hands. Creating a physical language of diplomacy also relies on the transmission of objects, and the conference will indeed consider the language of gift-giving, its assets and dangers. It will be an opportunity to reassess the concept of diplomatic incidents in old and new diplomacy.

Proposals for individual papers or panels could deal with (but are not limited to):

- ◆ Diplomacy and the Body: the ambassador's body (hands, poise, costumes etc), court appearances, organising and representing the diplomatic corps (administration, retinue, households ...)
- ◆ The Theatrical Nature of Diplomacy: Training ambassadors inside and outside the diplomatic world
- ◆ Reading Gestures: Observing and Decoding Ceremonies (letters, diplomatic and non-diplomatic accounts, artistic reception)
- ◆ European perspectives: theories and appraisals of diplomatic ceremonies (the political use of courtly sociability and ceremony), the choreography of diplomatic visits: movements and objects
- ◆ Non-European Relations and the Importance of Body Language
- ◆ Material Diplomacy: Gift-Giving and Gift-Receiving in Europe and Beyond.
- ◆ Storing Gifts: from Display to Dissimulation
- ◆ Diplomatic Incidents and Accidents: misreading / misusing the signs
- ◆ Diplomatic Networking: the material and physical aspects.
- ◆ Religious diplomacy: the influence of liturgy on the performance of diplomacy, the use of pilgrims and pilgrimage, the language of the pilgrimage, the diplomacy of relics and sacred objects
- ◆ Marriages as gestures: proxy-marriages and their gestures, the choreography of marriage diplomacy

Proposals (300-500 words) should be sent to se8.toulouse@gmail.com by **30th November, 2018**. Confirmation of acceptance by 15th December, 2018

Enquiries: please contact Nathalie Rivere de Carles (nrivere@univ-tlse2.fr) or premoderndiplomats@gmail.com

Organising Institutions:

Premodern Diplomats Network (Bath Spa University & Institute of History of Polish Academy of Sciences)

DiplomaticA (Research Programme on Early Modern Diplomacy, Literature & the Arts, CAS EA 201, University Toulouse Jean Jaurès)