We all gesticulate – that is, accompany our speech by more or less elaborate movements of arms, hands, and fingers. Northerners gesticulate less, the stereotype says, Mediterranean people more; in 1832, the learned author of a book on Neapolitan gestures (see Thomas, p. 3 of this volume) even asserted that among the inhabitants of northern Europe (that is, presumably, all of Europe north of the Alps) gesticulation did not exist – the cold climate having made them less fiery than the Italians.' This exaggerated opinion shows how gesticulation is generally viewed – as something natural and spontaneous, dependent upon factors of climate or character.

But in a way, the learned Neapolitan contradicts himself, since he also speaks about the language of gestures (il linguaggio dei gesti), even of its dialects – in Naples, there existed gestures different from those of Apulia or Sicily. Language is nothing natural, it is highly conventional and tied to a specific culture; differences in language mark differences in culture. The metaphor of the language of gestures implies the same conventionality and cultural determination for gestures. The metaphor, incidentally, is
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quite old: already in the fifties BC, Cicero wrote about sermo corporis, 'language of the body', and eloquentia corporis, 'eloquence of the body' — albeit in a slightly different way: he meant the entire delivery of a speech, both the voice (as an emanation of the body) and the gesticulation accompanying it.3

The metaphor answers a problem which seems (as far as a non-specialist may judge) not yet definitely answered by modern research: just how conventional are gestures?4 The discussion goes back to antiquity, to Roman rhetorical theory, and it owes its existence to the fact that in rhetorical training not only invention, composition, and style were taught, but also actio or hupokrisis — delivery of the speech, including the appropriate gestures. The orator had to have not only the qualities of a lawyer, philosopher, and a poet, but had to come close to being a theatrical performer as well5 — how close he came will be one of the questions discussed in this contribution. Its subject is rather a byway of classical philology: from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, when Europe still had a very lively rhetorical culture, the Roman texts on the subject were often read, discussed and used, though they virtually disappeared from sight in the nineteenth century when classical philology established itself as an academic discipline.6

**Quintilian's account**

When reading ancient text books on rhetoric, one gets the impression that their main concern was with the writing of a speech: in a way, they look like courses in better writing. But at least in part, this is the fault of the transmission of ancient texts: attention to the way a public speech should be delivered to be effective is nearly as old as rhetorical theory. The first (though entirely lost) treatise comes from a fifth-century sophist, Thrasy-machos; Aristotle and his pupils Theophrastos and Demetrios of Phaleron wrote about it, so did Cicero.7 Gesticulation is a part of delivery — to put it into the formalized dichotomies of the rhetorical schools delivery, hupokrisis or actio, consists of two parts, voice (vox) and gestus, which is both posture (the static way of presenting oneself) and gesticulation (the dynamic way).1 Circumstantial information about when to use which gestures and
which to avoid comes, of course, from a professor (albeit an influential one), Marcus Fabius Quintilianus. Born in Spain in about AD 35, he had been the first public professor of rhetoric in Rome and a teacher of the sons and nephews of the emperor Domitian; after his retirement he wrote a lengthy and very influential compendium 'The Formation of a Public Speaker', Institutio oratoria, in twelve books. Its eleventh book is concerned— at least in two of its three parts— with what should happen after one has written a speech; it concerns memoria, memory (Greek and Roman orators used to memorize their written texts and to speak without them) and pronuntiatio or actio, the delivery.

Quintilian's chapter is the only preserved Roman (or for that matter, ancient) text which gives detailed information about rhetorical body language in the Roman sense; some additional information from Cicero's rhetorical writings and from later authors corroborates or qualifies Quintilian's account. After a general introduction and a discussion of voice and pronunciation (paragraphs 14–65), Quintilian dwells on gestus, both posture and gesticulation (65–197). He prescribes all the movements which help, and points out those which damage the performance, systematically passing from the head to the feet, gaze, eyes, nose (you should never make gestures with your nose), arms, hands, and body (69–137), with a long section on gesticulation proper: the movements of the hand and the fingers which accompany the spoken word (85–121); he adds advice about how to make use of the orator's garment, the toga, to help create the desired impression on the audience (138–49), and ends with miscellaneous advice.

A number of points catch the modern reader's attention. First, many gestures are meticulously detailed, especially in the section on gesticulation, which sometimes reminds one of the report of a modern anthropological field-worker; others, well-known to his audience, are just hinted at. Often, he explains the significance of the gesture he describes, especially in the section on finger signs; obviously, these signs were either not familiar to the average Roman or they had one meaning in the rhetorical system but another in daily conversation.

Second, the categorization he offers is very rudimentary. Gestures in general are not categorized; in gesticulation— gestures
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taking place simultaneously with speech – he distinguishes between gestures 'which proceed naturally from us' and 'others which indicate things by means of mimicry' (88).\(^9\) The categorization does not greatly affect his description, but to a certain extent it anticipates the more elaborate categories of hand gestures as proposed by modern theorists, especially David Efron, Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen.\(^11\) They distinguish between four classes: ideographs, pointers, pictorial gestures, and batons. Batons are gestures which beat time to the rhythm of the speech: Quintilian does not mention them, Cicero explicitly forbids them\(^9\) – and since they would have looked rather clumsy, Quintilian certainly would have agreed. Pointers or 'indexical gestures' point at the objects of the words; Quintilian knows some and mentions the admiration Cicero felt for how Crassus used his index finger. Ideographs 'diagram the logical structure of what is said' (in Kendon's words): if we say 'the logical and emotional structure' this category contains most of the gestures Quintilian approves of; the only gesture which is strictly 'logical' in his list is the one accompanying a question, 'the turn of the hand, the arrangement of the fingers being indifferent' (101). These three categories would more or less correspond to his natural gestures. Pictorial gestures, finally, depict what is spoken about: as the name suggests they are the gestures of the mime artist. They correspond more or less to Quintilian's gestures 'which indicate by mimicry'; he very much disapproves of them.

Third (and not unconnected with the second observation), Quintilian demarcates the gestures he is teaching from other gestures – from spontaneous gestures, from the gestures of daily life and common people, from the gestures of foreigners, especially Greeks. But most insistent is the opposition between rhetorical and theatrical gesticulation. Quintilian (and before him Cicero) is at pains to impose a strict demarcation between the two – it seems to be the cardinal vice of a Roman orator to give the impression of being an actor.\(^13\) This is all the more surprising as both thought it worth while to learn from actors – Cicero was familiar with the famous Roscius, and we are told that he used to challenge him privately in declamation and gesticulation; his ideal orator has to have, among other things, the voice of a tragic actor and the delivery of a very good stage professional.\(^14\) Quintilian thought it
advisable for a future orator to have had, as a boy, lessons in enunciation, gesticulation, and miming from a professional actor and a training in body movements from a good gym instructor.\textsuperscript{15}

To understand the system of Roman rhetorical \textit{gestus} and its peculiarities, it is important to have a clear idea of its aim. Quintilian is outspoken about what it is all about; the gestural language together with the rest of the performance is directed towards the emotions, not the reason, of the audience: 'all emotional appeals will inevitably fall flat, unless they are given the fire that voice, look, and the whole comportment of the body can give them' (2). The body signs of the orator demonstrate his own emotions which in turn excite similar emotions in the audience.

Thus, gestures serve the overall aim of ancient rhetoric, \textit{psychagogia}, 'winning of men's souls', as Plato deprecatingly called it\textsuperscript{16} – a goal attained by aiming mainly at the emotions, not the intellect of the audience, especially when addressing huge crowds of fellow citizens or judges. It was these occasions – the address to the democratic assembly or to the large juries in fifth century BC Athens, to the Senate and the People in late Republican Rome – which had called for the development of rhetorical training based on a science of rhetoric. But this direct attack on the emotions is only one side. The theorists analyse the aim of rhetoric as threefold: not only to persuade and move the audience's minds (the direct emotional approach), but also to recommend the orator to his audience.\textsuperscript{17} This is done by the orator's creating a favourable impression on his public – by general outward signs and in particular by gestures. We all tend to believe (and often try to overcome it as a prejudice) what to ancient man and especially to ancient theorists was a stated fact: that the outward appearance of a person is an image of the inward personality and character – dress, gestures, walking, any motion, are significant of interior man.\textsuperscript{18} 'Gesticulation obeys our mind', says Quintilian (65); Cicero, with his philosophical training, gives an elaborate explication: 'Every motion of the soul has its natural appearance, voice and gesture; and the entire body of a man, all his facial and vocal expressions, like the strings of a harp, sound just as the soul's motion strikes them.'\textsuperscript{19}

To a certain extent, the role of gestures in the rhetorical system comes close to the dichotomy between word and gesture which the
anthropologist Gregory Bateson had established in 1968: "Our iconic communication serves functions totally different from those of language and, indeed, performs functions which verbal language is unsuited to perform... It seems that the discourse of nonverbal communication is precisely concerned with matters of relationship – love, hate, respect, fear, dependency etc. – between self and vis-à-vis or between self and environment." There is one very important difference, though: in rhetoric, gestures do not perform a function totally different from language, they underline and amplify the message of language by stressing the emotional, non-rational elements – exactly the modification made by more recent research to Bateson's position.

Among the gestures Quintilian describes, some are clear and unequivocal expressions of emotion. Certain head movements show shame, doubt, admiration, or indignation he says (71); it is a pity that he doesn't describe them: they are too well known – though not to us. With hand signs he often is more circumstantial, not least because, as he writes, 'they are almost as expressive as words' (86). 'Wonder', admiratio (both surprise and admiration) – to give some examples – is best expressed as follows: 'the right hand turns slightly upwards and the fingers are brought in to the palm, one after the other, beginning with the little finger; the hand is then reopened and turned round by a reversal of this motion'; regret or anger is indicated by the clenched fist, pressed to the breast."

I cited these two gestures also to show how Quintilian's descriptions combine gestures of different origin: they differ in the way they express their meaning. The gesture for wonder has nothing to do with the feeling it expresses, it is a purely arbitrary and conventional sign, like the sounds of speech or the digits in digital code. Pressing the fist to the breast as a sign for remorse or anger, however, to a certain extent pictures the feelings involved: the clenched fist is a means of aggression, the breast the seat of intense emotions. The emotion thus is indicated in broad outline only; the precise meaning has to be learned for it is a combination of a natural pictorial sign and conventionality.

These clear signs for emotions belong to single sentences, sometimes even words. Gesticulation has another, more general function, as Quintilian explains; it brings home the emotional
properties of the structural features of the speech, of its single parts. This is especially true of the hand signs.

A good instance is the hand gesture Quintilian calls 'the most common of all': it 'consists in placing the middle finger against the thumb, and extending the remaining three... the hand being moved forward with an easy motion a little distance both to the right and the left, while the head and shoulders gradually follow the direction of the gesture' – a splendid instance, by the way, of the lengths Quintilian can go to when describing a gesture.** This slow movement, he continues, is most useful in the introductory section of a speech; it also expresses firmness when stating the facts of a case during the narration – but here, the arm moves a little further forward; it finally demonstrates aggressiveness when accusing or refuting adversaries – again with the arm moving even further away from the body and more freely to the left and the right (92).

Here, Quintilian correlates gestures with the main divisions of a forensic speech, the exordium or beginning, the narratio (where the orator states the facts – or rather what he wishes his audience to believe are the facts), and the argumentatio (where he argues his own position and attacks his opponent's): while the basic gesture – both the position of the fingers and the direction of the arm movement – remains basically identical, its speed and amplitude are different for each section. This quantitative variation depends not upon the specific content of the section, but on the general impression: the argumentatio has to demonstrate the aggressiveness of the orator, the narratio his firmness – qualities of character and personality, not of the specific arguments.

This variation, according to the section of the speech, is a very basic feature. Accordingly, finger figures which express urgency or aggressiveness – like the variation of the described figure where 'the middle and third fingers are turned under the thumb' (93) or the gesture where 'three fingers are doubled under the thumb and the index is extended' (94) – are recommended for the argumentatio only, the former being 'more forcible', the latter useful in denunciation and indication and, when pointed toward the ground, demonstrating insistence. On the other hand, parts which have to be slow or without much force – like the exordium or the digressions during narratio and argumentatio – contain only slow gesticulation (164).
Thus the speech has its characteristic crescendo, each division being more forceful and dynamic than the preceding one, as Quintilian explicitly states (161–74); growing intensity of multifunctional gestures or the use of more powerful specific signals underline and amplify this.

A further sign language used to express this crescendo movement is the way the orator presents his garment. Quintilian advises the same pattern of speeding up – the toga 'sitting well upon the shoulders' during the exordium (161) is 'allowed to slip back' in the narratio (145); in the argumentatio, the toga may be thrown back from the shoulder and 'begins to assume something of a combative pose' (144ff.) – no wonder that, towards the end of the speech, 'we may... let our dress fall in careless disorder and the toga slip loose from us on every side' (147).

The use of gesticulation to underline the emotional properties of the main sections of a speech accounts for the prominence of ideographs among Quintilian's favourite gestures: ideographs, we saw, diagram the logical and emotional structure of what is being said. It also explains why he heartily disapproves of pictorial gestures: 'As for the gesture of demanding a cup, threatening a flogging or indicating the number 500 by crooking the thumb... I have never seen them employed even by uneducated rustics' (117); and, more generally, 'gestures which indicate things by means of mimicry... should be rigorously avoided in pleading' (88ff.). He gives two reasons: the orator should never seem to be a mime artist (saltator), and the gesture should follow the thoughts rather than the words of the speech; already Cicero had made the same distinction between 'a theatrical gesture which expresses single words' (which he disapproved of) and the rhetorical gesture 'which explains the entire topic and meaning by signifying, not by demonstrating'.23 Avoiding the appearance of a mime artist or an actor is fundamental for maintaining the decorum inherent in Roman pleading, but it is not a sufficient explanation for the avoidance of pictorial gesture. Gesticulation following 'thoughts' is gesticulation in the sense of ideographic gestures, diagramming the logical and emotional content; rhetorical psychagogia is more effective when the orator only signals general emotional and logical contents instead of freezing attention on single actions by displaying them mimetically.
Gestus – gesticulation and posture – not only brings about persuasion by underlining and amplifying the emotional and logical flow of the speech. The correct gestures and appropriate outward appearance are important in creating a favourable impression of the orator with his audience. With the help of the appropriate gestus, the orator impersonates what the Roman society regarded as the ideal orator – and since oratory is the main, if not the only way a member of the Roman upper class appeared in public, the orator has to show himself as the ideal Roman aristocrat – in the case of Quintilian's textbook addressed to students of the art, as the ideal young aristocrat. Quintilian never says so explicitly, but his advice is clear.

Let us begin with simple and trivial cases. At the end of his speech, Quintilian says, the orator may show not only his dishevelled dress but may also sweat profusely and show all signs of exhaustion. He has to overtly signal that he did not spare his strength in the interest of his client; even if he does not feel exhausted, at least he has to look it – as, earlier on, Quintilian had advised him to let the toga slip velut sponte, as though it were of its own accord, if it didn't do so by itself (147). Obviously, this final impression is important; the orator (at least in ideology) is not a professional acting for a fee, but a Roman nobleman, helping his cliens, his follower, in the capacity of patronus, protector, and thus fulfilling what his social position demands and legitimizing the social prerogatives of a Roman nobleman. The more exhausted he is (or looks), the better he has fulfilled this obligation.

This may seem far-fetched, at least at first glance, so let us look at what happens at the beginning of a speech. Before he can start to speak, the orator must again make a particular impression; since he cannot do it with words he does it with gestus; again Quintilian is very circumstantial. His dress must be immaculate, lacking all extravagance as well as all sloppiness: several paragraphs on dress are summed up by the advice that the dress 'should be distinguished and manly (virilis), as, indeed, it ought to be with all men of position (honesti)' (137). 'Manliness' is a quality which is demanded of an orator with a particular insistence – already in the second century BC, Cato defined the orator as 'a good man with experience in talking' (vir bonus dicendi peritus); Cicero demands, both in De oratore (1. 231) and the later Orator (59), that the
orator performs 'with manly bend of the body' (virili laterum flexione). The younger Seneca gives the deeper reason; he regards a 'strong, powerful, and manly eloquence' as a sign of a healthy and sound mind and censures Maecenas who used to appear in extravagant and sloppy dress as an effeminate, even castrated orator:" outward appearance reflects inward character, a fundamental belief in antiquity and the justification for scientific physiognomy, as we have already seen. Both terms Quintilian uses, 'manly' (virilis) and what has been translated 'a man of position' (honestus), are therefore not merely descriptive but normative – being manly implies the qualities of strength, valour, willpower and self-control, qualities most prominent in the ideal nobleman; honestus is someone who deserves to be honoured by his fellow citizens because of his high qualities – the 'honours' incidentally, being not abstract feelings, but the higher offices, the positions of power in the state with their tangible advantages. Cicero makes the connection explicit. Beauty, he writes in his De officiis (1. 130), is twofold, with sexual attractiveness being becoming to women and dignity to men: 'therefore, one must remove from one's appearance all dress unworthy of a man, and one should beware of similar mistakes in gestures and movements'.

Besides dress, initial gesticulation helps to create this same impression. We saw that gesticulation in the exordium should be slow and restrained and that this corresponds to the general character of the exordium. But there is more. The orator is advised not to start to speak immediately; he should pause, even pat his head or wring his fingers, 'pretend to summon all his energies for the effort, confess to nervousness by a deep sigh'; then he should stand quietly in front of his audience, upright, 'the shoulders relaxed, the face stern, but not sad, expressionless, or languid . . . while the right hand should be slightly extended with the most modest of gestures' (159).

Part of this procedure – patting the head, wringing the fingers – certainly serves to attract the attention. To stand upright – what Cicero had called 'a manly bend of the body' – signals nobility and liberty; a stoop, Quintilian advises, could be read as a sign of low origin and servile personality (83, cf. 69). Incidentally, Seneca had compared the dishevelled way Maecenas used to present himself to the posture of a servile character on the stage.25 To incline the head
to one side, on the other hand, expresses languor, a quality closely associated with effeminacy and as such the opposite of manliness. Quintilian, of course, disapproves of it.26

However, it should not be overdone: to stand too erect and fierce is a sign of arrogance or even barbaric hardness which is heavily advised against (69). Here, two norms conflict. With a certain insistence, Quintilian uses the term 'modest' (modestus) as a sort of catchword for the initial impression. Cicero is even more explicit: as Crassus, his spokesman in De oratore, says 'even the best orators appear impudent and arrogant, if they do not begin their pleading with due shyness and seem nervous at the beginning' (1. 119) – a rather strange demand, according to our modern taste. The young Roman orator wins his audience by appearing not only as a proud and manly aristocrat, but at the same time as a person naturally given to respect and subordination in front of the magistrates of the Republic who preside over all occasions of formal speech.

There are other, even more surprising restrictions imposed upon gesticulation. Any frenetic movement, such as frequent nodding, intense shaking of the head (72) or the hands (103), jerking of the shoulders (130) or wild gesticulation which 'delivers such a rain of blows to the rear that it is scarcely safe to stand behind him' (118) is ill-suited. Gesticulation has only a limited amplitude: the hand should never be raised higher than the eyes or lower than the chest (112), and it should never move further to the left than the shoulders (113). Gesticulation, finally, is mainly a matter of the right hand, the left being only auxiliary (114).

It is certainly possible to explain one or other of these limitations without recurrence to a more general system. The left hand of a Roman orator is restrained by the fall of the toga: it is natural to use it less; besides, the dominance of the right hand may be fundamental to human action (and, thus, to symbolism) in general.27 As to the upper limit for the lifted hand, in Imperial Rome it also has the function of distinguishing an ordinary orator from members of the Imperial house whose gestures of public address allow a higher lifting of the arm, as representations of emperors and magistrates show.28 But individual explanations help only partially since they cannot explain all limitations. There is a more general reason behind the insistence upon restricted movements.
Mildred in movement is, in Roman opinion, characteristic of
someclasses of men. In general, it is peculiar to a free man – only
slaves run, a free man has leisure.29 But being a free man is not only
a social category, it is a way of living, thinking, and being; being a
free man means also having a free soul, a specific personality.
Gestures, according to a widespread ancient conviction, express
character – Seneca's remarks on Maecenas make the point. Strictly
moderated and limited gestures, then, are an indication of a
moderate and self-controlled character – and this, of course, is
another requirement of an exemplary Roman aristocrat and

All this – the restrictions and the selection of gestures – points
in the same direction: rhetorical gestures are highly conventional,
they are a selection and adjustment of gestures from daily
conversation to the purpose of public speaking. Quintilian leaves
no doubts: many common gestures, not only pictorial ones, are
abhorred because they are too coarse and too vulgar; in one
instance, he accepts a gesture though it is 'a common rather than
professional gesture' (102).

One may reasonably suspect that approved gestures underwent
modification and streamlining to improve precision and lessen
ambiguity, but it is a difficult matter to substantiate this. One clue
is the subtle distinction in meaning between similar gestures.
'Placing the middle finger against the thumb and extending the
remaining three' has a variant where 'the middle and third fingers
are also sometimes turned under the thumb'; the function of the
two is different, the latter being more impressive and thus
prohibited in exordia, as we have seen; to lightly grip the top joint
of the index finger 'on either side, with the outer fingers slightly
curved' is 'a gesture well suited for argument', while 'holding the
middle joint of the finger and contracting the last two fingers still
further' is a sign for more vehement argumentation (95). In both
cases, the basic gesture is attested for daily conversation,31
although one wonders whether these distinctions really were
always observed there. In one case, at least, it seems possible to
demonstrate the process: the nice gesture to touch one's lips with
the fingertips to express wonder and admiration (103) is found
both on Greek vase paintings and in the novel of Apuleius. But,
typically enough, these attestations show some variation in form
without any discernible difference in meaning or chronological distinction – sometimes only the index finger touches the lips, in another case it is the thumb and index put together rather than all the fingers of the hand.32

**Gestures, stagecraft, and eloquence**

This brings us to the strict demarcation between orator and actor, pulpit and stage. Romans in general shared this feeling: the famous orator Hortensius, the story went, used to perform rather theatrically – which earned him the nickname Dionysia, the name of a famous cabaret dancer of the time.33 Appearing like an actor could mean looking like a woman, that is, not appearing manly enough. Dionysia was, moreover, of low social standing, her profession certainly did not qualify for a honestus, and her name contained an allusion to Dionysos-Bacchus the god of socially disapproved ecstasy and total loss of self-control; Quintilian explicitly forbids 'tossing or rolling the head till the hair flies free' because it recalls an ecstatic.34 Cicero once severely rebuked an agent who had bought him two statues of maenads, the ecstatic followers of Dionysos: 'where have I room for maenads?' In the same letter, he disapproved of a statue of Mars because he, Cicero, was a maker of peace, not war; this confirms that he disapproved of the maenads too because he thought they did not fit his character.35 Thus, to give the impression of an actor did not fit the image of a reliable aristocrat, the impression the orator had to give to recommend himself to his audience.

Among the Greeks, by the way, the situation was no better. Usually, to prove the contrary, modern scholars refer to the story that Demosthenes had been instructed by an actor. A closer look at the main account in Plutarch's *Life* of Demosthenes, however, shows that the actor offered himself and had to persuade Demosthenes to accept such a training – obviously instruction by actors was unheard of in Athens also.36 Thus, the case of Demosthenes is the only exception to a more general rule – that oratory and theatre were different things in Greece as well as in Rome.

Since the Roman sources make us believe that gesticulation in
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acting and pleading were quite close, it would be interesting to at least catch a glimpse of the stage. The task is difficult. Roman acting – as with most technicalities of the Roman stage – is largely unattested, and the tragedies (with the doubtful exception of Seneca) are lost. Still, there is some information on comic gesticulation to be gathered from the plays themselves, especially from Plautus.

One preliminary remark is important: gesticulation varied according to character type – after all, Roman comedy employed stock characters. Exuberant gesticulation and movement were characteristic of slaves; a free man does not run, but the running slave was a stock type, presumably with a special stage technique for running. Other violent gestures belong either to slaves or to low class free-born: shaking the head with anger or being swollen with it; grinding one's teeth and slapping the thigh in anger. This confirms our findings for the orator where frenetic movements were strictly forbidden – low origin and lack of self-control obviously going together.

More comes from a particular scene in the Miles Gloriosus, one of Plautus' best comedies (vv.200–215). The clever slave Palaestrio racks his brains to find a way to thwart the schemes of a fellow slave; in a splendid example of metatheatre, his neighbour, the old man Periplectomenus, comments on Palaestrio's gestures. First, with a stern face, he beats his chest with his fingers; turning to the side, he rests his left hand against his left thigh while he counts on the fingers of the right hand, slapping it against the right thigh in between. Then he snaps his fingers, shifts his posture several times, shakes his head ('he does not like what he thinks'); finally, he stands triumphantly erect having found the solution.

At the end, the onlooker Periplectomenus remarks that Palaestrio acts 'like the slave in comedy' (dulice et comoedice): his gesticulation is typical, conventional. Conventionality is what we would expect from the gestures of comic stock characters; as to gestures, the little evidence there is confirms it. But it is obvious that the raw material for this conventionalization (so to speak) was gestures of daily life: thigh-slapping or counting on one's fingers was widespread among Greeks and Romans as well as with modern Europeans. Conventionalization must have enforced certain characteristic elements in order to obtain better theatrical effects –
greater clarity, unequivocal significance and better adaptation to the standard role; with slave roles, therefore, having better comical effects.

Most of Palaestrio's gestures are also discussed in Quintilian: a comparison is revealing. Slapping one's thigh is a strong gesture which had been introduced into public speaking by the vulgar Athenian politician and rhetor Cleon; nevertheless, both Cicero (Brutus 278) and Quintilian (123) accept it — 'it is becoming as a mark of indignation', which holds true for Palaestrio as well as for the slave mentioned above; 'and', adds Quintilian, 'it excites the audience', a strong argument in favour. Counting on the fingers — or, rather, counting arguments on the fingers — is permitted, but better with both hands, and certainly without slapping one's thighs in between (115); forming the numerals with the fingers, however, is very vulgar indeed (117). Chest-beating the professor advises against: it is a theatrical trick, scaenicum (115); on rare occasions one may touch the chest with the fingertips to accompany words of exhortation, reproach, or commiseration. Thus, Palaestrio's gesticulation is stronger than Quintilian would allow for, it is typical for a slave, dulce, as Periplectomenus has it; but there is at least a common stock of gestures.

We have seen how the gestures of rhetors are just as conventional as those of the actor — this is one of the reasons for the difficult demarcation between the two. Like theatrical gesture, rhetorical gesture and gesticulation is a sort of self-sufficient sign system, based upon gestures and gesticulation of daily life but selecting and refining this raw material according to the principle of decency, decorum. It differs from scenic gesture only in the principle of selection, not in the fact of conventionality as such.

Rhetorical and theatrical gestures have not only their conventionality in common. Such a conventional system is teachable, in fact has to be taught: there are teachers of stagecraft, as there are teachers of rhetoric. But gestures which are taught are not spontaneous any more — therefore some people had misgivings: a fundamental difference between stage and court was that the actor dealt with fictional things, whereas the orator dealt with real life — would not an orator acting-out taught gestures incur the danger of appearing a fake and lose all credit with his audience? Quintilian himself answers this question in the affirmative: it would deprive
The gestures of Roman actors and orators

the orator of his credit, his *fides* and *auctoritas* – again two values central to the Roman *patronus* (184). Quintilian is also aware of the ultimate consequence, to renounce instruction in *gestus*. As a professional teacher, he has to reject it of course. In the introduction to his chapter on *actio* he attacks certain people 'who consider that delivery which owes nothing to art and everything to natural impulse is more forcible and the only form of delivery which is worthy of a man' (10). This reference to the ideal of manliness shows that these people thought all teaching of delivery unmanly, presumably because it was considered too theatrical. To rely solely on 'nature' for the delivery would avoid the danger inherent in taught delivery: the presentation of the speech would then appear to come spontaneously from the heart. Quintilian agrees with his opponents that nature, of course, would have to play a part, but that it was much better to improve nature by art – without appearing unnatural; in fact, the aim of his teaching is to achieve the impression of natural *spontaneity*.

**Culture and gestures**

Quintilian is well aware that the gestures he teaches have a special position: he distinguishes them not only from theatre and common use, but also from those of the past and those of other people and schools. Although many gestures seem to be common to both Greeks and Romans, there are those which only Greeks use or which 'foreign schools' – presumably again Greek teachers in Rome – recommend; typically enough, Quintilian advises against this gesture because it is too theatrical (103). What he prescribes, then, is (to use the term of the Neapolitan scholar) a specific Roman upper-class dialect of gestures.

This dialect has of course a historical dimension. Although in many instances Quintilian can refer back to Cicero as authority, once he confesses to a general development during the 150 years between Cicero's and his own teaching – namely, that modern gesticulation is generally somewhat livelier and more violent (184). He is not alone in making this observation, and more conservative observers connected the change with the decline of both rhetoric and morals."
A millennium and a half later, in his *Elementa Rhetorices* of 1532, the German humanist Philip Melanchthon came to a similar conclusion: 'delivery today is very different from that among the ancients.' Given the high conventionality of gestures and especially gesticulation, it need not come as a surprise. Among Quintilian's examples, few could be recognized today; mostly, they are pictorial gestures, Quintilian's 'imitative' ones. Counting on the fingers, for example, pictures a natural way of counting and so is still understandable to us. We would understand too that pressing the fist to the chest would have something to do with emotion (to this extent, the gesture is pictorial); I doubt, however, whether we would recognize it as expressing remorse – this specialization is arbitrary, culturally defined. Slapping one's thigh is even more arbitrary – we use it in our culture not to denote anger as in Plautus and Quintilian, but together with loud laughter as a somewhat vulgar expression of exhilaration.50

The distance is even greater with finger signs. Plain pointers are still recognizable: pointing with the index seems to have a deep natural basis; the vulgarity of pointing with the thumb – not quite recommended by Quintilian (104) – is still recognizable by us today. The highest degree of conventionalization seems to lie with ideographs; though even today one may sometimes see the 'most common' sign, thumb against middle finger, I doubt whether the users know what they are doing. Other signs recommended by the Roman have fallen out of use, others again changed into pictorial signs and are heavily advised against – 'to put the tip of index and thumb together to form a ring' was used by Greek dialecticians to round off their conclusions; 'to stretch out the forefinger and the little, the three others being closed' was to Quintilian a slightly more forceful sign during narrating and arguing. Among contemporary Swiss, the former gesture would be as abusive as the latter is to modern Italians. A time-traveller would be well advised to learn, amongst much else, the ancient art of gesticulation.


*Cicero, *De oratore* 3. 222; *actio quasi corporis quaedam eloquentia* ('delivery is a sort of eloquence of the body'): Cicero, *Orator* 55; compare also Quintilians *Institutio Oratoria* 11. 3. 1.

For a history of research see Adam Kendon, 'The study of gesture: some observations on its history', *Recherches Sémiotiques/ Semiotic Enquiry*, 2 (1982), pp. 45–62; for a bibliographical survey see the bibliography at the end of this volume.

See Cicero. *De oratore* 1. 128 'in an orator . . . there must be the shrewdness of a dialectician, the thoughts of a philosopher, the words nearly of a poet, the memory of a lawyer, the voice of a tragic actor and the delivery practically of the best stage-performer' (*inoratore . . . acumen dialecticorum, sententiae philosophorum, verba prope poetarum, memoria iuris consultorum, vox tragoedorum, gestus paene summorum actorum est requiendus*).


8 Explicitly stated in Quintilian 11.2.1; Cicero presupposes this bipartition in many places, e.g. De oratore 1.128, cited in note 5.

9 The only commentary on the chapters on *gestus* is the recent doctoral dissertation of Maier–Eichhorn. *Die Gestikulation* – a useful booklet which, however, neglects the wider relationship of gestures to general cultural background; here, Burkhard Fehr, *Bewegungsweisen und Verhaltensideale: Physiognomische Deutungsmöglichkeiten der Bewegungsdarstellung an griechischen Statuen* lies 5. and 4. Jh.v.Chr. (Bad Branistedt, 1979) is still a pioneering work, though with no interest in Roman culture; see also the new edn with French translation and notes by Jean Cousin (ed.), *Quintilien. Institution Oratoire. Vol. 6: livres X et XI* (Paris, 1979). Appearing only after the colloquium on which this volume is based was Katsouri, *Rhetorike Hypokrise* (see note 7), a survey of the Greek and Roman material on gesticulation in rhetoric (13–140) and on the stage (141–99) from Homer onwards, with the main sources and ample illustrations. The chapter on Quintilian (124–40) contains few new insights, its main aim being to show that the famous illuminations in the manuscripts of Terence can illustrate Quintilian and that they derive from a tradition of gesticulation going back to the fifth century BC Athenian stage (133–40); for the former thesis, heard since Friedrich Leo (1883), see now Maier–Eichhorn, *Die Gestikulation*, pp. 145–53 (149: ‘Für die Erklärung der Quintilianpassage gewinnen wir also aus den Bildern nichts, wenn sich auch mehrere, mindestens äussere Übereinstimmungen feststellen lassen’); the latter is highly speculative.

10 Here and in the following citations, passages from bk 11 ch. 3 of Quintilian’s *Institution Oratoria* are cited by their paragraph number only; the translations follow H.E. Butler’s Loeb edition.


12 Cicero, *Orator* 59: among the virtues of the perfect orator is ‘a finger which does not beat rhythmically’, *non ad numerum articulus cadens*.

13 The first preserved Roman rhetorical treatise, the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, already warns ‘not to change from an oratorical way into a tragic one’ (*ne ab oratoria consuetudine ad tragicam transeamus* 3.24), and more generally ‘in carriage and
gesticulation, there should be neither conspicuous beauty nor ugliness, lest we make the impression of an actor or a workman' (convenit... in gestu nec venustatem conspiciendam nec turpitudinem esse, ne aut histriones aut operarii videamur esse 3.26).

14 Macrobius, Saturnalia 3.14.11f. tells the story of Cicero and Roscius; the actor wrote, Macrobius adds, a treatise on the relationship between oratory and stagecraft. For Cicero's ideal orator see note 5.

15 See *Institutio Oratoria* 1.11.1–14.


18 See Cicero, *De officis* 2.128–30 'the way to stand, walk, sit, lie down, the expression of the face and the eyes, the movement of the hands should preserve this befitting appearance' (*status, incessus, sessio, accubitio, vultus, oculi, manuum motus teneat illud decorum*). Especially important is the way one walks, as already in the late second century BC the epitaph of a noble Claudia shows, among whose virtues is 'modest walking', see *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, ed. F. Bücheler, A. Riese, and E. Lommatzsch (3 vols, Leipzig 1895–1926), vol. 1, no. 52, 7 (*incessu commodo*); for the way of walking which indicates vice, see e.g. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 52.12, 114.3; Juvenal, Satires 2.17. Still important is Elizabeth C. Evans, 'Roman descriptions of personal appearance in history and biography', *Harvard Studies* in Classical Philology, 46 (1935), pp. 43–84; see also the commentary on Juvenal's Satires by Ludwig Friedländer (Leipzig, 1895), p. 166; Fehr, *Bewegungsweisen und Verhaltensideale*, pp. 7–12, and Bremmer, this volume, ch. 1, 'Walking'.

19 Cicero, *De oratore* 3.216 (*corpusque totum hominis et eius vultus omnesque voces, ut nervi in fidibus, ita sonant, ut a motu animi quoque sunt pulsae*).


21 Quintilian 100: *est admirationi conveniens ille gestus, quo manus modice supinata ac per singulos a minimo collecta digitos redeunte*
flexu simul explicatur atque convertitur; 104: compressam etiam manum in paenitentia vel ira pectori admoveamus.

22 Quintilian 92: est autem gestus ille maxime communis, quo medius digitus in pollicem contrablit explicitis tribus . . . cum leni in utramque partem motu modice prolatus, simul capite atque umeris sensim ad id, quo manus feratur, obscurantibus.

23 Cicero, De oratore 3.220: non hie (sc. gestus) verba exprimens scaenicus, sed universam rem et sententiam non demonstratione sed significatione declarans.

24 Seneca, Epistulae Morales 19.9.114, esp. paras 6 and 22; even more revealing are the metaphors in another description of Maccenas, Epistulae Morales 92.35: 'he had an abundant and manly nature, but success ungirded his dress' (habuit enim ingenium et grande et virile nisi illud secunda discinxissent).

25 See his Epistulae Morales 114.6.

26 Quintilian 69; see also Cicero, Brutus 220, on the orationes languidiores of Curio, not a favourite of Cicero, and De oratore 1.2 on Epicurus as a 'philosopher, so weak, so slothful, so spineless, so referring everything to bodily pleasure and pain' (philosophus tam mollis, tam languidus, tam enervatus, tam omnia ad voluptatem corporis doloremque referens). See also Brermer, this volume, ch. 1, 'Walking'.


28 See Richard Brilliant, Gesture and Rank in Roman Art. The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage (New Haven, 1963), pp. 9f.; Maier-Eichhorn, Die Gestikulation, p. 111 is muddled.

29 The earliest and most explicit testimony is Plautus, Poenulus 522s. liberos homines per urbem modico magis par est gradu ire; servile esse duco festinantem currere (‘that free men walk through town at a temperate pace is more befitting; it is, I think, slavish to run in haste’).


31 See the representations (mostly from Greek vases) in Gerhard Neumann, Gesten und Gebärdenden in der griechischen Kunst (Berlin, 1965), pp. 13–15.

32 The basic gesture: Karl Sittl, Die Gebärdenden der Griechen und Römer
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(Leipzig, 1890). pp. 272f.; Maier-Eichhorn, Die Gestikulation, pp. 99f.; formed only with the index finger: Sittl, Die Gebärden, p. 272 7n.; Apuleius, Metamorphoses 1.8; thumb and index in Apuleius, Metamorphoses 4.28, perhaps with ritual significance.

The story in Gellius, Noctes Atticne 1.5.2.


Besides Plutarch's Life of Demosthenes 7, where the actor has the name Satyros, see also Pseudo-Plutarch, Vitae Oratorum 845A (with the actor Andronikos), whereas in ibid 844F Demosthenes pays another actor, Neoptolemos, handsomely for his instruction; the story might go back to the late fourth century BC, see Demetrios of Phaleron, fr 164–66 in F. Wehrli, Die Schule des Aristoteles.

What the grammarian Aelius Donatus tells us in his commentary on Terence would be helpful – were it not information destined for rhetorical declamation rather than deriving from stage practice, see John William Basore, The Scholia on Hypocrisis in the Commentary of Donatus (Baltimore, 1908). And the illuminated manuscripts of Terence are no certain witness for theatrical practice, with due respect to Katsouri, Rhetorike Hypokrise, pp. 132–40.


The running slave in Taladoire, Commentaires, pp. 41–3; for head-shaking, the best example is Sauren, the doorman slave, in Plautus, Asinaria 403; swollen with anger is e.g. the vulgar soldier in Plautus, Bacchides 603; the soldier Stratopolianes in Plautus, Truculentus 601 'grinds his teeth and slaps his thigh' with rage.
40 For example, Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 11.7 or Petronius, *Satyricon* 19 on theatrical laughter (*mimicus risus*).

41 Slapping one's thighs as an expression of anger and sorrow, Sittl, *Die Gebärden*, pp. 21–5 (rarely and late as an expression of merriment, ibid., p. 12); counting on the fingers: ibid., pp. 252–62.

42 The special system of finger counting, however, seems to have been in high esteem, at least in later antiquity, see Sittl, *Die Gebärden*, pp. 254–62 for the key text of Bede; see also Apuleius, *Apologia* 89 where finger counting perhaps is regarded as rather simplistic, as in Quintilian.

43 'He stands like the slave in comedy' (*astitit et dulice et comoedice*) comments Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus* 213. The theoreticians themselves point this out: Quintilian 1.11.3, and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.

44 The expression is Quintilian's, 11.3.71 (doctorcs scaenici), cf. 1.11.4.

45 Explicitly and with some weight in Quintilian's introduction to our subject, 11.3.4f.

46 One of these extremists was Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Demosthenes* 54 – the position is understandable for an Atticist. One could, of course, refer to Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.1.1404a12 for a justification: Aristotle already put nature much higher than art in delivery.

47 Quintilian 1.11.3; anticipated in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.27 'a good performance has the result that the discourse appears to come from the heart' (*pronuntiationem bonam id perficere, ut res ex animo agi videatur*).


50 In this signification, it is rarely attested and late; see Sittl, *Die Gebarden*, p. 12.