

DESMOND MORRIS

# MANWATCHING

A Field Guide to Human Behavior

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# GESTURES

A gesture is any action that sends a visual signal to an onlooker. To become a gesture, an act has to be seen by someone else and has to communicate some piece of information to them. It can do this either because the gesturer deliberately sets out to send a signal—as when he waves his hand—or it can do it only incidentally—as when he sneezes. The hand-wave is a Primary Gesture, because it has no other existence or function. It is a piece of communication from start to finish. The sneeze, by contrast, is a secondary, or Incidental Gesture. Its primary function is mechanical and is concerned with the sneezer's personal breathing problem. In its secondary role, however, it cannot help but transmit a message to his companions, warning them that he may have caught a cold.

Most people tend to limit their use of the term 'gesture' to the primary form—the hand-wave type—but this misses an important point. What matters with gesturing is not what signals we think we are sending out, but what signals are being received. The observers of our acts will make no distinction between our intentional Primary Gestures and our unintentional, incidental ones. In some ways, our Incidental Gestures are the more illuminating of the two, if only for the very fact that we do not think of them as gestures, and therefore do not censor and manipulate them so strictly. This is why it is preferable to use the term 'gesture' in its wider meaning as an 'observed action'.

A convenient way to distinguish between Incidental and Primary Gestures is to ask the question: Would I do it if I were completely alone? If the answer is No, then it is a Primary Gesture. We do not wave, wink, or point when we are by ourselves; not, that is, unless we have reached the unusual condition of talking animatedly to ourselves.

## INCIDENTAL GESTURES

### **Mechanical actions with secondary messages**

Many of our actions are basically non-social, having to do with problems of personal body care, body comfort and body transportation; we clean and groom ourselves with a variety of scratchings, rubbings and wipings; we cough, yawn and stretch our limbs; we eat and drink; we prop ourselves up in restful postures, folding our arms and crossing our legs; we sit, stand, squat and recline, in a whole range of different positions; we crawl, walk and run in varying gaits and styles. But although we do these things for our own benefit, we are not always unaccompanied when we do them. Our companions learn a great deal about us from these 'personal' actions—not merely that we are scratching because we itch or that we are running because we are late, but also, from the way we do them, what kind of personalities we possess and what mood we are in at the time.

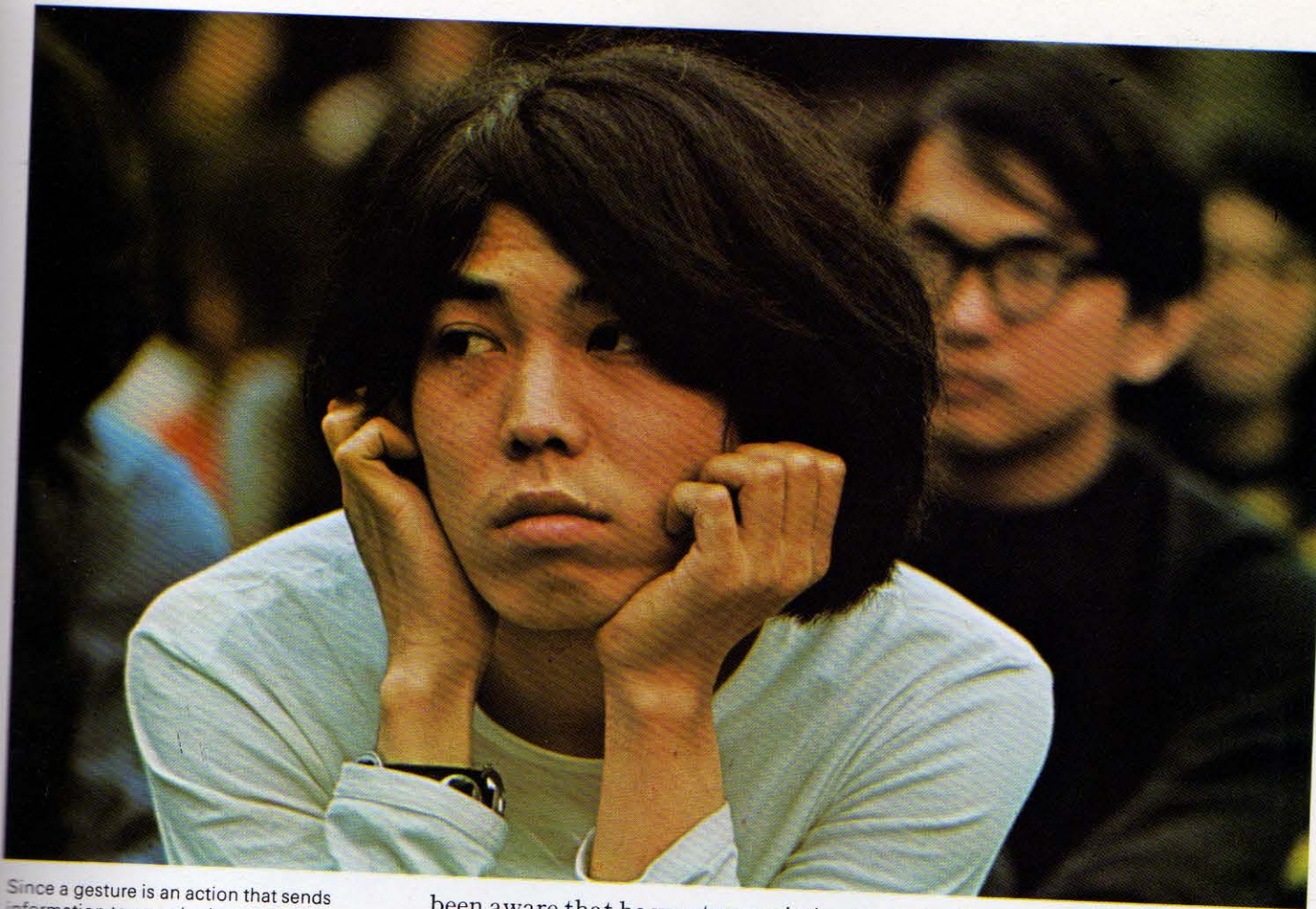
Sometimes the mood-signal transmitted unwittingly in this way is one that we would rather conceal, if we stopped to think about it. Occasionally we do become self-consciously aware of the 'mood broadcasts' and 'personality displays' we are making and we may then try to check ourselves. But often we do not, and the message goes out loud and clear.

For instance, if a student props his head on his hands while listening to a boring lecture, his head-on-hands action operates both mechanically and gesturally. As a mechanical act, it is simply a case of supporting a tired head—a physical act that concerns no one but the student himself. At the same time, though, it cannot help operating as a gestural act, beaming out a visual signal to his companions, and perhaps to the lecturer himself, telling them that he is bored.

In such a case his gesture was not deliberate and he may not even have







Since a gesture is an action that sends information to an onlooker, even a sneeze (left) can act as a gesture: it tells us about the condition of the sneezer, although that is not its primary function. It is an Incidental Gesture and contrasts with a Primary Gesture such as a wave or a beckon, where signalling is the only function. Supporting a tired head (above) is a simple, mechanical act, but since an interested audience is usually alert, slumped bodies confronting a speaker cannot help sending signals of boredom. As with sneezing, the head-propped posture therefore acts as an Incidental Gesture.

been aware that he was transmitting it. If challenged, he would claim that he was not bored at all, but merely tired. If he were honest—or impolite—he would have to admit that excited attention easily banishes tiredness, and that a really fascinating speaker need never fear to see a slumped, head-propped figure like his in the audience.

In the schoolroom, the teacher who barks at his pupils to 'sit up straight' is demanding, by right, the attention-posture that he should have gained by generating interest in his lesson. It says a great deal for the power of gesture-signals that he feels more 'attended-to' when he sees his pupils sitting up straight, even though he is consciously well aware of the fact that they have just been forcibly un-slumped, rather than genuinely excited by his teaching.

Many of our Incidental Gestures provide mood information of a kind that neither we *nor our companions* become consciously alerted to. It is as if there is an underground communication system operating just below the surface of our social encounters. We perform an act and it is observed. Its meaning is read, but not out loud. We 'feel' the mood, rather than analyse it. Occasionally an action of this type becomes so characteristic of a particular situation that we do eventually identify it—as when we say of a difficult problem: 'That will make him scratch his head', indicating that we do understand the link that exists between puzzlement and the Incidental Gesture of head-scratching. But frequently this type of link operates below the conscious level, or is missed altogether.

Where the links are clearer, we can, of course, manipulate the situation and use our Incidental Gestures in a contrived way. If a student listening to a lecture is not tired, but wishes to insult the speaker, he can deliberately adopt a bored, slumped posture, knowing that its message will get across. This is a Stylized Incidental Gesture—a mechanical action that is being artificially employed as a pure signal. Many of the common 'courtesies' also fall into this category—as when we greedily eat up a plate of food that we do not want and





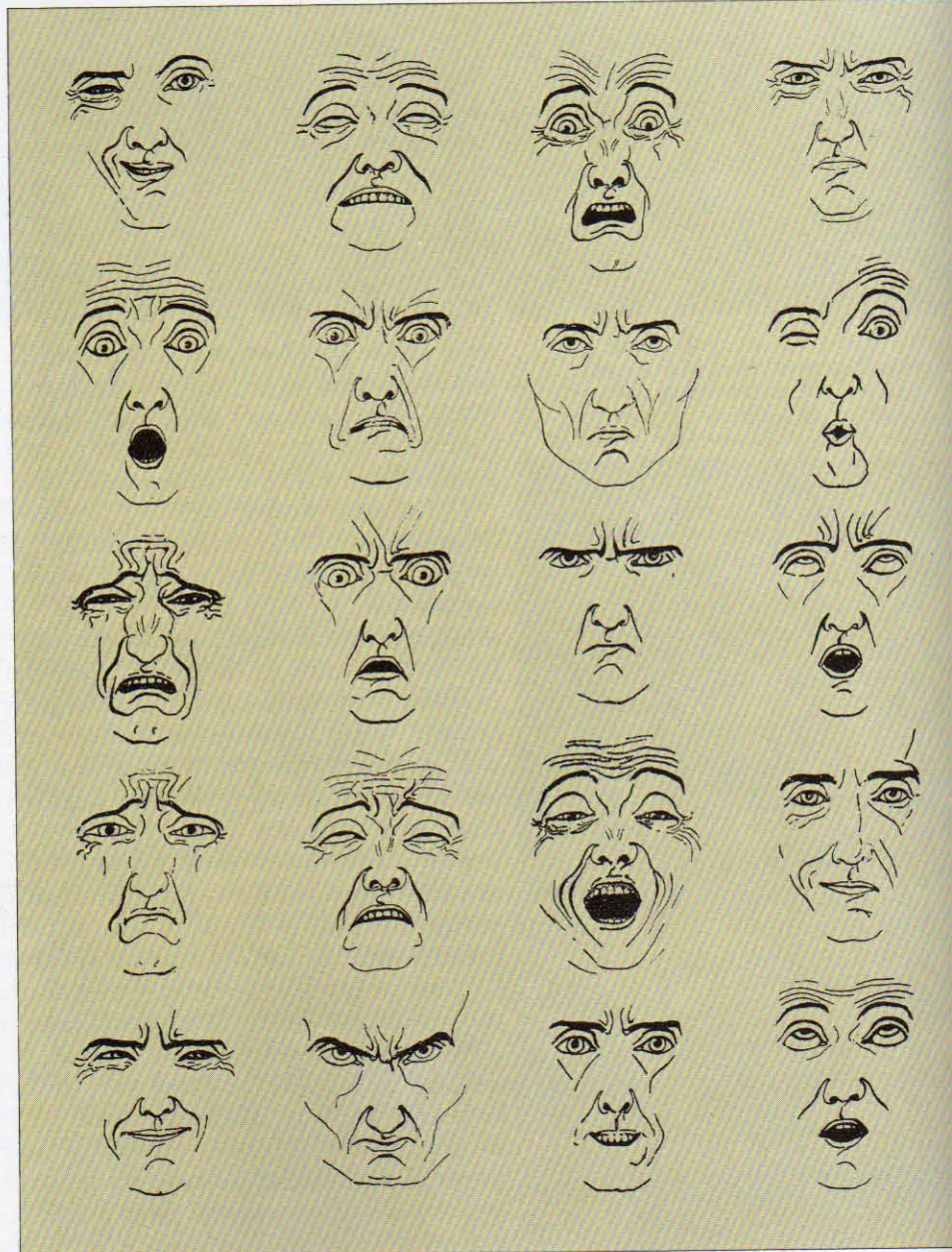
which we do not like, merely to transmit a suitably grateful signal to our hosts. Controlling our Incidental Gestures in this way is one of the processes that every child must learn as it grows up and learns to adapt to the rules of conduct of the society in which it lives.

## EXPRESSIVE GESTURES

### Biological gestures of the kind we share with other animals

Primary Gestures fall into six main categories. Five of these are unique to man, and depend on his complex, highly evolved brain. The exception is the category I called Expressive Gestures. These are gestures of the type which all men, everywhere, share with one another, and which other animals also perform. They include the important signals of Facial Expression, so crucial to daily human interaction.

All primates are facially expressive and among the higher species the facial muscles become increasingly elaborate, making possible the performance of a whole range of subtly varying facial signals. In man this trend reaches its peak, and it is true to say that the bulk of non-verbal signalling is transmitted by the human face.







A shouting man, a smiling woman and a grimacing child. The human face has the most complex and highly developed set of facial muscles in the entire animal world. Some of our animal relatives are capable of a fair range of expressions, but none can match the subtlety or variety of human facial expressions and the moods they transmit. The array of Expressive Gestures (left) is from a book on the art of pantomime by Charles Aubert; and the drawing of the muscles of the face (far left) is from a study by Ernst Huber of the evolution of the face.

The human hands are also important, having been freed from their ancient locomotion duties, and are capable, with their Manual Gesticulations, of transmitting many small mood changes by shifts in their postures and movements, especially during conversational encounters. I am defining the word 'gesticulation', as distinct from 'gesture', as a manual action performed unconsciously during social interactions, when the gesticulator is emphasizing a verbal point he is making.

These natural gestures are usually spontaneous and very much taken for granted. Yes, we say, he made a funny face. But which way did his eyebrows move? We cannot recall. Yes, we say, he was waving his arms about as he spoke. But what shape did his fingers make? We cannot remember. Yet we were not inattentive. We saw it all and our brains registered what we saw. We simply did not need to analyse the actions, any more than we had to spell out the words we heard, in order to understand them. In this respect they are similar to the Incidental Gestures of the previous category, but they differ, because here there is no mechanical function—only signalling. This is the world of smiles and sneers, shrugs and pouts, laughs and wincings, blushes and blanches, waves and beckons, nods and glares, frowns and snarls. These are the gestures that nearly everyone performs nearly everywhere in the world. They may differ in detail and in context from place to place, but basically they are actions we all share. We all have complex facial muscles whose sole job it is to make expressions, and we all stand on two feet rather than four, freeing our hands and letting them dance in the air evocatively as we explain, argue and joke our way through our social encounters. We may have lost our twitching tails and our bristling fur, but we more than make up for it with our marvellously mobile faces and our twisting, spreading, fluttering hands.

In origin, our Expressive Gestures are closely related to our Incidental Gestures, because their roots also lie in primarily non-communicative actions. The clenched fist of the gesticulator owes its origin to an intention movement of hitting an opponent, just as the frown on the face of a worried man can be traced back to an ancient eye-protection movement of an animal anticipating physical attack. But the difference is that in these cases the link between the primary physical action and its ultimate descendant, the Expressive Gesture, has been broken. Smiles, pouts, wincings, gapes, smirks, and the rest, are now, for all practical purposes, pure gestures and exclusively communicative in function.

Despite their worldwide distribution, Expressive Gestures are nevertheless subject to considerable cultural influences. Even though we all have an evolved set of smiling muscles, we do not all smile in precisely the same way,





to the same extent, or on the same occasions. For example, all children may start out as easy-smilers and easy-laughers, but a local tradition may insist that, as the youngsters mature, they must hide their feelings, and their adult laughter may become severely muted as a result. These local Display Rules, varying from place to place, often give the false impression that Expressive Gestures are local inventions rather than modified, but universal, behaviour patterns.

## **MIMIC GESTURES**

### **Gestures which transmit signals by imitation**

Mimic Gestures are those in which the performer attempts to imitate, as accurately as possible, a person, an object or an action. Here we leave our animal heritage behind and enter an exclusively human sphere. The essential quality of a Mimic Gesture is that it attempts to copy the thing it is trying to portray. No stylized conventions are applied. A successful Mimic Gesture is therefore understandable to someone who has never seen it performed before. No prior knowledge should be required and there need be no set tradition concerning the way in which a particular item is represented. There are four kinds of Mimic Gesture:

First, there is Social Mimicry, or 'putting on a good face'. We have all done this. We have all smiled at a party when really we feel sad, and perhaps looked sadder at a funeral than we feel, simply because it is expected of us. We lie with simulated gestures to please others. This should not be confused with what psychologists call 'role-playing'. When indulging in Social Mimicry we deceive only others, but when role-playing we deceive ourselves as well.

Second, there is Theatrical Mimicry—the world of actors and actresses, who simulate everything for our amusement. Essentially it embraces two distinct techniques. One is the calculated attempt to imitate specifically observed actions. The actor who is to play a general, say, will spend long hours watching films of military scenes in which he can analyse every tiny movement and then consciously copy them and incorporate them into his



Mimic Gestures can usually be understood by strangers or foreigners, since they try to copy or mime real objects or actions. Eating, drinking, smoking and firing a gun (shown) are easy enough signals to interpret without prior knowledge of local gesture customs. And most observers would guess correctly that the small boy (left) is doing his best to imitate the flight of an aeroplane.

final portrayal. The other technique is to concentrate instead on the imagined mood of the character to be portrayed, to attempt to take on that mood, and to rely upon it to produce, unconsciously, the necessary style of body actions.

In reality, all actors use a combination of both these techniques, although in explaining their craft they may stress one or other of the two methods. In the past, acting performances were usually highly stylized, but today, except in pantomime, opera and farce, extraordinary degrees of realism are reached and the formal, obtrusive audience has become instead a shadowy group of eavesdroppers. Gone are the actor's asides, gone are the audience participations. We must all believe that it is really happening. In other words, Theatrical Mimicry has at last become as realistic as day-to-day Social Mimicry. In this respect, these first two types of mimic activity contrast sharply with the third, which can be called Partial Mimicry.

In Partial Mimicry the performer attempts to imitate something which he is not and never can be, such as a bird, or raindrops. Usually only the hands are involved, but these make the most realistic approach to the subject they can manage. If a bird, they flap their 'wings' as best they can; if raindrops, they describe a sprinkling descent as graphically as possible. Widely used mimic gestures of this kind are those which convert the hand into a 'gun', an animal of some sort, or the foot of an animal; or those which use the movements of the hand to indicate the outline shape of an object of some kind.

The fourth kind of Mimic Gesture can best be called Vacuum Mimicry, because the action takes place in the absence of the object to which it is related. If I am hungry, for example, I can go through the motions of putting imaginary food into my mouth. If I am thirsty, I can raise my hand as if holding an invisible glass, and gulp invisible liquid from it.

The important feature of Partial Mimicry and Vacuum Mimicry is that, like Social and Theatrical Mimicry, they strive for reality. Even though they are doomed to failure, they make an attempt. This means that they can be understood internationally. In this respect they contrast strongly with the next two types of gesture, which show marked cultural restrictions.

## SCHEMATIC GESTURES

### Imitations that become abbreviated or abridged

Schematic Gestures are abbreviated or abridged versions of Mimic Gestures. They attempt to portray something by taking just one of its prominent features and then performing that alone. There is no longer any attempt at realism.

Schematic Gestures usually arise as a sort of gestural shorthand because of the need to perform an imitation quickly and on many occasions. Just as, in ordinary speech, we reduce the word 'cannot' to 'can't', so an elaborate miming of a charging bull becomes reduced simply to a pair of horns jabbed in the air as a pair of fingers.

When one element of a mime is selected and retained in this way, and the other elements are reduced or omitted, the gesture may still be easy to understand, when seen for the first time, but the stylization may go so far that it becomes meaningless to those not 'in the know'. The Schematic Gesture then becomes a local tradition with a limited geographical range. If the original mime was complex and involved several distinctive features, different localities may select different key features for their abridged versions. Once these different forms of shorthand have become fully established in each region, then the people who use them will become less and less likely to recognize the foreign forms. The local gesture becomes 'the' gesture, and there quickly develops, in gesture communication, a situation similar to that found in linguistics. Just as each region has its own verbal language, so it also has its own set of Schematic Gestures.







Because Schematic Gestures select one special feature of the thing to be portrayed and present this in a stylized way, they are not always clear to strangers who are ignorant of local gestural conventions. Some objects, however, have one feature so obvious that it is nearly always chosen. Thus cattle are represented schematically as a pair of horns in cultures as widely separated as those of the Australian Aborigine and Hindu dancer (above) and the North American Indian (opposite).

To give an example: the American Indian sign for a horse consists of a gesture in which two fingers of one hand 'sit astride' the fingers of the other hand. A Cistercian monk would instead signal 'horse' by lowering his head slightly and pulling at an imaginary tuft of hair on his forehead. An Englishman would probably crouch down like a jockey and pull at imaginary reins. The Englishman's version, being closer to a Vacuum Mimic Gesture, might be understood by the other two, but their gestures, being highly schematic, might well prove incomprehensible to anyone outside their groups.

Some objects, however, have one special feature that is so strongly characteristic of them that, even with Schematic Gestures, there is little doubt about what is being portrayed. The bull, mentioned above, is a good example of this. Cattle are nearly always indicated by their horns alone, and the two horns are always represented by two digits. In fact, if an American Indian, a Hindu dancer, and an Australian Aborigine met, they would all understand one another's cattle signs, and we would understand all three of them. This does not mean that the signs are all identical. The American Indian's cattle sign would represent the bison, and the horns of bison do not curve forward like those of domestic cattle, but inward, towards each other. The American Indian's sign reflects this, his hands being held to his temples and his forefingers being pointed inward. The Australian Aborigine instead points his forefingers forward. The Hindu dancer also points forward, but rather than using two forefingers up at the temples, employs the forefinger and little finger of one hand, held at waist height. So each culture has its own variant, but the fact that horns are such an obvious distinguishing feature of cattle means that, despite local variations, the bovine Schematic Gesture is reasonably understandable in most cultures.

## SYMBOLIC GESTURES

### Gestures which represent moods and ideas

A Symbolic Gesture indicates an abstract quality that has no simple equivalent in the world of objects and movements. Here we are one stage further away from the obviousness of the enacted Mimic Gesture.

How, for instance, would you make a silent sign for stupidity? You might launch into a full-blooded Theatrical Mime of a drooling village idiot. But total idiocy is not a precise way of indicating the momentary stupidity of a healthy adult. Instead, you might tap your forefinger against your temple but this also lacks accuracy, since you might do precisely the same thing when indicating that someone is brainy. All the tap does is to point to the brain. To make the meaning more clear, you might instead twist your forefinger against your temple, indicating 'a screw loose'. Alternatively, you might rotate your forefinger close to your temple, signalling that the brain is going round and round and is not stable.

Many people would understand these temple-forefinger actions, but other







would not. They would have their own local, stupidity gestures, which we in our turn would find confusing, such as tapping the elbow of the raised forearm, flapping the hand up and down in front of half-closed eyes, rotating a raised hand, or laying one forefinger flat across the forehead.

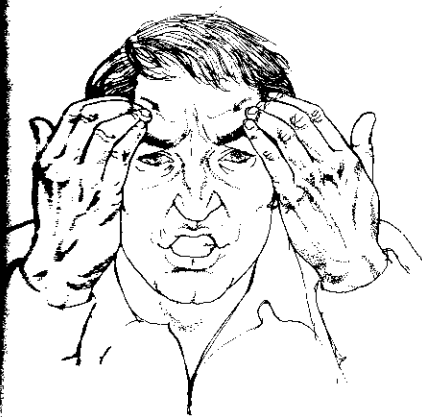
The situation is further complicated by the fact that some stupidity signals mean totally different things in different countries. To take one example, in Saudi Arabia stupidity can be signalled by touching the lower eyelid with the tip of the forefinger. But this same action, in various other countries, can mean disbelief, approval, agreement, mistrust, scepticism, alertness, secrecy, craftiness, danger, or criminality. The reason for this apparent chaos of meanings is simple enough. By pointing to the eye, the gesturer is doing no more than stress the symbolic importance of the eye as a seeing organ. Beyond that, the action says nothing, so that the message can become either: 'Yes, I see', or 'I can't believe my eyes', or 'Keep a sharp look-out', or 'I like what I see', or almost any other seeing signal you care to imagine. In such a case it is essential to know the precise 'seeing' property being represented by the symbolism of the gesture in any particular culture.

So we are faced with two basic problems where Symbolic Gestures are concerned: either one meaning may be signalled by different actions, or several meanings may be signalled by the same action, as we move from culture to culture. The only solution is to approach each culture with an open mind and learn their Symbolic Gestures as one would their vocabulary.

As part of this process, it helps if a link can be found between the action and the meaning, but this is not always possible. In some cases we simply do not know how certain Symbolic Gestures arose. It is clear that they are symbolic because they now represent some abstract quality, but how they first acquired the link between action and meaning has been lost somewhere in their long history. A good instance of this is the 'cuckold' sign from Italy. This consists of making a pair of horns, either with two forefingers held at the temples, or with a forefinger and little finger of one hand held in front of the body. There is little doubt about what the fingers are meant to be: they are the horns of a bull. As such, they would rate as part of a Schematic Gesture. But they do not send out the simple message 'bull'. Instead they now indicate 'sexual betrayal'. The action is therefore a Symbolic gesture and, in order to explain it, it becomes necessary to find the link between bulls and sexual betrayal.

Historically, the link appears to be lost, with the result that some rather wild speculations have been made. A complication arises in the form of the 'horned hand', also common in Italy, which has a totally different significance, even though it employs the same motif of bull's horns. The horned hand is essentially a protective gesture, made to ward off imagined dangers. Here it is clear enough that it is the bull's great power, ferocity and masculinity that is being invoked as a symbolic aid to protect the gesturer. But this only makes it even more difficult to explain the other use of the bull's-horns gesture as a sign of a 'pathetic' cuckold.

Symbolic Gestures are often difficult to understand because their origins have been lost. But some can be guessed, as in the case of signs symbolizing 'stupidity'. These vary from place to place, but nearly all indicate something wrong with the eyes. Examples (below, left to right) are the Simple Tap, the Temple Rotate, the Forehead Screw, the Forehead Tap, the Eyes Closed, and the Forehead Scrub. The last is common to certain North American Indians, but the others are more widespread.







The Cuckold Sign from Italy, seen in an 18th-century drawing (above) and performed by a 19th-century Harlequin (below). The symbolic origins of this ancient action—a gross insult to an Italian—are lost, but several conflicting theories have been proposed. Opposite: symbolic finger-crossing actions. The act of kissing crossed forefingers when swearing an oath is not difficult to trace to its origin, the crossed fingers clearly representing the Christian Cross. Less obviously sharing the same origin is the familiar 'good luck' sign of crossing the first two fingers of one hand.



A suggested explanation of this contradiction is that it is due to one gesture using as its starting point the bull's power, while the other—the cuckold sign—selects the bull's frequent castration. Since the domestication of cattle began, there have always been too many bulls in relation to cows. A good uncastrated bull can serve between 50 and 100 cows a year, so that it is only necessary to retain a small proportion of intact bulls for breeding purposes. The rest are rendered much more docile and easy to handle for beef production, by castration. In folk-lore, then, these impotent males must stand helplessly by, while the few sexually active bulls 'steal their right females'; hence the symbolism of: bull = cuckold.

A completely different explanation once offered was that, when the cuckold discovers that his wife has betrayed him, he becomes so enraged and jealous that he bellows and rushes violently about like a 'mad bull'.

A more classical interpretation involves Diana the Huntress, who made horns into a symbol of male downfall. Actaeon, another hunter, is said to have sneaked a look at her naked body when she was bathing. This so angered her that she turned him into a horned beast and set his own hounds upon him, who promptly killed and ate him.

Alternatively, there is the version dealing with ancient religious prostitutes. These ladies worshipped gods who wore 'horns of honour'—that is, horns in their other role as symbols of power and masculinity—and the gods were so pleased with the wives who became sacred whores that they transferred their godly horns on to the heads of the husbands who had ordered their women to act in this role. In this way, the horns of honour became the horns of ridicule.

As if this were not enough, it is also claimed elsewhere, and with equal conviction, that because stags have horns (antlers were often called horns in earlier periods) and because most stags in the rutting season lose their females to a few dominant males who round up large harems, the majority of 'horned' deer are unhappy 'cuckolds'.

Finally, there is the bizarre interpretation that bulls and deer have nothing to do with it. Instead, it is thought that the ancient practice of grafting the spurs of a castrated cockrel on to the root of its excised comb, where they apparently grew and became 'horns', is the origin of the symbolic link between horns and cuckolds. This claim is backed up by the fact that the German equivalent word for 'cuckold' (*hahnrei*) originally meant 'capon'.

If, after reading these rival claims, you feel that all you have really learned is the meaning of the phrase 'cock-and-bull story', you can be forgiven. Clearly, we are in the realm of fertile imagination rather than historical record. But this example has been dealt with at length to show how, in many cases, the true story of the origin of a Symbolic Gesture is no longer available to us. Many other similarly conflicting examples are known, and this one will suffice to demonstrate the general principle.

There are exceptions, of course, and certain of the Symbolic Gestures





make today, and take for granted, can easily be traced to their origins. 'Keeping your fingers crossed' is a good example of this. Although used by many non-Christians, this action of making the cross, using only the first and second fingers, is an ancient protective device of the Christian church. In earlier times it was commonplace to make a more conspicuous sign of the cross (to cross oneself) by moving the whole arm, first downwards and then sideways, in front of the body, tracing the shape of the cross in the air. This can still be seen in some countries today in a non-religious context, acting as a 'good luck' protective device. In more trivial situations it has been widely replaced, however, by the act of holding up one hand to show that the second finger is tightly crossed over the first, with the crossing movement of the arm omitted. Originally this was the secret version of 'crossing oneself' and was done with the hand in question carefully hidden from view. It may still be done in this secret way, as when trying to protect oneself from the consequences of lying, but as a 'good luck' sign it has now come out into the open. This development is easily explained by the fact that crossing the fingers lacks an obvious religious character. Symbolically, the finger-crossing may be calling on the protection of the Christian God, but the small finger action performed is so far removed from the priestly arm crossing action, that it can without difficulty slide into everyday life as a casual wish for good fortune. Proof of this is that many people do not even realize that they are demanding an act of Christian worship—historically speaking—when they shout out: 'Keep your fingers crossed!'



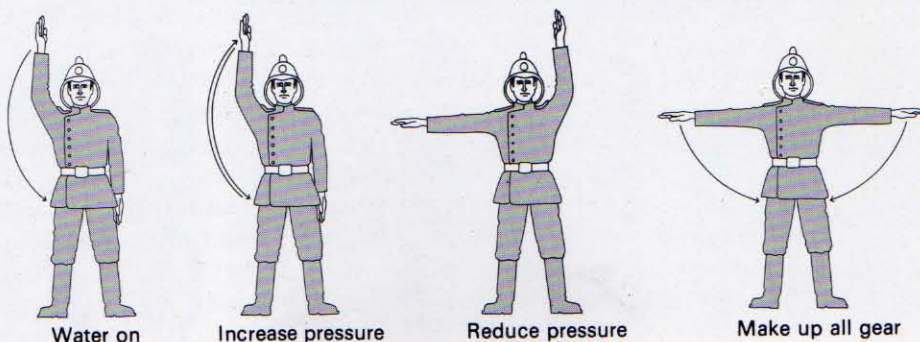
## TECHNICAL GESTURES

### Gestures used by specialist minorities

Technical Gestures are invented by a specialist minority for use strictly within the limits of their particular activity. They are meaningless to anyone outside the specialization and operate in such a narrow field that they cannot be considered as playing a part in the mainstream of visual communication of any culture.

Television-studio signals are a good example of Technical Gestures in use today. The studio commentator we see on our screens at home is face to face with a 'studio manager'. The manager is linked to the programme director in the control room by means of headphones and conveys the director's instructions to the commentator by simple visual gestures. To warn the commentator that he will have to start speaking at any moment, the manager raises a forearm and holds it stiffly erect. To start him speaking, he brings the forearm swiftly down to point at the commentator. To warn him that he must stop speaking in a few seconds, the manager rotates his forearm, as if it were the hand of a clock going very fast — 'Time is running out fast.' To ask him to lengthen the speaking time and say more, he holds his hands together in front of his chest and pulls them slowly apart, as if stretching something — 'stretch it out.' To tell the speaker to stop dead this instant, the manager makes a slashing action with his hand across his throat — 'Cut!' There are no set rules laid down for these signals. They grew up in the early days of television and, although the main ones listed here are fairly

Technical Gestures are used by specialists and do not constitute part of the gestural repertoire of a whole society. Examples include signals given to British crane-drivers (below) or exchanged by firemen (below right).





widespread today, each studio may well have its own special variant worked out to suit a particular performer.

Other Technical Gestures are found wherever an activity prohibits verbal contact. Skindivers, for instance, cannot speak to one another and need simple signals to deal with potentially dangerous situations. In particular they need gestures for danger, cold, cramp and fatigue. Other messages, such as yes, no, good, bad, up and down, are easily enough understood by the user of everyday actions and require no Technical Gestures to make sense. But how could you signal to a companion that you had cramp? The answer is that you would open and close one hand rhythmically—a simple gesture, but one that might nevertheless save a life.

Disaster can sometimes occur because a Technical Gesture is required from someone who is not a specialist in a technical field. Suppose some holiday-makers take out a boat, and it sinks, and they swim to the safety of a small rocky island. Wet and frightened, they crouch there wondering what to do next, when to their immense relief a small fishing-boat comes chugging towards them. As it draws level with the island, they wave frantically at it. The people on board wave back, and the boat chugs on and disappears. If the stranded holiday-makers had been marine 'specialists', they would have known that, at sea, waving is only used as a greeting. To signal distress, they should have raised and lowered their arms stiffly from their sides. This is the accepted marine gesture for 'Help!'

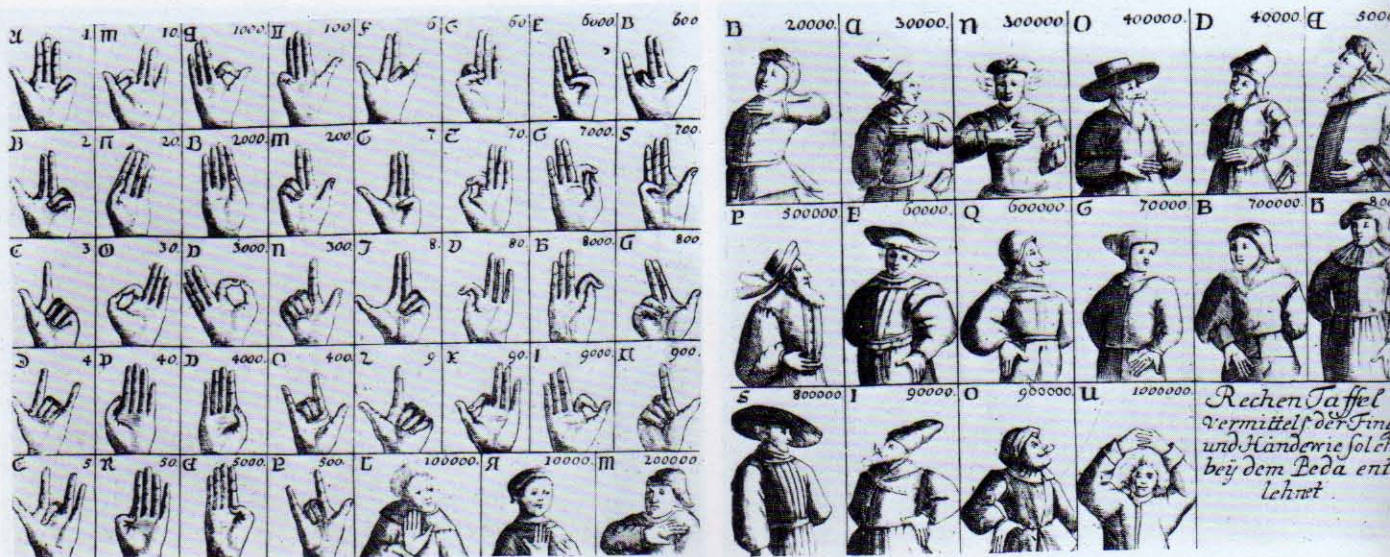
Ironically, if the shipwrecked signallers had been marine experts and had given the correct distress signal, the potential rescue boat might well have been manned by holiday-makers, who would have been completely nonplussed by the strange actions and would probably have ignored them. When a technical sphere is invaded by the non-technical, gesture problems always arise.

Firemen, crane-drivers, airport-tarmac signalmen, gambling-casino croupiers, dealers at auctions, and restaurant staff, all have their own special Technical Gestures. Either because they must keep quiet, must be discreet or cannot be heard, they develop their own sets of signals. The rest of us can ignore them, unless we, too, wish to enter their specialized spheres.

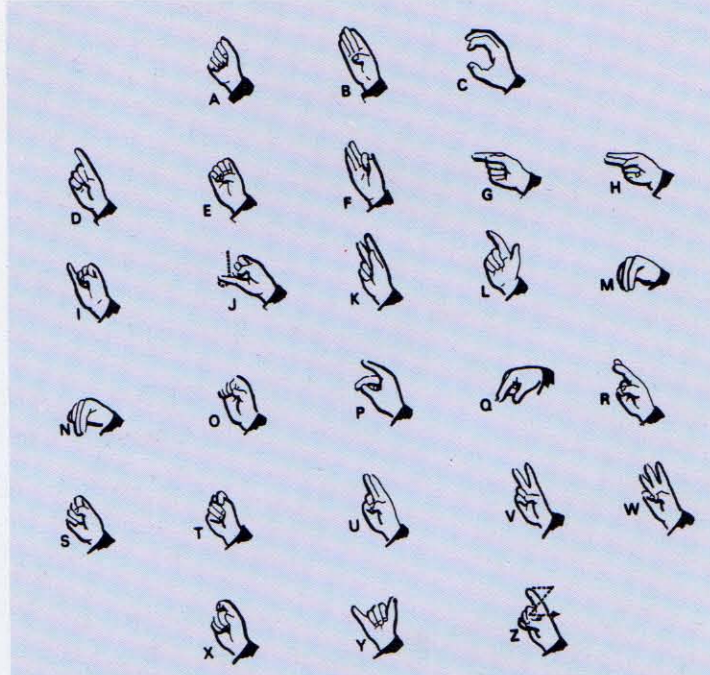
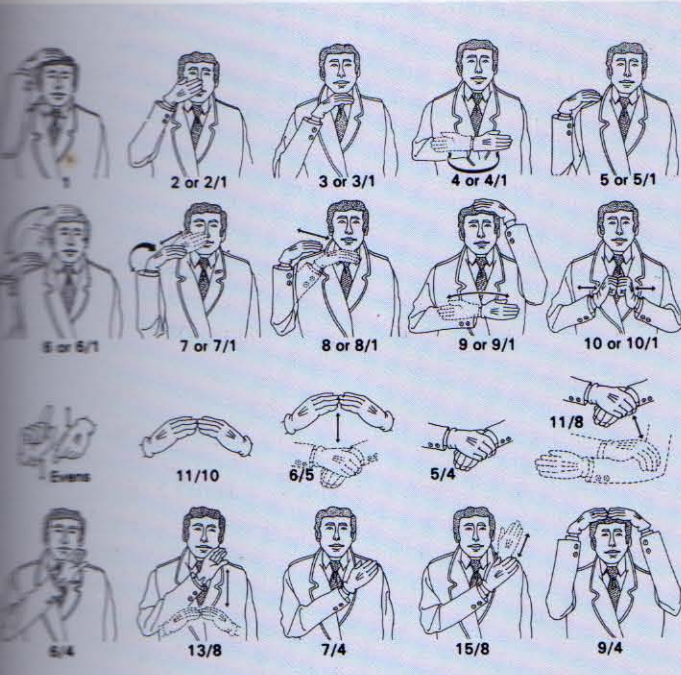
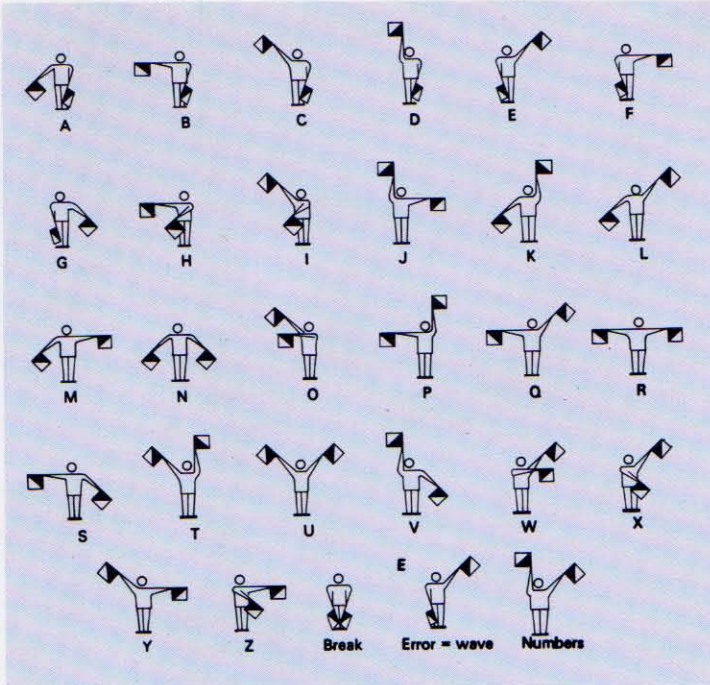
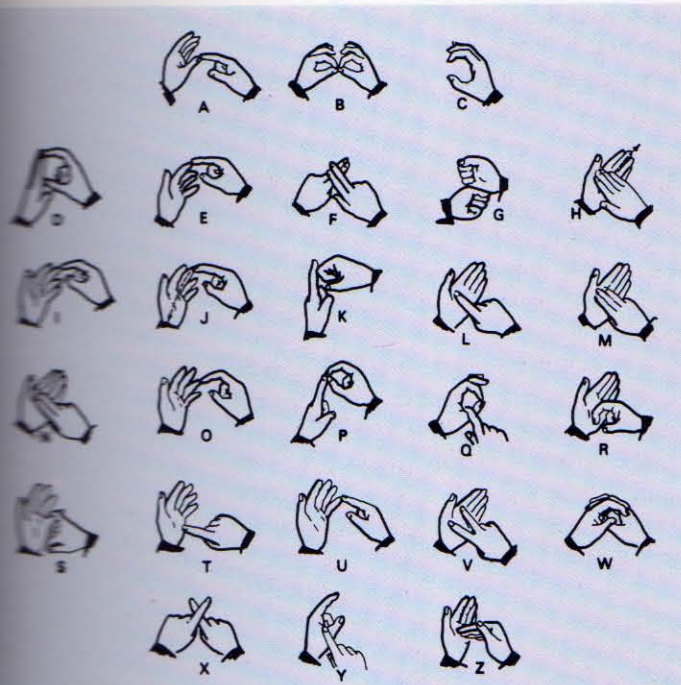
## CODED GESTURES

### Sign-language based on a formal system

Coded Gestures, unlike all others, are part of a formal system of signals. They interrelate with one another in a complex and systematic way, so that they constitute a true language. The special feature of this category is that they







Coded Gestures only have meaning as part of a planned, structured signalling system. Examples include the two-handed and one-handed deaf-and-dumb codes (top left and bottom right), the semaphore code employed for naval communications (top right), and the tic-tac system used on race-courses for describing the betting odds (after Brun). There are also many gestural counting systems, such as this early one at left, dating from 1724.

individual units are valueless without reference to the other units in the code. Technical Gestures may be systematically planned, but, with them, each signal can operate quite independently of the others. With Coded Gestures, by contrast, all the units interlock with one another on rigidly formulated principles, like the letters and words in a verbal language.

The most important example is the Deaf-and-dumb Sign Language of hand signals, of which there is both a one-handed and a two-handed version. Also, there is the Semaphore Language of arm signals, and the Tic-tac Language of the race course. These all require considerable skill and training and belong in a totally different world from the familiar gestures we employ in everyday life. They serve as a valuable reminder, though, of the incredibly sensitive potential we all possess for visual communication. It makes it all the more plausible to argue that we are all of us responding, with greater sensitivity than we may realize, to the ordinary gestures we witness each day of our lives.



# GESTURE VARIANTS

## Personal or local variations on gestural themes

Gestures, by definition, transmit signals, and these signals must come across clearly if we are to understand their messages. They cannot afford to be vague and woolly; they must be crisp and sharp and difficult to confuse with other signals. To do this they have to develop a 'typical form' that shows comparatively little variation. And they must be performed with a 'typical intensity', showing much the same speed, strength and amplitude on each occasion that they are brought into action.

It is rather like the ringing of a telephone bell. The signal goes on sounding at fixed intervals, at a fixed volume, and with a fixed sound, no matter how urgent the call. The telephone system treats a casual call in just the same way as one that happens to be a matter of life and death. The only difference it permits is the length of the ringing, before the caller gives up. This may seem inefficient, and one sometimes longs for a telephone bell that gets louder and louder, with increasing urgency. But the rigidity of the ringing tone is important in one major respect: it reduces ambiguity. No one confuses a telephone bell with a front-door bell or an alarm clock. Its fixed form and its fixed intensity make it unmistakable.

This process is at work in human gestures. They can never hope to perfect a completely fixed intensity, like the bell, but they can and do achieve something approximating it in many cases. Here again, the ambiguity is reduced and the message is clear.

When an angry man shakes his fist, the chances are that the speed, force and amplitude of each shake, as the fist jerks back and forth in mid-air, are much the same on each occasion that he employs this gesture. And there is a

Fist-shaking is performed in much the same way wherever it occurs, and is easy to understand because its form of expression has developed a 'typical intensity'—it conforms to a general rule. Below: the fist-shaking of political demonstrators.

Gesture Variants are departures from the general rule. Right: three variants of a gestural theme, the Forearm Jerk. This is a phallic insult common to many Western countries, but the precise form it takes varies from place to place and from person to person. For example, it may appear in a flat-hand version, a palm-down-fist version, or a palm-up-fist version.







Personal Gesture Variants provide each of us with an individual 'body-style'. We all smile, but some of us have supersmiles, exposing gums as well as teeth—like President Carter (above right)—while others show only a low-gap grin.



reasonable likelihood that his speed, force and amplitude will be similar to those of any other fist-shaker. If, as an experiment, you were to perform a fist-shaking gesture in which you slowed down the movement, decreased the force, and increased the distance travelled by the clenched fist, it is doubtful if your signal would be understood. An onlooker might imagine you were exercising your arm, but it is doubtful if he would read the message as a threat display.

Most of our gestures have grown into typical presentations of this kind. We all wave in much the same way, clap our hands at roughly the same speed, beckon with much the same amplitude, and shake our heads with the same sort of rhythm. This is not a conscious process. We simply tune in to the cultural norm. Unwittingly, we smooth the path of the hundreds of tiny messages that fly between us whenever we meet and interact. Somehow we manage to match up our gestures with those of our companions, and they do the same with ours. Together we synchronize the intensities of our gesturings until we are all operating in concert, as if under the control of an invisible cultural conductor.

As always with human behaviour, there are exceptions to this general rule. We are not automatons. We show personal idiosyncracies—individual variations on the cultural themes. One man, with a particularly fine set of teeth, shows an exaggeratedly intense, open-lipped smile, and he does this even in mild situations. Another man, with bad teeth, gives a more closed





The Italian Ear Touch gesture, meaning that a man is considered to be effeminate, exists in several variant forms. The ear may be held, flicked or (as seen here) pulled. All these actions have the same meaning and in this case, because of the absence of other ear-touching signals, the variations do not create confusion.



The Hand Purse gesture has many variant forms in different countries. Here, performed by a Sardinian, it means 'What's the matter with you?' In this version, the hand is jerked rapidly up and down.

smile, even when strongly stimulated. One man bellows with laughter, while another titters, in reaction to the same joke. These are the Gesture Variants and they provide each of us with a behavioural 'style', or body-personality. They are small differences compared with our general gesture-conformity, but they can become important personal labels none the less.

There is another type of Gesture Variant, and that is the one that exists because a particular gesture is rather rare and is unlikely to be confused with any other gesture. It fails to develop a typical form, through lack of use and lack of ambiguity. A good example is the Italian Ear Touch. This gesture always has the same meaning throughout Italy: it is a sign that someone, male, is considered to be effeminate or homosexual. It occurs infrequently and there are no other ear-touching gestures with which it can be confused. The result is that it lacks a typical form. The ear can be pulled, tugged, flipped, flicked or merely touched, and yet the message is always the same. The observer is not confused by these variations, as he might be with other gestures that have close similarities with one another. There is no pressure on the gesturer to narrow the action down to a precise movement. The gesture owes its origin, incidentally, to the fact that women wear ear-rings, the gesture representing the touching of an imaginary ear ornament and therefore implying a female trait.

Although the Gesture Variants in this particular case cause no confusion, the situation becomes much more complicated with certain other gestures. The Hand Purse signal is a case in point. In origin this is a hand action which is used to emphasize a statement being made during the course of a conversation. The thumb and fingertips are brought together in a circle, pointing upwards. The hand beats time in this posture as the key words are uttered, and in this form the gesture can be observed in almost every country in the world. But in certain regions specific variations of this basic gesture have been developed, each with its own particular, local meaning. In Greece and Turkey the action has come to mean 'good'; in Spain it means 'lots of... something'; in Malta it implies heavy sarcasm; in Tunisia it indicates the caution: 'Slowly, slowly'; in France it says: 'I am afraid'; and in Italy, where it is extremely common, it is usually an irritated query, saying: 'What's the matter, what's up?' In each of these cases the action is performed in a specific local variant form of the basic action. In Malta, for instance, the hand is pulled heavily down through the air once; in Tunisia, the hand moves down several times very slowly; in France, it is done with the fingers opening and closing very slightly; and in Italy the hand is jerked up and down rapidly.

The truth is that the original Hand Purse gesture has grown into a whole series of quite distinct actions, each of which should be considered as a separate gesture. These are not true Gesture Variants of one gesture, they are now a whole family of gestures. This works well enough within any one culture. But when a man moves from one of these countries to another, he is very likely to become confused. He sees the foreign gesture as merely a Gesture Variant of his own, and therefore cannot understand why it should have a totally different meaning. He reads the variation as a personal or local idiosyncrasy and imagines that the foreigner he is observing simply has a rather odd way of performing his old familiar gesture.

Were there a great deal of contact between two such cultures there is little doubt that over a period of time the gesture differences would start to widen until no confusion was possible, but without this, errors do occur. This underlines the reason why, within one culture, typical action-patterns develop and how, in so doing, they avoid signalling ambiguity. Except in special cases, Gesture Variants constitute a threat to this system and tend to be eliminated or reduced. In this way, each culture develops its own clear-cut repertoire of discrete visual signals, each unit being clearly differentiated from all the others. Only when our wanderlust and our modern mobility lead us into foreign parts does this efficient communication system start to break down.



# MULTIMESSAGE GESTURES

gestures that have many meanings

Multimessage Gesture is one that has a number of totally distinct meanings, depending on the time and the place.

When an American wants to signal that something is OK, fine, perfect, great—he raises his hand and makes a circle with his thumb and forefinger. This circle-sign has only one message for him, and he might be surprised to discover that in other countries it can mean something quite different.

In Japan, for instance, it is the gesture for money. In France it means 'zero' or 'worthless'. In Malta it means that someone is a 'pooftah'—a male homosexual. In Sardinia and Greece it is an obscene comment or insult to either a male or female.

Apart from the fact that such differences can obviously lead to all kinds of misunderstandings when foreigners meet, it is puzzling that such contradictory messages should have arisen in the first place. To find the explanation we have to look at the basic symbolism used in each case.

The American sign for something perfect is derived from the hand posture of precision. If we want to say that something is precise or exact, we make the movement of holding something very small between the tips of our thumb and forefinger. People all over the world do this unconsciously when speaking about some fine point. The object they hold is imaginary—they merely go through the motions of holding it, and in this way they automatically form a ring or circle with the thumb and forefinger. In America this unconscious gesticulation became amplified into a deliberate signal, the expression of exactness developing into the message 'exactly right', or 'perfect', and the famous OK sign was born.

The Japanese sign for money starts from a completely different source. Money means coins and coins are circular. Therefore, making a circular hand-sign comes to symbolize money. It is as simple as that.

The French sign for 'nothing', or 'worthless', also starts from a simple situation, but this time the circle represents not a coin, but a nought. Nought = zero = nothing = worthless.

The sexual examples are related to one another and have the same basic symbolism. Here the ring made by the thumb and forefinger stands for a bodily orifice. Because it is circular, the hand posture is strongly anal, hence its significance in Malta as a gesture meaning male homosexual. In Sardinia and Greece it is used more as a general obscene comment or insult to either sex, but the meaning is still basically anal. These uses of the gesture have a long and ancient history and have certainly been operating for more than two thousand years. An early vase painting shows four athletes bathing outside a gymnasium, with one of them clearly insulting the others by making the anal orifice gesture.

So the simple, circular hand-sign can stand for a precision grip, a coin, a nought, or an orifice, according to its country of origin. And these visual comparisons then lead on to the five different symbolisms of perfection, money, worthlessness, homosexuality, or sexual propositioning.

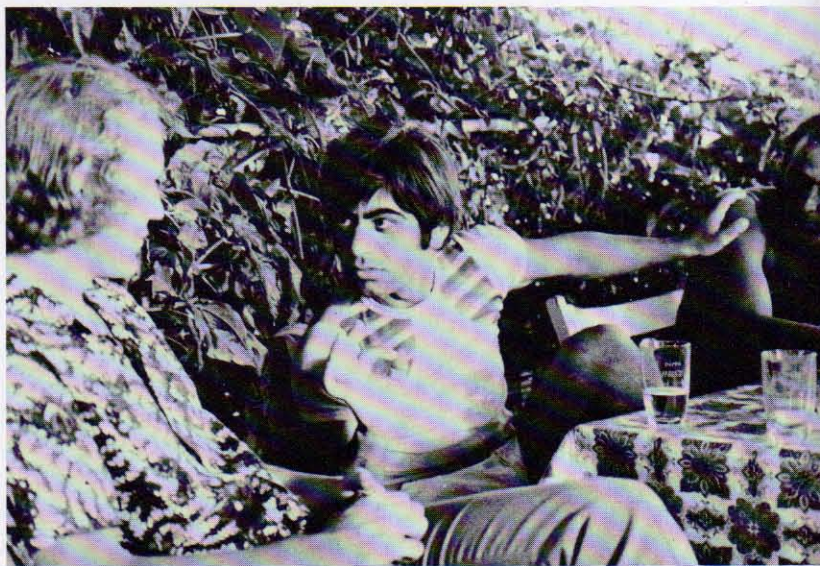
This situation is complicated enough, but it becomes even more complex when one particular message starts spreading into the range of the others. The American OK sign has become so popular that it has invaded Europe. In England there was no local circle-sign in use, so the American OK sign could move in without resistance. No Englishman today would use the gesture for any other purpose. But in France the situation was different. They already had the zero sign, so that the arrival of the OK gesture created a problem. Today, many Frenchmen still use the circle-sign as a 'zero' signal, others as OK. The 'zero' message predominates in the south of France, while the OK is more common in the far north of the country. Although this can lead to difficulties, confusion is usually avoided by taking into account the context



The Circle-sign made by forming a ring with the thumb and forefinger of one hand. It carries different messages for different people. An Englishman knows only one meaning for this sign; for him, both drawings (above) carry an 'OK' message. But for many Frenchmen only the smiling picture is signalling 'OK', while the other signals 'zero' or 'worthless'. To a Japanese (below) the same sign may mean 'money'.







of the gesture. If the gesturer looks happy, it is likely that he means 'OK'; if not, he means 'zero'.

This raises an important point, for in England, or America, where there is only one dominant meaning for the circle-signal, the facial expression would make little difference. The message is so clear that it overrides the context. If an Englishman deliberately makes a grim face while giving the OK sign, the sign is so powerful that the face would be ignored, or interpreted as a joke—a mock-sadness that is not really being felt.

This phenomenon of 'context override' usually comes into operation wherever there is a single, clear, dominant meaning for a particular gesture. But as soon as you move into a region where more than one meaning is possible, the context becomes vitally important.

Multimessage Gestures with as many meanings as the circle-sign are comparatively rare, but there are large numbers of signs that have more than one basic message. Wherever the action involved has a built-in ambiguity, there we are likely to find alternative meanings if we look far enough afield.

For example, actions in which the finger touches the temple or forehead usually symbolize some condition of the brain, but the condition varies from case to case. Sometimes it means 'clever'—'good brain'—and sometimes it means 'stupid'—'bad brain'; actions in which the mouth is touched may mean 'hunger', 'thirst', 'speech' or 'lack of speech'; actions involving pointing at the eye may refer to 'seeing well' or 'seeing badly'. The generality of the basic gesture leads to different paths of symbolism, spreading out in different directions.

As an obscene comment or insult, the circle-sign, demonstrated above by a Sardinian, has been active in the Mediterranean region for over two thousand years, and can be found in ancient paintings, as amulets and as sculptures such as the one shown (above left).



# GESTURE ALTERNATIVES

Different gestures that transmit the same signal

Just as one gesture can have many different meanings, so can many different gestures have the same meaning. If a message is basic enough and of sufficient importance to appear in widely varying cultures, the chances are high that it will be transmitted by gestures that are strikingly different both in form and origin.

If two men are standing on a street corner and they see an attractive girl walking past, one may turn to the other and signal his appreciation by a simple gesture. Even within one particular culture there are usually several ways in which he can do this; but when we cast our net wider and observe this meeting incident on street corners in many different countries, the list of possible signals becomes even more impressive. The illustrations show twelve ways of saying: 'What a beautiful girl!'—and reveal the many different sources that are drawn upon when performing this brief act of praise.

Gestures 1-4 are ways of commenting on the girl's attributes.

1. The Cheek Stroke. The forefinger and thumb of one hand are placed lightly on the gesturer's cheek-bones and then stroked gently down towards the chin. The gesture symbolizes the smooth roundedness of the face of a beautiful girl, and is said to have originated in ancient Greece, where an egg-shaped face was the ideal of female beauty. Greece remains to this day the area where the gesture most commonly occurs, but it is now also found in Italy and Spain.

2. The Cheek Screw. A straight forefinger is pressed into the middle of the cheek and rotated. There are two possible origins. One idea is that the action symbolizes something delicious to eat, which is extended to mean that the girl is 'delicious'. The other sees the gesture as emphasizing the dimpling of a beautiful girl's cheek. Today, the Cheek Screw is in common use throughout Italy, including Sicily and Sardinia, but is rare elsewhere.

3. The Breast Curve. The hands describe the forward curve of the female breasts. The origin is obvious and the action is common over a wide range.

4. The Waist Curve. The hands sweep down through the air describing an exaggerated female-trunk outline, emphasizing the narrow waist-line and the wide hips. Again, an obvious origin for an action that is widely understood and especially common in English-speaking countries.

Gestures 5-8 are comments by the man on his reactions to the girl.

5. The Eye Touch. The man places a straight forefinger against his lower eyelid and may pull it slightly downwards. This action occurs in many countries and has many meanings, but in certain areas, such as parts of South America and a few districts in Italy, it is a signal that a girl is 'an eye-ful'.

6. The Two-handed Telescope. The hands are curled and the man peers



Mike Williams.





7



9



10



11

*mike winiams*



8



12

through them as if using a telescope to gaze at the girl. The symbolism is based on the idea that the girl deserves a closer look. This gesture is found in particular in Brazil.

7. The Moustache Twist. The thumb and forefinger are squeezed together in the cheek region and twisted round, as if twiddling the tip of an imaginary moustache. The symbolism derives from the male's need to preen himself in preparation for his advances towards the girl, stimulated by her beauty. This is primarily an old Italian gesture, surviving into modern times despite the absence of long mustachios.

8. The Hand-on-Heart. The man places his right hand flat on to his chest in the heart region. The symbolism indicates that the girl is so beautiful that she makes his heart beat faster with emotion. In English-speaking countries this would be considered too 'formal' a gesture, but in some South American countries it is employed in informal contexts in a more spontaneous way.

Gestures 9-12 are comments by the man on what he would like to do to the girl.

9. The Fingertips Kiss. The man kisses his fingertips and then fans them out, flinging them towards the girl. This action of throwing a kiss could, of course, be done as a salutation or a direct act of praise, but it is also seen as a signal performed for the benefit of his male companion, when the girl is not watching. The gesture is aimed at the girl, but the message is directed at his friend. This is particularly common in France, but is also found today in many other countries.

10. The Air Kiss. The man makes a kissing movement with his lips, in the direction of the girl. Again, this is done for the benefit of his companion, to indicate what he would like to do to the girl, because she is so beautiful; and it is most likely to be performed at a moment when the girl cannot observe him. It is common in English-speaking countries as an alternative to the more 'Continental' Fingertips-Kiss.

11. The Cheek Pinch. The man pinches his own cheek as if he were doing it to the girl. This action is most commonly used in Sicily, but is also seen elsewhere.

12. The Breast Cup. The hands make a cupping movement in the air, as if holding the girl's breasts and squeezing them. This obvious gesture is popular in Europe and elsewhere and is easily understood even by those who do not employ it themselves.

There are many other gestures that signify female beauty, but this selection suffices to make the point that a message as basic as the male's response to feminine appeal will inevitably find a wide variety of forms of expression, both within cultures and between them. As with other basic messages, the inventiveness of human symbolizing gives rise to a bewildering array of Gesture Alternatives. This makes the task of assembling a comprehensive international dictionary of human gestures a daunting prospect, and one that has so far not been seriously attempted.



# HYBRID GESTURES

Signals made up of two original gestures

A Hybrid Gesture is one that combines two separate gestures, with distinct origins, in a single action.

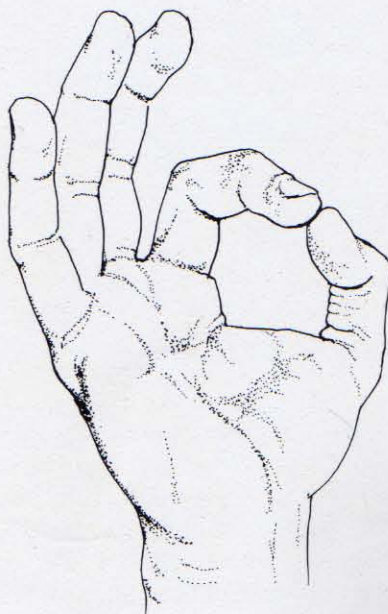
A popular threat display is the cutting through the air of a stiffly flattened hand—the Hand Chop gesture, common in Italy and various other countries around the Mediterranean. Its meaning is obvious enough—I will chop off your head. In Tunisia this gesture often becomes grafted on to the French sign meaning 'zero' or 'worthless' which is performed by making a ring from the thumb and forefinger. Tunisians, when threatening, often combine these two gestures into a Hand Ring-Chop gesture. The thumb and forefinger form the circle, while the other three fingers are held stiffly flattened. In this posture the hand is chopped repeatedly through the air. The message is 'I will kill you tomorrow'. It is a combination of the two parent messages 'worthless' and 'kill'. In effect, the signal says: 'You are so worthless that I will kill you tomorrow.'

Hybrid Gestures of this kind are extremely rare in ordinary social gesturing. When giving a visual signal, people tend to do one thing at a time. Gesture communication is unitary rather than a language that combines visual 'words' into visual 'sentences'. Of course, we may perform a whole stream of gestures, one after the other, and we may grimace while gesticulating, but that is not the same as welding together two distinct gestures into a new double-unit. The few examples that do exist nearly all combine two actions that both have the same general meaning, but are brought together in the hybrid form to produce a double-strength signal. The insulting Forearm Jerk gesture, for instance, may be combined with the equally insulting Middle-finger Jerk, or with the obscene Fig Sign. Usually these are given separately, but when done together they intensify the insult that is being hurled at the victim.

Only when we move into the specialized area of North American Indian Sign Language or the Deaf-and-Dumb Sign Language does this type of combination occur with any frequency. The Indian sign for beauty, for example, consists of raising one hand, like a mirror, and looking into it, while bringing the other hand, palm-down, across to touch the chest. This second gesture means 'good', so that the combination reads as: looking good = beautiful.



The North American Indian sign for 'beauty' is a Hybrid Gesture combining the sign for 'looking' (gazing into a mimed mirror) with the sign for 'good' (placing the palm-down hand to the chest). The Hand Chop gesture (below left)—a simple threat—and the Hand Ring gesture—here meaning 'zero' or 'worthless'—may be combined as a Ring-Chop gesture (below). This Hybrid Gesture signals, in Tunisia, the double message: 'You are worthless and I will kill you'.









# COMPOUND GESTURES

Gestures made up of a number of distinct elements

A Compound Gesture is one that is made up of a number of separate elements, each of which has at least some degree of independence.

Many human gestures have only one element. If a man is busy working at his desk and someone asks him if the work is going well, he may answer by giving a thumb-up sign. He can do this without looking up and without pausing in his work. He merely extends a hand with the thumb raised. The rest of his body contributes nothing, and yet the message is understood.

This is a simple gesture and it contrasts sharply with more complex ones involving related but discrete features. Human laughter, or, rather, what happens when a man laughs, is a good example of a Compound Gesture. When the display occurs at its very highest intensity, the laughter simultaneously: (1) emits a hooting or barking sound; (2) opens his mouth wide; (3) pulls back his mouth-corners; (4) wrinkles up his nose; (5) closes his eyes; (6) shows crinkle lines at the outer corners of his eyes; (7) weeps; (8) throws back his head; (9) raises his shoulders; (10) rolls his trunk about; (11) clasps his body; and (12) stamps his foot.

Whenever you observe someone laughing, it should be possible to score them on this 12-point scale. Extreme scores are rare. It is possible to score only one point—by laughing with the mouth shut and with the body immobile—and it is possible to score a full 12—as with uncontrollable, cheek-streaming belly-laughter. But it is much more common to observe a middle-range laugh of about 6 to 8 points. These will not always be the same elements. Even the laughing sound itself can be omitted—think of silent laughter or a picture of a laughing man—and yet the message of the display still comes across.

A Compound Gesture is made up of three kinds of elements. First, there are the *essential elements*. These are the ones that *must* be present if the display is to be understood. In the case of a simple gesture, such as the thumb-up, the essential element is the gesture—there is nothing else. But with Compound Gestures, such as laughing, there need be no essential elements at all. Each element may be expendable provided there are enough of the other elements present. Not one of the 12 laughter signals listed above is absolutely essential to the message. Each can be replaced by other features.

Second, there are the *key elements*. These do not have to be present, but they are the most important features of a display, and their special quality is



Human laughter in its most fully developed form is a Compound Gesture made up of twelve major elements. The New Guinea highlander (opposite) is performing a high-intensity laugh which includes throwing back the head, closing the eyes and hunching the shoulders. Low-intensity laughter (above top) involves fewer elements. There are many different ways of laughing: two common forms (left) are the snigger and the guffaw. The snigger shows exaggerated nose-wrinkling and eye-creasing but no head-tilting; the guffaw involves a marked throwing back of the head but less nose-wrinkling. At very high intensity, laughter includes the element of weeping (above), and when examining photographs it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between crying and intense laughing.



that they can, by themselves, in the absence of all the other elements, still transmit the message. Although the sound of laughter is not an essential element in the display, it is a key element, because it can operate on its own in the absence of all the visual elements.

Third, there are the *amplifiers*, or supporting elements. These cannot operate on their own, and only transmit the message if other elements are present. For instance, if a man retracts his neck, or throws his head back, these actions alone do not mean 'laughter' to an onlooker. Most of the visual aspects of laughing are of this type, but with some other Compound Gestures this is not the case.

With the shrug gesture, for example, there are more key signals than amplifiers. The full shrug involves (1) a brief hunching of the shoulders, (2) a twisting of the hands into a palm-up posture, (3) a tilting of the head to one side, (4) a lowering of the mouth-corners, and (5) a raising of the eyebrows. Four of these five are key elements and can work alone. I can perform a perfectly understandable shrug merely by raising and then lowering my shoulders. I can even do it by briefly hunching just one shoulder while keeping the other still. The same applies to my hands. I can shrug expressively with one or both hands, simply by twisting them momentarily into the palm-up posture. Or I can transmit the same message by an exaggerated lowering of my mouth-corners, remaining immobile in every other respect. I can even do it with an upward jerk of my eyebrows. Only the head-tilting element would fail to work in isolation and this is therefore the only amplifier in the case of the Compound Gesture of shrugging.

Inevitably this means that there are many possible styles of shrugging, depending on which key elements are used. These styles vary from person to person and from culture to culture. Travelling around the Mediterranean, an expert shrug-watcher can quickly identify the local 'shrug-dialects', as he moves from country to country.







s Greek car-sticker, representing a natural relic from Byzantine times, is intended to offer a *moutza* insult to the driver of the car behind should he approach too closely.



certain gestures have outlived the situations that created them. This Neapolitan gesture of self-preening consists of the twiddling of the tips of an imaginary mustache. As a grooming action it is a relic from the days when waxed or pointed mustaches were common in Italy.

A shrug is another Compound Gesture involving many independent elements. A shoulder shrug (top left) may occur by itself, without other elements; a mouth shrug (left) is often combined with an eyebrows shrug, but the eyebrows shrug by itself (above left) often appears with a head-shrug element and a side-tilt of the head.

# RELIC GESTURES

Gestures that have survived long after their primary contexts have vanished

A Relic Gesture is one that has outlived its original situation. It might be an historic relic, surviving long after the period that gave birth to it, or a personal relic, such as an infantile pattern lasting into adulthood.

There is usually a special reason for the survival of a gesture from an earlier historical period—some slight advantage it has over its modern equivalent. Without this, it would die out along with the context that created it. A good example is the telephone gesture. The telephone rings and the caller asks to speak to someone who is on the far side of a noisy, crowded room. The person who has taken the call asks the caller to wait and struggles across the room. Halfway across he catches the eye of the person he wants and gestures to him: 'You are wanted on the telephone.' How does he do it? The modern telephone does not lend itself to miming, but he may try to act out the posture of holding the receiver to his ear. Or he may silently mouth out the word 'telephone', exaggerating his lip movements as much as possible. Long ago, a more primitive kind of telephone was operated by cranking a handle, and this provided the basis for a much more easily identifiable hand gesture. One hand was held near to the ear and then rotated forwards in tight circles. This gestural abbreviation—cranking+ear—supplied the information: 'Someone has *cranked* their telephone to get the exchange to call your number, so please come and put your *ear* to the phone.' This gesture was efficient because it could not be confused with any other action. Because it was more explicit than its modern equivalent, it managed to outlive changes in telephone design. Even today, many years after the demise of the last of the cranked telephones, it still survives in certain parts of southern Europe and South America. Now totally emancipated from its original mechanical source, the mime lives on, handed down from generation to generation. As an historical Relic Gesture, it is used today by people who may never even have heard of a cranked telephone and who do not understand where the action stems from.

A similar Relic Gesture is the rude sign used in Britain to say that something stinks, or is rubbish. This consists of reaching up to pull an imaginary lavatory chain, as if in the act of flushing something down the drain. Old-fashioned lavatories with a high-level water-tank are rapidly disappearing and being replaced by low-level suites, where the bowl is flushed by turning a small handle or pressing a button. As with the modern telephone, the hand actions involved in turning the handle or pressing the button are far less characteristic or specific. To mime them would be ambiguous and, as rude signs, they would be quite meaningless. So, once again, the early technology and its accompanying action live on in the form of a Relic Gesture. In this case, the old-fashioned lavatory chains have not as yet vanished altogether, like the cranked telephones, but there is every likelihood that, even when they have been completely superseded, the gesture will persist.

Some ancient gestures have managed to survive for centuries after the disappearance of the occasions that gave birth to them. In modern Greece, the rudest gesture it is possible to make is the *moutza*, which had its origins in the Byzantine era. It consists of thrusting an open hand towards the insulted person's face. To a non-Greek this seems harmless enough, but to a Greek it is a gross act of ridicule. It produces such an angry response that it is largely confined to traffic disputes, where one driver is telling another to get lost, and where the insulted driver is unable to retaliate physically. To understand the potency of this gesture we have to turn the clock back hundreds of years to the ancient city streets, where captured criminals were paraded in chains through the crowded thoroughfares so that the populace could torment and abuse them. The favourite way of doing this was to scoop up a handful of filth





This Japanese earthquake victim sits hunched beside her ruined home, rocking back and forth and weeping like a lost child. When caught in a disaster, many adults revert to relic behaviour of this kind, stemming from their infancy.

and thrust it into the helpless captive's face. In Britain and other countries, criminals placed in a public pillory or stocks were often abused in a similar way, but only in Greece has the smearing action survived as an historical Relic Gesture. It says something for the persistence of Relic Gestures that the moutza has retained its savage message despite the fact that it is now performed (1) with a clean hand, (2) at a distance from the face, (3) hundreds of years after the last true 'smearing' took place, and (4) by people who, in most instances, have little idea about its original meaning.

A more delicate Relic Gesture is the twiddling of the tips of an imaginary moustache. With the notable exception of the painter Salvador Dali, few men today wear long moustaches with finely pointed, upward-sweeping tips, but in earlier times, when this fashion was popular and widespread, especially among the European military, a man could express his amorous arousal to his companions by a little deft moustache-grooming. These actions can still be observed today in various European countries, performed by clean-shaven men who live in towns that have not seen a fine, pointed moustache for many a year.

A completely different kind of Relic Gesture is the one which survives not from past history, but from the personal past of an individual's lifetime. These personal behaviour relics are nearly always infantile actions that survive, disguised, into adulthood, and occur at moments when the inner mood of the adult suddenly matches one of the special conditions of childhood. The disaster victim, sitting beside the corpses of loved ones or the shell of a destroyed home, rocks back and forth, back and forth, in a desperate attempt at self-comfort. As the body rocks rhythmically to and fro, the hands clasp the knees or the trunk. The eyes weep and the voice sobs. All these actions are rare among adults in ordinary day-to-day life, but they are commonplace in infancy. The desolate adult victim, in an unconscious attempt to console himself, reverts to infantile patterns which once spelled safety and security. The parental arms, so large in relation to the small child's body, so all-enveloping and protective, have long since vanished. Now, the agonized adult must replace the parental hug of reassurance with the self-hug of his own arms; and the gentle rocking of his mother's embrace with the rhythmic tilting of his own, solitary body. The self-hugging and the self-rocking are personal relics from the days of dependency and, inadequate though they may be as substitutes, their latter-day revival in moments of crisis clearly provides some small consolation.

A less dramatic example is the simple Head Cock. An adult who wishes to appear appealing to another adult, from whom it is hoped to wheedle some reward or advantage, often gives a soft smile and tilts the head on to one side while continuing to gaze hopefully in their direction. This is not an action to be found among liberated feminists: it is the teasing, cajoling action of the woman who is playing the 'little girl' role to break down a man's resistance. Although adult, she is playing the part of his young daughter, and the Head Cock action is a Relic Gesture stemming from the juvenile movement of laying the head against the parent's body, when seeking comfort or rest, or during tender moments of body-contact loving. In the adult, relic version the head is no longer directed towards the companion's body, but the cocking movement itself is sufficiently evocative to arouse protective feeling. Without knowing why, the companion feels his reluctance draining away.

The Head Cock is not confined entirely to situations of wheedling persuasion. It can also be observed in many 'appealing girl' photographs where the smiling subject tilts the head provocatively to one side, as if to say 'I would like to lay my head on your shoulder.' Certain males also employ the device, again unconsciously, when at their most sympathetic and reassuring, as if they are trying to convey the feeling that 'I am not really a hard-bitten ruthless adult, but merely a helpless little boy'.

Perhaps the most important of all the personal Relic Gestures are those whose source can be traced back to those very early moments when,





Oral-contact is the most widespread and common form of Relic Gesture. Contact with the mouth during moments of tension makes it possible to re-live momentarily the comforts known at the mother's breast. Among children, oral-contact often takes the form of thumb-sucking (top left). Thumb-sucking vanishes with adulthood, but finger-sucking (left) survives and becomes extended to pen-sucking (middle left), pipe-sucking, cigar-chomping and cigarette-smoking. In the family group (above), the comfort of the mother's nipple has been replaced, for the child, by a plastic 'comforter', and, for the adults, by their own nicotine 'comforters.'



babies, we are nursed at the breast—or at the bottle. We all experience our first great moments of comfort during these early feeding sessions, and they appear to leave a lasting impression on us that leads to the later re-surfacing of a variety of oral-comfort actions. In adult life these actions are usually heavily disguised and it is hard to convince an elderly businessman, sucking on his unlit pipe or squeezing his cigar between his lips, that he is in reality comforting himself with a sophisticated version of a baby's dummy. Thumb-sucking among children—often quite old children—is fairly transparent in its relation to sucking at the breast, and its frequency increases and decreases with the rise and fall of moment-by-moment tensions; but once adulthood has been reached we have to put away childish things—or, at least, those that are detectably childish—and the oral-comfort actions have to undergo a metamorphosis. The nipple-sucking and teat-sucking of babyhood, after being transformed into the comforter-sucking of infancy and then the thumb-sucking of childhood, becomes the nail-biting and pencil-sucking of adolescence, which later becomes the gum-chewing, sunglass-sucking, cigarette and cigar-sucking, and pipe-sucking of adulthood. The nicotine pleasures of the various forms of smoking fall very far short of explaining the full reward which these activities bring, just as sucking sweets is more than a matter of taste-bud reward. The oral contact involved and the sucking movements of the tongue and mouth are also vitally important, as we relive our earliest infantile comforts.

It has been argued that even our Head Shake action for No can be traced back to these early moments. The infant who is not hungry rejects the breast, or food offered on a spoon, by a sharp turning of the head to the side. In other words, the Head Shake begins as an act of rejection, a negative No to food. From these beginnings, it is argued, has come our adult sign for negation, which we accept without questioning its origin and without ever considering that it, too, might be a relic from our personal past.

Apart from rejecting food by turning the head to the side, the baby also pushes it away by using its tongue. Protruding the tongue becomes another very basic rejection movement. Later in life we use it in two distinct ways: when concentrating hard on some difficult task or skill, or when being deliberately rude to someone. Sticking out the tongue as a rudeness is obviously related to the rejection act in infancy, but the showing of the tip of the tongue during moments of intense concentration is not at first sight so easy to explain. However, careful studies of this action, not only in human adults, but also in nursery-school children—and in great apes, such as gorillas—have revealed that here too we are in the realms of Relic Gesturing.

Observers noticed that the nursery-school children protruded their tongues slightly whenever they wanted to avoid a social contact. If they were busy doing something and suddenly it looked as if they were about to be interrupted, out would come the tongue. This is not the full protrusion of the deliberately rude 'sticking-out-the-tongue' gesture, but an unconscious action in which only the tip of the tongue is showing from between closed lips. The gesture gradually revealed itself, not so much as a pure 'concentration' gesture, but as a 'please-leave-me-in-peace' gesture. This explains why children sometimes show the tip of the tongue when doing difficult homework or other complicated manual tasks. Once the action was understood as a social rejection gesture, it began to fit in with the infantile, breast-rejection movement and also the deliberately rude one. Turning their attention to apes, the observers found that the same rules applied here, too, indicating that this particular Relic Gesture has an even wider significance.

Critics were quick to point out that sticking out the tongue can, in certain, more erotic circumstances, function as a 'come-on' signal rather than a rejection device. But a closer examination of these sexual tongue gestures shows them to be of rather a special kind. Here, the tongue is not pushing something away. Instead, it is curling and moving, as if searching for something. These actions, it seems, can be related to what happens when a



The three forms of tongue-protrusion: the Concentration Tongue (above), the Rude Tongue (below) and the Sexy Tongue (opposite). As with oral-contact gestures, each is a Relic Gesture having its origins in infantile moments at the mother's breast.







baby's tongue is searching for the nipple, rather than trying to push it away. They are the tongue actions of pleasure-seeking moments from our infancy and are Relic Gestures of a totally different kind.

Kissing comes into this category. In early human societies, before commercial baby-food was invented, mothers weaned their children by chewing up their food and then passing it into the infantile mouth by lip-to-lip contact—which naturally involved a considerable amount of tonguing and mutual mouth-pressure. This almost bird-like system of parental care seems strange and alien to us today, but our species probably practised it for a million years or more, and adult erotic kissing today is almost certainly a



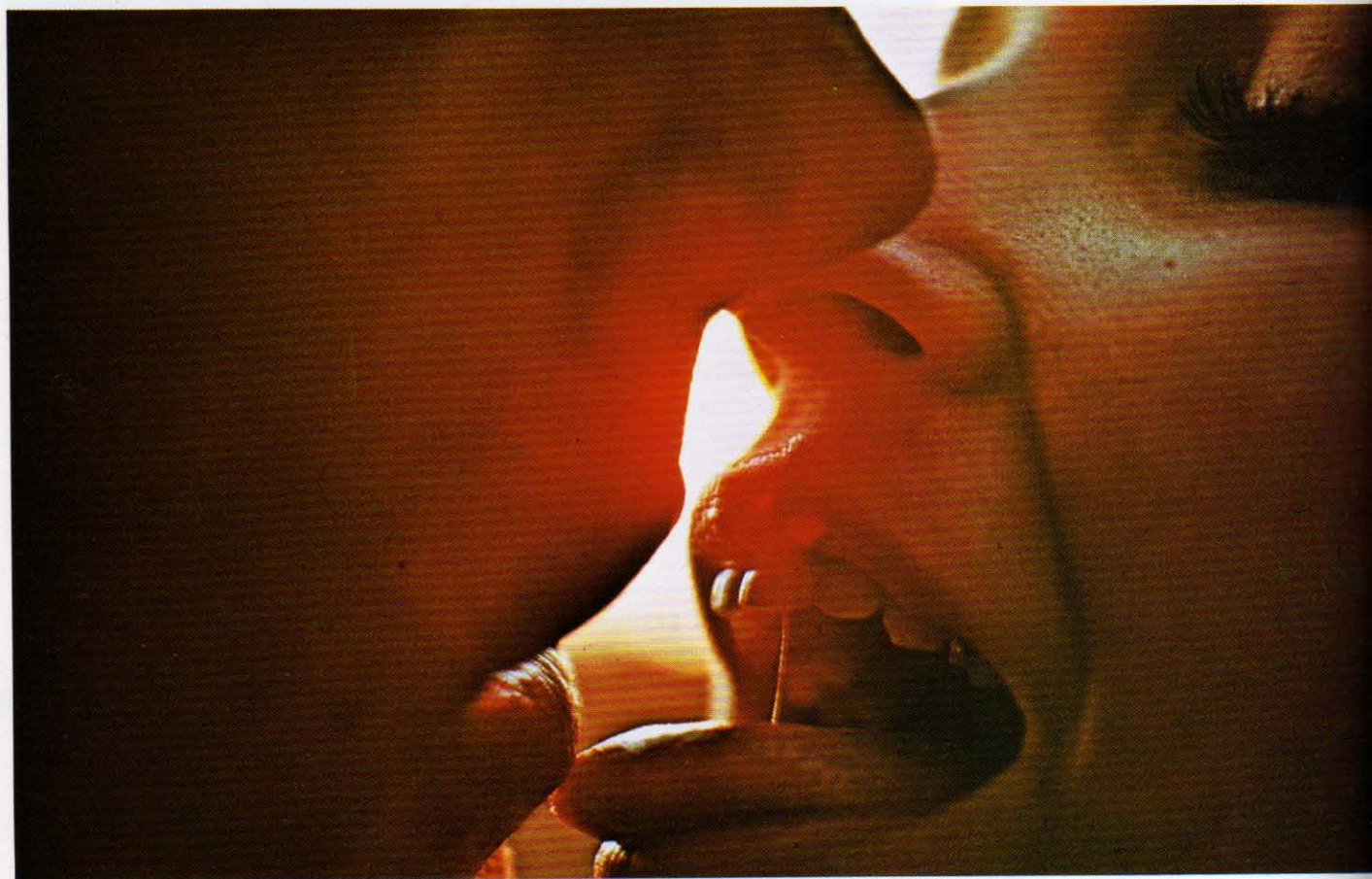


Mothers once weaned their babies by passing chewed-up food mouth-to-mouth (above) (after Eibl-Eibesfeldt) and this appears to be the origin of erotic tongue-kissing between adult lovers.

Relic Gesture stemming from these origins. In this case, however, it is a relic not of our personal past, since we no longer feed infants this way, but of our ancient prehistoric past. Whether it has been handed down from generation to generation, like the Greek insult sign, or whether we have an inborn predisposition towards it, we cannot say. But whichever is the case, it looks rather as though, with the deep kissing and tonguing of modern lovers, we are back again at the infantile mouth-feeding stage of the far-distant past. Many other adult actions could, perhaps, be traced back in a similar way.

Some writers give the impression that the discovery of a relic element in adult actions somehow makes them ridiculous or superfluous. But in fact quite the opposite seems to be true. If we perform Relic Gestures today, as modern adults, it is because they are of value to us *as* modern adults. For some reason they still assist us in our daily lives. To understand their origins is to clarify their value for us, not to condemn them as 'childish' or 'old-fashioned'. If the disaster victim rocking to and fro feels the comfort of being rocked again in his mother's arms, this feeling may help him to cope better with the disaster that has befallen him. If the young lovers exploring each other's mouths with their tongues feel the ancient comfort of parental mouth-feeding, this may help them to increase their mutual trust and thereby their pair-bonding.

These are valuable patterns of behaviour, and although they are, to use a Freudian term, 'regressive', they clearly have a functional role in adult life. If Freudian theory is often critical of them, this is because psychoanalysts encounter them in extreme forms, with patients who have reverted extensively to childhood patterns as a substitute for adult living. But to attack all relic actions, as Freudians tend to do, is rather like saying that no one should take an aspirin to relieve a headache because some people are advanced hypochondriacs. The man-watcher, making his observations in everyday life, rather than the clinic, is perhaps better placed to avoid such errors.





# REGIONAL SIGNALS

How way signals change from country to country and district to district

Regional Signal is one that has a limited geographical range. If a Norwegian, a Korean and a Masai were marooned together on a desert island, they would easily be able to communicate their basic moods and intentions to one another by their actions. All humanity shares a large repertoire of common movements, expressions and postures. But there would also be misunderstandings. Each man would have acquired from his own culture a special set of Regional Signals that would be meaningless to the others. If the Norwegian were shipwrecked instead with a Swede and a Dane, he would find the task much easier, because their closer origins would mean a greater share of these regional gestures, since localized actions, like many words, do not always follow precisely the present-day national boundaries.

This comparison of gestures with words is significant because it reveals immediately our state of ignorance as regards gestural geography. We already know a great deal about linguistic maps, but we know far too little about Gesture Maps. Ask a linguist to describe the distribution of any language you like to name and he will be able to provide accurate, detailed information for you. Take any word, and he will be able to demonstrate its spread from country to country. He can even present you with local dialect maps for some parts of the world and show you, like Professor Higgins in *Pygmalion*, how slang expressions are limited to certain small areas of big cities. But ask anyone for a world-wide gesture atlas, and you will be disappointed.

A start has already been made, however, and new field work is now beginning. Although this research is only in its infancy, recent studies in Europe and around the Mediterranean are providing some valuable clues about the way gestures change as one travels from locality to locality. For example, there is a simple gesture in which the forefinger taps the side of the nose. In England most people interpret this as meaning secrecy or conspiracy. The message is: 'Keep it dark, don't spread it around.' But as one moves down across Europe to central Italy, the dominant meaning changes to become a helpful warning: 'Take care, there is danger—they are crafty.' The two messages are related, because they are both concerned with cunning. In England it is *we* who are cunning, by not divulging our secret. But in central Italy it is *they* who are cunning, and we must be warned against them. The Nose Tap gesture symbolizes cunning in both cases, but the source of the cunning has shifted.

This is an example of a gesture keeping the same form over a wide range, and also retaining the same basic meaning, but nevertheless carrying a quite distinct message in two regions. The more gestures that are mapped in the world, the more common this type of change is proving to be. Another instance is found in the Eye Touch gesture, where the forefinger touches the face just below the eye and pulls the skin downwards, opening the eye wider. In England and France this has the dominant meaning: 'You can't fool me—I see what you are up to.' But in Italy this shifts to: 'Keep your eyes peeled—be alert, he's a crook.' In other words the basic meaning remains one of alertness, but it changes from 'I am alert' to 'You be alert'.

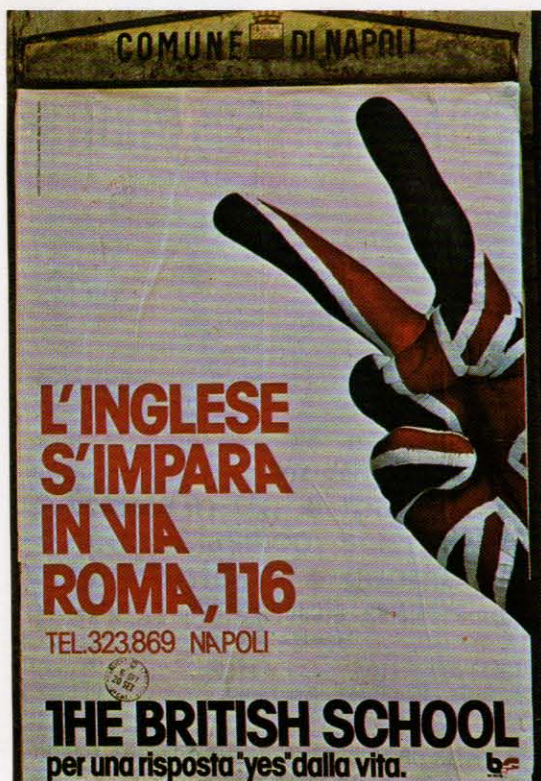
In both these cases, there is a small number of people in each region who interpret the gesture in its other meaning. It is not an all-or-none situation, merely a shift in dominance of one message over the other. This gives some idea of the subtlety of regional changes. Occasionally there is a total switch as one moves from one district to the next, but more often than not the change is only a matter of degree.

Sometimes it is possible to relate the geography of modern Regional Signals to past historical events. The Chin Flick gesture, in which the backs of the fingers are swept upwards and forwards against the underside of the



The Nose Tap gesture. In England this is a signal for conspiracy or secrecy, but in Italy the meaning changes and it becomes a friendly warning: 'Take care, there is danger.'





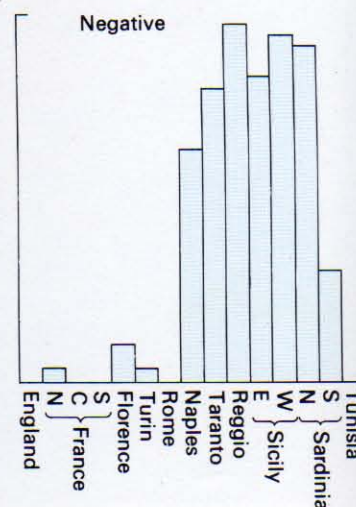
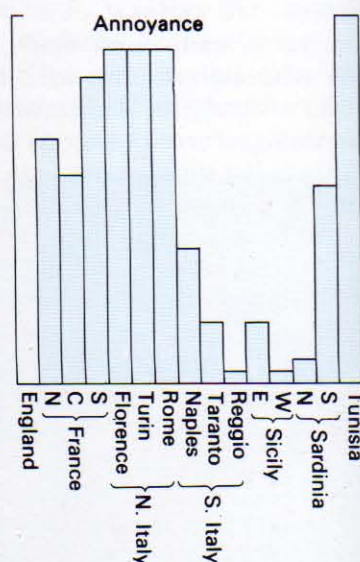
An Italian poster and a German Pop-sculpture embodying the British Victory V-sign, introduced by Churchill during the Second World War. From a local Regional Signal this sign has spread to become one of almost worldwide significance in less than 40 years.

chin, is an insulting action in both France and northern Italy. There it means 'Get lost—you are annoying me.' In southern Italy it also has a negative meaning, but the message it carries is no longer insulting. It now says simply 'There is nothing' or 'No' or 'I cannot' or 'I don't want any'. This switch takes place between Rome and Naples and gives rise to the intriguing possibility that the difference is due to a surviving influence of ancient Greece. The Greeks colonized southern Italy, but stopped their northern movement between Rome and Naples. Greeks today use the Chin Flick in the same way as the southern Italians. In fact, the distribution of this, and certain other gestures, follows remarkably accurately the range of the Greek civilization at its zenith. Our words and our buildings still display the mark of early Greek influence, so it should not be too surprising if ancient Greek gestures are equally tenacious. What is interesting is why they did not spread farther as time passed. Greek architecture and philosophy expanded farther and farther in their influences, but for some reason, gestures like the Chin Flick did not travel so well. Many countries, such as England, lack them altogether, and others, like France, know them only in a different role.

Another historical influence becomes obvious when one moves to North Africa. There, in Tunisia, the Chin Flick gesture once again becomes totally insulting: a Tunisian gives a 'French' Chin Flick, rather than a 'Southern Italian' Chin Flick, despite the fact that France is more remote. The explanation, borne out by other gesture links between France and Tunisia, is that the French colonial influence in Tunisia has left its imperial mark even on informal body-language. The modern Tunisian is gesturally more French than any of his closer neighbours who have not experienced the French presence.

This gives rise to the question as to whether gestures are generally rather conservative, compared with other social patterns. One talks about the latest fashions in clothing, but one never hears of 'this season's crop of new gestures'. There does seem to be a cultural tenacity about them, similar to the persistence found in much folklore and in many children's games and rhymes. Yet new gestures do occasionally manage to creep in and establish themselves. Two thousand years ago it was apparently the Greeks who were the 'gesturally virile' nation. Today it is the British, with their Victory-sign

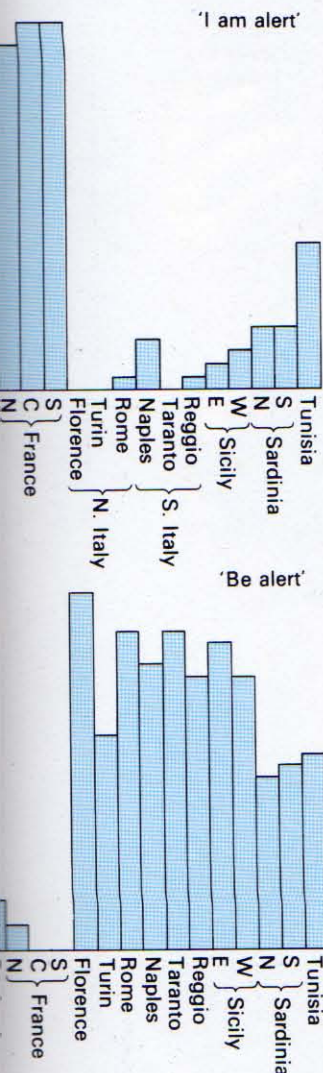
The Chin-flick gesture—see drawing (2), opposite—is unknown in England; in France and Northern Italy it means 'get lost'; in Southern Italy it is no longer insulting, but is merely a simple negative. These differences are expressed quantitatively in the two charts (below).





... gestures have only a limited geographical range, while others are known across wide areas. These ten Neapolitan gestures published by Andrea de Jorio in 1832 have, or had, the following meanings: (1) silence; (2) negative; (3) beauty; (4) anger; (5) derision; (6) tiredness; (7) stupidity; (8) beware; (9) dishonest; (10) vanity. Some, such as (1) and (5), will be known to at least all Europeans, while others, such as (9) and (10), may not be understood at all outside Italy.

Eyelid-pull gesture—see drawing—changes its meaning slightly when a traveller crosses the border between France and Italy. In France it means: 'I am alert'; while in Italy it means: 'You be alert. Watch out!'. In cases where the meaning changes, such as (1) and (5), the gesture has to do with cunning, with one's eyes open, but in France it is to be cunning, while in Italy it is they are cunning. This difference is expressed in the two charts (below). (All charts from Morris et al: *Gesture Maps*.)



and their Thumbs-up, and the Americans with their OK Circle-sign. These have spread right across Europe and much of the rest of the world as well, making their first great advance during the turmoil of the Second World War, and managing to cling on since then, even in the gesture-rich countries of southern Europe. But these are exceptions. Most of the local signs made today are centuries old and steeped in history.



# BATON SIGNALS

Actions that emphasize the rhythm of words

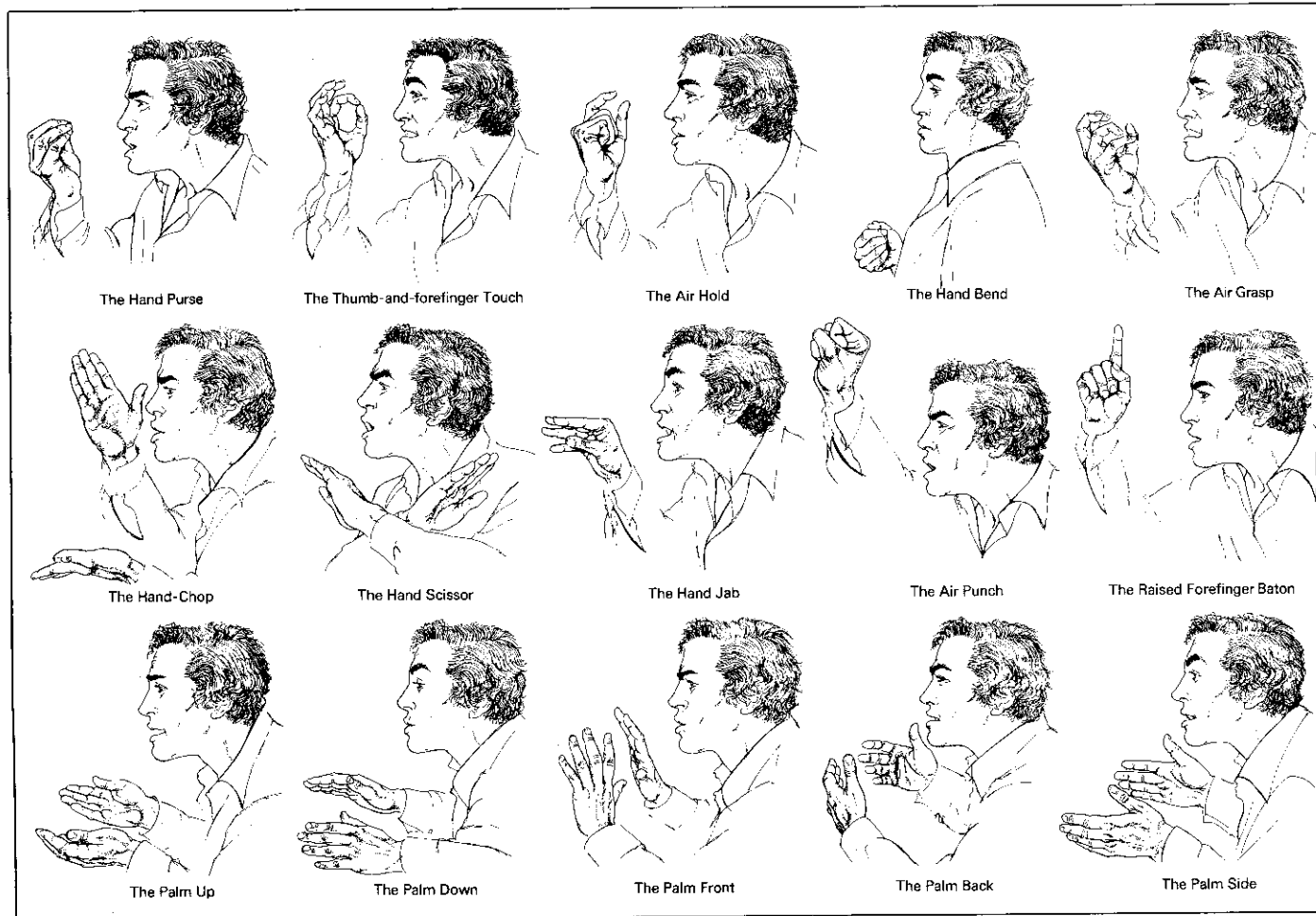
Baton Signals beat time to the rhythm of spoken thoughts. Their essential role is to mark the points of emphasis in our speech, and they are so much an integral part of our verbal delivery that we sometimes gesticulate even when talking on the telephone.

Batons account for the bulk of the gesticulations that accompany conversation or public speaking. An animated speaker's hands are seldom still, but flick, swish and dip as he conducts the 'music' of his words. He is only half-conscious of these movements. He knows his hands are active, but ask him for an exact description of his Baton Signals and he will be unable to give it. He will admit to 'waving his hands about', but there the description will end. Show him a film of himself batoning to his speech and he will be surprised to see that his hands perform a veritable ballet of airborne movements and shifting postures.

It is these posture changes that are of special interest. If Baton Signals did no more than beat time to words there would be little to say about them. But each time-beat is performed with the hand in a particular position and these positions vary from occasion to occasion, from person to person, and from culture to culture. The beating of the hand says: 'This is the point I am making, and *this*, and *this*'. The posture of the beating hand says: '... and this is the mood in which I am making these points'. It is possible to make a detailed classification of these beating postures and then to study their natural history in the field. Here are some of the most important types:

1. The Vacuum Precision-grip. The human hand has two basic holding actions—the precision-grip and the power-grip. In the precision-grip it is the

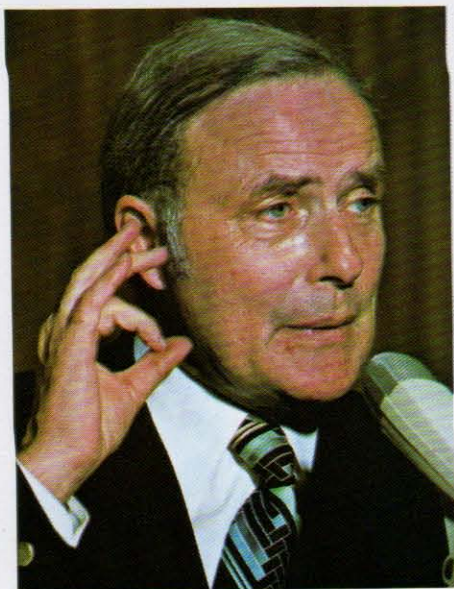
Some of the more distinctive hand batons used by gesticulating speakers. The Air Grasp baton, emphasizing the need for control, was used so often by President de Gaulle (right) that it became one of his best-known idiosyncrasies.











The delicate Thumb-and-forefinger Touch underlines the precision of a point made—on this occasion, by a German politician. Superficially it resembles the familiar American OK sign.



During an informal discussion, the Shah of Iran reaches out as if to touch the listener. The resulting Palm Side baton reinforces his desire to project his ideas.

tips of the thumb and fingers that are used; in the power-grip the whole hand is involved. We employ the precision-grip when holding small objects delicately and manipulating them with accuracy, as when writing or threading a needle. When batoning during speech, we often adopt a precision-grip hand posture, even though the hand in question is empty. In other words, we perform the precision-grip in vacuo. This form of baton reflects an urge on the part of the speaker to express himself delicately and with great exactness. His hand emphasizes the fineness of the points he is stressing.

There are two popular versions of the Vacuum Precision-grip: the Hand Purse and the Thumb-and-forefinger Touch. In the Hand Purse the tips of all five digits are brought together until they touch in a tight circle, like the mouth of a string-closed purse.

In the Thumb-and-forefinger Touch, the tips of only these two digits are brought into contact with each other. This appears to be the most popular form of the Vacuum Precision-grip, requiring slightly less muscular effort than the Hand Purse.

2. The Intention Precision-grip. In this baton posture, the hand makes the intention movement of delicately taking hold of an imaginary, small object, but does not follow the action through to the point where the thumb-tip and finger-tips meet. It is an Air Hold posture and the mood it reflects is more one of a quest for precision than precision itself. There is usually an element of questioning or uncertainty on the part of the gesticulator, as if he is searching for something. The hand, beating the air, almost closes on the answer, but not quite.

3. The Vacuum Power-grip. We employ the power-grip for crude, forceful manipulations such as grasping or hammering. The digits are curled tightly around the held object. When this is done in vacuo, the result, in mild cases, is a bent hand and, in strong cases, a tight fist.

In the Hand Bend posture the curled fingers only lightly touch the palm. This is a rather insipid baton posture, reflecting neither precision of thought, nor forcefulness. The Tight Fist, in contrast, although it lacks delicacy, does signal considerable determination and strength of thought.

Of all the baton hand-positions, the Tight Fist carries the most obvious mood-message, so much so that it is the most likely of the different forms to be used as a deliberate, contrived act. A political speaker who is indecisive and confused may purposely and deceitfully adopt a Tight Fist baton-posture in order to convince his audience of his mental vigour and determination. In other words, the action is too well understood to be a reliable indicator of the underlying mood.

4. The Intention Power-grip. The speaker who is seeking control and is striving in his speech to master the situation, but has not yet done so, performs his batons with his hand held in the frozen intention movement of the power-grip. This is the Air Grasp posture, with the digits stiffly spread and slightly bent. The hand grabs at the air but does not follow through.

5. The Vacuum Blow. The hand acts, not as a holding machine, but as a blunt instrument. Instead of gripping, grabbing, or grasping, it chops, jabs or punches. But again it does this in vacuo, chopping, jabbing or punching the air rather than a solid object.

The Hand Chop, with the straight hand rigid and slashed downward through the air like an axe, is the baton posture of the aggressive speaker who wants his ideas to cut through the confusion of the situation, to an imposed solution. A special variant of the Hand Chop is the Hand Scissor, where the forearms cross over each other horizontally, then both chop outwards. The Hands Scissor baton adds a strong flavour of denial or rejection to the mood of the speech. It is as if, with this variant, the speaker is cutting his way through a hostile barrier, negating the opposition by striking it away from him, both to the left and to the right.

The Hand Jab baton, where the fingertips are prodded sharply towards the



the Hand Chop, in which the flattened hand slices through the air, emphasizing the speaker's need to cut through a problem.



The Palm Up baton of the speaker who implores his audience to agree with him. His hands adopt the posture typical of a begging man.

listener, is also aggressive, but here the aggression is more specific. It has to do with the listener rather than with the general problem.

The Air Punch is the most aggressive of the baton postures, and when the hand is beaten in the air as a clenched fist there is little doubt of the mood of the performer. There is a similarity between this type of batoning and the Tight Fist of the Vacuum Power-grip, but it is usually possible to distinguish between them. The Tight Fist shows the hand gripping the air, while the Air Punch shows it punching into the air. In both cases the hands may beat time aggressively, but only in the Air Punch is there a sense that the fists are delivering blows.

6. The Hand Extend. Instead of imaginary gripping or hitting, the batoning hand may simply be extended in front of the body and held there in a rather neutral posture, fingers together and flat. The important clue in such cases is the direction of the palm. The Palm Up: the imploring hand of the beggar. Hand batons in this posture beg the listener to agree. The Palm Down: the restraining hand of the cool-headed. Hand batons of this type reveal an urge to damp down or lower the prevalent mood—to control it by reduction. The Palm Front: the repelling hand of the protester. The hand faces forwards as if to protect the speaker or push away some imaginary object approaching from the front. The mood reflected is one of rejection. The Palm Back: the embracing hand of the comfort-seeker. This baton is usually performed with both hands at once, palms towards the chest. They are held in front of the body as if embracing an invisible companion. Their posture reflects an attempt to embrace an idea, to encompass the concept under discussion, or to pull the other person metaphorically closer to the speaker. The Palm Side: the reaching hand of the negotiator. The hand is held out in the hand-shake position, where it beats the air in a baton-action that seems to reflect the urge to stretch out and touch the companion. The predominant mood appears to be a strong desire to bridge the gap between speaker and listener—to 'reach' the other person's mind with the idea being expressed in words.

7. The Intention Touch. When the fingers are spread out in a radiating shape—the hand-fan posture—the baton takes on a special flavour. This Air Touch posture is especially popular amongst professional communicators. The speaker widens his hand as if each finger tip is reaching out to touch a





The aggressive Air Punch lends an added vehemence to a speaker's words: an American Civil Rights leader in full cry.

different section of his audience. It is a delicate action related, because of its tip-touching emphasis, to the precision-grip batons mentioned earlier. The difference is that here, instead of the tips touching one another, as in the Hand Purse, they make the intention movement of touching the listeners.

8. The Hands together. If the speaker joins his left and right hand in some sort of hand-to-hand contact, this tends to replace batoning. Instead of beating time to his thoughts, he now enjoys the comforting sensation of 'holding hands with himself' while continuing to talk.

This self-intimacy often clashes with the urge to emphasize a point, however, and speakers can be observed in a state of conflict, with their linked hands rebelling against their conjoined repose. Without pulling apart, they jerk and jump with the shift of spoken thoughts. These muted batons are common among individuals made anxious and insecure by the tension of the social situation in which they find themselves, but who nevertheless have a strong urge to communicate to their companions.

9. The Forefinger Baton. Hand batons usually employ all the digits working together, but there is one common baton posture in which a single digit—the forefinger—plays a dominant role. This is the extended-forefinger posture.

There are two popular versions: the Frontal Forefinger Baton and the Raised Forefinger Baton. In the frontal case the forefinger is jabbed towards the listener or towards some object under discussion. Pointing at an object may be merely a way of emphasizing the importance of that object for the discussion, but pointing directly at a listener is an assertive, authoritative act and when it becomes extended as a rhythmic baton, the impact on the listener is one of open hostility or domination. The jabbing forefinger may only assault the air, but the listener can almost feel it stabbing into his ribs.





Forefinger Baton is usually employed assertively by a domineering speaker: boxer Muhammad Ali, weighing in for a world heavyweight title fight, predicts the outcome. This baton is aggressive enough to make even a fragile signaller (below) appear firm and authoritative.



The Raised Forefinger Baton is also seen as threatening or domineering, but for a slightly different reason. Here the forefinger is acting as a symbolic club or stick, raised ready to deliver a symbolic blow. The beating-time action of the speaker who holds his hand aloft in this position is menacing because it relates to the ancient overarm blow of our species.

It is known that both very small children and our closest ape relatives employ the overarm blow as a fundamental attack movement and that when human adults indulge in informal violence, as in a city riot, they too invariably resort to this particular action. It seems probable that it is an example of an inborn action pattern for the human species. The use of the warning finger, raised high and beating the air like a miniature blunt instrument, is therefore likely to trigger off a deep-seated intimidation response in the speaker's audience, even though the forefinger itself is such a puny symbolic substitute for a real weapon.

10. The Head Baton. The hands are undeniably the most important baton organs, but other parts of the body also beat time to the spoken ideas. The head often plays a supporting role, making small dipping movements to add further emphasis. Each Head Dip involves a sharp down-jerk, followed by a softer up-jerk return. There is a small forward movement as the head dips, giving it a slightly attacking quality. In fact, this form of baton is usually reserved for rather forceful, aggressive statements and the Head Dip action appears to have originated from a lunging intention movement.

11. The Body Baton. Similar to the Head Baton, but involving the whole body as well, is the Body Jerk. This is seen in the most dramatic cases of batoning, where the speaker literally throws himself into his role of communicator. The musical baton-waver—the orchestra conductor—shows the most exaggerated form of this type of beating-time action, but it can also





The Tight Fist, a Baton Signal popular among politicians, is used to transmit an impression of unshakable determination. A Head Dip reinforces its effect.

be observed in cases of extravagantly intense public speakers, who are rather aggressively desperate in their attempts to convince their audiences.

Another Body Baton, popular among singers, is the Body Sway, in which the trunk tilts to the side, first one way, then the other, keeping in time with the emphasis of the sung words, which will also, inevitably, be the tempo of the song's music.

12. The Foot Baton. Feet play little part in ordinary speech batoning, but there is one special exception—the Foot Stamp. This Foot Baton is almost exclusively connected with passionate, violent emphasis, when the speaker is almost at temper-tantrum level. The foot is banged down hard with each point of verbal emphasis, with the result that this particular baton, like fist thumping on a table, is heard as well as seen.

These, then, are the major Baton Signals. In each case the underlying mood has been suggested, but these suggestions must not be interpreted too rigidly. They represent probabilities rather than certainties and there is a good reason for this, namely the 'personal fixation' factor. Each of us is likely to develop personal preferences for certain types of Baton Signal and then, as the years go by, display these more and more to the exclusion of others. Our batoning style will still vary with our mood-changes, but in a less precise way, with our favourite hand postures covering a rather wider range of moods than might be expected from the simplified classification given here.

Other differences in batoning behaviour have been noted as well. It is claimed that some nationalities gesticulate more than others, that lower classes gesticulate more than upper classes, and that the inarticulate gesticulate more than the articulate. National differences certainly do seem to exist, and studies of film sequences confirm that most Mediterranean peoples gesticulate more freely than northern Europeans. The trend is not so much national as geographical, and the obvious implication is that it has something to do with temperature differences but, as yet, no one has been able to explain why this should be.

Class differences may also exist, but these have been exaggerated. It is true that upper-class Victorians frowned on all forms of social disinhibition and the lively use of the arms and hands 'as auxiliaries to the voice' was considered 'vulgar' by the author of *The Habits of Good Society*, published in London a hundred years ago. However, the Victorian public speaker was noted for his manual gestures and was even able to buy books on how to gesticulate more effectively when addressing an audience. So the precise social context was relevant, and even in Victorian times the matter was not as simple as it might seem at first sight. Today there are still some lingering influences from this earlier era, with certain individuals taught that it is unseemly to gesticulate emotionally, but there is no longer any clear-cut division between one social group and another. In all social strata there are wild gesticulators and non-gesticulators.

As regards the articulation claim, there seems to be little supporting evidence. The idea was that verbal clumsiness was counterbalanced by manual gesturing, that the inarticulate are groping with their hands for words that elude them. Again, the truth is not that simple. Some articulate men are rather body-static, but many more are highly animated. Some of the most brilliant wordsmiths alive are also the most gesticulatory. Conversely, many of the least articulate individuals are such blunted personalities that their hands are as inexpressive as their words.

Apart from group-to-group differences and person-to-person differences there are also variations in batoning frequency from occasion to occasion in the same individual. Since batons are concerned with both emphasis and mood, it follows that in situations where spoken comments are rather matter-of-fact, such as when ordering groceries, the words will be accompanied by fewer batons than when someone is arguing about some passionately held belief. Also, he is more likely to gesticulate if he is an enthusiast rather than a cynic. The enthusiast wants to share his excitements and feels a power



baton signalling is so compulsive that often  
e continue to use hand batons to  
emphasize words, even when the listener is  
early unable to see them.



need to emphasize every point that he considers important. The cynic is so negative in all his attitudes that he feels no such urge.

The enthusiast's behaviour provides another clue. His batons beat out his eagerness to arouse similar enthusiasm in his listeners. The more feedback he gets from them, the more successful he will feel. The more successful he feels, the less he will be driven—unconsciously—to emphasize his verbal statements. So, the reaction of his audience to his speech is a vital factor in influencing the intensity of his baton signals. A demonstrative and totally sympathetic listener will tend to damp down his gesticulations. But give him an attentive yet critical audience and his hands will start to dance. He must win over the listener and to do this he must emphasize his words over and over again. Bearing this in mind, it suddenly becomes clear why public speakers addressing large groups of people gesticulate so much more than private conversationalists. The same man talking to a single friend or addressing a big audience shows many more batons in the public situation than in the private encounter. The reason is that, paradoxically, he gets less feedback from the crowd than he does from the solitary friend. The friend keeps on nodding and smiling and the speaker knows all the time that his words are getting across. No need then to add much manual emphasis. But the members of a large audience do not show their minute-by-minute appreciation with smiles and nods. Being part of a crowd makes their relationship with the speaker impersonal. They stare at him and save their reaction for the end, when they applaud with hand-clapping. For the speaker, the sea of faces is a challenge—they are not nodding as a close friend would do, so what precisely *are* they thinking? Are the ideas getting across or are they failing to make any impact? Unconsciously, the speaker decides that the only safe course of action is to step up the emphasis, just to make sure. And so it is that moderate gesticulators in private become intense gesticulators on the public platform.

Finally, in addition to differences in frequency, there is also much subtle variation in baton style. But little research has been done on this subject so far, and for a detailed report on baton 'dialects', we must await the results of field studies yet to come.



the Palm Back baton is used by  
gesticulators attempting to 'embrace' a  
concept. The hands appear to embrace an  
invisible companion.



# GUIDE SIGNS

Pointing and beckoning—how we show the way

Guide Signs are actions which indicate direction. They guide the attention of the onlooker, or his actual movements. In a word, they are pointers. In the scientific literature they have been given the name Deictic Signals, but this seems unnecessarily obscure.

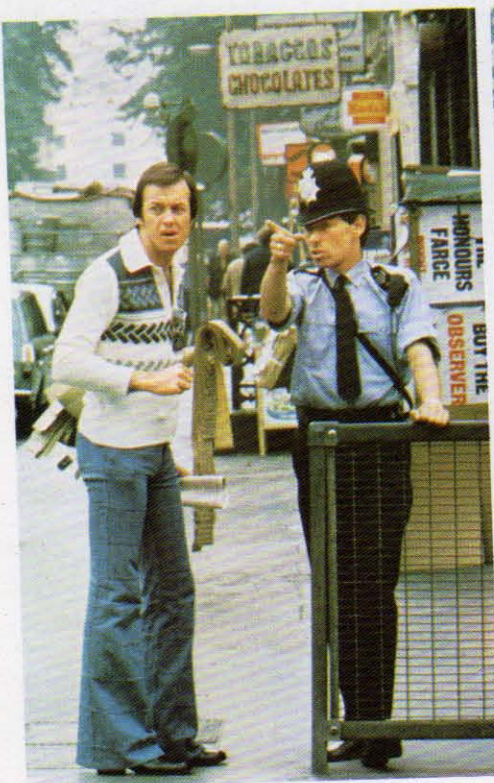
When we point at something it seems such a simple thing to do that we tend to take this type of action for granted. Yet other animals are poor pointers and the extensive use of Guide Signs is uniquely human property. Pointing is, in fact, a speciality of our species and we perform it in many different ways.

The most simple Guide Sign is the Body Point, and this is the only form of pointing which we do share with other species. If some sudden stimulus alerts one animal in a group and it swings its body quickly to face the stimulus, this action may guide the attention of its companions so that they too turn to face in the same direction, even though they themselves may not yet have spotted the source of interest. We have made special use of this animal Body Point in one instance—the gun-dog aptly called the 'Pointer'.

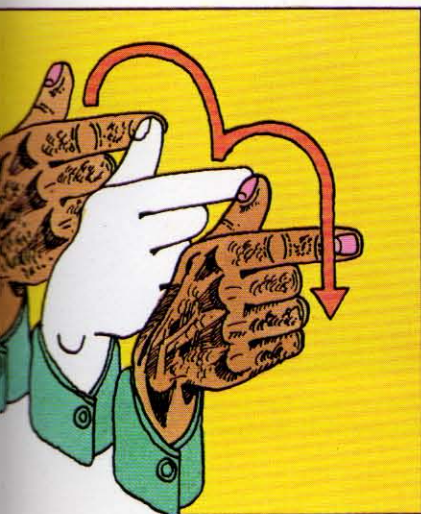
Human body-pointing can be observed at any social gathering where an important personage is present. We can detect his position as we enter the room by the cluster of bodies surrounding him and all facing towards him. Street clusters of this kind also arouse our curiosity, when we see a circle of inward-facing bodies obscuring some focal point of interest. When there has been an accident, people run towards such a cluster, guided by the inward body-pointing, so that the clump of onlookers quickly swells to a dense crowd.

Human body-pointing is only an incidental gesture. We do not do it as an intended signal—it is secondary to what else is going on. The most popular form of deliberate guide-signing in our species is undoubtedly the Forefinger Point. When someone stops us in the street and asks the way, we may give a perfectly adequate verbal answer, but we rarely omit to add a Forefinger Point in support of those words. Even when the pointing is clearly

The Forefinger Point (below far left) is a Guide-sign showing the position of something, while the Hand Point (below left) is used to indicate the course to be taken. The farther away the object, the higher the forefinger points (below), as if we were an arrow about to be fired at a target

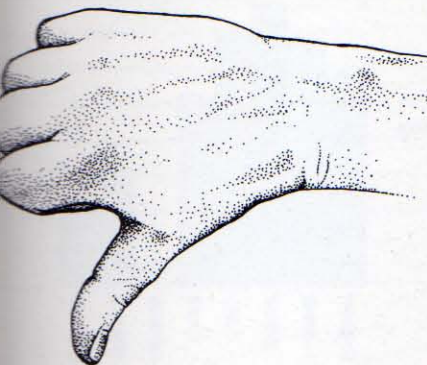
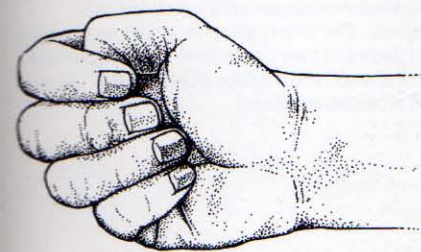






The Forefinger Hop, in which the finger hops forward once for each future day. The sign shown here means 'the day after tomorrow'.

The thumbs-compressed and the thumbs-down signs. The Romans' sign for 'slay him' was the thumbs-down and their signal for 'spare him' was the thumbs-compressed—not, as is usually believed, the thumbs-up.



superfluous we still feel compelled to do it, and it is an action that is observable in almost all countries in the world. In certain places, where finger-pointing is taboo, it is replaced by the Head Point, in which the head is jerked in the appropriate direction, combined with an opening and closing, or pouting, of the lips. Head-pointing is most likely to be encountered in Central and South America, in black Africa and among Gurkhas and North American Indians.

A special form of the Head Point is the secretive Eyes Point. If I wish to warn you that someone has just entered the room, out of your line of vision, I may glance quickly in their direction, pause with an intense stare for a fraction of a second, then return my gaze to you again to see if you have understood. The chances are that I will have to repeat this special glance several times before you get the message. This is a deliberate and intensified version of the ordinary Eyes Glance action, but it requires delicate handling. If I perform the action too intensely, it may be observed by the third party, and if I do not intensify it enough you may overlook it.

Returning to the most important human pointer—the hand—there are some variants there, too. In addition to the Forefinger Point, there is also the Hand Point, in which all five digits are aimed, flat-handed and with the fingers together. The difference between the Forefinger Point and the Hand Point is subtle. If I ask someone in the street 'Where is the station?' and he replies 'It is down there', he is likely to point with his forefinger. If I ask 'How do I get to the station?' and he replies 'You walk down there', he is more likely to indicate the direction of my walk by pointing with the whole of his hand, thumb uppermost and all four fingers stretched out.

In other words, the pointing hand is a Guide Sign indicating the course to be taken, while the pointing finger is more concerned with indicating the position of the goal you are seeking. It is as if the forefinger is an arrow about to be fired at your destination. So relevant is this analogy, that in certain tribal societies, the distance of the destination is indicated by the angle of the forefinger. If I ask 'Where is the nearest waterhole?' and it is close by, the forefinger will point almost horizontally; but if it is far away, then the forefinger will be tilted slightly upwards. The farther away it is, the higher the pointing finger is tilted up, just as an arrow would be fired higher to make it go farther.

In Greece and parts of Italy there is a special version of this symbolism—the Forefinger Hop. In this action, the extended forefinger is jumped forward in an arc, each jump representing one day ahead of the present day. This is a Guide Sign indicating a direction in time rather than space and, with its aid, a boy and girl can make a date across a crowded room without exchanging a word. The question and answer goes something like this:

BOY: Unspoken words: Can we meet tomorrow at five? Actions: (1) points at girl, points at himself (=we); (2) hops forefinger once (=tomorrow); (3) holds up five fingers (=5 pm).

GIRL: Unspoken words: No, but I can manage five, the day after. Actions: (1) tosses head back (=no); (2) hops forefinger twice (=day after tomorrow); (3) holds up five fingers (5 pm).

The Two-fingers Point, employing the first and second fingers, is not a common Guide Sign, but is used sometimes as an intermediate between goal-indicating forefinger-pointing and course-indicating hand-pointing.

Finally, there is the Thumb Point, with an ancient and bloody history. In Roman times this was a Guide Sign that could spell death. When a gladiator was defeated in combat in the arena, he might be spared or he might be killed on the spot by his victor. The crowd of spectators could influence the decision by the position of their thumbs. It is popularly believed that the life-or-death thumb gestures were thumbs-up for life and thumbs-down for death, but this appears to be based on a misinterpretation of ancient writings. A re-examination of these writings makes it more likely that the 'thumbs-up' posture was really a 'thumbs-cover-up'—with the thumbs hidden inside the



closed hands—while the ‘thumbs-down’ was really a ‘thumbs-point-down’. The crowd was seated above the arena, so if they pointed their thumbs towards the gladiator they would automatically be pointed downwards. So the life-or-death gesturing was either thumbs-hide for life, or thumbs-point for death.

We are so used to the modern version of thumbs-up and thumbs-down that this explanation of the ancient signs seems highly improbable, but the fact remains that the original phrase for thumbs-up—*pollice compresso*—means literally ‘thumbs compressed’, which is hardly the way we would describe the modern thumb sign indicating approval. The origin of the ancient actions appears to be based in simple mimicry. The thrusting downwards of the thumb, with the fingers closed, is an imitation of the killing action of thrusting the sword down into the victim. It is a swordless sword-thrust performed by the onlookers to encourage the winner to do likewise to the loser. To give the opposite signal—spare him, do *not* make the sword-thrust—they hold out their hands with the thumbs clearly hidden inside their closed fingers.

Perhaps because of their ancient heritage, Italians today are far less likely to use the thumbs-up gesture meaning ‘OK’, ‘fine’, ‘good’, when compared with, say, Englishmen or Frenchmen. When quizzed on this point, 95 per cent of Englishmen and Frenchmen agreed that they used the sign in this way, but the figure for Italians was as low as 23 per cent. What is more, many of the Italians referred to the sign as the ‘English OK’ signal, and mentioned that they had seen it in films or on television. So it looks as if the popular thumbs-up, which started out as a mistranslation from the literature of ancient Rome, is now ‘returning’ to the city from which it never really came in the first place.

Apart from this special use of the thumb, there is also a more general, directional thumb-point. It has the flavour of a rather surly action—a grumpy or irritated gesture. If I am busy and someone interrupts me to ask where an object is, I may respond by jerking my thumb in the appropriate direction. Such an action is considered rather impolite, and it is worth asking why. I am, after all, providing the required information. I am not ignoring the questioner, so why should he feel that my jabbing thumb is slightly insulting? The answer seems to be connected with the role of the thumb as the ‘brutal digit’, or ‘power digit’. If we want to press down on something as hard as we can, we use the thumb rather than any of the fingers. When we grip an object firmly, the thumb’s strength has to balance the strength of all four fingers put together. We talk of having a person ‘under our thumb’ when we mean they are under our control, in our power. So the directional thumb-jab is a statement unconsciously associated with physical strength. As a gesture that hints at hidden power it is definitely not for use by subordinates towards their superiors. No one in a junior role would indicate direction to a senior colleague by means of a thumb-jerk, unless he were being deliberately rude.

The only exception to this rule is when the direction being indicated is over the shoulder of the pointer. If he were being polite, he would turn right round and point with his forefinger, but if it is difficult for him to turn, then a thumb-point over his shoulder is acceptable. A special case of this is the hitch-hiker, who thumb-points down the road behind him as he faces the on-coming traffic.

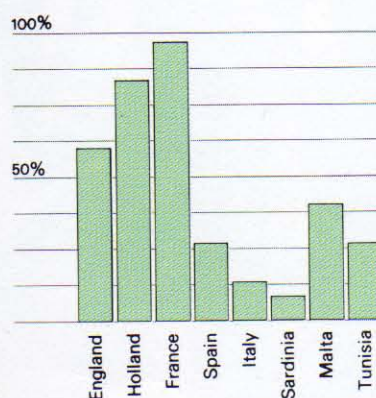
In addition to the gestures we call ‘pointing’, there is another special category of Guide Signs that we refer to as ‘beckoning’. Here there is only one direction involved—towards oneself. These are the ‘come here’ or ‘come hither’ signals and there are several variants.

The most common form of beckoning is the Hand Beckon in which all four fingers open and close together. Some people do this with the palm facing upwards, and others do it in the opposite way, with the palm facing downwards. Which of these positions you use depends on where you live. If



The sarcastic Forefinger Beckon, a favourite gesture of Oliver Hardy's.

Beckoning is done with the palm up in some countries and the palm down in others. The charts show how the preference changes as you travel from England across Europe to North Africa (Charts after Morris et al: *Gesture Maps*).





you are an Englishman or a Frenchman you always use the palm-up posture for beckoning, but if you are an Italian you nearly always use the palm-down posture. This is because Italians employ a good-bye wave that looks almost exactly like the Anglo-French beckon. If they beckoned in the Anglo-French style it could lead to confusion.

In the rest of the world, the palm-up Hand Beckon is seen in most areas, but the palm-down variant is found in certain parts of Asia and Africa, and in Spain and the South American Countries.

The Forefinger Beckon is much less common than the Hand Beckon, and in England it has a slightly teasing or sarcastic flavour. This is not so marked in France and it is twice as common there as in England. In Italy it is rare, but even less common is the palm-down Forefinger Beckon which was used by only 5 out of 300 Italians questioned on the subject (1.7 per cent).

Another rare variant is the Two-finger Beckon, which was found in only 8 per cent of Englishmen and Frenchmen and not at all in Italy. Its lack of popularity may well be due to its resemblance to the Two-finger Jerk, which is a widespread obscenity.

If a beckoner wishes to be more insistent—a parent signalling to a child in the distance, for example—he often employs a full arm movement which makes the message more conspicuous. The Sideways Arm-sweep is the most popular version of this gesture, which says, not so much 'Come here', as 'Come on!'. Another long-distance beckon signal is the Raised-forefinger Rotation gesture. In this, the arm is raised above the head, the straightened forefinger stretched up to the sky. The finger is then rotated vigorously. This is observable in many military contexts, but is also reported to be used by certain Bedouins in North Africa—who may prove to be the original source from which the military borrowed the action.

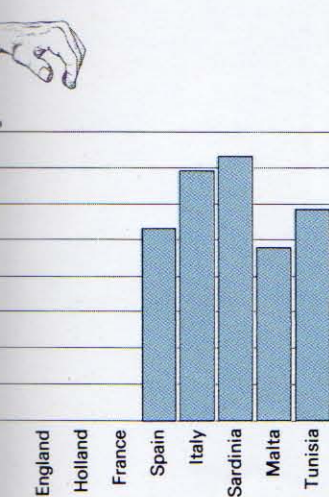
Another North African speciality that has been observed is numbered beckoning. If you see a group of people and you wish to beckon only one of them to come over to you, you use a forefinger only. If you want two of them to come to you, you employ the second finger as well as the forefinger. If you want three of them, you use the first, second and third fingers. This beckoning 'oddity' was discovered in Tunisia, but whether it was a local peculiarity, or whether it has a wider importance is not yet clear.

A theatrical and rather sarcastic, 'school-masterish' beckon is the Finger-by-finger Beckon. In this the fingers do not close together, but one after the other in a wave motion, starting with the little finger and ending with the forefinger. Some comedians use this as a mocking sign of 'patient exasperation'. In origin it appears to be a hybrid between an ordinary Hand Beckon and a grasping action.

Finally, there is the Head Beckon, which is normally used only when the hands are full and unable to perform the more usual beckoning movements. A special exception is the collusive Head Beckon which gives a sexual 'Come Hither' signal. This involves no more than a very slight head jerk and implies a sexual invitation, although it is now used more in a joking context of pretended sexuality, rather than in a truly erotic situation.

Apart from pointing and beckoning there are various hand and arm movements that act as general Guide Signs. The Hand-repel gesture, with the hand held up, palm-front, and pushing away from the signaller, guides the companion to go back. The directional Hand Flap ushers the companion in the direction of the moved hand. The Hand Lift directs upwards, and the Hand Downbeat directs downwards.

Put together, all these Guide Signs confirm the claim that man is the best and most elaborate pointer in the animal kingdom. We take it all for granted, and yet when one considers all the subtle distinctions between the different types of directional signalling, it is clear that even here there is a whole complex world of gesture communication, enabling man to express with just the right degree of precision the 'whereness' of the objects, places and people around him.





# YES/NO SIGNALS

Ways in which we signal agreement and acceptance, or denial and refusal

Many people believe that there is only one way to signal YES and one way to signal NO—the Head Nod and the Head Shake—and that these actions are global in their distribution. This is close to the truth, but it is not the whole truth. In certain regions there are other, less well-known head movements that are used locally to signify affirmatives and negatives, and unless these are understood, travellers may find themselves in difficulties. There are five main head actions.

1. The Head Nod. The head moves vertically up and down one or more times, with the down elements stronger than the up elements. Essentially this is an incipient bowing action, with the head starting to make a bow and then stopping short. Since bowing is part of a worldwide system of submissive body-lowering, it is not surprising to find that the Head Nod occurs almost everywhere and that whenever it does occur, it is always a YES sign, never a NO. Even remote tribes, such as the Australian Aborigines, were found to be using the Head Nod for YES, when first encountered by white men, so that it must either be thousands of years old or have developed independently in different places at various times. Its wide range certainly cannot be explained as a recent colonial or tourist import.

In addition to the Aborigines, the Head Nod has also been recorded in the Amazonian Indians, Eskimos, Fuegians, Papuans, Samoans, Balinese, Malays, Japanese, Chinese, and a number of African Tribes. It is also used by nearly all whites in Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, and it has even been recorded in people born deaf and blind, and in microcephalic individuals incapable of speech. This impressive list, which could doubtless be greatly extended, strongly suggests that affirmative Head Nodding may well be an inborn action for our species. If this is so, then the exceptions to the rule—those people who employ some other head movement for YES—require a special explanation. The chances are that they are adding to rather than replacing the nodding gesture. In Ceylon, for instance, the Head Nod was said by some travellers to be replaced by a Head Sway. When agreeing to some proposal, the local inhabitants were seen to sway the head from side to side instead of nodding it up and down. Closer study revealed that this was only the case where agreement was concerned and that if a factual question was put, it was answered with the familiar Head Nod. So it depended on the type of YES involved. For most people there is simply a 'blanket response' to all questions requiring an affirmative signal, but for others, the precise kind of YES is relevant. There are several basic varieties of YES:

The Acknowledgement Nod: 'Yes, I am still listening.'

The Encouraging Nod: 'Yes, how fascinating.'

The Understanding Nod: 'Yes, I see what you mean.'

The Agreement Nod: 'Yes, I will.'

The Factual Nod: 'Yes, that is correct.'

If, in any particular locality, one of these types of Nod is replaced by some other head action, then this is likely to be the one that catches the eye of the casual traveller, simply because it is different; and he will return with inaccurate stories of a totally different signalling system for affirmations.

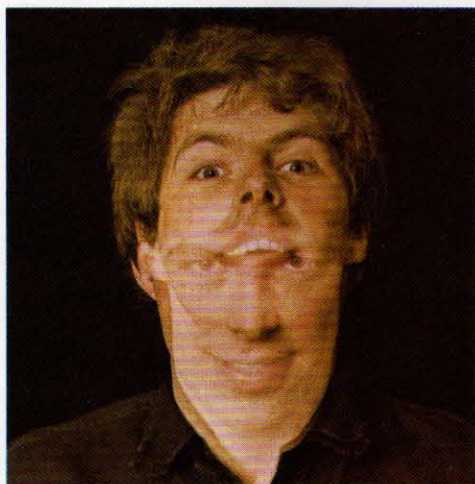
2. The Head Shake. The head turns horizontally from side to side, with equal emphasis left and right. This is the most common form of negative response, covering a wide range of nos, from 'I cannot' and 'I will not' to 'I disagree' and 'I do not know'. It can also signify disapproval or bewilderment.

Like the Head Nod, the Head Shake is virtually global in range and, again like the Head Nod, it usually manages to survive in those areas where some other negative action is operating. In origin, as mentioned earlier, it is





Head Nod and the Head Shake, the two most widespread signs for 'yes' and 'no'. Many people mistakenly believe that these are the only two gestures employed for affirmations and negations.



thought to stem from the infantile action of rejecting the breast, the bottle, or a spoonful of food. When the parent tries to persuade the baby to feed, the negative response to the offering is to twist the head first to one side and then to the other, turning the head away from the unwanted object. This alternate turning is seen as the starting point for the adult Head Shake, and explains why, wherever it occurs, it is always a negative signal.

3. The Head Twist. The head turns sharply to one side and back again to the neutral position. This is half a Head Shake and means much the same. It is employed as a NO sign in parts of Ethiopia and elsewhere, and is even more clearly related to the child's action of refusing food which is being pressed to the mouth.

4. The Head Sway. The head tilts rhythmically from side to side, describing an arc as if it were an inverted pendulum. To most Europeans, this action would mean 'Maybe yes, maybe no', with the head mimicking the alternating actions of going 'this way or that way'. But in Bulgaria and parts of Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran and Bengal, this rocking movement of the head is reputed to be a replacement for the more familiar Head Nod. In these areas it is said to mean YES, rather than maybe, and the movement is sufficiently similar to the more common Head Shake to cause some confusion.

When Head-shaking Russian soldiers were occupying Bulgaria in the last century, they had trouble understanding the local inhabitants. The Bulgarian YES looked so much like a Russian NO that complications arose. To solve the problem the Russians trained themselves to sway their heads when they meant YES and to suppress their own negative Head Shakes. This should have worked well, but even greater misunderstandings arose because the Bulgarians were never sure whether the Russians had remembered to switch to their system, or whether they had reverted momentarily to their own. At this point, all head signalling broke down.

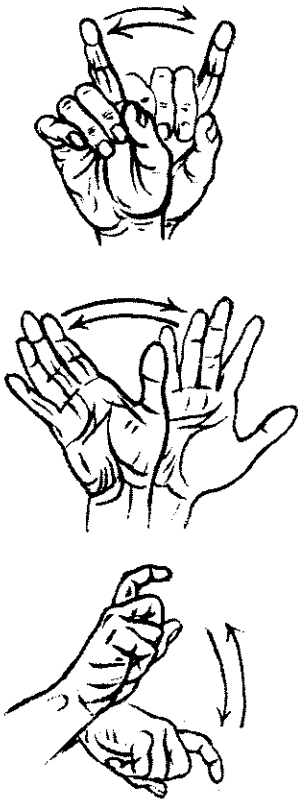
The Bulgarian language contains several phrases which give the clue to the origin of the Head Sway movement as an affirmative. There are sayings such as 'I give you my ear' and 'I am all ears', and the suggestion is that the swaying movement is a stylized form of tilting the ear to the companion to offer him your attention. Affirming your interest then becomes a generalized affirmation.

5. The Head Toss. The head is tilted sharply back and returns less sharply to the neutral posture. This is like an inverted Head Nod, and is a special way of saying NO for many regions. Many signals work on the *antithesis principle*, and this is one of them. The principle states, quite simply, that if two signals mean the opposite of each other, then the actions on which they are based will also be opposite in form or direction. For example, in a dominant posture, the body is held high, while in a submissive posture it crouches low. Similarly, if the Head Nod means YES, then one might expect the sign for NO to be the



Picking the backs of the fingers of one hand and pushing them forward against the underside of the chin, a southern Italian (left) indicates a negative answer. This gesture—the Chin Tuck—is an amplification of the upward Head Toss (above).





The wagged forefinger (top) or the laterally shaken hand (middle) often act in place of the simple Head Shake. These are examples of Substitute Signals, where one part of the body (the forefinger or the hand) replaces the usual organ (the head) involved in sending the signal. In a similar way, the North American Indian sign for 'yes' is a dip of the forefinger (above), with this movement substituting for a nod of the head.

opposite of it. There are two ways of opposing the downward noddin movement—one is the sideways shaking action, the Head Shake, and the other is upward Head Toss.

Perhaps because it is less distinctive than the Head Shake, the Head Toss has a much more limited range. Its main centre is in Greece, and it is sometimes referred to as the 'Greek NO', but it also spreads out around many parts of the Mediterranean and can be seen today not only in Greece, but also in Cyprus, Turkey, Yugoslavia, some Arab countries, Malta, Sicily and southern Italy. As with the Chin Flick (one of the Regional Signals discussed earlier), its present-day range is remarkably similar to the territorial spread of ancient Greece in its heyday, and it looks very much as though this is an ancient Grecian gesture that has survived in those places that were once Greek colonies, despite the passage of over two thousand years. To test this a special study was made in central Italy. It was found that, despite the mobility of modern populations in Italy and the existence of a national television network covering the whole country, modern Romans still say NO with a Head Shake, and Neapolitans still say NO with a Head Toss. Travelling through the villages between the two cities, it became clear that there was a fairly sharp dividing-line coinciding with the first mountain range north of Naples. South of this, nearly everyone used the Head Toss; north of it they used the Head Shake. As far as the Head Toss is concerned, it is almost as if the Greeks never left the south of Italy.

For most people in the south, however, the Head Toss is not used for even a kind of negative statement. A little Head Shaking still goes on, especially for factual nos. The Head Toss has the flavour of an emotional NO—'No, you may not', 'It's no good', 'No!!!'. It is sometimes emphasized by the addition of lip-pursing, eye-raising and eyebrow-raising, and a clicking sound. At a distance, it is also augmented by a flicking movement in which the backs of the fingers scrape forward under the chin—the Chin Flick.

To confuse matters further, there is a totally different meaning for the Head Toss in certain other parts of the world. Among the Maoris of New Zealand, the Tagals of the Philippines, the Dyaks of Borneo, and certain Ethiopians, the Head Toss means, not NO, but YES. This remarkable scattered distribution is hard to understand, but the way in which the tossing back of the head can come to mean YES is not impossible to guess. There is a 'Aha!' response, involving an up-and-back tilt of the head, which we all give when we have just solved a problem with a flash of insight. It is a movement of pleased surprise: 'Ah, yes, of course!', and the 'Ah, yes' can presumably develop into a simple YES signal. This is what seems to have happened in several isolated cases, and it provides another reason why the Head Toss is not a more popular, world-wide sign, like the Head Nod and the Head Shake. It lacks their specificity.

The five main YES/NO signals are all movements of the head—but there are other ways of saying YES or NO, involving the hands. A parental warning to a child not to do something is often performed, not with a shaking head, but instead with a wagging forefinger. This is an example of a Substitute Signal, with one part of the body 'standing in' for another. Here, the forefinger is being shaken in imitation of the shaken head. The hand, so to speak, borrows the action from the head and, in so doing, is able to speed it up and add more vigour to it. If the parent is anxious or angry, the child can be given a more forceful, agitated and rapid shaking signal with the finger than would be possible with the head. Another version is the shaking hand. The same action is performed, but with the flat palm of the hand facing the companion.

According to students of North American Indian sign language, the Indian hand signal for YES is a downward dip of the forefinger—another Substitute Signal, this time a 'Hand Bow' or 'Hand Nod', with the dipping down of the hand standing in for the dipping of the affirmative head. The Indian NO is a flicking UP of the hand, again a copy of a typical head movement, in this case the upward Head Toss.





# GAZE BEHAVIOUR

Staring eyes and glancing eyes—the way we look at one another

When two people meet and make eye contact, they find themselves in an immediate state of conflict. They want to look at each other and at the same time they want to look away. The result is a complicated series of eye movements, back and forth, and a careful study of this Gaze Behaviour can reveal a great deal about their relationship.

To understand why the rules of human 'glancing' are so complex, it is necessary to appreciate that there is not one, but several reasons why we may want to look at someone, and several other reasons why we may want to look away. In the case of young lovers experiencing the first intense emotions of mutual attraction, there are some very noticeable patterns of gazing. If both boy and girl are acutely shy, they may spend a lot of time looking far away from each other. As they talk, they exchange only the briefest of glances. For most of the time they will stare down at the ground or gaze in opposite directions. Sometimes their deflected gaze is so intent that it seems there must be something fascinating lying on the ground near their feet. Their eyes are rivetted there, as if concentrating hard on some tiny speck of dust. Internally, it is the conflict between fear and sexual attraction that is

ing friendly social encounters, eye contact is held fractionally longer than usual. Individuals who find their companions appealing. This extended gaze is usually formed unconsciously and its message is given in the same way. The companions are aware of the unusual warmth of the encounter but they do not analyse the signals involved.



Gaze Behaviour of young lovers passes through several distinct phases. Initially, shyness involves much looking away and a reluctance to meet the companion's eyes. Then there are the sidelong glances in which the eyes gaze at the partner, but the head is still turned away. Sometimes this attitude is deliberately adopted as a joking play of flirtation, as can be seen here.





The agonized staring of the adoring fans of a pop star idol (above) contrasts with the softer mutual gaze of young lovers (below): but both cases illustrate the way in which loving attachment is linked with a dramatic increase in the amount of direct gazing.

creating the problem of where to direct their eyes. As the courtship progresses, there is less fear and the lovers meet each other's eyes more often. Even so, there is still some shyness and instead of turning full-face to look at each other, they continue to show typical, side-long glances (sometimes called making 'sheep's eyes'). But these nervous glances are now more frequent and last a little longer. If one of the lovers becomes bolder than the other, there is a period of rapt attention, with one staring long and longingly at the other, who may still be concentrating on that important speck of dust on the ground. 'He could not take his eyes off her', and 'He kept on staring at me', are the phrases used to describe this phase of a relationship.

Eventually, when the lovers have grown truly intimate and all fear is gone, they may sit close together, gazing deeply into each other's eyes for long periods of time, with only occasional glances away, talking softly and making gentle physical contacts. This progression, from the shy beginnings, to the one-sided longing, to the powerful, mutual attachment, involves a massive increase in the amount of time spent looking at each other, and inevitably labels 'long-looking' as a sign of loving.

Switching to an entirely different kind of emotional encounter: what







Intense staring at close quarters occurs in threatening as well as in loving situations. The actively hostile dominant male (right) thrusts his face close to that of the intimidated subordinate, who dare not meet his gaze. Where two opponents are both actively threatening, the close staring becomes mutual and the arguing pair face each other eye to eye (above).



happens to the eyes when status rather than love is the dominant element? Suppose a subordinate has done something stupid, and he is called to the office of a superior to be reprimanded. As he enters, he is watching the dominant one's face closely for signs of his mood, but the superior sits quietly behind his desk, staring out of the window. With hardly a glance at the subordinate he tells him to sit and then begins to attack him verbally, still looking out of the window. Suddenly the subordinate's replies annoy him and he swivels round to glare intently at the unfortunate man, fixating him with a threatening expression. He holds this prolonged stare and now the subordinate cannot meet his eyes. In his nervousness, the weaker man looks away, glancing back only occasionally to check any change in mood. As he looks away more and more, his face is lost to view—he is literally 'losing face'. The dominant is threatening with phrases such as 'I am keeping my eye on



you', while he does precisely that, his eyes boring into the head of the now submissive employee. But he goes too far and the subordinate loses his temper. Leaping up, he starts shouting at the dominant figure. With his sudden change of mood, to open hostility, his Gaze Behaviour is transformed. Now he too is staring hard at his opponent, and they fixate each other. Out of control, the subordinate leaps round the desk and begins hitting the older man, who falls to the floor. With the dominant man's rapid change to panic and fear for his physical safety, there is a major change in facial expression, but he keeps his eyes fixed on his angry opponent. In this situation, however, his stare is one of fearfulness, not aggression. He dare not take his eyes off his assailant for a second if he is to protect himself.

This escalating scene involves several distinct changes in Gaze Behaviour. It shows that *passive* dominance and *passive* submission both involve exaggerated looking away. Before the superior was roused to action, he haughtily ignored the subordinate and stared out of the window as if the employee were hardly worth a glance. The subordinate, for his part, looked away dejectedly when being glared at, and submissively lowered his eyes. It also shows that *active* aggression and *active* fear both involve intense looking towards the opponent. The angered superior, the outraged subordinate and, finally, the panic-stricken superior, in each case, fixated their opponent, either as a direct threat, or as a means of keeping alert for signs of attack.

Summing up these highly-charged scenes of love and hate, it can be said that a direct stare indicates intensely active feelings of an amorous, hostile, or fearful kind, while a deflected gaze is linked with shyness, casual superiority, or downcast submissiveness. Since there are basically only two kinds of gazing—away and towards—it is left up to the accompanying facial expressions to signal which of the three major moods is involved—love, anger, or fear. In the strongly emotional situations described, these facial expressions will be undiluted and unmistakable, but these are comparatively rare occasions. The vast majority of social encounters are, by comparison, mild and muted affairs. Even if slight feelings of sexual arousal, hostility, or anxiety are present, they tend to remain submerged beneath a mask of social politeness. At a party, a meeting, a dinner, or some other gathering, the man who finds the woman to whom he is talking exceptionally appealing will probably not reveal the fact by adopting an obviously lecherous facial expression. Instead, he will carry on his conversation at what he hopes will look like a merely friendly level. Another man, who finds his host especially irritating, will likewise suppress his hostile facial expressions, and a third, who feels unduly intimidated by his impressive companion, will not permit his face to break out into an expression of naked anxiety.

Under these more moderate conditions, the less intense emotions can be controlled and the outward display is flattened out to one of almost uniform 'nodding-and-smiling'. But smiles are more easy to discipline than glances. We are hardly aware of changes in our pattern of eye movements as we chat and sip our drinks. What is happening is that slightly, very slightly, we increase the amount of time we spend looking away from, or towards, our companions as we engage them in conversation. The man who finds a beautiful colleague unusually arousing may not show his feelings in other ways, but his gaze, when their eyes meet, holds hers fractionally longer than usual. Another man, forced to talk to his singularly unappealing hostess, will reveal his inner reactions to her not by his beaming smile, but by the brevity of his glances in her direction. In the same way, the smiling but rather hostile, domineering guest, tends to fixate his companions with over-long glances, with the result that his smiling but secretly rather nervous victims will divert their eyes much more than in the average encounter.

The obvious problem with these situations is trying to tell whether the guest who 'super-gazes' you fancies you or actively dislikes you. This is too much to ask of Gaze Behaviour. All the eye directions can tell you is whether you are getting slightly more or slightly less attention than usual. The precise

Because humans engage in prolonged verbal encounters face-to-face the signals of gaze direction have become especially important for our species. In connection with this, we have developed distinctive 'whites' to our eyes, making the direction of our glance more conspicuous. These 'whites' are lacking in our nonverbal relatives, such as the chimpanzee.







Such is the impact of the close-quarters gaze that the schoolboy game of stare-you-out is extremely difficult to maintain over a long period of time.

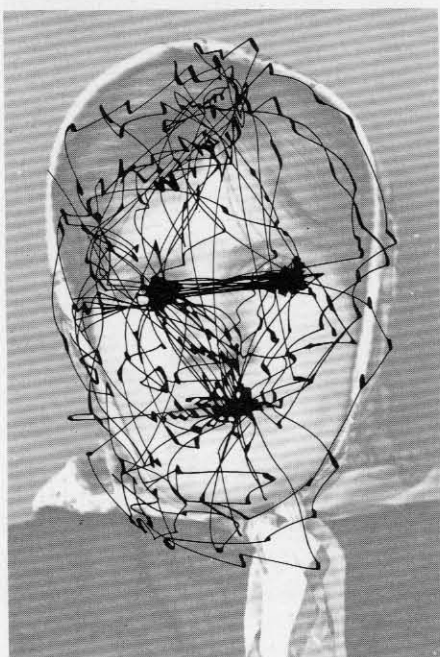
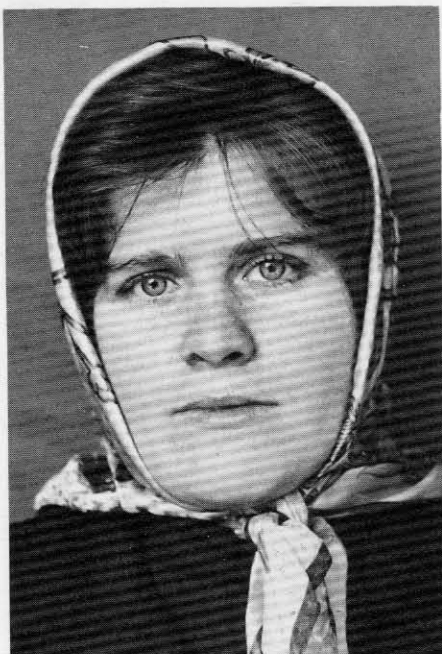
nature of that attention must be sought in other nonverbal clues—those that may remain unmasked by the polite smile. But even though the small increases and decreases of direct gazing are only general indicators, carrying little mood-specificity, they are nevertheless vitally important social clues to which we all respond unconsciously every time we meet and talk with a companion.

So important are they, that we have evolved a special facial element—the white of the eye—that serves to make our glancings more conspicuous. Other primates lack this and their shifts of eye-direction are much less obvious. But they, of course, do not stand hour after hour in a face-to-face relationship, talking to one another. It is, in fact, the evolution of speech that has made eye contact such a significant and useful human signalling device.

Watch the eyes of any two people engrossed in conversation, and you will observe a highly characteristic 'dance' of gaze shifts. The speaker starts his statement with a glance at his companion. Then, as he gains momentum of thought and word, he looks away. As he is coming to the end of his comment, he glances back again to check the impact of what he has said. While he has been doing this, his companion has been watching him, but now, as the listener takes over the talk and becomes the speaker, he, in turn, looks away, glancing back only to check the effect of his words. In this way, the talk and the eyes go back and forth, in a remarkably predictable pattern.

In ordinary conversation, it is the moments where the eyes make brief contact, at the point of handing over the speaking role, that the variations in attention start to make themselves felt. It is there that the amorous male





When we stare closely at a human face, we do not remain fixated on exactly the same spot for any length of time. Our eyes scan the features of the face, but concentrate most on the eyes and mouth, as revealed by this experimental record of eye-movements made by a subject staring for three minutes at a photograph of a young girl's face. (After Yarbus.)

holds on a little too long. As he answers the beautiful girl's last statement he begins talking and reaches the point where normally he would look away, but instead he is still staring at her. This makes her uncomfortable, because she is forced either to lock eyes with him, or to look away from him while *he* is talking. If he continues to talk and stare while she deflects her eyes, it puts her into the 'shy' category, which she resents. If she boldly locks eyes with him, then he has forced her into a 'lover's gaze', which she also resents. But the chances are that he will not go this far. He will only increase his gaze-time by a tiny amount, just long enough for the message to get across without creating any embarrassment.

There are several other variants that can be seen in almost any social gathering. For instance, there is the verbose companion who talks so much and for so long that he cannot wait for the end of his statement to check reactions to what he is saying, and has to keep glancing back during the course of his speech. Then there is the shifty-eyed man, whose nervousness fluctuates rapidly between nervous attention (glance towards) and nervous submission (glance away). His eyes dart back and forth wildly, creating acute discomfort in his companion. Or there is the gushing 'fan', whose rapt interest in an admired companion means that he cannot take his eyes off him for a second, whether talking or listening. This forces the admired one either to lock eyes, or to gaze, like a passive dominant, into the distance.

These special cases disrupt the typical back and forth balance of the Gaze Behaviour of the ordinary social encounter, a balance which expresses interest without the implication of intense emotional involvement, and does it with great delicacy and finesse without our ever being consciously aware of it. Only when we encounter an unusually distorted pattern of gazing do we notice what is happening. One situation in which this always occurs is the giving of a lecture or talk to a large audience. The speaker mounts the platform and immediately sees before him a sea of eyes, all staring at him. As he starts to speak, he inevitably feels threatened by their massed stare and he gazes away, up into the air, or down at his notes. An experienced lecturer knows that this is bad technique, and learns to correct it by forcing himself to look directly at the audience from time to time, as he would do if conversing with a single companion. This is important because to each of the listeners he is, in effect, a one-to-one companion. If he does not look in their direction occasionally, they feel ignored. The expert lecturer's solution is to sweep the audience slowly with his eyes at frequent intervals.

The exact opposite problem faces the television newscaster. For him, there are no staring eyes, only a camera lens. Over the lens is an automatic device called an auto-cue, on which the words he must speak roll slowly past. To read these words he need never look away from the lens—indeed it is difficult to do so without him losing his place in the text. But for the viewer at home he appears to be performing a prolonged, unrelenting stare, which gives an unnatural feel to his delivery. His problem is solved by having a sheaf of notes on his newsdesk, to which he can glance occasionally and thereby relieve the tension of his super-stare. Other expert auto-cue users, standing in a studio and pretending to speak off the cuff, develop the technique of deliberately glancing away from the camera from time to time for a similar reason. They have no notes to look at, but they can gaze upwards or to one side of the camera, treating it as if it were a human companion, and thereby create a much more natural relationship with the viewers in their homes.

Our sensitivity to prolonged staring is such that the child's game of stare you-out is extremely difficult to keep going for any length of time. Direct eyeball-to-eyeball staring seems to have a deeply threatening effect, even when we consciously tell ourselves that it is only a game. Before long something in us snaps and we have to look away. It is almost as if we feel that we will somehow be damaged by the staring eye, and this feeling has given rise to many superstitious practices—the most famous being the powerful and widespread belief in the Evil Eye.



# SALUTATION DISPLAYS

Hello and goodbye—greetings and farewells

A Salutation Display demonstrates that we wish someone well, or, at the very least, that we wish them no harm. It transmits signals of friendliness or the absence of hostility. It does this at peak moments—when someone is arriving on the scene, departing from it, or dramatically changing their social role. We salute their comings, their goings and their transformations, and we do it with rituals of greeting, farewell and celebration.

Whenever two friends meet after a long separation, they go through a special Greeting Ritual. During the first moments of the reunion they amplify their friendly signals to super-friendly signals. They smile and touch, often embrace and kiss, and generally behave more intimately and expansively than usual. They do this because they have to make up for lost time—lost friendship time. While they have been apart it has been impossible for them to send the hundreds of small, minute-by-minute friendly signals to each other that their relationship requires, and they have, so to speak, built up a backlog of these signals.

This backlog amounts to a gestural debt that must be repaid without delay, as an assurance that the bond of friendship has not waned but has survived the passage of time spent apart—hence the gushing ceremonies of the reunion scene, which must try to pay off this debt in a single outburst of activity.

Once the Greeting Ritual is over, the old relationship between the friends is now re-established and they can continue with their amicable interactions as before. Eventually, if they have to part for another long spell, there will be a Separation Ritual in which the super-friendly signals will once again be displayed. This time they have the function of leaving both partners with a powerful dose of befriendedness, to last them through the isolated times to come.

In a similar way, if someone undergoes a major change in social role, we again offer them a massive outpouring of friendliness, because we are simultaneously saying farewell to their old self and greeting their new self. We do this when boy and girl become man and wife, when man and wife become father and mother, when prince becomes king, when candidate becomes president, and when competitor becomes champion.

We have many formal procedures for celebrating these occasions, both the

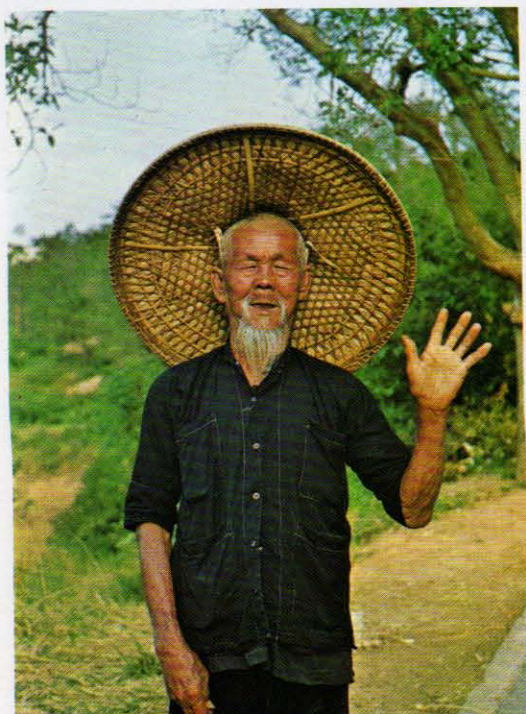
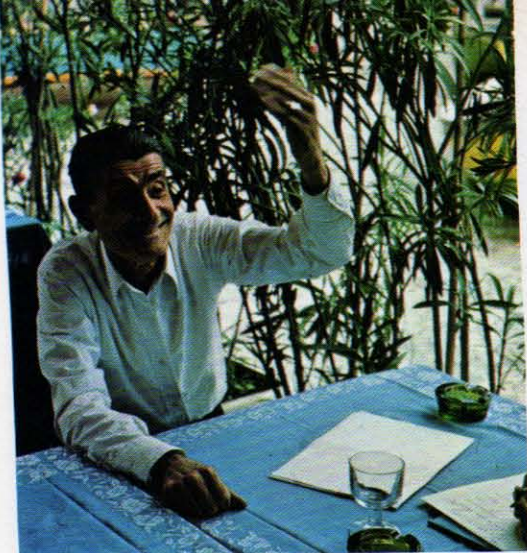


Salutation Displays occur when friends meet after a period of separation (above) or when companions are undergoing a transformation ceremony, such as marriage (below).



The salutation at a wedding has a double function: it says farewell to the old role and welcome to the new role. There is little difference between the human displays of greeting, congratulation and departure. In all three cases there are the same contact elements of hand-shaking, patting, embracing or kissing.







The Inconvenience Display. The first element of a planned greeting is a show of inconvenience in which the greeter moves off his home territory. He may travel to the airport or may go no farther than his front doorstep (right). Or he may remain doggedly in the centre of his territory and have his visitor brought to him.



physical arrivals and departures and the symbolic comings and goings of the social transformations. We celebrate birthdays, christenings, comings-of-age, weddings, coronations, anniversaries, inaugurations, presentations and retirements. We give house-warmings, welcoming parties, farewell dinners, and funerals. In all these cases we are, in essence, performing Salutation Displays.

The grander the occasion, the more rigid and institutionalized are the procedures. But even our more modest, private, two-person rituals follow distinct sets of rules. We seem to be almost incapable of beginning or ending any kind of encounter without performing some type of salutation. This is even true when we write a letter to someone. We begin with 'Dear Mr Smith' and end 'Yours faithfully', and the rules of salutation are so compelling that we do this even when Mr Smith is far from dear to us and we have little faith in him.

Similarly we shake hands with unwelcome guests and express regret at their departure, although we are glad to see the back of them. All the more reason, then, that our genuine greetings and farewells should be excessively demonstrative.

Social greetings that are planned and anticipated have a distinctive structure and fall into four separate phases:

1. The Inconvenience Display. To show the strength of our friendliness, we 'put ourselves out' to varying degrees. We demonstrate that we are taking trouble. For both host and guest, this may mean 'dressing up'. For the guest it may mean a long journey. For the host it also entails a bodily shift from the centre of his home territory. The stronger the greeting, the greater the inconvenience. The Head of State drives to the airport to meet the important arrival. The brother drives to the airport to greet his sister returning from abroad. This is the maximum form of bodily displacement that a host can offer. From this extreme there is a declining scale of inconvenience, as the distance travelled by the host decreases. He may only go as far as the local station or bus depot. Or he may move no farther than his front drive, emerging from his front door after watching through the window for the moment of arrival. Or he may wait for the bell to ring and then only displace himself as far as his doorway or front hall. Or he may allow a child or servant to answer the door and remain in his room, the very centre of his territory, awaiting the guest who is then ushered into his presence. The minimal Inconvenience Display he can offer is to stand up when the guest enters the room, displacing himself vertically but not horizontally. Only if he remains seated as the guest enters and approaches him, can he be said to be totally omitting Phase One of a planned social greeting. Such omissions are extremely rare today and some degree of voluntary inconvenience is nearly always demonstrated. If, because of some accident or delay, it is unavoidably omitted, there are profuse apologies for its absence when the meeting finally takes place.

The Distant Display. When human greeters first establish eye contact with one another they perform some kind of recognition display. This may be a Palm-hidden Wave, typical of Italians (far left top), which to other eyes may resemble an act of beckoning; or a simple hail, with a raised hand, as in the old man from Hong Kong (far left middle); or it may be a Vertical Wave, as shown by the young Russian boy (above left), or a Lateral Wave, performed here by Egyptians greeting President Nixon (left).





At the time of farewell, the Inconvenience Display is repeated in much the same form. 'You know your own way out' is the lowest level of expression here. Beyond that, there is an increasing displacement from territorial base with the usual social level being 'I will see you to the door'. A slightly more intense form involves going outside the house and waiting there until the departing figures have vanished from sight. And so on, with the fullest expression being an accompaniment to the station or airport.

2. The Distant Display. The main moment of greeting is when bodily contact is made, but before this comes the moment of first sighting. As soon as host and guest have identified each other, they signify this fact with a recognition response. Doorstep meetings tend to curtail this phase, because contact can be made almost immediately the door is opened, but in most other greeting situations the Distance Display is prominently demonstrated. It consists of six visual elements: (1) the Smile; (2) the Eyebrow Flash; (3) the Head Tilt; (4) the Hail; (5) the Wave; and (6) the Intention Embrace.

The first three of these almost always occur, and they are performed simultaneously. At the moment of recognition, the head tilts back, the eyebrows arch up, and the face breaks into a large smile. The Head Tilt and the Eyebrow Flash may be very brief. They are elements of surprise. Combined with the smile, they signal a 'pleasant surprise' at seeing the friend. This basic pattern may or may not be augmented by an arm movement. The simplest such action is the Hail—the raising of one hand. A more intense version, typical of long-distance greetings, is the Wave, and still more intense expression is the Intention Embrace, in which the arms are stretched out towards the friend, as if the greeter cannot wait to perform the contact-embrace that is about to take place. A flamboyant special





sometimes added is the Thrown or Blown Kiss, again anticipating the contact to come.

As before, the same actions are repeated during the farewell Separation Ritual, but with Intention Embraces less likely and Thrown or Blown Kisses more likely.

Of these Distant Displays, the Smile, Head Tilt and Eyebrow Flash appear to be worldwide. They have been observed in remote native tribes that had never previously encountered white men. The raising of an arm in some form of Hail or Wave salute is also extremely widespread. The exact form of the arm movement may vary from culture to culture, but the existence of *some* kind of arm action appears to be global for mankind. The actions seems to stem, like the Intention Embrace, from an urge to reach out and touch the other person. In the Hail, the arm is raised up rather than reached out, because this makes it more conspicuous from a distance, but the movement is essentially a stylized version of touching the distant friend. More 'historical' explanations, such as that the hand is raised to show it is empty of weapons or that it is thrust up to mime the action of offering the owner's sword, and therefore his allegiance, may be true in certain specific contexts, but the action is too widespread and too general for this interpretation to stand for all cases of Hailing.

The Wave takes three main forms: the Vertical Wave, the Hidden-palm Wave, and the Lateral Wave. In the Vertical Wave, the palm faces the friend and the hand moves repeatedly up and down. This appears to be the 'primitive' form of waving. In origin, it seems to be a vacuum patting action, the hand patting the friend's body at a distance, again in anticipation of the friendly embrace to come. The Hidden-palm Wave, seen mainly in Italy, is also a patting action, but with the hand moving repeatedly towards the waver himself. To non-Italians, this looks rather like beckoning, but it is basically another form of vacuum embracing. The Lateral Wave, common all over the world, consists of showing the palm to the friend and then moving it rhythmically from side to side. This appears to be an improved form of the other waves. The modification is essentially one of increasing the visibility and conspicuousness of the patting action. In turning it into a lateral movement, it loses its embracing quality, but gains dramatically in visual impact from a distance. It can be further exaggerated by extending it to full arm-waving, or even double-arm-waving.

3. The Close Display. As soon as the Distant Display has been performed, there is an approach interval and then the key moment of actual body contact. At full intensity this consists of a total embrace, bringing both arms around the friend's body, with frontal trunk contact and head contact. There is much hugging, squeezing, patting, cheek-pressing and kissing. This may be followed by intense eye contact at close range, cheek-clasping, mouth-kissing, hair-stroking, laughing, even weeping, and, of course, continued smiling.

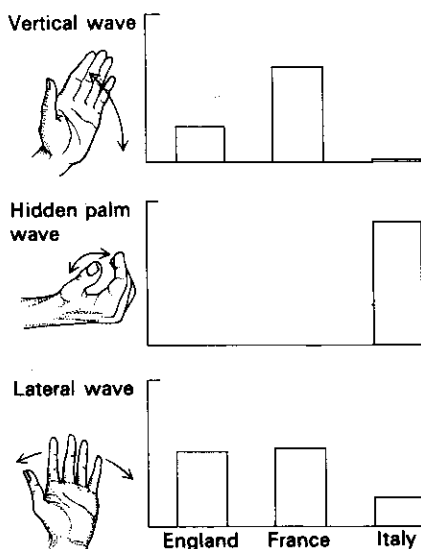
From this uninhibited display, there is a whole range of body-contacts of decreasing strength, right down to the formal handshake. The precise intensity will depend on: (1) the depth of the prior relationship; (2) the length of the separation; (3) the privacy of the greeting context; (4) the local, cultural display-rules and traditions; and (5) the changes that have taken place during the separation.

Most of these conditions are obvious enough, but the last deserves comment. If the friend is known to have been through some major emotional experience—an ordeal such as imprisonment, illness, or disaster, or a great success such as an award, a victory or an honour—there will be a much more intense greeting and stronger embracing. This is because the Salutation Display is simultaneously a greeting and a celebration and is, in effect, double-strength.

Different cultures have formalized the close greeting performance in different ways. In all cases, the basis of the display is the full embrace, but

the Close Display. Following the cognition display there is an approach phase leading to the body-contact actions of a Close Display. This may vary from a simple handshake to a full embrace (far left). In some cultures, elements of cheek-kissing and nose-rubbing (above) (from Eibesfeldt) are common, while in others they are suppressed. Again, in some places such as France and Russia male-to-male greeting kisses (left) are common, while in other regions such contacts are avoided.





The three basic forms of hand waving. As you travel from England through France to Italy the favoured wave changes. In England the Lateral Wave dominates the scene, while in France it is overtaken in popularity by the Vertical Wave. In Italy the local Hidden-palm Wave largely replaces them. The columns show the percentage of people using each wave, from samples taken in each country. (From Morris et al: *Gesture Maps*)

when this is simplified, different parts of it are retained in different places. In some cultures, the head-to-head element becomes nose-rubbing, cheek-mouthing, or face-pressing. In others, there is a stylized mutual cheek-kiss, with the lips stopping short of contact. In others again, there is kissing between men—in France and Russia, for example—while in many cultures, male-to-male kissing is omitted as supposedly effeminate.

While these cultural variations are, of course, of interest, they should not be allowed to obscure the fact that they are all variations on a basic theme—the body embrace. This is the fundamental, global, human contact action, the one we all know as babies, infants and growing children, and to which we return whenever the rules permit and we wish to demonstrate feelings of attachment for another individual.

4. The 'Grooming' Display. Following the initial body contacts, we move into the final stage of the greeting ceremony, which is similar to the social grooming performances of monkeys and apes. We do not pick at one another's fur, but instead we display 'Grooming Talk'—inane comments that mean very little in themselves, but which demonstrate vocally our pleasure at the meeting. 'How are you?', 'How nice of you to come', 'Did you have a good journey?', 'You are looking so well', 'Let me take your coat', and so on. The answers are barely heard. All that is important is to pay compliments and to receive them. To show concern and to show pleasure. The precise verbal content and the intelligence of the questions is almost irrelevant. This Grooming Display is sometimes augmented by helping with clothing, taking off coats, and generally fussing with creature comforts. On occasion there is an additional Gift Display on the part of the guest, which brings some small offering as a further, material form of salutation.

After the Grooming Display is over, the friends leave the special site of the greeting and move on to resume their old, familiar, social interactions. The Salutation Display is complete and has performed its important task.

By contrast, unplanned greetings are far less elaborate. When we see a friend in the street, or somewhere away from home, we give the typical Distant Display—a smile and a wave—and perhaps no more. Or we approach and add a Close Display, usually a rather abbreviated embrace, but more usually a mere handshake. As we part, we again display, often turning for final Distant Signal, as we move off.

Introductory Greetings take yet another form. If we are meeting someone for the first time, we omit the Distant Display, simply because we are not recognizing an old friend. We do, however, offer a minor form of Close Display, nearly always a handshake, and we smile at the new acquaintance and offer him a Grooming Display of friendly chatter and concern. We treat him, in fact, as though he were a friend already, not a close one but a friend none the less, and in so doing we bring him into our orbit and initiate a social relationship with him.

As a species of primate, we are remarkably rich in greetings and farewell. Other primates do show some simple greeting rituals, but we exceed them and we also show farewell displays which they seem to lack entirely. Looking back into our ancestry, there seems to have been a good reason for this development. Most primates move around in a fairly close-knit group. Occasionally, they may drift apart and then, on reuniting, will give small gestures of greeting. But they rarely part deliberately, in a purposeful way so they have no use for Separation Displays. Early man established himself as a hunting species, with the male hunting group leaving for a specific purpose at a specific time, and then returning to the home base with the kill. For millions of years, therefore, we have needed Salutation Displays, both in the form of farewells, as the group split up in its major division-of-labour, and in the form of greetings, when they came together again. And the importance of success or failure on the hunt meant that these were not trivial, but vital moments in the communal life of the primeval tribe. Little wonder that today we are such a salutatory species.