

Introduction

GESTURE AS A CULTURAL SYSTEM

WHEN GREGORY BATESON was conducting fieldwork in New Guinea, his friends among the native Iatmul could not understand why he had to work so hard to learn their language: “But our language is easy to understand” they told him, “we just talk.”¹ I wonder how Romans would react to an American studying their gestures from a distance of two millennia. A predictable response would be that their body language is easy to understand; they just move. It is in this common lack of self-reflection that both the complications and rewards of studying ancient gesture lie. Since gesture normally does seem the natural thing to do with the body from day to day, the texts and visual representations from antiquity tend to be uninterested in depicting the particulars of how Romans moved their bodies as they interact with their environment and each other. At the same time, however, this very lack of interest makes the subject ideal for a cultural critique. When our sources mention a gesture being performed, and its intention being understood by a viewer, we gain access to a shared area of knowledge, one based not on the expression of individual will but on cultural circumstances.² As an early modern historian has remarked in introducing a group of essays intended to apply the study of gesture to the humanities, to “interpret and account for a gesture is to unlock the whole social and cultural system of which it is a part.”³ To give an example that has recently engendered much discussion and that I shall not discuss in this book: when a Roman man scratches his head with his middle finger, and his audience is able to understand that he wishes through this gesture to advertise his sexual availability to another man, the common area of belief underlying the practice affords the scholar a glimpse into a world of homoerotic activity for which Roman texts of the period otherwise give only shadowy outlines.⁴ In researching and writing about Roman gesture I have kept in mind Bourdieu’s concise formulation concerning the role of the body in the social and political life of the individual: “It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know.”⁵ The

¹ Bateson 1991.216.

² Schmidt 1953.235, speaking of folk gestures generally.

³ Thomas 1992.11.

⁴ For the gesture, see Corbeill 1996.164–65; on its value as evidence for a male homosexual subculture, see esp. Richlin 1993, Taylor 1997, Williams 1999.218–24, and Frier 1999.

⁵ Bourdieu 1990.69.

modern scholar, therefore, confronts a rare opportunity in which distance from the subject studied can be construed as an advantage. Gestures provide access to a system of thought and prejudice otherwise not accessible to us—and one often only dimly perceived by contemporaries.

It has become a cliché to say that the body “speaks.” I wish to consider the implications of this cliché of the speaking body by demonstrating how much of the gestural language displayed on the streets and in the houses of Rome can in fact be shown to belong to a self-consistent language, and to one no less complicated and subject to exploitation than the spoken language of Latin. In antiquity, Roman authors debated the extent to which Latin grammar and syntax ought to be regularized or whether it should be allowed to develop in anomalous and potentially difficult directions—the so-called analogy-versus-anomaly controversy.⁶ The analogists wished to rationalize grammar to eliminate unusual formations from the language—the deponent form *adsentior*, for example, should yield to the formally regular *adsentio*; Julius Caesar proposed that Latin adopt a present participle for the verb “to be” (*ens*) in order to fill an inconvenient gap in Latin morphology. Cicero, by contrast, was a strong opponent to the analogists, insisting that speaking a rule-bound Latin constituted speaking against Roman tradition.⁷ This topic of debate, centered on the distinction between “natural” and “unnatural” changes to the language, has implications beyond the grammatical, involved as it is in the politics of excluding provincials and the undereducated from the ranks of the late Republican elite.⁸ In similar ways, elite authors of rhetorical and philosophical texts are found debating the relationship between the body and nature and underlining the importance of maintaining particular bodily etiquettes.⁹ Not only does Roman society depend upon moral codes being as stable as Latin morphology, but it also demands that those codes emerge in visible, easily detectable signs. By using notions of the body simultaneously to create and reinforce social distinctions, the elite in Rome could check the power of marginalized groups such as women and ambitious politicians from outside Rome.

The clearest example of this need to control the public body on display can be found in the third section of the eleventh book of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*.¹⁰ Modern scientific research into the role of the body in spoken lan-

⁶ For this ancient linguistic controversy, see Rawson 1985.117–31, esp. 120–23.

⁷ Cic. *orat.* 155.

⁸ Sinclair 1994.92–96.

⁹ For concise surveys of Roman writings that discuss gesture, see Schmitt 1989, Fögen 2001.

¹⁰ For a range of recent approaches to this section of Quintilian, see Fantham 1982 (source study), Maier-Eichhorn 1989 (commentary), Graf 1992 (orators and actors), Wülfing 1994 (pedagogy), Aldrete 1999.3–43 (Roman oratorical practice), and Gunderson 2000.59–86 (construction of Roman masculinity).

guage has uncovered increasing evidence for the claim that “the gesture and the spoken utterance are different sides of a single underlying mental process.”¹¹ Such claims Quintilian would have found self-evident. His discussion of oratorical delivery, which covers approximately fifty pages in modern editions, includes numerous minute details of how to hold the head and fingers. To quote one example of the complexities that faced the aspiring orator as he strove to master the hand position appropriate to his words: “Grasp the tip [of the index finger] lightly on both sides and gently curve the remaining two fingers—the little finger less so [than the ring finger]. This gesture is appropriate for argument. If you wish to seem to argue more keenly, grasp instead the middle joint of the index and have the last two fingers contracted more tightly to correspond with the tighter position [of the thumb and middle finger].”¹² Quintilian’s remarks do not only show the types of details the student of oratory was expected to internalize; in order for these gestures to possess any kind of persuasive power, we must also presuppose an audience trained at some level to interpret these gestures correctly. This tacit understanding between speaker and audience ultimately works to distinguish between bodies that accurately convey a speaker’s mind by moving in accordance with nature and those that can be marked as unnatural and therefore in some way deviant.¹³ It is not surprising, then, that the gestures taught in “foreign schools” are on one occasion singled out for derision (11.3.103); the non-Roman, as often in Latin texts, is marked as morally suspicious. Quintilian is perfectly clear on the body’s role in persuasion: emotional appeals to an audience fail to convince when they are not “set aflame” by the skillful use of vocal inflection, facial expression, and “the carriage of nearly the entire body.”¹⁴ And yet, in a paradox not lost on the author, formal training is necessary to act naturally.¹⁵ This need for training has further repercussions beyond the exclusion of non-Roman elements. Easily understood pantomime gestures—such as pretending to reach for a cup or threatening to strike a blow (11.3.117; see also 90, 104)—are discarded by Quintilian’s handbook in favor of the less direct, and less easily mastered, system he describes. Commonly understood gestures are constructed as beneath the orator’s dignity. The gesture that is widely recognized (*vulgaris*) becomes distinct from the more desirable form that derives from art (*ex arte*; 11.3.102).

¹¹ McNeill 1992.1.

¹² Quint. inst. 11.3.95: *summo articulo [indicis digiti] utrimque leviter apprehenso, duobus modice curvatis, minus tamen minimo, [gestus] aptus ad disputandum est. acrius tamen argumentari videntur, qui medium articulum potius tenent, tanto contractionibus ultimis digitis, quanto priores descenderunt.*

¹³ Gesture reflecting mind: e.g., Quint. inst. 11.3.65; among Quintilian’s many remarks on the “naturalness” of the body: Quint. inst. 11.3.88.

¹⁴ Quint. inst. 11.3.2: *adfectus omnes languescant necesse est, nisi voce vultu totius prope habitu corporis inardescunt.*

¹⁵ See, for example, Quint. inst. 11.3.10–13.

The particular configuration of knowledge-as-power that we see at work in Quintilian resembles a recent assessment of the role twentieth-century education plays in replicating class distinctions:

The judgments that teachers make with regard to students . . . take into account not only knowledge and know-how, but also the intangible nuances of *manners* and *style*, which are imperceptible and yet never unperceived manifestations of the individual's relationship to such knowledge and know-how and the "half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable" expression of a system of values which are always deciphered in terms of another system of values which themselves are just as unuttered and as unutterable.¹⁶

These remarks are applicable to the specific context of the control of the body. "Unuttered and unutterable" rules legislate the elite orator's body movement and, as a result, the physical demeanor of the right-thinking citizen. Pliny the Younger offers a rare glimpse of an ancient awareness of how such elite mannerisms undergo silent replication: "It has been established since antiquity that we should learn from our elders *not only with our ears but also with our eyes* the things that we must ourselves do and, in turn, pass on to our descendants."¹⁷ Pliny describes the *tirocinium fori*, the period of education during which sons of the elite received instruction in the fine points of speechmaking and statesmanship by observing the successful friends of their fathers. This training is then repeated for each subsequent generation, insuring replication within the elite ranks.

Modern scholarly research on Roman gestures has been dominated by two works.¹⁸ Sittl's *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer*, published in 1890, offers a magisterial survey of gesture in both Greece and Rome that has not been replaced. Yet this groundbreaking and comprehensive study must primarily concern itself with providing taxonomies, and the tendency to conflate Greek and Roman practice offered few opportunities for Sittl to provide extensive culture-specific analysis. The second landmark in the study of Roman gestures is Brilliant's *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art*. Although primarily restricted to how status is represented in sculptural and numismatic sources, the work contains much of value to a study of bodily expression in Roman society in general. Especially helpful is Brilliant's notion of a Roman "appendage aesthetic." In contrast with the Greek artist, who tends to glorify the individual parts and particular musculature of the body, Roman art "is characterized by the manipulation of significant parts of the image without reference to the physi-

¹⁶ Bourdieu and Saint-Martin 1974.338–39 (original emphases).

¹⁷ Plin. *epist.* 8.14.4: *erat . . . antiquitus institutum ut a maioribus natu non auribus modo verum etiam oculis disceremus quae facienda mox ipsi ac per vices quasdam tradenda minoribus haberemus* (italics added in translation).

¹⁸ De Jorio 1832 also deserves mention for its delightful tone and remarkable prescience.

cal qualities of the body to which they are attached.”¹⁹ Those parts consist primarily of the arms, legs, and head, the appendages Quintilian describes most fully in his analysis of the importance of rhetorical gesture. Since the 1980s the tremendous growth throughout the humanities of scholarly interest in the body has accordingly given rise to a number of detailed studies on gesture and the body in ancient Rome. I hope that this book will complement these already published specific studies of the body with a general consideration of why and in what ways gesture in ancient Rome was able to assume so much importance.

It should by now be clear that I do not intend in the following to provide a taxonomy of the types of gestures used in Rome and to describe the range of their uses. In particular I will not be adopting the distinctions among gestures that one finds in modern studies of nonverbal behavior. A common category employed in these works comprises those gestures normally referred to as “emblems” or “quotable gestures,” gestures that “may be quoted and provided with verbal glosses so that they can be listed apart from the contexts of their use.”²⁰ These gestures are distinct from so-called batons or beats, that is, movements of the hand that act in tandem with speech by punctuating and emphasizing the spoken word.²¹ Recent studies have shown that the great majority of quotable gestures, as used in modern situations, are “concerned with the regulation of interpersonal relationships, with displays of one’s own current mental or physical condition, or with an evaluative response to another.”²² They are, in other words, concerned first and foremost with conveying and interpreting internal states through unspoken means. Many Roman gestures of this type would be quite familiar to the modern viewer: Romans pointed with the index finger to draw attention to a person or object,²³ scratched the head and bit the fingernails in anxiety,²⁴ and put a finger to the lips to request silence.²⁵ And yet Sittl’s compendium of many of these “quotable gestures” in his sixth chapter (tellingly entitled “Symbolische Gebärden”) reveals that the ancient authors who preserve even such apparently straightforward gestures do not consider their uses restricted to interpersonal communication. Rather, the gestures frequently derive their validity from a perceived relationship between their individual expression and workings in the world that exist outside the gesture’s ad hoc usage. The most familiar example of the coexistence of a human and transhuman element in gesturing is the ex-

¹⁹ Brilliant 1963.10; I discuss the value of this observation particularly in chapter 4.

²⁰ Kendon 1984.94–104 analyzes these types of gestures in detail (quotation is from 94).

²¹ McNeill 1992.15–16, who offers a survey of other types at 12–18.

²² Kendon 1984.95; compare Bateson 1972.412–13.

²³ Kendon 1984.90 remarks on the apparent universality of this gesture (on which compare *Lucr.* 5.1030–32).

²⁴ *Hor. Sat.* 1.10.70–71; *Pers.* 1.106.

²⁵ *TLL* 5.1: 1124.38–45 (J. Rubenbauer).

tended middle finger. Originally representing the erect phallus, the gesture conveys simultaneously a sexual threat to the person toward whom it is directed and an apotropaic means of warding off unwanted elements of the more-than-human.²⁶

This possibility, that *even common gestures are perceived to have connections with a world beyond interpersonal communication*, is the first of three basic assumptions that underlie my project. A corollary of this belief is the possibility that gestures originally represented not arbitrary signifiers but had a stage that was somehow mimetic, even if the precise connotations of that imitation are now lost.²⁷ Many students of gesture, for example, attribute the Western head shake of disagreement to the movement of a feeding infant's head from its mother's breast when done nursing.²⁸ As a second assumption, I presuppose *a continuity of gesture across the time and space of the ancient Roman world unless there exists clear evidence to the contrary*.²⁹ Third, I assume that *there exists a principle of gestural economy*. If a gesture can be demonstrated as having one meaning in one context, then that same gesture will tend to retain a single primary meaning in different contexts within its single, coherent culture. An instance of the workings of gestural economy in the modern United States is in the meaning of the sign consisting of the index and middle finger forming the letter "V." This sign, interpreted in English-speaking countries beginning with the First World War as the "V-for-victory" salute, now commonly connotes "peace" (apparently originally in the sense "victory for peace"), regardless of the context in which the gesture is made. These latter two assumptions—of gestural continuity and gestural economy—are particularly crucial for a study of gesture in antiquity, since the limitations of our sources for bodily movement will often force me to employ evidence not only from different media but from different centuries. I would like now to demonstrate briefly how these three assumptions can be applied to a specific case. In the next three paragraphs I shall apply each to an analysis of thumb gestures in Roman antiquity.³⁰

I begin with the first assumption, that gestures originate from some mimetic principle that connects the body with the world outside the body (a detailed demonstration of this assumption occupies chapter 1). Ancient authors remark on the etymology of *pollex*, the Latin word for "thumb," an etymology that distinguishes it from the remaining fingers and appears to be unique

²⁶ For Roman examples of the extended middle finger, see Mart. 2.28.1–2; Suet. *Cal.* 56; Priap. 56.1–2; Groß (1968) 7.930; for the relationship between sexual insult and apotropaism, see Röhrich 1967.21–24. Compare, too, the connotations of sticking out the tongue in derision: Pers. 1.60 with Sittl 1890.90–91 and Schmidt 1953.239–40.

²⁷ Kendon 1984.103.

²⁸ Darwin 1998.272–77 was the first to suggest this parallel.

²⁹ For the principle, see Röhrich 1967.14.

³⁰ Chapter 2 offers a more detailed treatment of these issues.

among the Indo-European languages: “the thumb (*pollex*) received its name from the fact that it has power (*pollet*).”³¹ This etymological connection between the thumb and power is supported by the ways in which the Romans refer to thumbs in diverse areas of their culture: in contrast with the other fingers, it alone is used in synecdoche for activities involving the entire hand, such as spinning and writing;³² the thumb plays a prominent role in preparing medicines and effecting cures, with the result that it is occasionally designated in combination with the ring finger as one of the “medicinal fingers.”³³ The living connection between words and things reveals in this case the thumb’s access to a power that lies outside the human physique.

This etymology may also inform the origins of the sign that is referred to in ancient texts as the “hostile thumb” (*infestus pollex*), which provides a clear example of my second assumption, that of gestural economy. On the basis of philological evidence it can be argued with virtual certainty that this gesture resembled the modern “thumbs up” (a gesture that itself did not have positive connotations until the twentieth century). The Roman manifestation of this particular thumb gesture demonstrates the principle of economy in two ways. First, its position accords with a notion of economy of structure, since the thumb in this gesture resembles the erect phallus in ways similar to the erect middle finger.³⁴ In this light, it is fitting that this sign can be identified with that given in the gladiatorial arena to request the death of an unsuccessful combatant, the firmly attested “turned thumb” (*verso pollice*).³⁵ The hostility of the openly erect thumb brings death to those vanquished in combat. A second type of economy displayed in the case of the *infestus pollex* is that of diametrically opposed gestures conveying opposite meanings; one can compare the Roman head nod forward in assent with its precise opposite, the nod of the head backward in denial. By this principle, it follows that the sign for sparing would represent an opposing thumb position, in this case that of the thumb pressed firmly on the closed fist. And in fact there is independent evidence that such a gesture had positive connotations. The pressing of the thumb on the closed fist corresponds to a Roman gesture of well-wishing that Pliny the Elder attests as being used frequently in Roman society.³⁶ The principle of economy, therefore, allows us to connect the commonly attested “hostile thumb” with the gestures for death and mercy in gladiatorial contests.

³¹ Ateius Capito fg. 12 Strzelecki (= Macr. *Sat.* 7.13.14); see too Lact. *opif.* 10.24, Isid. *orig.* 11.1.70.

³² For example, Ov. *met.* 4.34–36 (spinning), Ov. *epist.* 17.266 (writing).

³³ Marcell. *med.* 28.72; see, too, 2.9, 25.13, 32.5, and Plin. *nat.* 23.110, 28.43; Niedermann 1914.329–30.

³⁴ Sittl 1890.102–3, 123.

³⁵ Anth. Lat. 415 (413 Shackleton Bailey).27–28: *sperat et in saeva victus gladiator arena, / sit licet infesto pollice turba minax*; for (*con*)*verso pollice*, see Juv. 3.36–37, Prud. c. *Symm.* 2.1097–99.

³⁶ Plin. *nat.* 28.25.

My third assumption concerns the stability of the meaning of Roman gestures through time and among the various peoples that inhabited Roman territory. In the case of texts, the thumb's "power" is a theme shared by a diverse range of authors, from Republican etymologists to medical writers of the early Empire to a poet composing riddles in the fifth century CE. This type of stability also applies to artistic representations. Two pieces of material evidence from different parts of the empire offer evidence for the thumb gesture requesting that a fighter be spared. These two representations, one a stone relief sculpture (apparently from Rome), the second an appliqué medallion in terracotta from the Rhône valley, show the thumb pressed firmly on the closed fist.³⁷ In both the textual and material evidence, therefore, the gesture survives both across the span of centuries and within the culturally coherent space of Rome.

Reconstructing the rudiments of a grammar of Roman gesture produces an epistemology of physical movement that can allow us to understand why the Romans invested so much in manipulating their own bodies and in reading those of others. On several occasions I will be pointing out differences between Greek and Roman gesture. What I focus on in analyzing these differences are not those bodily movements that the two cultures do not share, but those in which a gesture shared with the Greeks becomes integrated into the culture and naturalized as uniquely Roman.³⁸ For this process of naturalization another analogy from the study of spoken language will help illustrate my practice. It is a common phenomenon for a word new to a language to acquire a different meaning on the basis of how the word "sounds" in its new linguistic context. For example, the English adjective "husky" originally denoted anything that "had the qualities of a husk," in accordance with normal rules for producing adjectives from nouns by adding the suffix *-y*. Eventually, however, the sound of the word, produced deep in the throat, caused a new meaning to evolve, so that voices that are hoarse or deep are now described as "husky."³⁹ Gestures are similarly subject to unpredictable changes in signification. Usage, as often, determines meaning. A particularly clear case that I will discuss in chapter 2 involves the gestures of mourning women. Acts of self-degradation that are shared by grieving women in numerous cultures—tearing the hair, scratching the cheeks, beating the breasts—acquire new meaning in a Roman context. Rather than offering the women as targets for the pollution of death, these actions in fact celebrate the uniquely feminine power of giving and nurturing life.

³⁷ For illustrations and discussion, see chapter 2.

³⁸ In addition to Brilliant's notion of an "appendage aesthetic," other studies that treat how the Romans viewed the body differently from the Greeks include Torelli 1992 (historical reliefs), Lateiner 1996 (nonverbal behaviors in epic). For a general analysis of how Romans naturalize the educational aspects of their Greek inheritance, see Corbeil 2001.

³⁹ Jespersen 1922.405–11.

I have chosen for the subjects of the book's five chapters bodily behaviors that cover as wide a spectrum of ancient Roman culture as possible. In order of presentation, I explore how physical deportment assisted in clarifying and reinforcing religious ritual, medical practice, gender roles, and political ideologies. I summarize my individual arguments in the following paragraphs.

Chapter 1 surveys the gestures of priests and doctors to develop a working epistemological model for gesture. My sources include noncanonical texts from medical writers, the natural scientist Pliny, and papyri describing magical ritual. Effective prayer to the Roman required physical as well as mental activity. The body technique of doctors and priests, in mimicking a prayer or incantation's goal, depends upon an understanding of how symbolic positioning and movement by the body can affect external reality. In the second century BCE Cato the Elder demonstrates how mending a twig can mend a fractured leg, and gynecologists advise a man to alternately bind and loosen his wife's clothing when she has trouble in childbirth. What all these practices share, I argue, is a desire to harmonize the movements of the human body with the external, more-than-human world. It is here that my title "embodied nature" takes on its full meaning. Physical gesture is characterized as being, above all, coextensive with the nature of which it is a part.

In chapter 2 I turn from this broad consideration of the world of nature to a close analysis of one small component: the Roman thumb (*pollex*). By evaluating various aspects of this digit, from its etymological meaning to its everyday manifestations, I demonstrate how the Romans located in this single body part a notable source of power. I close the chapter by using this discussion to reconstruct the outward appearance of the "turned thumb" that spectators deployed at the gladiatorial games to bid that a fighter be killed or spared.

Chapter 3, following up on the idea of death in the arena, examines the social function of Roman gestures of lamentation. After surveying how expressions of grief divide along gender lines—men reconcile the loss of the deceased as a former member of the community, whereas women ensure that the dead person successfully enter an afterworld—I focus particular attention on the function of self-mutilation and degradation on the part of women. I suggest that the violent physical expressions of women do not transform these mourners into offerings for the potentially hostile dead, a scapegoat theory that has been offered from Roman antiquity (Varro) up through the twentieth century (especially by Durkheim and his followers). Instead I show how this violent mourning should be understood as part of "woman's work." Female mourning practice has its own end in effecting the successful separation of the corpse from the surviving society; it replicates the birth process, thereby ushering the deceased into its new phase of existence. Numerous acts, many peculiar to Italic ritual, support this belief: the prescription that the deceased be removed from the house feet-first is a conscious inversion of the fetus emerging from the womb; the preparation of the corpse on bare ground is prefigured by the

same positioning of the newborn; women unbind hair and clothing during both lamentation and childbirth; and the nine-day period between burial and funeral feast finds its analog in the nine-month pregnancy. I conclude by examining the textual and visual evidence that suggests how beating the breasts represents a metaphorical “breast feeding” of the corpse to ensure immortality in the afterlife. Contrary to the way the male-dominated literary elite represents their actions, women in grief celebrate the rejuvenating and life-giving powers of the female body.

Chapter 4 shows how the interpretation of gesture can be exploited at a particular historical moment. Using primarily the speeches and philosophical works of the politician Cicero, I analyze the relationship between bodily movement and political programs in late Republican Rome. Physical bearing provided visible indications of whether a politician identified with popular or elite politics. A contemporary Ciceronian moral treatise asserts that certain types of gesture violate natural law (*fin.* 5.47). Integrating Bourdieu’s model of the *habitus* with Roman notions of how nature is embodied in the “natural” human being, I show how elite figures publicly adapt Cicero’s philosophical claim to Roman politics: “popular” politicians, with their identifiable gestures and walk, rebel against the truth of nature. The elision of nature and culture serves the purpose of social exclusion. I close this chapter by conjecturing the ways in which Julius Caesar used gesture as a means for political advancement. An awareness of contemporary cultural attitudes enabled Caesar to exploit elite Roman strictures regarding physical movement. I argue that Caesar intentionally adopted the demeanor of “popular” politicians as an act of defiance toward the elite, who had worked to define this demeanor as deviant. The intentional disjuncture between Caesar’s political agenda and the expectations anticipated by his gestures advanced his image as a proponent of social and political change.

In chapter 5 I offer a diachronic analysis of the ways in which Roman writers express a growing dismay about the inability to read the human body. After demonstrating how Republican texts depend on facial expressions being stable and unambiguous signifiers of internal thoughts and character, I turn to a specific text, the first six books of Tacitus’s *Annals*, which were composed in the new political climate of the autocratic Empire. By examining one particular aspect of how Tacitus portrays the relationship between the emperor Tiberius and the senate—the misreading of facial expressions—I analyze the ways in which Tacitus isolates the reign of Tiberius (14–37 CE) as the starting point for the separation of the Roman emperor from the rest of the Roman elite. Facial expression, commonly used in oratory produced during the Republic to indicate character and intention, evolves under Tiberius into a shifting signifier, a reflection of the political uncertainty that arose from the solidification of imperial power. For Tacitus, the accession of Tiberius and the introduction of a new political order have prompted the rise of a new cosmic order, a

new perception of the increasingly inscrutable relationship between truth and the body.

Although each of these chapters can be read as an independent case study, in combination they are intended to offer a coherent narrative of the ways in which the Romans came to develop and manipulate relationships between their bodies and the world of which their bodies form a part. That narrative, as conceived here, is one of decline; I offer up a model of innocent and eager Romans, continually striving to harmonize their bodies with the world until political reality intrudes to manipulate an idyllic state of balance. My narrative of this decline doubtless owes much of its pessimism to the ancient authors who are my sources and, in fact, the decline is in many ways only apparent. The harmony with the world that I posit as working in medical practice, religious ritual, and mourning likely continued from archaic times until the fall of pagan Rome and, conversely, these models inevitably were exploited from the very moments of their origin. My adoption of a master narrative of development and decline may open me to charges of being unable to interpret the past outside of my own frame of reference. And yet I consciously embrace this hackneyed trope that sees morality as declining from an imaginary, pristine, and natural state. I cannot help but share with these sources a feeling that something vital in the relationship between bodies and their external environment has been, and continues to be, lost.