A gesture in the narrower sense is bodily communication by means of hands and arms and to a lesser degree by the head. This narrower concept excludes nonverbal communication by posture and body movement and facial expression. But in a broader sense of gesture, not adopted here, the latter modes of expression are also included. In a still broader sense, gesture has been used by some authors as a fundamental term for any act of communication.

Such broad definitions include the concept of vocal gesture. Mead uses the term gesture in this broad sense as a key concept of his theory of symbolic interaction to describe communicative acts of human or of animals.
**KINESICS**
The concept of kinesics is derived from the Greek “movement”. Birdwhistell, the founder of kinesics, defined it as the “systematic study of how human beings communicate through body movement and gesture”, and also as the “systematic study of the visually sensible aspects of nonverbal interpersonal communication”.

**BODY LANGUAGE**
For lack of a better term, bodily communication by posture, body motion, and orientation will be subsumed under the designation of body language. The major objection against this term is that bodily communication has only few features in common with linguistic codes. An older term for the field of bodily communication is pantomime, but generally this concept is restricted to theatrical performances.
BODY LANGUAGE

Interpretations of body language have focused on the following dimensions of significance:

1. **Cultural specificity.** The number and form of conventional and socially acceptable bodily postures vary cross-culturally. Mauss argued that the techniques of the body, the simple and practical everyday activities, are not natural but are learned.

2. **Ethological significance.** The degree to which bodily behavior is culturally coded is still disputed. Ethological interpretations of nonverbal behavior give evidence for the universality of bodily behavior. But most ethological research in body language has so far been concerned with gestures and facial expression.
3. Psychoanalytic significance. Postural behavior of patients during interviews has been interpreted as a symptom of unconscious emotional needs.

4. Interpersonal relations. Bodily behavior as an expression of social relations such as status, power, preference, or affiliation.

5. Expressive functions. Bodily movements as expressions of emotional states.
GENERAL TYPOLOGY OF GESTURES

One of the most influential classification of gestures was developed by Ekman & Friesen. In further development of Efron’s theory of gesture, this classification comprises the following five categories of nonverbal behavior:

1. **Emblems** are gestures “which have a direct verbal translation, or dictionary definition”. They are conventional and generally intended signs which are autonomous in relation to language. But an emblem may repeat, substitute, or contradict some part of the concomitant verbal behavior.

2. **Illustrators** are speech-related gestures serving to illustrate what is being said verbally. *A less technical term for this type of nonverbal communication is gesticulation.*
3. **Affect displays** are nonverbal (mostly facial) expressions of emotions and affects.

4. **Regulators** are speech-related gestures which regulate the verbal interaction between speakers and listeners.

5. **Body manipulators** are movements of touching or manipulating one’s one body (e.g., scratching the head, licking the lips) or an object (e.g., playing with a pencil). Such acts of subconscious autocommunication are interpreted as adaptive efforts to satisfy self or bodily needs or to manage emotions.
The **semiotics of gestures** covers three major areas of study: gestures as autonomous signs or even “languages”, gestures in contiguity with other modes of sign behavior, and the role of gestures in the evolution of sign behavior (semiogenesis).

**GESTURES AS SIGNS**

The human body is acting at all times. This ubiquity of the body as a medium of expression has given rise to the metacommunicative axiom of the impossibility of not communicating, which was modified elsewhere into an axiom of the merely potential (not necessary) semioticity of behavior, objects, and events.
The semioticity of the human body in a given situation depends on several pragmatic factors. While there is little doubt about conventional gestures being signs, the semioticity of practical behavior has been questioned.

Cultural differences in the meaning and use of gestures, even in such widely distributed gestures as those for “yes” and “no”, characterize gestures as arbitrary and in this respect similar to linguistic signs. On the other hand, ethnologists have emphasized the universal character of the origin of gestures, which brings gestures closer to natural than to conventional signs.
The question whether everyday practical behavior is communicative or whether a dividing line can be drawn between praxis and semiosis has been raised by semioticians such as Rastier, Kristeva, Greimas.

Mukarovsky, in his theory of semiotic functions, draws a clear dividing line between praxis and semiosis. According to this theory, praxis is “immediate self-realization vis-à-vis reality”. This occurs “when man reorganizes reality with his own hands so that he can immediately use this reorganization to his own advantage.”
With reference to Mauss and theories of cultural anthropology, Greimas bases his *theory of gesturality* on the assumption of cultural determination and thus semioticity of all human actions. Nevertheless, Greimas also distinguishes between *gestural praxis* and *gestural communication*: gestural praxis describes behavior whose intention is to “transform the world” and not to communicate any message to those who observe it. This criterion, according to Greimas, characterizes two modes of behavior, *practical gestures* (such as acts performed by a cook in a kitchen) and *mythical gestures* (e.g., ceremonial, ritual, or magic).

A basic distinction between gestural praxis and gestural communication, according to Greimas, is in the role of the acting subject. *In gestural communication*, the agent has the role of a sender and is thus the subject of a communicative act of enunciation. *In gestural praxis*, the agent is the subject of the utterance.
While the agent of communicative gestures is a “you” for the addressee, the agent of the utterance of gestural praxis remains “he or she” for those who observe it.

The field of communicative gestures according to Greimas is further subdivided as follows:

(1) **attributive gestures**, expressions of attitudes and inner states;
(2) **modal gestures**, expressing phatic (communication-related) and metasemiotic (text-related) functions;
(3) **mimetic gestures**, bodily icons of visual events;
(4) **playful gestures** (gestualite ludicue), e.g. dance.
GESTURES. GESTURAL CODES.
IN: WINFRIED NÖTH. HANDBOOK OF SEMIOTICS

SEMIOTIC TYPOLOGY
From a semiotic point of view, gestures have been classified with respect to their function and their object relation.

- In a functional view, gestures are **referential** when they refer to an extracommunicative object.
- Gesticulation is **emotive** when it express the sender’s feelings, and it is
- **appellative** when it is directed toward the receiver.
- A fourth important type of function is the **phatic gesture**. It indicates interest in maintaining and regulating the communicative interaction (e.g., turn taking).

Typologies of gestures from the point of view of their object relation were set up by Wundt and Buhler. In terms of Peirce’s typology, these and other studies of gestures have distinguished between **indexical** (pointing), **iconic** (representing), and **symbolic** (conventional) gestures.
THEATRICAL GESTURES

Gesticulation and “body language” in theater have a twofold sign character:

- On the one hand, they are *emblems*, *illustrators*, or *regulators* with semiotic functions like everyday gestures.
- On the other hand, they are *iconic signs* representing the behavior of persons in the extratheatrical world.

*Theatrical gesture and “body language” thus permanently have a semiotic function, whereas gestures in everyday communication are only potentially communicative.*