

Week 1 – Friday
W4a

Self-representation of ancient
civilisations in text and art
Case study: Maya gestures

HPAR4006

What makes civilisation?

Dr. Katharina Zinn

UNITED STATES

MESOAMERICA

GULF OF MEXICO

MEXICO

Puerto Vallarta ●

Teotihuacán ▲

México City ●

Veracruz ●

Acapulco ●

Monte Albán ▲ ● Oaxaca

La Venta ▲

Villahermosa ●

Palenque ▲

Merida ●

Chichén Itzá ▲

Belmopan ●

Caracol ▲

GUATEMALA

Copan ●

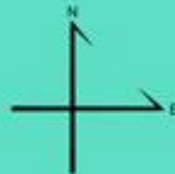
Tegucigalpa ●

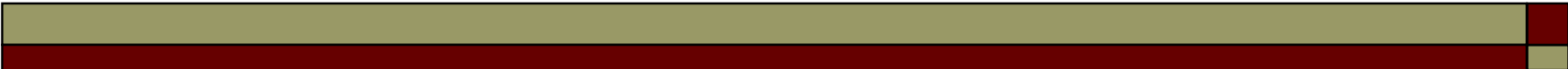
Cerén ▲

San Salvador ●
EL SALVADOR

PACIFIC OCEAN

- ▲ Ancient Site
- Modern City
- Northwest Area
- Central Plateau
- Gulf Coast Area
- Oaxaca Area
- Maya Area

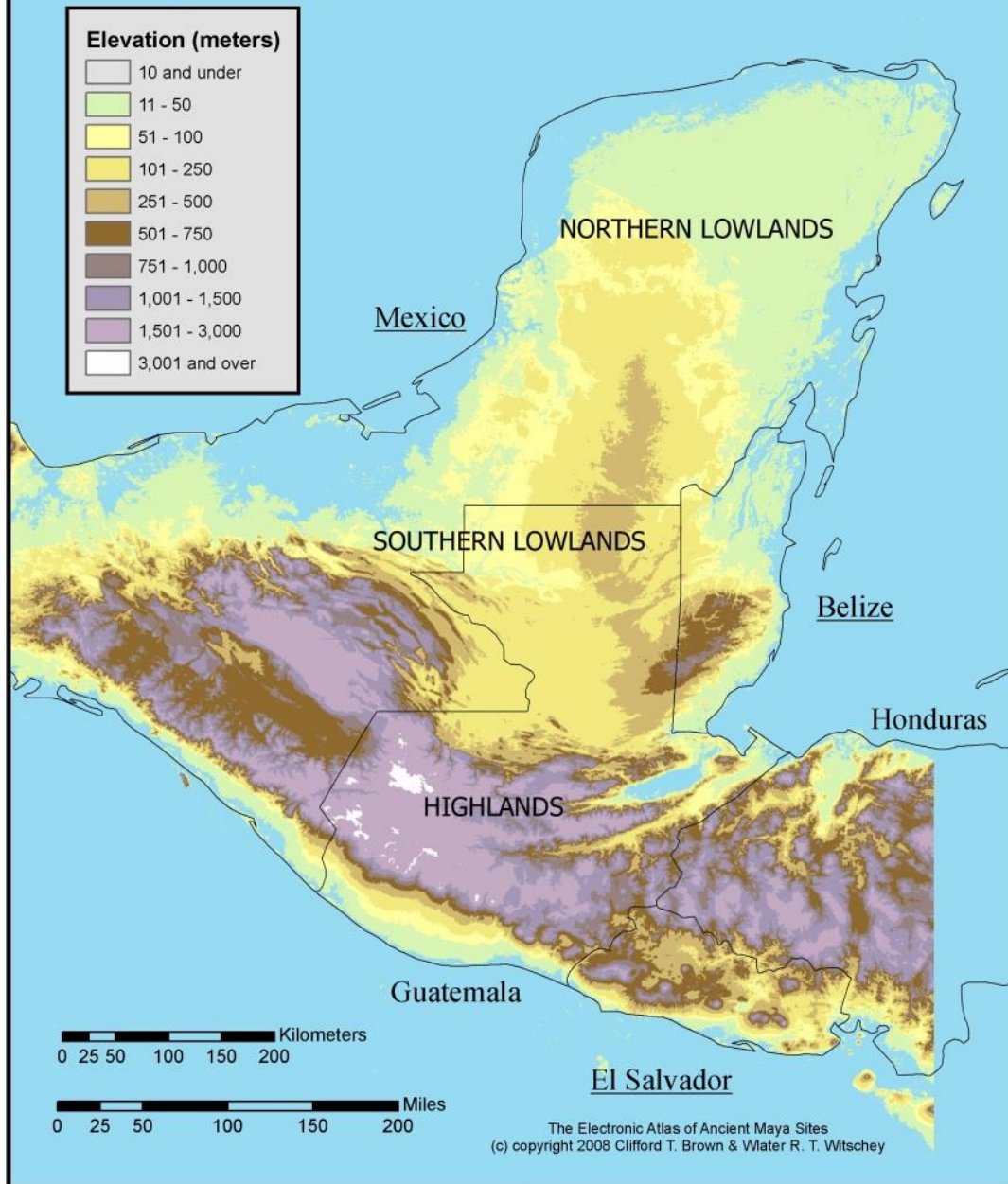




Key Points

- ❑ The Maya were ***never*** a unified state or empire. At any given point in time, there were a number of distinct (although related) city-states
- ❑ Maya civilisation was not an isolated development
- ❑ There are many Maya groups and communities today, with over 6 million speakers of various Maya languages

The Maya Area



3 main regions:

(1) Pacific Coast

(2) Highlands

(3) Lowlands

- Southern Lowlands
- Northern Lowlands

Seasons

Dry Season:
January – April

Rainy Season:
May - December

Map of the Maya area showing principal archaeological sites

Harri Kettunen 2010

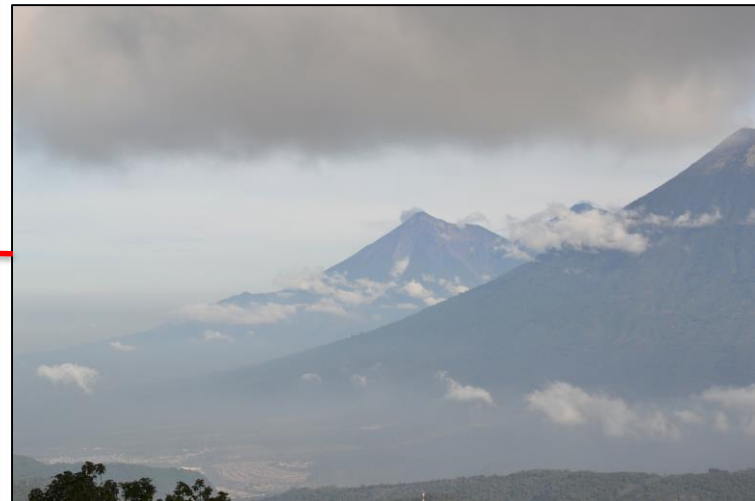
Gulf of Mexico

Caribbean
Sea

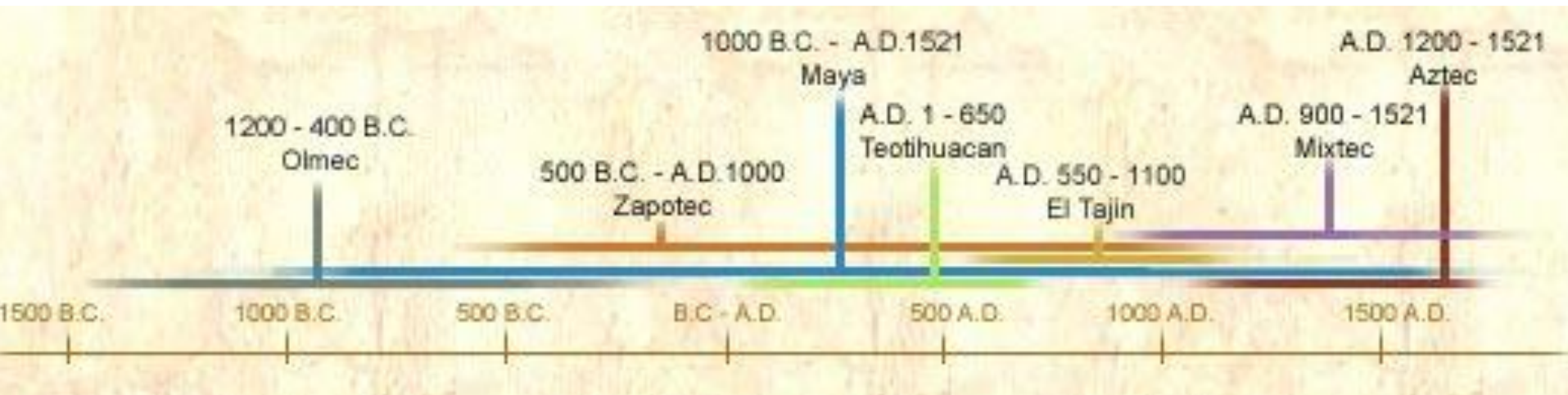
Pacific Ocean

N

0 100 200 km



Timeline



Over time considerable fluctuation in the size and complexity of the mosaic of Maya polities (Sharer and Traxler 2006: 79)

Chronological Periods in the Maya Area

(Sharer and Traxler 2006: 98)

Period	Estimated dates	Major cultural developments
Paleoindian or Lithic	12,000/20,000 – 8000 BC	Initial settlement of the Americas
Archaic	8000 – 2000 BC	Settled communities and agriculture
Early Preclassic	2000 – 1000 BC	Initial complex societies
Middle Preclassic	1000 – 400 BC	Growth in socioeconomic complexity
Late Preclassic	400 BC – AD 100	Initial states
Terminal Preclassic	AD 100 - 250	Decline and transformation of states
Early Classic	AD 250 - 600	Expansion of lowland states
Late Classic	AD 600 - 800	Apogee of lowland states
Terminal Classic	AD 800 – 900/1100	Decline and transformation of states
Postclassic	AD 900 /1100 - 1500	Reformulation and revival of states

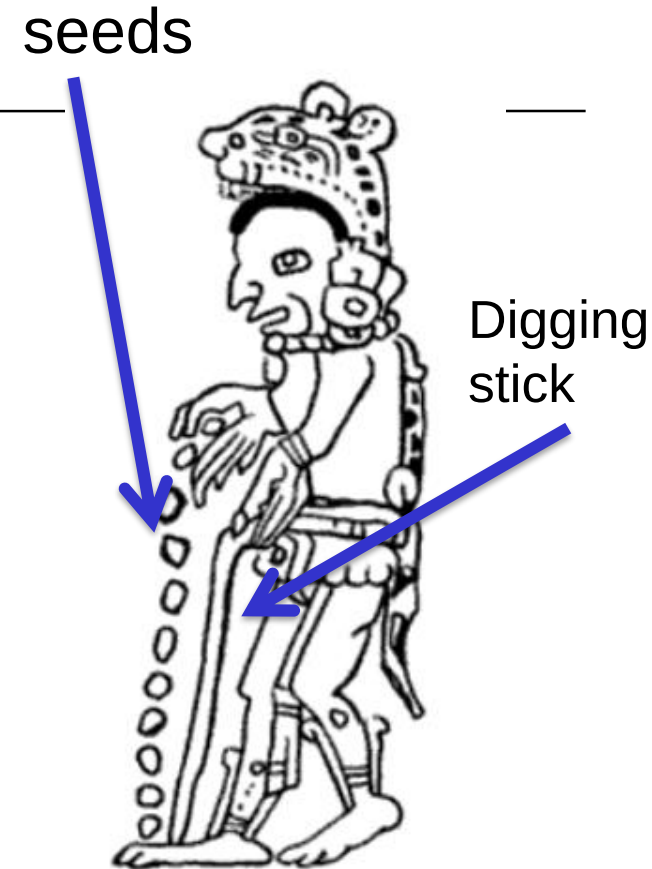
Subsistence

- Variety of resources and techniques
- Farming has root in the Early Preclassic period (c.2000BC)
 - Growth of settled communities, small scattered villages, and fishing camps
 - increased reliance on select foods, especially ones that could be easily stored
 - Entailed the protection and nourishment of the crops
- Earliest form of cultivation was swidden agriculture (or 'slash and burn' farming')



Joya de Ceren, El Salvador

- Earliest form of cultivation was swidden agriculture (or 'slash and burn' farming')
- Clearing, burning and planting of fields (milpa)
- Trees and other vegetation cut down
- The field is left over the dry season
- March, April or May the dried vegetation is burned, leaving a rich deposit of carbon and ash
- Seeds are planted using a wooden digging stick
- Heavy rains in June and July germinate the crops, to be harvested later in the year



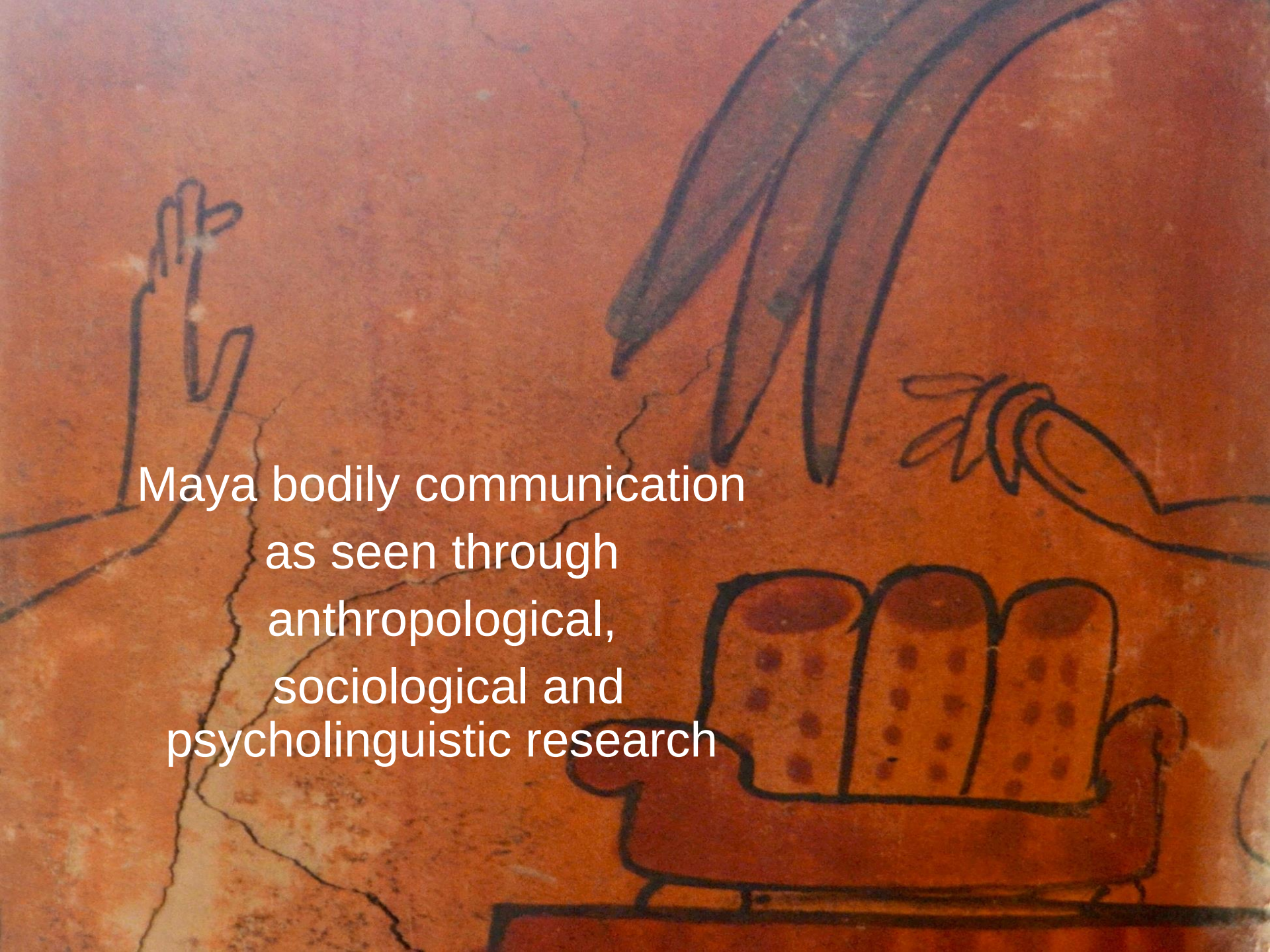
Planting seeds, Madrid
Codex p.36

Self-representation in art

How to read that?





The background of the slide is a photograph of a piece of ancient Maya pottery. The pottery is a reddish-brown color with some visible cracks. It features several painted elements: a hand on the left side with fingers spread, a large bird-like figure at the top right with long, curved wings, and a stylized bird or animal figure at the bottom right with a patterned body. The text is overlaid on the left side of the pottery.

Maya bodily communication
as seen through
anthropological,
sociological and
psycholinguistic research

Bodily communication: Why should we look outside the discipline?

- We are dealing with something that is ephemeral – difficult to trace
- Archaeological record: material traces of actions
 - residues of structures – how people would have moved through the built environment and landscapes
 - Artefacts, objects – how they were handled, used
 - Art - representations of people engaged in action



Aspects of bodily communication

TASK:

Team up in pairs and have a chat about the ways we can communicate meaning through the body, so our everyday actions.

(2 minutes)

So what did you come up with?

Aspects of bodily communication

Gesture (hand signals and movement)





Facial expression

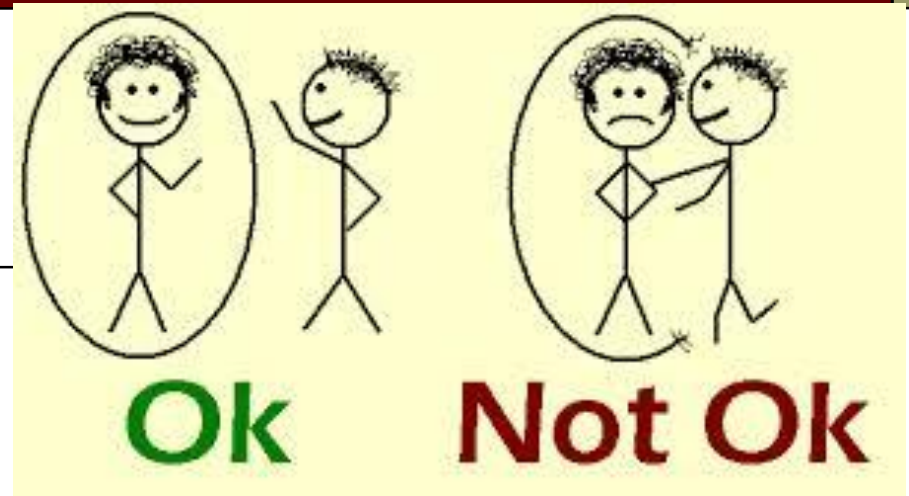




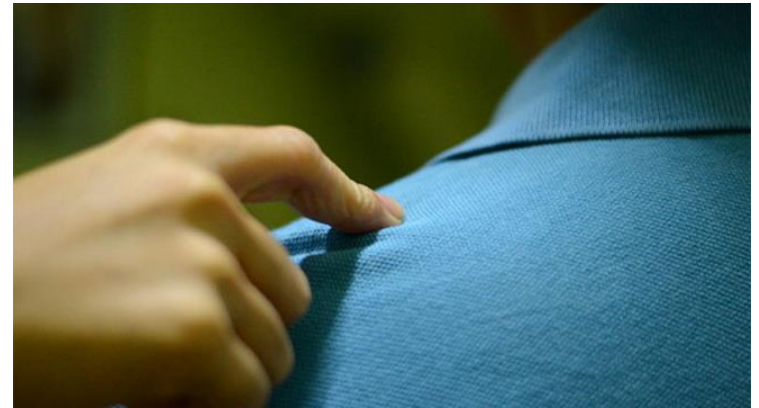
Posture



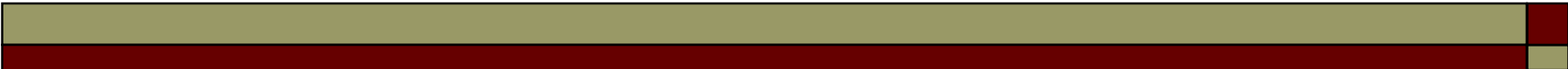
Body orientation



Proxemics

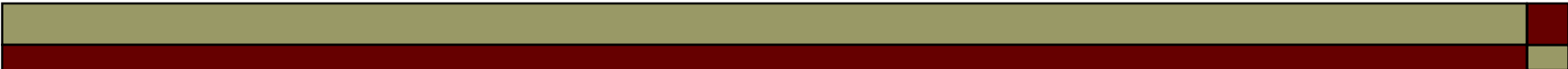


Haptics



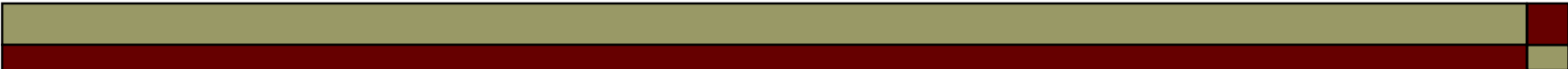
TASK – body warmup

- ❑ Go back in pairs
- ❑ face the person sitting next to you
- ❑ one person is the leader and to start making movements:
 - big or more subtle movements with your hands, arms, torso, head, make facial expressions
- ❑ Non-leader is going to mirror the leader's actions –observe what leaders do and mirror their movements
- ❑ Swap round in a couple of minutes.



Movement and perception

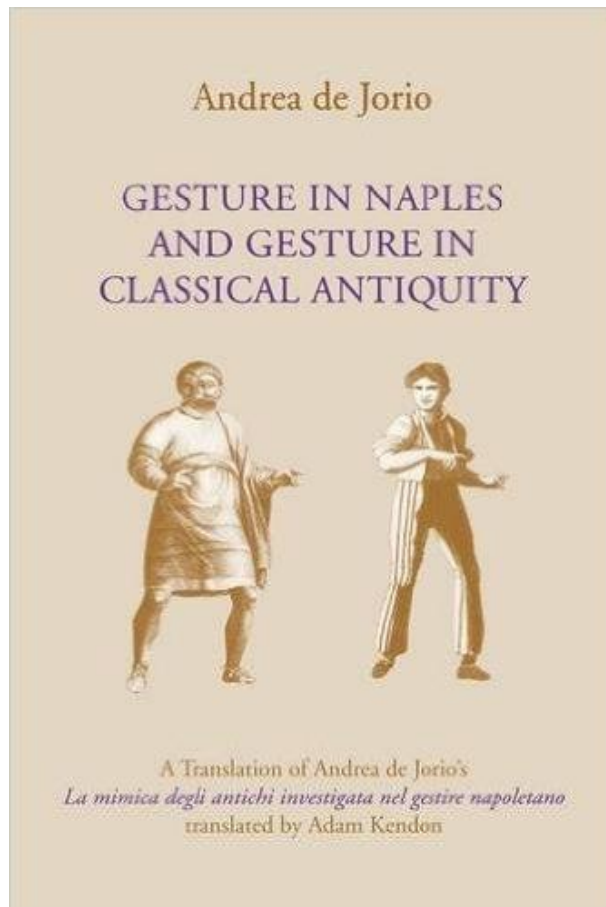
- *changes in movement and being perceptive*
- Bodily communication is not only what a person does with their body, but how those movements are perceived and understood by others.



The Theory and Anthropology of Gesture

- ❑ Long history
- ❑ Visible and meaningful bodily actions
- ❑ 19th century – studies of gesture developed considerably:
 - Andrea de Jorio
 - Edward Tylor
 - Garrick Mallery
 - Wilhelm Wundt
- ❑ Role of gesture in everyday interactions
- ❑ Contributed to a better understanding of sign languages
- ❑ Value of gesture for understanding the processes involved in the development of symbolic communication

Andrea de Jorio (1769-1851)



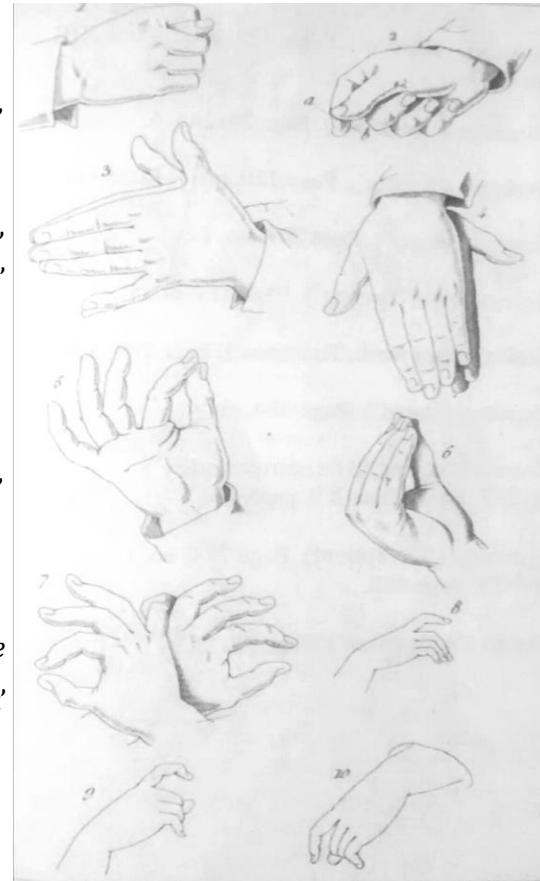
Mano in fica
'The 'fig' hand'

Stupido,
'Stupid'

Amore, 'Love'
Chiedere, 'To ask'

Condotta versipelle
'Dissembling conduct'

Disprezzo
'Scorn'



Danaro,
'Money'

Stupido,
'Stupid'

Chiedere, 'To ask'
Bacio, 'Kiss'

Schiopetto,
'Finger-snap'

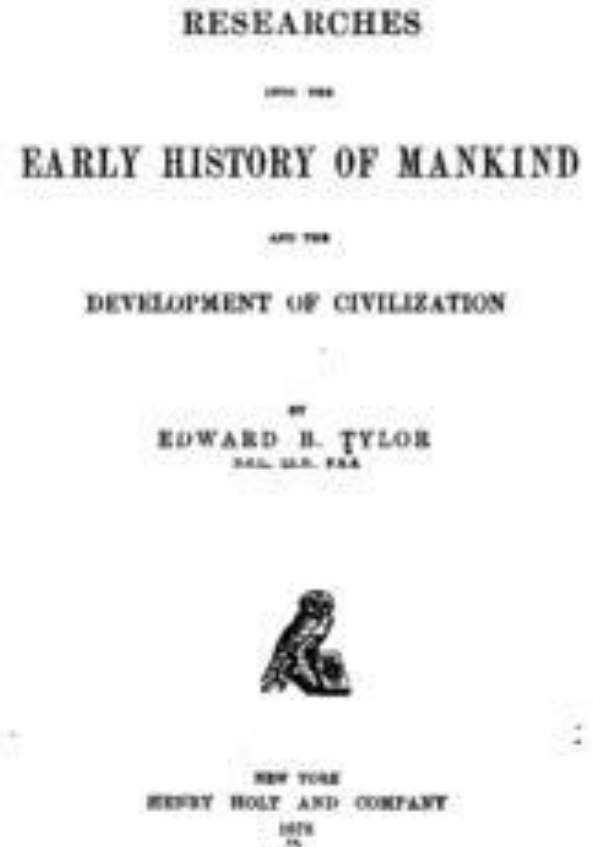
Disprezzo,
'Scorn'

Neapolitan hand gestures

Edward Tylor (1832-1917)

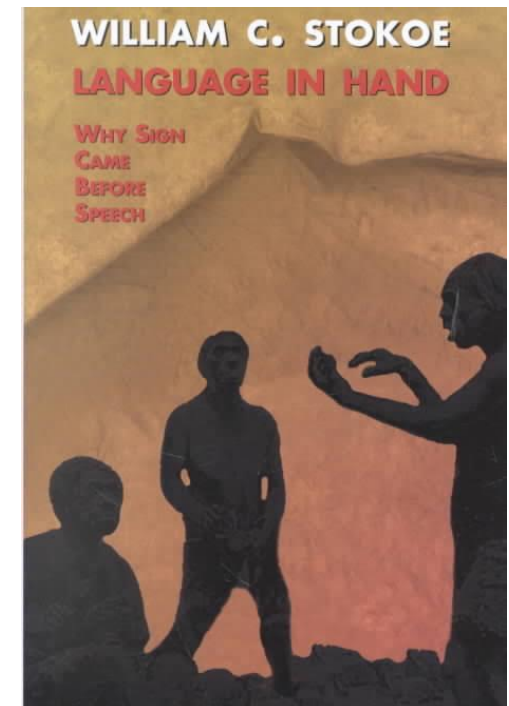
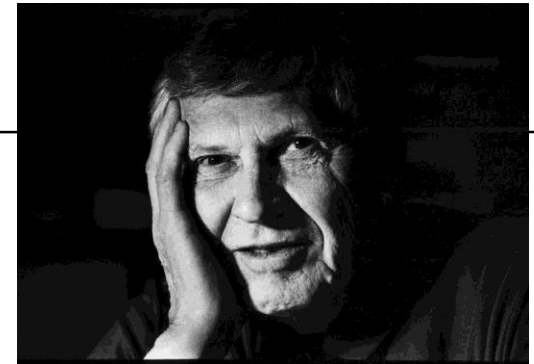
- one of the founders of what is now known as cultural anthropology
- *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865)
 - Five key points about language and gesture

(1) Detailed observation of sign language as used by the deaf is proof that linguistic communication is possible without speech



William Stokoe (1919-2000)

- ❑ This point was really developed by William Stokoe in the 1960s.
- ❑ Stokoe was an American linguist
- ❑ His research on American Sign Language (ASL) revolutionized the understanding of ASL in the United States as a true language with syntax and grammar
- ❑ In his later work, *Language in Hand* (2001), Stokoe argues that the role of the body and gestures in early hominid communication would have been significant.



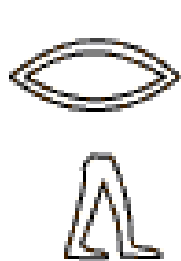
- ‘both words and sentences crystallized out of gestures’ (Stokoe 2001: 12)
-

“the animal went up the tree”

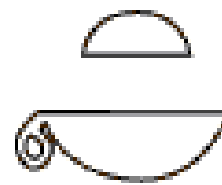
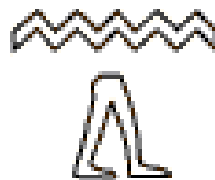
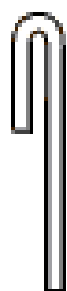


similarities between gesture-language and picture-writing

evolution of Chinese writing and the development from hieroglyphs to alphabetic writing shows how arbitrary linguistic forms can evolve out of expressions that were originally pictorial



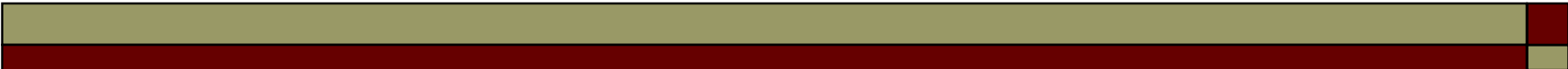
Give directions



Approach



Movement



Gesture studies today

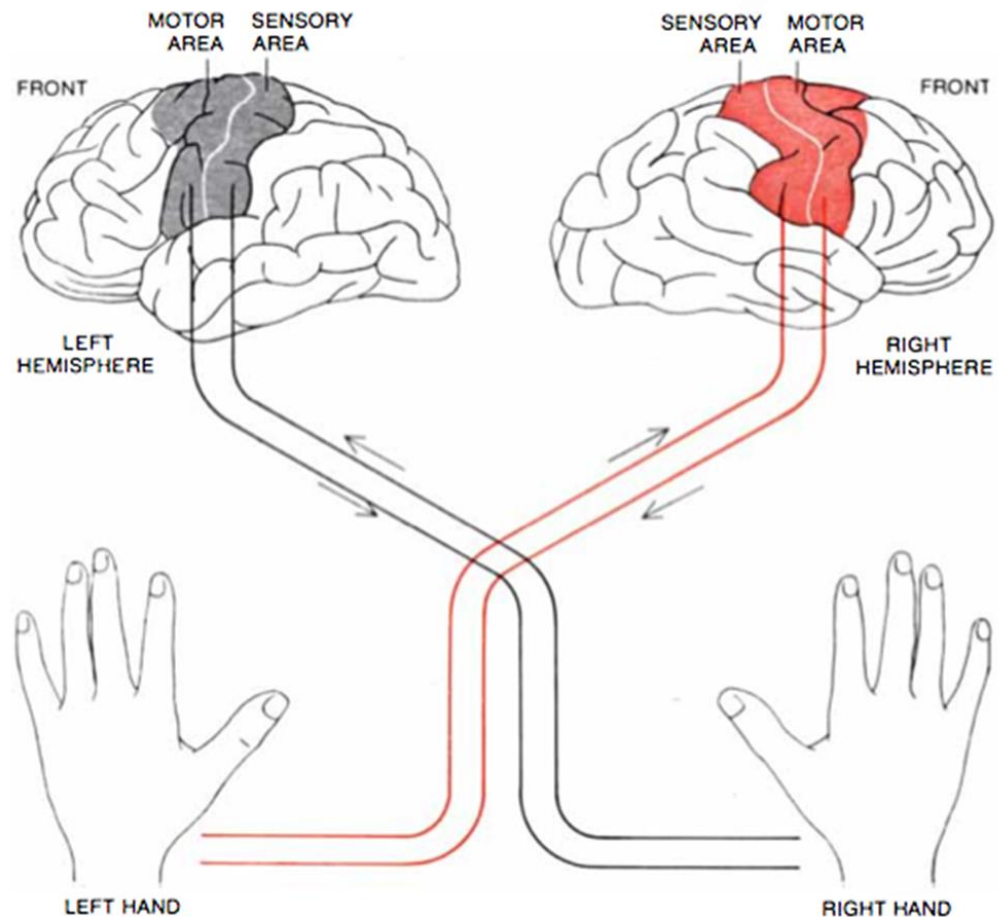
- ❑ Mid-1970s that gesture studies began to really emerge as a field in its own right, encompassing dynamic research in sociology, anthropology, history, linguistics and psychology
- ❑ International Society for Gesture Studies was established in 2002

Handedness

- ❑ Palka, J. W. Left/Right Symbolism and the Body in Ancient Maya Iconography and Culture. *Latin American Antiquity*, 13(4): 419-443.
- ❑ tendency to use either the right or left hand more ‘naturally’ than the other
- ❑ evolutionary and developmental theories – population right-handedness is unique to humans (e.g. Corballis and Beale 1976)
- ❑ other studies suggest that the manual functions of gorillas, chimpanzees and young children show that right-handedness may not be species specific. Rather, handedness is context specific, and inherited from a behaviour common to both humans and great apes (e.g. Hopkins 1996; Forrester 2015).

Handedness and brain lateralization

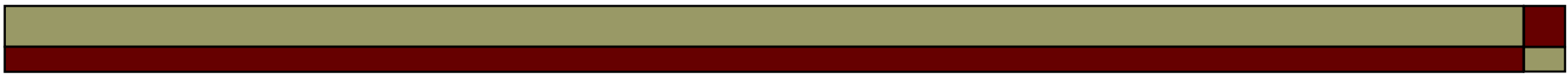
- ‘the exhibition of a consistent laterality preference during the performance of complex and highly differentiated manual adoptive patterns’ (Martin 1952: 527)



Metaphor Explanation Through Gesture

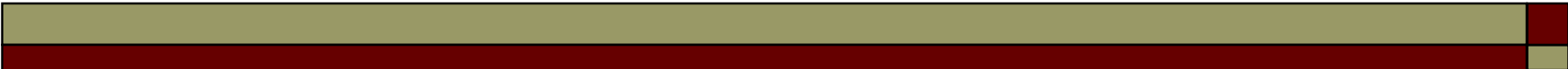
(Kita, Condappa, and Mohr 2007)

- Participants were asked to explain metaphors, such as ‘to spill the beans’ (meaning to tell secrets)
- they observed that people tended to use left hand gestures
- Left-hand gestures are used in describing metaphors that generate imagery in the right brain hemisphere, which helps in metaphor processing.
- gestures help us to think about the concrete and abstract
- ‘gesture affects the mental world, just as practical actions affect the physical world’ (Kita 2015)



- ❑ research encourages archaeologists to engage with and explore the multifaceted nature of bodily communication
- ❑ helped by gesture studies within the social and biological sciences
- ❑ Studies of posture and gesture important in archaeology
- ❑ can also contribute to the history of gestures and to the dialogue about the similarities and differences in gestures in cultures around the world
- ❑ Comparisons of gesture = better understanding of nature of bodily communication in space and time



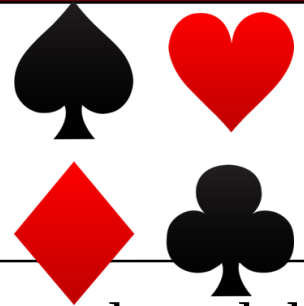


GESTURE AND COMMUNICATION

past, present, future

The importance of understanding
the past in order to understand
the future of

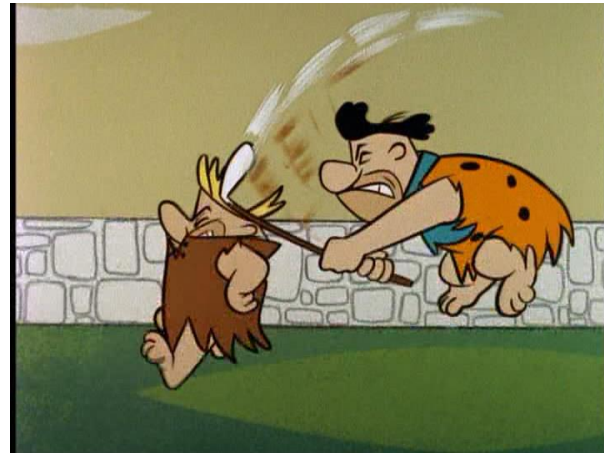
TASK – communication without words

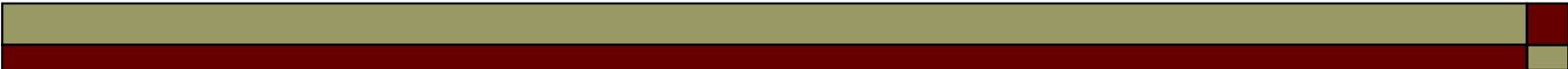


- ❑ each receives a card → four suits – hearts, diamonds, spades, clubs
- ❑ take a look at your card, but don't let anyone else see which one you have
- ❑ organize yourselves into the correct line-up of cards without talking and *only using gestures*, no showing your card to anybody else
- ❑ you can get up, move around, think about how you are going to communicate what your card would be.
- ❑ find your suit, you then need to find a way to get line up in numerical order: ace, two, three, four, up to Jack, Queen, King
- ❑ missing numbers, so just bear that in mind when you are getting in line
- ❑ When you're done, all do a thumbs up gesture.



What kinds of gestures did you use?





How do gestures get their meanings?

- ❑ Why do we use certain actions to communicate certain meanings?
- ❑ What are the differences among the gestures we use?
- ❑ To what extent are our gestures determined by the biology of human behaviour, and how much of how we communicate meaning is conditioned by culture?

Human Ethology

- study the behavioural sequences of interactions among people and groups to understand the laws underlying social interaction (see Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989)
- some cross-cultural parallels relating to bodily practices can be drawn on the basis that all humans share similar basic physical conditions in the ways in which bodies articulate and have the potential for movement
- Bodily experience and meaning



Cultural differences in gesture

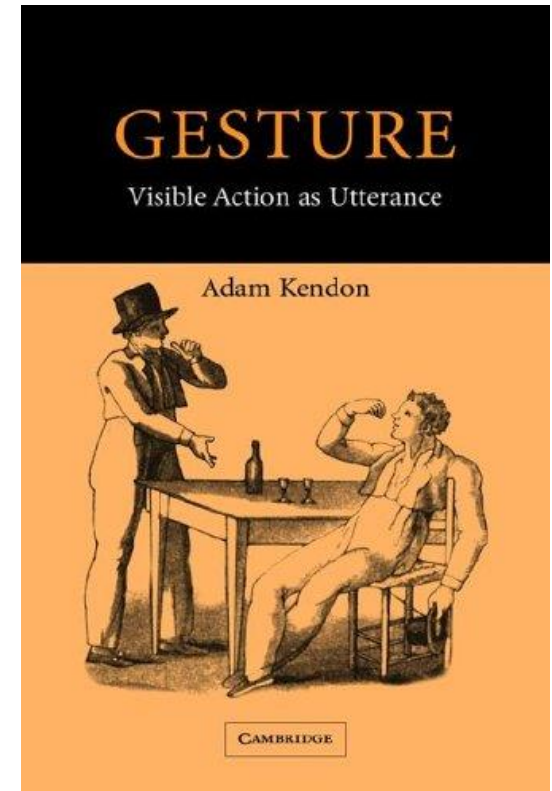
- Marcel Mauss (1935) 'Techniques du Corps' [Techniques of the Body]
 - There are cross-cultural differences in bodily movements and habits
 - 'polite and impolite positions of the hands' (Mauss 1935: 72)
- Robert Layton: for communication to succeed, 'each participant must share similar, if not identical, understandings of each other's intended meanings' (2007:49)
- Desmond Morris points out that one only needs to observe the miscommunication signaled through gestures to know that certain bodily actions are produced as part of a culture's norms and structures (Morris 1994).

‘women’s ceremonies’ (Kendon 1988)



Gesture families

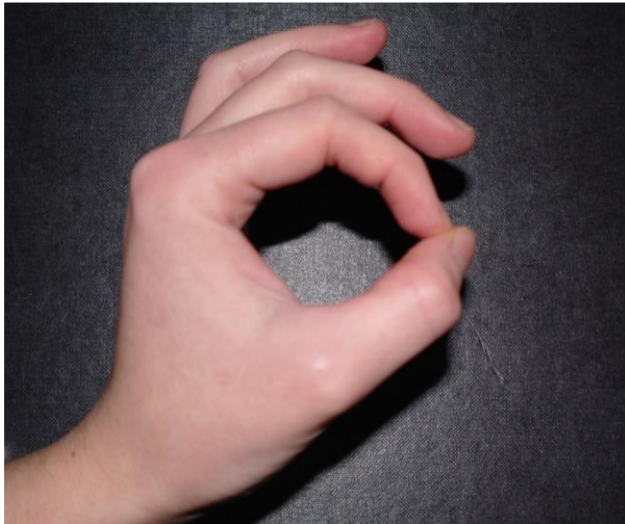
- Gesture families are groups of gestural expressions that share certain formal characteristics. What is interesting about these families is, as Adam Kendon states,
- “Each family not only shares in a **distinct set** of kinesic features but each is **also** distinct in its **semantic** themes”



Grouping gestures

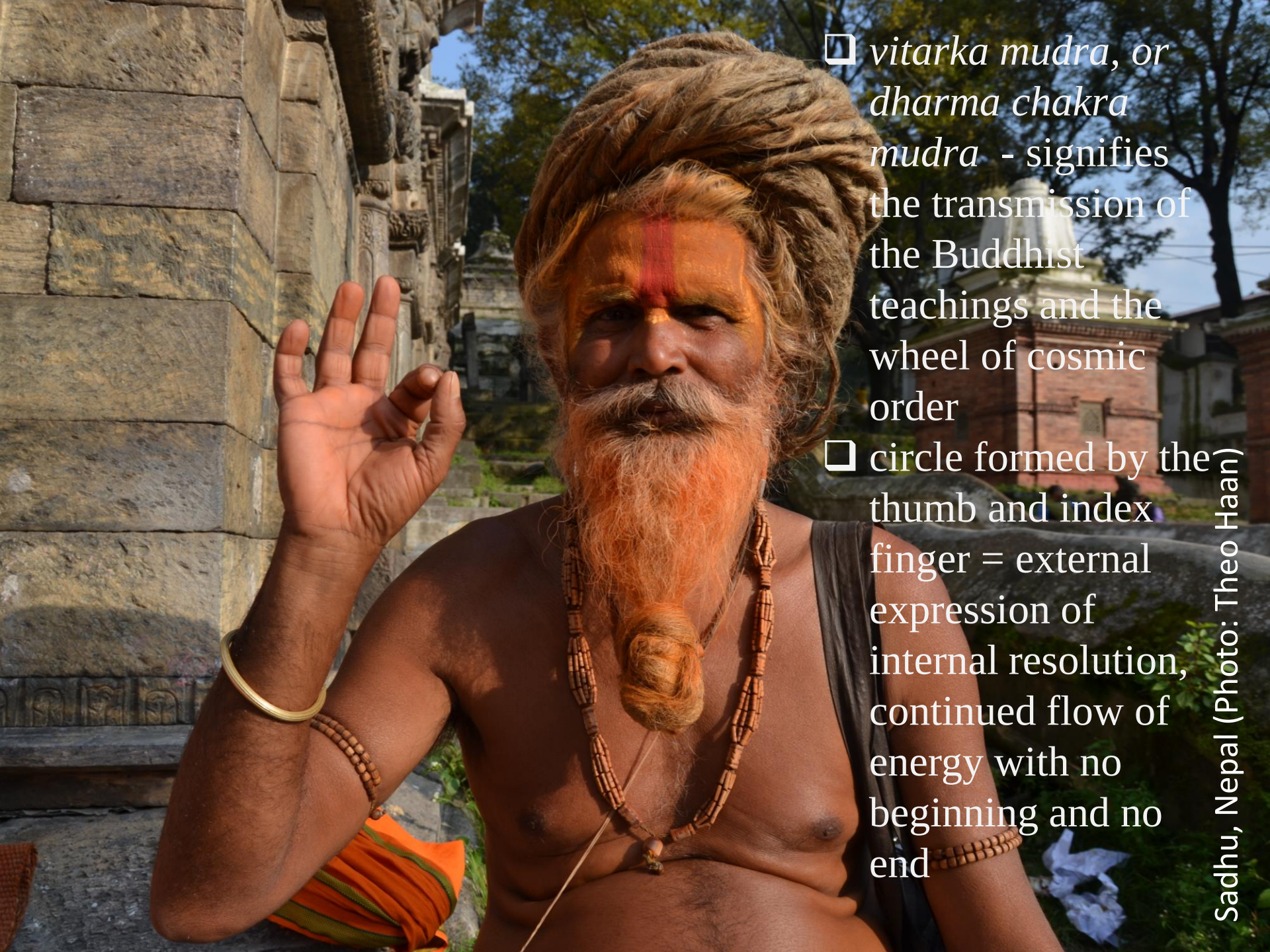


The Ring-shape gesture



USA/UK; great, awesome
France: zero
Greece / Turkey: personal
insult





❑ *vitarka mudra*, or *dharma chakra mudra* - signifies the transmission of the Buddhist teachings and the wheel of cosmic order

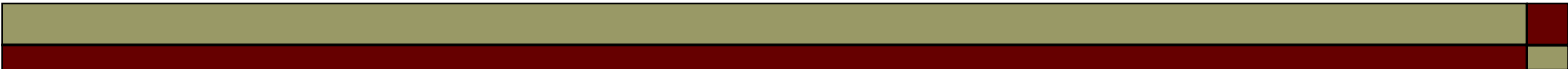
❑ circle formed by the thumb and index finger = external expression of internal resolution, continued flow of energy with no beginning and no end

Also: putting two things together



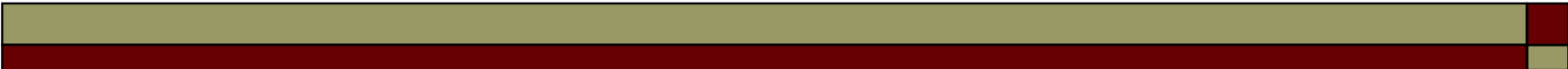
“the use of the index finger to pick up and hold onto something small”

Detail of a poster design by Craig McCarthy.



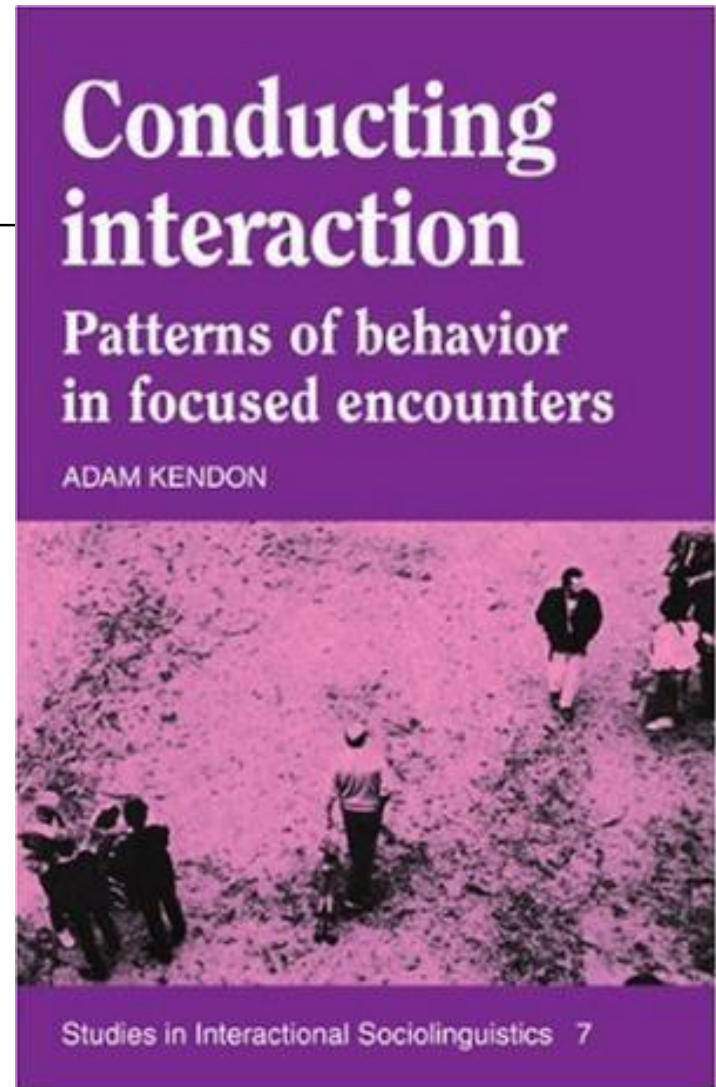
The helpfulness of gesture families in archaeology

- In art we see gesture forms, but we don't see their meanings, and it's not easy to figure out what the hands symbolised or communicated
- The 'gesture families' framework could help to explore the form/meaning relationship of gestures in the Maya context and ancient iconography more broadly



SITUATING INTERACTION: POSTURE, BODY ORIENTATION, AND SPATIAL SETTING

-
- ❑ the importance analysing structures in interpersonal actions
 - ❑ clusters, lines, or circles, or into various other kinds of patterns
 - ❑ Action and conversation is ‘bracketed’ and ‘framed’ through the participants’ spatial-orientation
 - ❑ When a pattern is sustained, it can be called a ‘formation’

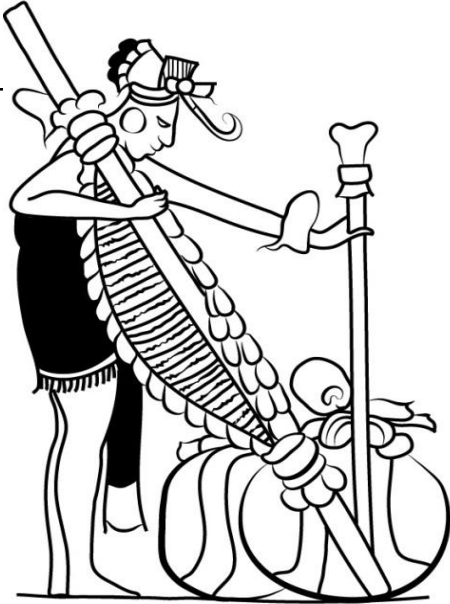


F-formation

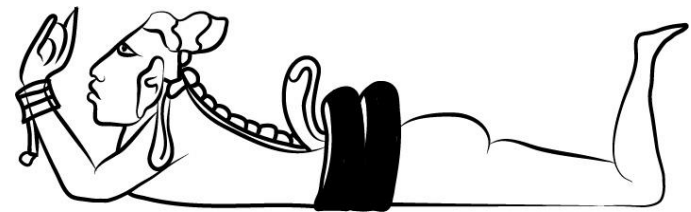
- ❑ two or more people engaging in action with a space between them
- ❑ Possible analysis of behaviour
- ❑ The F-formation system serves to maintain differential access to the space among participants and maintains the focus of attention in the engagement or encounter



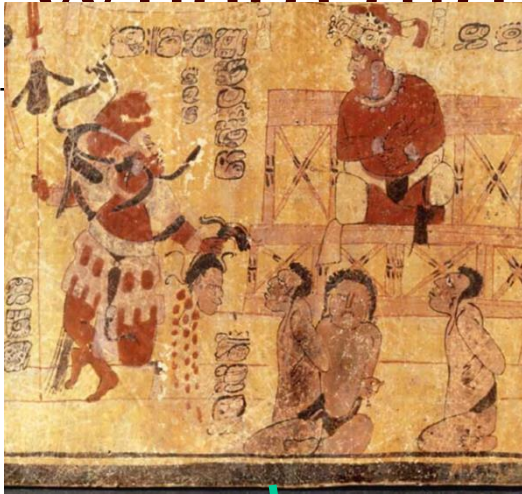
Cross cultural similarities in postures



Standing, sitting, kneeling, crouching, lying down



Where did activities take place?



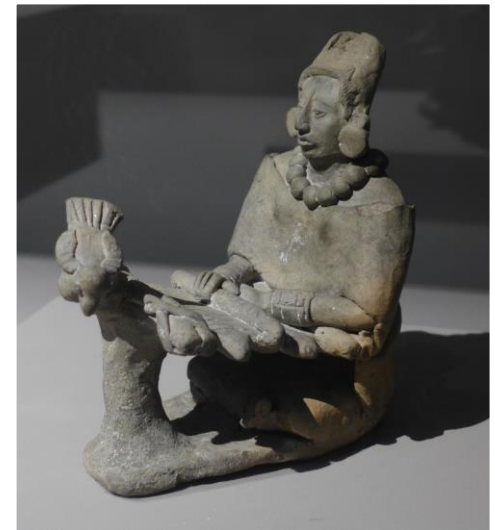
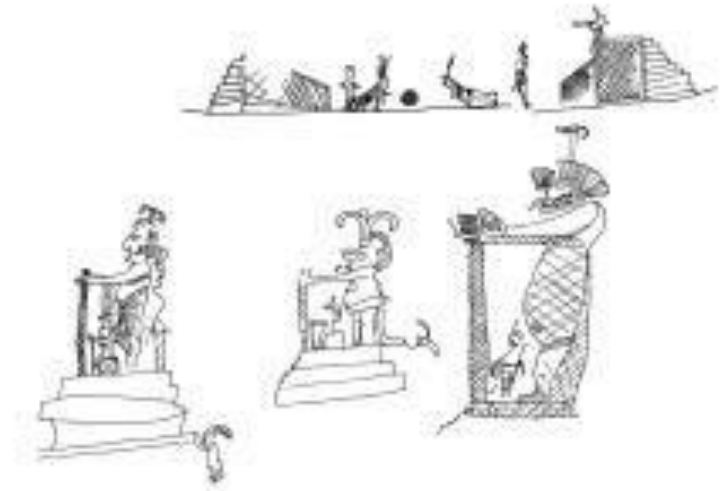


MAYA ART



Figural Art in the Classic Period (c. 250 – 850 AD)

- ❑ Murals
- ❑ Stone monuments
 - Stelae
 - Lintels
 - Panels
- ❑ Ceramic vessels
- ❑ Figurines
- ❑ Graffiti
- ❑ Small figures carved in jade





Mural in Room 3 Structure 1, Bonampak, Mexico



**Carved stone “stela” and molded stucco inside Structure 21,
Yaxchilan, Mexico**





Painted ceramic vessels: (L) Tikal, Guatemala; (R) Chama,



K7999