

## The Articulate Hand

**Andrew Dawson**, director, performer, Feldenkrais practitioner and hand model, talks about his Wellcome Collection event, 'The Articulate Hand'.

**VO:** The crew of Apollo 11 are now leaving the confines of Earth's gravity. They are travelling faster than any man has ever travelled, at over 1000 miles per hour.

**AD:** My name's Andrew Dawson and this evening I'm presenting as part of the 'apparatus' series, a talk and presentation called 'The Articulate Hand', which is really focusing on what it is to have a hand and how that defines us as human, and also how I use it in my artistic practice, which is mainly in the theatre.

**VO:** The atmosphere decreases their speed but the leading edge of the command module still reaches temperatures of 5000°. Down they fall, down, down through the atmosphere until finally Columbia's chutes open.

**AD:** Part of the performance tonight will be talking a little bit about the evolution of the hand but also illustrating how I use my hands in theatre and one of the pieces I present is a short section from a show where I create the entire Apollo 11 moon landing with my hands on a table. So you have a lunar module and rockets and wave particles and the whole thing, and it's fascinating to take such a big subject – it's 40 years ago this year that they landed on the moon – and do it in such a miniature way and really how even just through the hands we can convey such scale and such a big story.

**VO:** A quarter of a million miles away lies Earth. Here there are vast blue oceans teeming with life, both small and large.

**AD:** Originally I was told by my drama teacher that I was a really bad actor and I thought 'oh, but I want to work in theatre', so I got interested in dance and dance led me to be interested in sort of more physical theatre and the fact that you could tell stories with your body. But I got fascinated by the hands and I realised how I could do certain things with my hands and create illusion and tell stories with my hands, and that's led me to work in theatre creating my own work, touring around the planet and also to be a choreographer on an opera at the Met last year and also to work as a hand model occasionally in commercials and photography and things like that. So a whole eclectic thing but all coming round back to the hand.

If you think about your hand, and we're kind of familiar with the idea of the opposable thumb, but if we go back in evolutionary terms of course this hand on the end of this limb was used for hanging out of a tree and then it became something that you would walk on with the other two limbs and then little by little maybe we became bipedal and then these hands were free of the ground and could be a little softer, the fingers can be a little longer, the palm gets a little shorter so we end up gaining this enormous amount of dexterity that is unique to us and without that dexterity we wouldn't have any of this around us, you wouldn't be able to do up your shirt buttons in the morning, you wouldn't be able to travel on the Tube, you wouldn't be able to build a bridge or work on the internet or create magic or draw or play the piano or play a musical instrument. I can't play a musical instrument but that's not because of my hands, that's because of me.

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So it fascinates me that all the way – so if you go right back, right back – that still we talk with our hands and that with my wife the most magical thing we can ever do is simply hold hands, you know, still after 20 years of marriage it's a good thing. But so even the most delicate thing, just a gentle stroke of a cheek, yet the hand can also be a fist. So in a way what defines us as human – one could say that it's consciousness or individuality – but maybe somewhere in there it's actually because we have hands, so in way that is what 'The Articulate Hand' is about.

[End of transcript]

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