SIGN ICONS
GEBAREN-ICONEN

ALPHABETUM VIII
2021

SIGN ICONS
GEBAREN-ICONEN

A WRITING SYSTEM FOR SIGN LANGUAGE
BY RUUD JANSSEN

We must protect and preserve our beautiful signs
as the noblest gift God has given deaf people.

George W. Veditz, 1913

TABLE OF CONTENTS

7

Introduction
Yael Keijzer

Script does not exist without the senses. This is the title for the infographic designed by Ruud Janssen as an introduction to his model of sign icons. Basically, script originates from language, but language itself is not linked to literacy and it is not only verbal. Language is more universal. It does not have a single purpose either. In addition to practically conveying a message to another person, we also use language for ourselves; to express ourselves creatively, or to understand something better. The possibilities for this are provided by our senses – these are the building blocks for all ways of communication. After all, we cannot think, or imagine, beyond the categories of our perception. This results in a language, often conditioned by nature and culture. By this I mean that our bodies and their attributes influence what language is formed (also how people think and understand the world), and that this is tuned and agreed upon in groups, to facilitate communication. Then it can be attempted to make this language 'readable', visualised, into writing and a written tradition. For example, certain notation systems are more image–based, such as Chinese characters. But Western languages, using letters and alphabets, are mainly derived from sound.
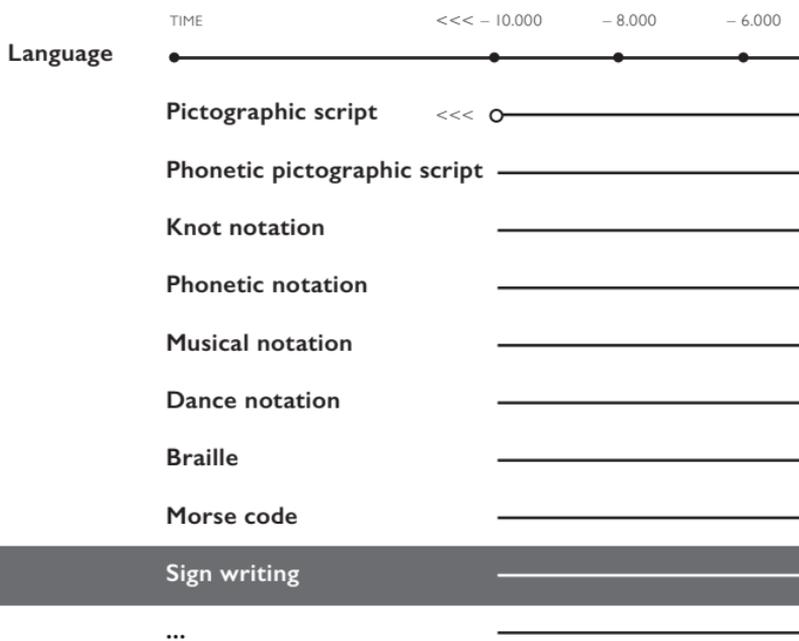
This booklet traces the developments in mapping the non–verbal elements of speech, such as the phonetic symbols in Visible Speech (1867) by Melville Bell, or the palm orientation (1965) by William Stokoe. But it remains a tough topic.

When, at the end of the 1970s, Janssen, as a student of graphic and typographic design at the Royal Academy of Visual Arts, was asked to photograph hands, he turned to sign language. At the time, the director of an institute for the deaf said 'sign language does not exist' – it was important to teach the deaf to read and speak.
The sign languages that inevitably eventually developed were and are still adapted to languages based on sound and letters. So here we have a confusion of the senses.
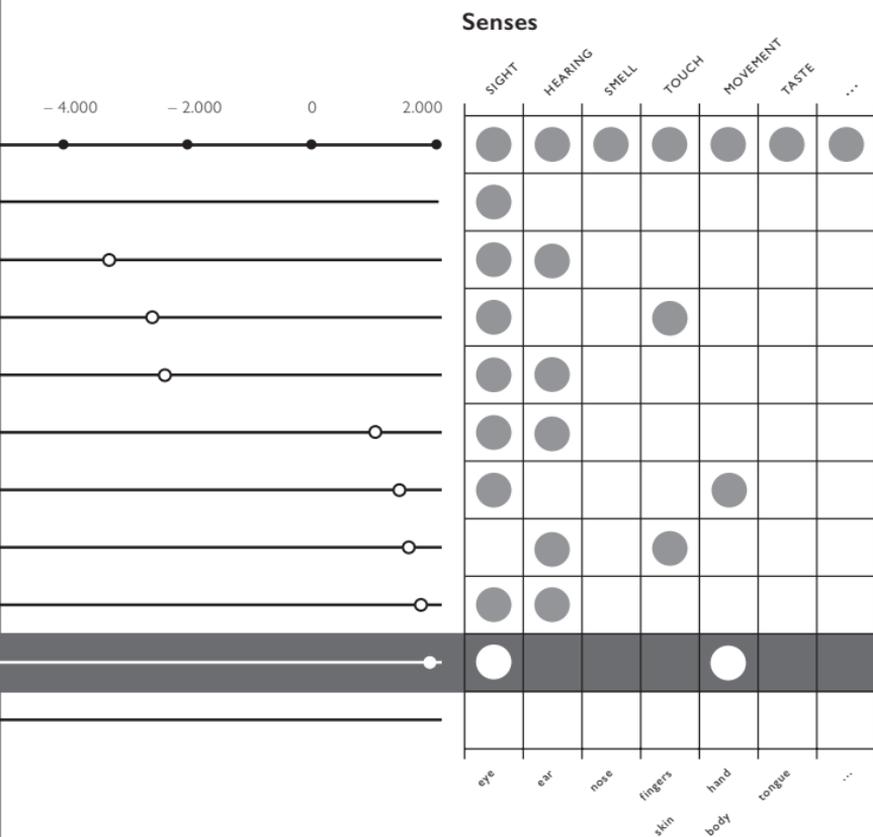
With 26 hand positions you can represent the alphabet. But how do you capture the enormous variety of the hand positions for signs? Every sign also has a spatial movement, however small. Janssen's model of sign icons is an attempt to capture space, movement, starting point, ending point, changing positions, expression, hands and body in one image, and thus to form a fully–fledged sign language that can stand on its own, without being derived from another language. And assuming that language is equivalent to thinking, and as something that comes about reciprocally with sensory perception, a sign is not only supportive, but a fully–fledged building block of communication. When we talk, we are quick to make gestures. Semantically, these are often more important than the words that accompany them. Perhaps it is time for a reappraisal.

Scripts

       <<< – 10.000   – 8.000   – 6.000

Language

Pictographic script   <<<

Phonetic pictographic script

Knot notation

Phonetic notation

Musical notation

Dance notation

Braille

Morse code

Sign writing

...

12

Script does not exist without the senses

Ruud Janssen

Senses

SIGHT HEARING SMELL TOUCH MOVEMENT TASTE ...

− 4.000   − 2.000   0   2.000

eye ear nose fingers skin hand body tongue ...

Language is the sum of the senses. Script is a product of the senses.
It is remarkable that research into a notation system for sign language only
began in 1965 with the 'Stokoe Notation System'.

ꝋꟾꝋꝾꟾꝋꞱ ꝋ� ꝌꝾꝾꞱ�:

VISIBLE SPEECH:

THE SCIENCE OF

ꝋꞱꝌꟾꝾꟾꝾꝋꙄꝋ ꝾꙄꝾꝾꝾꝾꙄꝌꙄ:

UNIVERSAL ALPHABETICS;

OR

SELF-INTERPRETING PHYSIOLOGICAL LETTERS,

FOR THE WRITING OF

ALL LANGUAGES IN ONE ALPHABET.

ILLUSTRATED BY

TABLES, DIAGRAMS, AND EXAMPLES.

BY

ALEX. MELVILLE BELL, F.E.I.S, F.R.S.S.A.,

PROFESSOR OF VOCAL PHYSIOLOGY,
LECTURER ON ELOCUTION IN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON,
AUTHOR OF 'PRINCIPLES OF SPEECH AND CURE OF STAMMERING,' 'ELOCUTIONARY MANUAL,'
'STANDARD ELOCUTIONIST,' 'EMPHASIZED LITURGY,'
'REPORTER'S MANUAL,' &C., &C.

INAUGURAL EDITION.

Visual Speech, oralism and sign language
Wim Zonneveld

Edinburgh, Scotland, mid-nineteenth century. A local speech therapist designs symbols for speech sounds to support his practice and arranges them in a diagram.

This speech therapist is Alexander Melville Bell. Like his father Alexander Bell, he teaches speech to public speakers, performing artists, actors and people with speech problems and he suspects that it helps if he allows them to 'visualise'

**Alexander Melville Bell**
photo: Granger, ±1890

the sounds. He made them imagine how those sounds are formed by the speech organs, which are not always visible themselves. The name of the system: *Visual Speech*. He published it under that name in London in 1867.

Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922), Alexander Melville's son, continued the family tradition in language and speech, surpassing his father and grandfather, especially as the inventor of the telephone, which he is usually credited with.

Alexander Melville Bell with his wife Eliza Grace Symonds and their granddaughter Elsie May Bell at Beinn Bhreagh, Nova Scotia, 1884. Granddaughter Elsie speaking to grandmother Eliza via voice tube.

When the family moved to America, he was the first of a number of researchers who were conducting the same experiments to have his 'speaking telegraph' recognised by the US patent office in March 1876 – the device with which, in his speech laboratory at Boston University, the request 'Mr Watson, come here, I want to see you' was transmitted to his assistant one room away. They are the predecessors of all those words that we speak into our mobile phones without a second thought, almost a century and a half later, to someone else who is also sitting in a room, or is walking outside, or standing in a dance club, sometimes thousands of kilometres away in Rotterdam, Rome, New York, Sydney or somewhere in China.
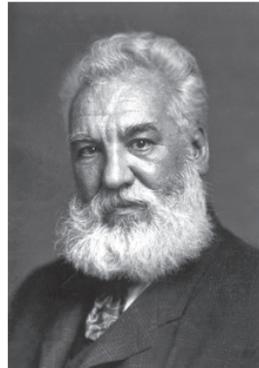
Alexander Graham Bell

But Alexander Graham Bell is also a controversial figure. Or at least: he has become one. Anyone searching for him on Google will quickly read that he and his *'voices from far away'* are considered by some to be a pioneer in the field of speech technology, language processing, communication and speech therapy, of cognition research and artificial intelligence, of military applications and even of 'video gaming'.
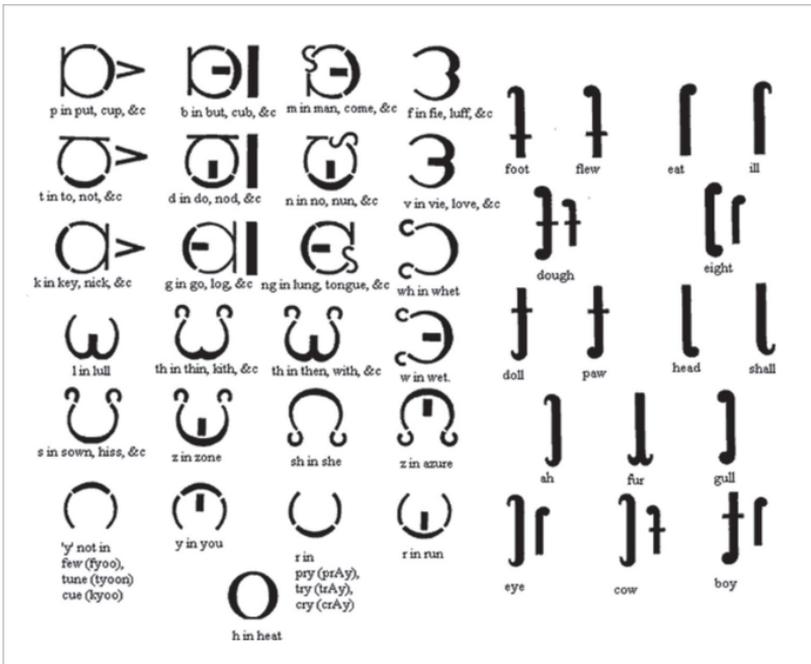
To others, he is someone who used, nay abused, his talents as a researcher and his prestige as a scientist

Visible Speech Charts [1]

The partial symbol for **Z** in 'zone'.

Visible Speech Chart – diagram

---

1 The cover states: 'Reprint of Education of Deaf Children, Part II,
   Pp. 248–253, with directions and accompanying examples by Dr A.
   Graham Bell, presented to the Royal Commission of Great Britain for the
   benefit of the Blind, the Deaf, the Deaf-mutes, etc. London, June, 1888.'

in another field: to propagate that deafness is a threat to the social order, a person who wanted to prohibit intermarriage and eventually even mutual contact between deaf people because that would lead to a 'deaf race', which would be a disaster for our world. A person who was leaning towards eugenics, which we remember from the darkest era of the twentieth century.

Visual Speech

Visual Speech is perhaps a somewhat bizarre looking but not complicated system. Each separate action of the speech organs is represented by a partial symbol. In the first three drawings on the top left of the diagram, it works like this: a circle closed by a line on the left and completed by an arrow to the right means: closed lips that are released with a thud – an (English) **p**! An internal line added and followed by a thick line: the same sound, but with vibration of the vocal cords continued in a vowel – a **b**. The circle on the left is closed with a wobble: a sound where air escapes through the nose – an **m**. And so on, the speech organs can handle a lot of variation!

This diagram, says father Bell, could eventually, with minimal symbol adjustments, describe all the sounds of all human languages. More or less like Mendeleev's periodic table does for chemical elements. The lines, circles and wobbles eventually disappear, but the train of thought forms the basis of the International Phonetic Alphabet that was developed at the end of the nineteenth century by English and French 'phoneticians' (speech researchers) and that is still being used worldwide with continual refinements. This successful IPA goes back to Bell. But not only that: as an entrepreneur, Father Bell took his system, his sound *'chart'*, on the road, with his

son Alexander Graham as his representative. While doing this, they came up with the idea that the Visual Speech system could also be used in the world of the deaf.

Oralism

When two children had succumbed to tuberculosis in quick succession in Scotland, father Alexander Melville, in search of a healthier climate, moved his family to Canada in 1870. It was son Alexander Graham who promoted Visual Speech in schools for the deaf in North America and in 1872 he opened a school himself in Boston where he taught the deaf.

In 1877 he married Mable Hubbard, the deaf daughter of a Boston lawyer who was also the president of the local Clarke School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. It is a time when the integration of large influxes of immigrants into American society is a matter of great concern and Bell begins to place his work in that context. If speaking the language is a prerequisite for successful integration then how could the deaf better integrate than by learning that language? The correct articulation of the sounds of – in his situation – English in combination with lip–reading became the pillars of his teaching and educational recommendations for the deaf. It would become known as Oralism, and Alexander Graham Bell promoted it wherever he could, among politicians, teachers, medical professionals and funding agencies, taking advantage of his status and authority as the inventor of the telephone. Not insignificant is the support received from the parents of deaf children, who obviously want nothing more than the integration of their children into society.

In 1880, a large world congress on education for the deaf and the hard of hearing was held in Milan, where Oralism

· CHART Ⅲ ·
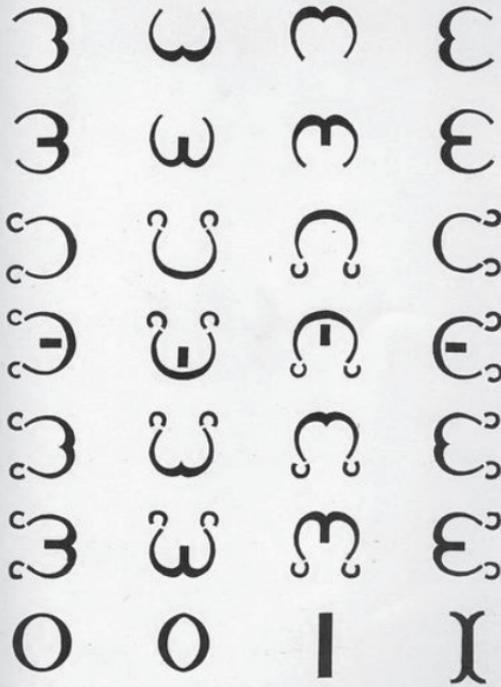
VISIBLE SPEECH.
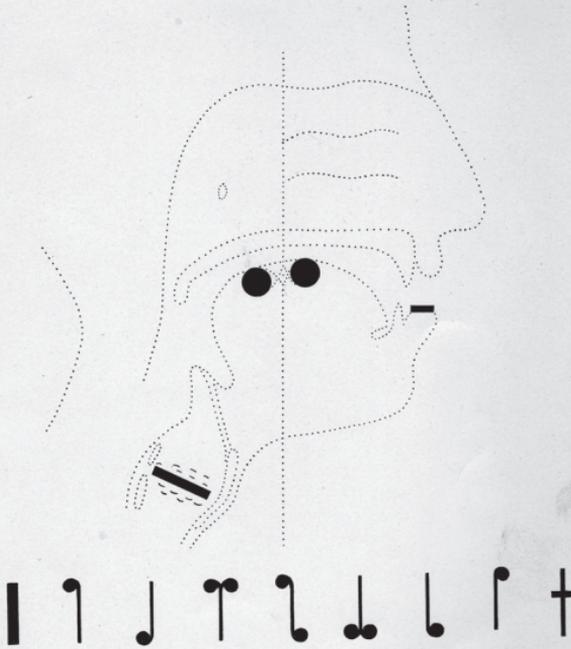
INVENTED BY PROF. MELVILLE BELL.

Visible Speech Chart III

is adopted in several resolutions as the best form of education for the deaf and the hard of hearing. Alexander Graham Bell develops and propagates the most radical form of it. In a lecture in 1883 to the American National Academy of Sciences, he makes recommendations for the social integration of the deaf. He disapproves of associations for the deaf, newspapers for the deaf and schools for the deaf as sources of the continued use of

sign language and of intermarriages between the deaf, from which a deaf variant of the human species could emerge through genetic inheritance. He advocates a ban on sign language, the replacement of deaf teachers by hearing teachers and physical integration between deaf and hearing students in education. He declares deafness to be 'a defect' and advocates the de facto elimination of the 'own deaf culture' that would lead to isolation instead of integration.

Oralism was born out of Visual Speech, which laid the foundation for much that was good and useful in the study of sounds. Oralism became the standard in the education of the deaf worldwide for almost a century, without the deaf themselves having any say in it. Of the 164 participants in the Milan congress, one was deaf. Bell showed off deaf students who had learned to communicate through his system. But practice proved much more difficult for many, including his own wife, of whom it is said that she never succeeded in mastering speech. It never appears to have effected Bell.

Visible Speech Chart IV [2]

---

2 Melville Bell's Visible Speech has long continued to inspire individuals in the teaching of speech to the deaf. However, various attempts to teach the 'invisible' sounds will, however, remain unsuccessful without a thorough teaching of sign language. The first Dutch Sign Language teachers, some of them deaf themselves, graduated from the HU University of Applied Sciences in Utrecht in 2001.

De tekst woord voor woord in Whipple's fonetische alfabet: 'Some foolish persons drink rum and gin and other strong liquors to keep them warm in Winter.'
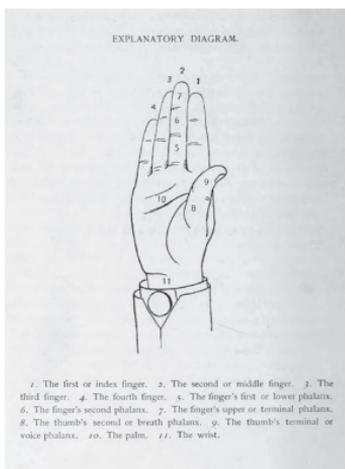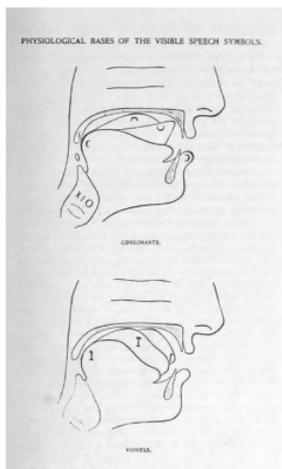

Zerah C. Whipple

---

3 Zerah C. Whipple (1849 – 1879) Whipple also developed a phonetic alphabet for the deaf to learn sounds. The letters in this alphabet were schematic representations of the position and movement of the vocal organs when pronouncing sound. Whipple's school still exists and is now called 'Mystic Educational Centre'.

1. The first or index finger. 2. The second or middle finger. 3. The third finger. 4. The fourth finger. 5. The finger's first or lower phalanx. 6. The finger's second phalanx. 7. The finger's upper or terminal phalanx. 8. The thumb's second or breath phalanx. 9. The thumb's terminal or voice phalanx. 10. The palm. 11. The wrist.

Edmund Lyon

CODE OF ENGLISH SOUNDS.

---
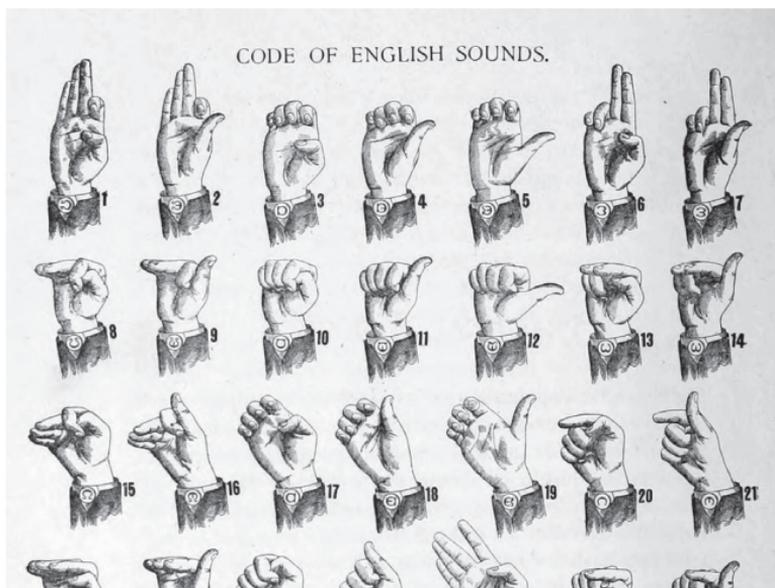
4 Edmund Lyon (1855 – 1920) was an inventor (including the electric starter motor), entrepreneur and acquaintance of Graham Bell. He devised 45 hand positions for the symbols of Melville Bell's Visible Speech. The system turned out not to work and the deaf continued to regard oralism as a serious threat to the development of the sign language.

George W. Veditz: Preserve sign language [1]

George W. Veditz, a teacher and deaf himself, referred to Alexander G. Bell as the American most feared by deaf people. He said:

'... he comes in the guise of a friend, and [is], therefore, the most to be feared enemy of the American deaf, past and present.'

George W. Veditz was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1861. His parents were German immigrants and George grew up bilingually, but at the age of 8 he contracted rubella and became deaf. He was home-schooled until the age of 14 and then continued to learn a craft, shoemaking, as was common at the time. Through studies, he worked his way up to teacher and later gained prominence as the 7th president of the *National Association of the Deaf.*

A proponent of sign language, which Veditz considered *'The noblest gift of God'*, he became known for his plea from 1913, recorded on 35 mm film, for the preservation of sign language. Between 1910 and 1921, about 50 films were recorded to capture the richness of sign language before it would be lost to oralism initiated at the congress in Milan in 1880. The films were very popular and the subjects diverse: travel stories, all kinds of histories, poems, songs, jokes, a sermon and even The Gettysburg Address of Abraham Lincoln. Many of the films were

lost, but 14 of them, known as the Veditz collection, could eventually be digitised. Oralism dominated the education of the deaf both in America and Europe and until deep into the 1970s, also in the Netherlands. However, the struggle of Veditz and like-minded people to preserve sign language bore fruit, as witnessed by the current international appreciation and recognition of sign language.

1 **George W. Veditz** filmed himself in 1913 in the film titled *Preservation of the Sign Language*. In December 2011, the film was entered into the *National Film Registry of the Library of Congress.*

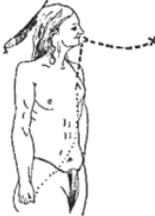*'Preservation of the Sign Language'* with subtitles

EXAMPLES.

Word or idea expressed by sign: To cut, with an ax.

DESCRIPTION:

With the right hand flattened (X changed to right instead of left), palm upward, move it downward to the left side repeatedly from different elevations, ending each stroke at the same point.

Conception or origin: From the act of felling a tree.

Word or idea expressed by sign: A lie.

DESCRIPTION:

Touch the left breast over the heart, and pass the hand forward from the mouth, the two first fingers only being extended and slightly separated (L, 1—with thumb resting on third finger).

Conception or origin: Double-tongued.

L, 1.

Word or idea expressed by sign: To ride.

DESCRIPTION:

Place the first two fingers of the right hand, thumb extended (N, 1) downward, astraddle the first two joined and straight fingers of the left (T, 1), sidewise, to the right, then make several short arched movements forward with hands so joined.

Conception or origin: The horse mounted and in motion.

N, 1.

T, 1.

Dotted lines indicate movements to place the hand and arm in position to commence the sign and not forming part of it.

> Indicates commencement of movement in representing sign, or part of sign.

-------- Dashes indicate the course of hand employed in the sign.

X Represents the termination of movements.

Used in connection with dashes, shows the course of the latter when not otherwise clearly intelligible.

72

Instruction for the notation when collecting signs.[1]

28

Garrick Mallery: Ethnographer

Descriptions of the earliest contacts of Europeans with Native Americans in North America in the sixteenth century already reveal the use of sign language by the indigenous peoples. Further research from the nineteenth century onwards revealed it to be a fully developed language, in use over a wide area stretching from Central Canada crossing the American Midwest to Northern Mexico. As nothing was recorded about it, its exact origin is unclear, but its main function would appear to have been as a trade language between peoples with completely different spoken languages. But it was equally used in ceremonies, recitals, storytelling, and in the communication between and with the deaf and the hard of hearing. Despite more than a century of social and political developments that are as familiar as they are sad, of the more than 100,000 users at the end of the nineteenth century, there are still 'speakers' left in modern times, probably in the thousands.

Garrick Mallery

What we know of this system of gestural communication is largely due to Garrick Mallery (1831–1894). Trained as a lawyer, he fought as a volunteer in the American

Civil War of 1861–1865, and subsequently obtained a commission in the US Army Signal Corps, where flag signals (the 'semaphore' system) were used for long-distance communication. He thus became interested in the linguistic use of signs among the Dakota, and in their system of 'pictograms' on rocks, skins and bark, used for
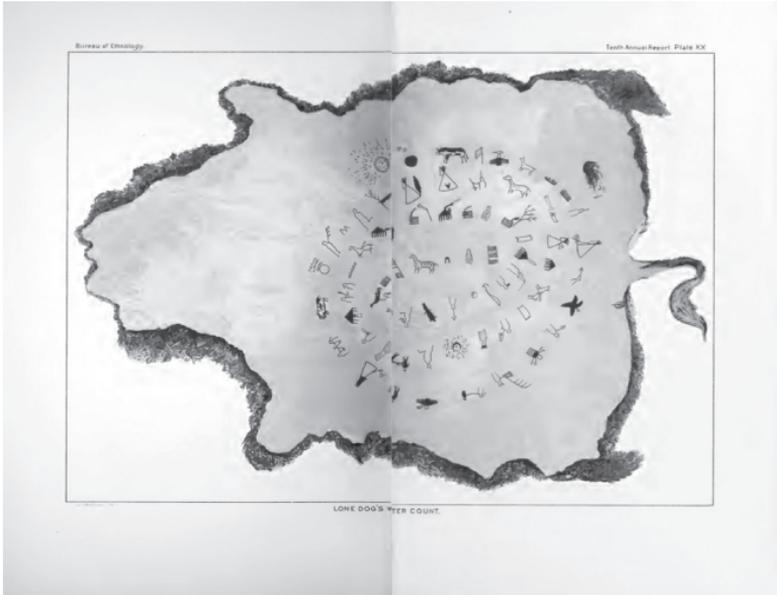

Plate XX, Lone dog's winter count [2]

the transmission and the preservation of myths and in historiography. In 1880, Mallery took early retirement because of his intensive military years and was appointed to the brand-new Bureau of American Ethnology, which had the task – out of scientific curiosity, but also before it was too late – of conducting ethnographic, archaeological

2 **From: 'Picture Writing of American Indians' by Garrick Mallery, 1894.**

3 **From: 'Sign Language Among North American Indians Compared With That Among Other Peoples And Deaf-Mutes' by Garrick Mallery, 1881: fig. 127, fig. 82 en 342a.**

and linguistic research into the culture and history of the
– as they were then called – *'American Indians'*.

Between 1880 and 1890 Mallery published books
of hundreds of pages and a series of articles on the
sign and pictogram systems of the Native Americans,
including (the titles say it all) *'A Collection of Gesture
Signs and Signals of the North American Indians, with
Some Comparisons'* and *'Picture Writing of the American
Indians'*. His most important work is *'Sign-language
among North American Indians Compared with that
Among other People and Deaf-mutes'* of 1881, an
incredibly detailed and – for its time – advanced work
of 290 pages with maps, 13 large illustrations and 285
figures, the main part of which is an analysis of the sign
language of Native Americans at that time. One of the
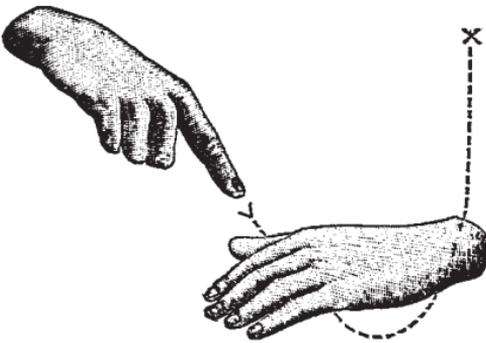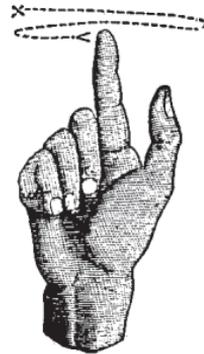most important findings was that the sign system did not

fig. 127 [3]   fig. 82

'parasitise' spoken languages, it was not the secondary
product of simple translation of spoken utterances but
functioned independently of them. Not as just another
convenient communication system but 'as a language',
with a structure, a word and a sentence structure, and

31

TYPES OF HAND POSITIONS IN SIGN LANGUAGE.

A—Fist, palm outward, horizontal.

B—Fist, back outward, oblique upward.

C—Clinched, with thumb extended against forefinger, upright, edge outward.

D—Clinched, ball of thumb against middle of forefinger, oblique, upward, palm down.

E—Hooked, thumb against end of forefinger, upright, edge outward.

F—Hooked, thumb against side of forefinger, oblique, palm outward.

G—Fingers resting against ball of thumb, back upward.

H—Arched, thumb horizontal against end of forefinger, back upward.

I—Closed, except forefinger crooked against end of thumb, upright, palm outward.

J—Forefinger straight, upright, others closed, edge outward.

K—Forefinger obliquely extended upward, others closed, edge outward.

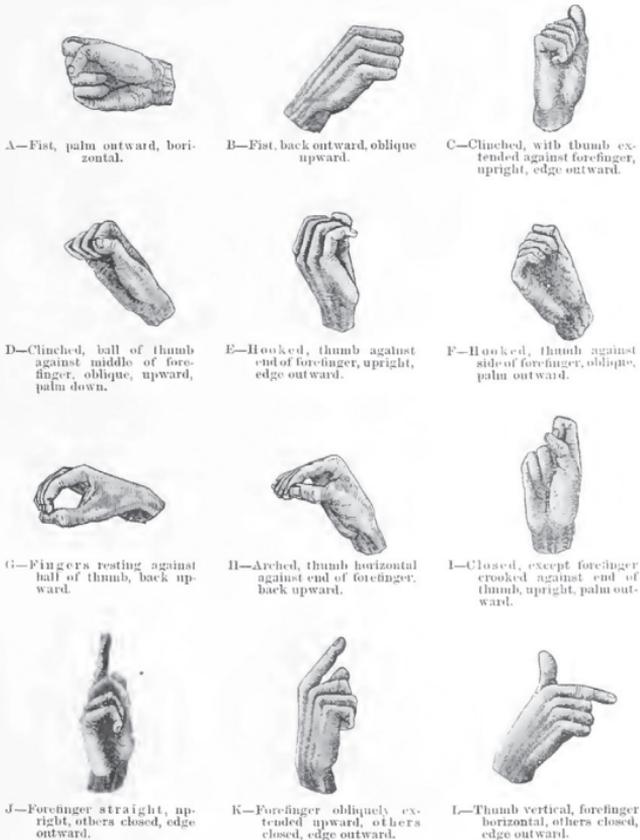L—Thumb vertical, forefinger horizontal, others closed, edge outward.

Fig. 342a.

Fig. 342a – Hand positions [4]

----

[4] Garrick Mallery described 25 hand positions to serve as examples when recording hand positions during the fieldwork and assigned a letter to each hand position.
From: 'Sign Language Among North American Indians Compared With That Among Other Peoples And Deaf–Mutes', page 547.

so on. In English, this is clearly expressed as the difference between a system of *'gestures'* and a system of *'signs'*, whereas in Dutch they are both referred to as 'gestures' ('gebaren').

One of the many figures and parts of the inventory and analysis of 'hand positions' that are meaningfully used in this sign system, in this language, is shown here alongside. Similar representations and analyses can be found in descriptions of sign languages up to the present day.

The Bureau of Ethnology collected its data through intensive fieldwork, just as Mallery had already done for the Native American sign system. This made him a methodological trailblazer. He was given his own place in the emerging anthropology of the late nineteenth

The movement was carefully analysed and annotated. The black letters were added later.

century, unique for his field of research but at the same time in line with one of the most important new ideas of the time, thanks to the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas as a result of his own research into Native American cultures: that the 'evolutionary' hierarchical view of culture, as a development towards an ever-higher form (obviously with Western Europe at the top), was untenable and had to be replaced by 'relativism', which emphasised cultural individuality.

Franz Boas, anthropoloog
(Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution Archives)

In the early 1890s, Mallery founded the Washington Anthropological Society, he became its president and in his last publications he focused on secure and comprehensible research reporting. He died in Washington in October 1894.
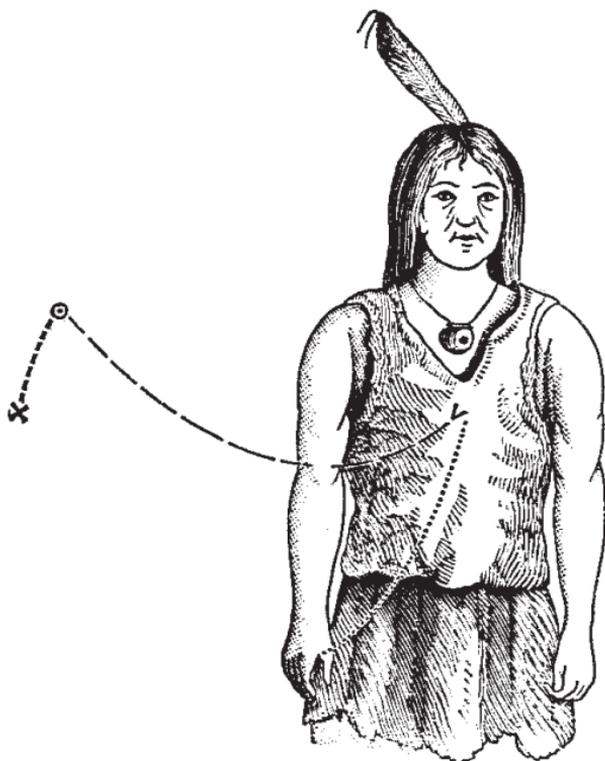
fig. 346 – Ik ga naar huis [5]

EXPLANATION OF MARKS.

The following indicative marks are used in the above examples:

·············   Dotted lines indicate movements to place the hand and arm in position to commence the sign and not forming part of it.

-----------   Short dashes indicate the course of hand employed in the sign, when made rapidly.

— — — — —   Longer dashes indicate a less rapid movement.

— —— ——   Broken lines represent slow movement.

>   Indicates commencement of movement in representing sign, or part of sign.

×   Represents the termination of movements.

⊙ Indicates the point in the gesture line at which the hand position is changed.

---

5 From: 'Sign Language Among North American Indians Compared With That Among Other Peoples And Deaf-Mutes', page 551.

DIALOGUES.
TENDOY – HUERITO DIALOGUE.[6]

The following conversation took place at Washington in April, 1880, between TENDOY, chief of the Shoshoni and Banak Indians of Idaho, and HUERITO, one of the Apache chiefs from New Mexico, in the presence of Dr. W.J. HOFFMAN. Neither of these Indians spoke any language known to the other, or had ever met or heard of one another before that occasion:

Huerito.—WHO ARE YOU?

Tendoy.—SHOSHONI CHIEF.

Huerito.—HOW OLD ARE YOU?

Tendoy.—FIFTY-SIX.

Huerito.—VERY WELL. ARE THERE ANY BUFFALO IN YOUR COUNTRY?

Tendoy.—YES; MANY BLACK BUFFALO.

Tendoy.—DID YOU HEAR ANYTHING FROM THE SECRETARY? IF SO, TELL ME.

Huerito.—HE TOLD ME THAT IN FOUR DAYS I WOULD GO TO MY COUNTRY.

Tendoy.—IN TWO DAYS I GO TO MY COUNTRY JUST AS YOU GO TO YOURS.

I GO TO MINE WHERE THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF SNOW,

AND WE SHALL SEE EACH OTHER NO MORE.

Tendoy, fig. 310

Huerito, fig. 309

---

6 From: 'Sign Language Among North American Indians Compared With That Among Other Peoples And Deaf-Mutes', pages 486 – 490.

**Photos of Tendoy and Huerito in
de photo studio of Charles Milton Bell,
Washington, 1880.**

$B_aB_a{}^{z\sim}$ $\overset{\cdots}{\mathcal{N}}\overset{\cdots}{\mathcal{N}}\overset{\dot{a}\cdot}{}$ $3^{\perp}$ $[]\,\mathcal{J}C^{\dagger}\mathcal{J}C^{\underset{\times}{\vee}\cdot}$ $)Y\overset{@}{\vee}$ $\mathcal{J}G_{\wedge}{}^{<v<}$

$\overline{B}_a$ $\mathcal{B}_{\wedge}{}^{\underset{\supset}{w}}$ $G^{\perp}$ $B_{\wedge}{}^{\prime}B_{\wedge}\overset{\div}{\vee}$ $\mathcal{D}\,\dot{A}^{@X}$ $\underline{B}_{\mathcal{D}}$ $B_{\mathcal{D}}{}^{\perp}$

$G^{>}$ $\wedge\dot{5}^{X}$ $[]\,\mathcal{J}C^{\dagger}\mathcal{J}C^{\underset{\times}{\vee}\cdot}$ $X_{\perp}X_{\perp}\overset{\div}{a}$ B_{T} $V_{\mathcal{D}}{}^{\vee\cdot}$

$\overline{B}_a$ $L^{\#\cdot}$ $X_{\perp}X_{\perp}\overset{\div}{a}$

William C. Stokoe (1919–2000)
A piece of text from the fairy tale 'Goldilocks' transferred to American Sign Language (ASL) in the Stokoe Notation System.

The natural language for the deaf

In the 1960s, a turnaround took place when modern insights from psycholinguistics were deployed by William Stokoe of the Gallaudet University in Washington D.C., and other like-minded researchers. Sign language appears to be the most natural language for the deaf. Despite the significant differences in implementation ('modality'), there are important similarities between spoken languages and sign languages that go beyond this, in sentence structure, word structure, intonation. It shows that 'articulation' is a – literally – superficial way of expressing a general language capability in the brain. Sign language is taught most successfully in the same way as spoken language – as early and as linguistically rich as possible. Research into 'multilingualism' concludes that multiple languages do not have to get in each other's way, and indeed can have a stimulating effect on general 'cognitive' abilities.

The issue of the integration of the deaf and the hard of hearing, retaining and even using their specific skills and own culture, of which language is such an important part, in a society that is only moderately equipped for their successful participation, has not been resolved. But there is a dawning realisation that it is a two-way process, a *'team effort'*, a group effort, from parents, from teachers and policy makers, from politicians, from scientists, from the deaf and the hard of hearing and their organisations. The debate about the exact 'how' of this will still be going on for some time.
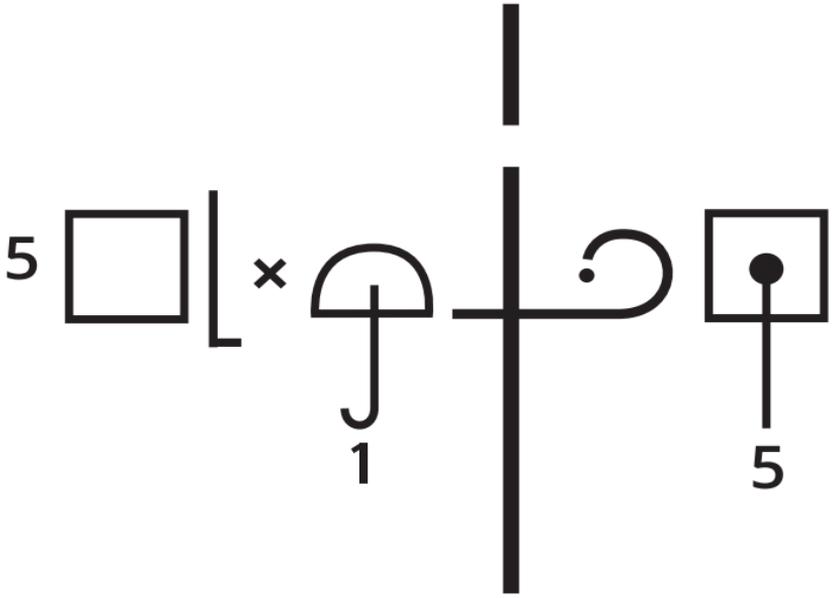
https://aslfont.github.io/Symbol-Font-For-ASL/ways-to-write

a ɒ Ƨ d ℓ ⊥ ℠ ◯ \ √ π
∪ ◸ ŋ ⦿ ᴅ N a T ∧ ∨ ω
z ⊙ ℘)(_ ⊥ ‡ [ ] □ ÷
5 A B C G L R V X Y

1 **Stokoe Notation System (1965)** – William C. Stokoe played an important role in the creation of the American Sign Language (ASL) dictionary and developed a system in which signs could be looked up by location, hand position and movement. It was designed specifically for ASL, contains no elements of expression and was not intended to be used for writing full sentences.

2 **Sutton Sign Writing (1974)** – Valerie Sutton developed a system to make it possible to annotate sign languages exactly. It uses many symbols, including for elements of expression. At the request of sign language researchers at the University of Copenhagen, ballet dancer Sutton developed this system. She was in Denmark to promote her notation system for dance movements.

3 **Hamburg Notation System, HamNoSys (1985)** – A group of researchers at the University of Hamburg developed a system for the annotation of all sign languages. The individual elements are notated linearly. It remains popular for academic purposes and has been revised four times.

4 **Si5s (2010)** – The Si5s was designed by Robert Arnold Augustuso to be written on paper, so the symbols can be rotated at any angle and placed anywhere on the paper. There is no separate series of motion arrows so any movement can be drawn by putting a dot at the end of a free line shape. Symbols and lines have been put together to form a picture of each sign, and the signs are laid out from left to right.

Sign icons
Ruud Janssen

Sign icons are an abstract representation of signs and sign sequences. They are related to expressions in sign languages, but not to spoken or written Dutch or other foreign languages. With other analysis systems of signs, 'Sign icons' recognise that signs are made up of components and that these components can be grouped into hand positions, orientation, small and large movements, expression, etc.

In other, usually linear systems, the writer lays out the sign in loose elements in a fixed order and the reader assembles these into a sign to be able to interpret it. In Sign Icons, individual elements are immediately assembled into a sign that can be adequately interpreted. The starting point is the basic idea: what is the minimum needed to be able to represent a sign or a sequence of signs in context (a 'sentence') in its entirety?

The small, standard and large signing space

small signing space   standard signing space   large signing space
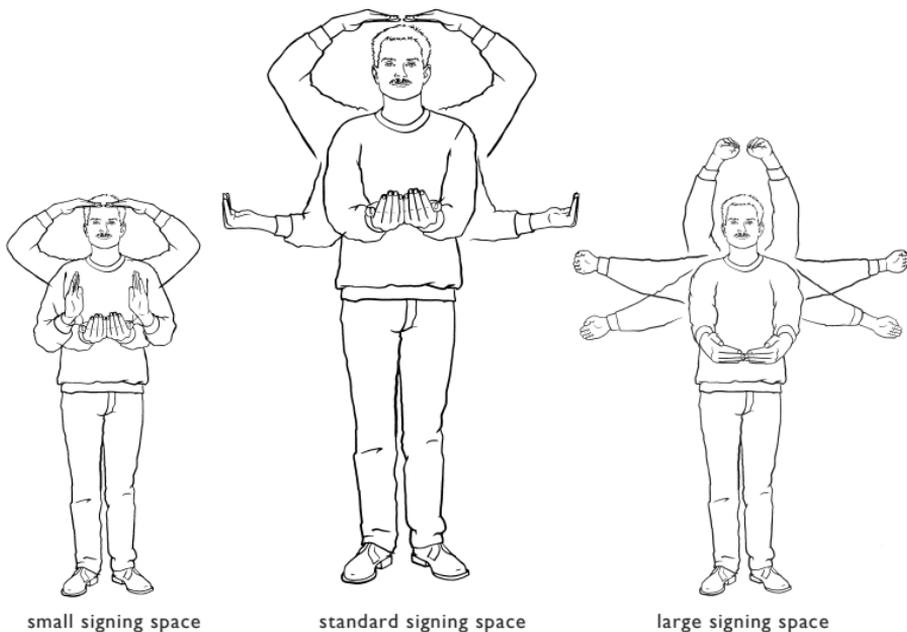
The signing space[1] is the foundation of sign language.
When speaking / signing, gestures have a constantly
changing position in space. These spatial positions
depend on what is being said, on the intonation of what
is being said or on the temperament of the individual
speaker / signer.
You can compare signing in a 'small' or a 'large' space
with speaking 'softly' or 'loudly'.

---

1 See pag 26: 'Gebarentaal – De taal van doven in Nederland',
  Liesbeth Koenen, Tony Bloem, Ruud Janssen en Albert van de Ven
  Nijgh & van Ditmar, 1993 – Uitgeverij Atlas, 1998 – Vi-taal, 2005.

The whispering space
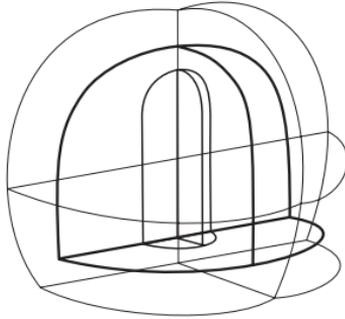
small -, standard - and large signing space

whispering space

Whisper as softly as possible, so that others nearby do not understand you.
In all four of these 'spaces', the head plays an important role. In the whispering space, it plays a very important role. In the 'whispering space', the head (with its facial expression) is separate from the space in which the hands are gesturing to make it difficult for people for whom the message is not intended to read the gestures.

Building blocks of a sign

Gebaar	Beweging	Handvorm	Expressie
	beginpunt	**gestrekt** gebonden - *open / gesloten* gespreid - *open / gesloten*	**hand** vingers, duim, pols
	richting handpalm- / vingeroriëntatie	**gebogen** gebonden - *open / gesloten* gespreid - *open / gesloten*	**romp** schouders, heup
	weg / snelheid	**gehoekt** gebonden - *open / gesloten* gespreid - *open / gesloten*	**hoofd** wenkbrauwen / voorhoofd, oog, oogleden, neus, lippen, tong, wangen

	eindpunt	**duim**
		gestrekt
		  gebonden / gespreid - *open / gesloten*
		gebogen
		  gebonden / gespreid - *open / gesloten*
		gehoekt
		  gebonden / gespreid - *open / gesloten*
			rest van het lichaam
			alles wat voor het oog zichtbaar is
			en kan bewegen

		tellen	
		handalfabetten	

The gesturing space as a foundation and the movement of the gesture are the most important building blocks of a sign. Directly followed by the hand positions and the expression. The crux, of course, lies in the interplay of these components.

Stretched - curved – angled
Instead of making an inventory of existing signs and distilling and grouping hand positions from them, Sign Icons is based on the forms that the hand can naturally assume, with a separate role for the **thumb**.
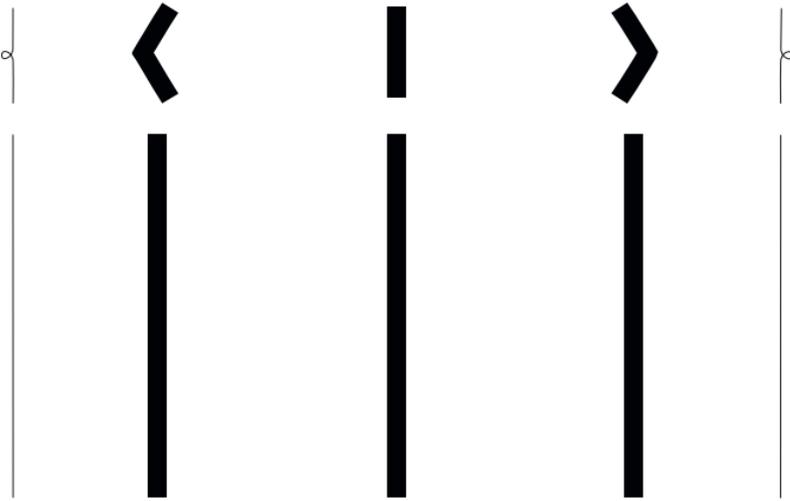
The signing space

The 'head' and 'body' icons make it possible to quickly annotate the start and end points of a sign. This also instantly indicates the location of the sign.

It is a lot simpler than linear systems, such as the Hamburg Notation System and the Dutch KOMVA-system, where dozens of symbols are needed just for the indication of locations.

The Sign Icons system offers the possibility of improvising with (one's own) additional indications that can be understood without explanation.

Symbols for hand shapes
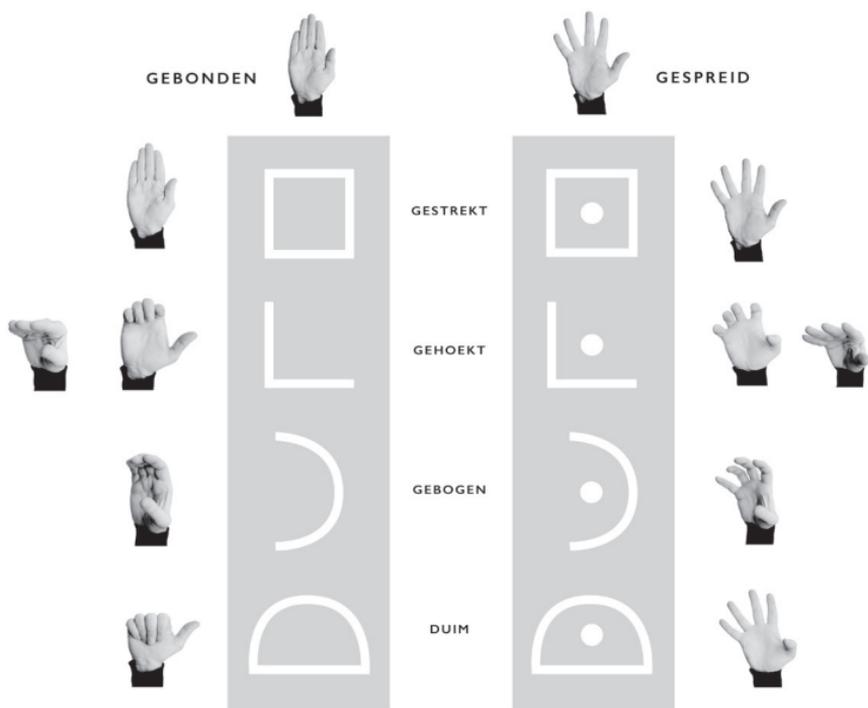
The symbols are derived from the hand shapes and easy to reproduce.
The dot indicates that the meaning supporting, acting fingers are separate (spread).

In sign language, names or words that you do not know are sometimes written in the air in finger spelling.
These letters are written in the sign icon as text. This also applies to numbers.
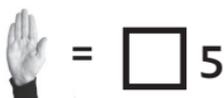
Overview of hand shapes - stretched

Based on the four symbols, eight series of hand shapes are formulated. In these series, the hand shapes are placed and grouped in a logical sequence. Per series, each hand shape is given a number.

In the hand shapes, acting fingers are usually easily distinguished from non-acting fingers.
The thumb sometimes plays a supporting role and at other times a leading role. For this reason, the thumb has its own symbol and its own series.

Elements of Sign Icons

GEBARENRUIMTE BEWEGING HORIZONTAAL VERTIKAAL HAND HANDVORMEN GESTREKT GEHOEKT GEBOGEN DUIM

KOP BEGINPUNT HAND GEBONDEN

AFGELEGDE WEG HAND AAN DE ANDERE KANT GESPREID

HAND MET VINGERORIËNTATIE ACCENT

ROMP HANDPALMORIËNTATIE NAAR BOVEN NAAR LINKS NAAR BENEDEN NAAR RECHTS NAAR JE TOE NAAR VOREN NAAR BOVEN NAAR LINKS NAAR BENEDEN NAAR RECHTS NAAR JE TOE NAAR VOREN

HAND AAN DE ANDERE KANT MET ACCENT

GESTREKT

NUMMER HANDVORMEN

GEHOEKT

GEBOGEN

DUIM

EXPRESSIE

KOP OGEN WENKBRAUWEN MOND WANGEN

HANDGESPELDE LETTERS A B C

HANDGESPELDE CIJFERS 1 2 3

LEESTEKENS < KLEINER
> GROTER
× CONTACTPUNT / RAAKPUNT
• SAMEN VERDER
! EXPRESSIEF
~ VLOEIEND / INTERNE BEWEGING HAND

In order to create a broad support base, a sign language must be easy to learn and use.
The starting point for the development of Sign Icons is to represent an unlimited number of signs with a limited number of graphic elements.

Sign Icons are not tied to a national language, just like, for example, the Hamburg Notation System and Sutton Sign Writing.

The hand on the other side

5   5
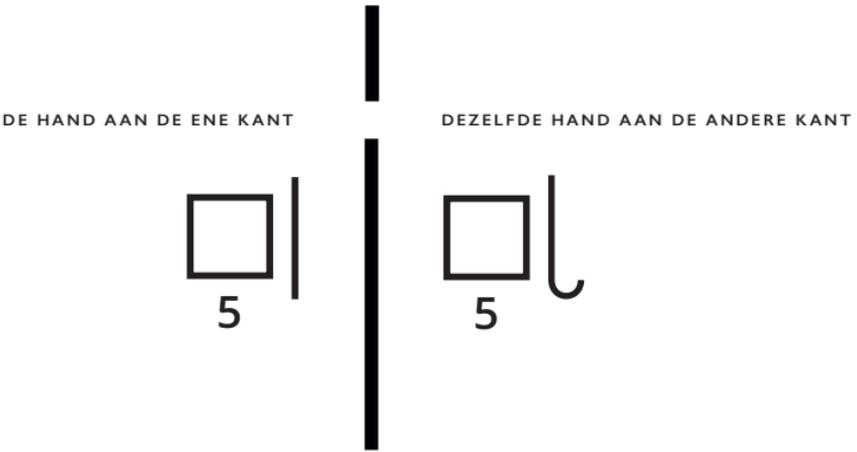
When a hand moves to the other side, you indicate this
with a small hook on the hand.

A *movement* that starts with a certain hand shape on
one side of the body and ends with a different hand
shape on the other side can be clearly marked with a
small hook.
If the hand shape does not change, there is no need to
annotate the end position.

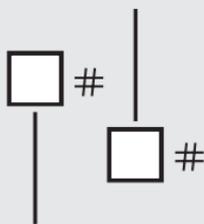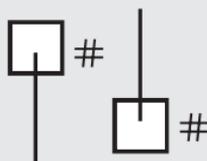## Palm orientation

HANDPALM NAAR BOVEN

HANDPALM NAAR LINKS

HANDPALM NAAR BENEDEN
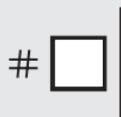
HANDPALM NAAR RECHTS

HANDPALM NAAR JE TOE
VINGERORIËNTATIE NAAR BENEDEN EN BOVEN

HANDPALM NAAR VOREN
VINGERORIËNTATIE NAAR BENEDEN EN BOVEN

HANDPALM NAAR JE TOE
MET ACCENT VINGERORIËNTATIE

HANDPALM NAAR VOREN
MET ACCENT VINGERORIËNTATIE

HAND

MET ACCENT INGEVAL VINGERORIËNTATIE

ACCENT

NUMMER HANDVORM

The hand is represented by a line.
The line itself does not show on which side the palm is located. Therefore, the symbol for the hand shape is always placed on the back of the hand.

The finger orientation has already been included in the symbols. The location also often determines the orientation of the fingers. In cases where a choice has to be made, an 'accent' can be placed.

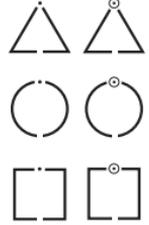## Horizontal and vertical representation of a sign

beginpunt · VOORAANZICHT

⊙ BOVENAANZICHT

▽ SCHUINAANZICHT
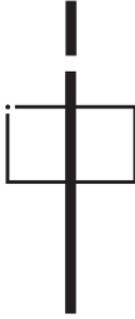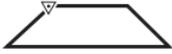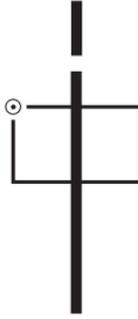
EEN VERTICAAL VLAK   EEN HORIZONTAAL VLAK

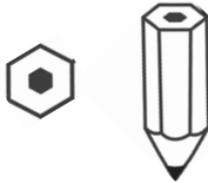RAAM   PLAFOND   TAFEL   VLOER

In order to indicate a horizontal plane, it is useful to show the path of the movement from above. The circle around the starting point indicates that the movement is in top view while the body remains in the same position.

Annotation of the movement[1]

Ik geef af en toe.
zie pagina 157

Ik geef hem vaak.
zie pagina 157

Ik geef ieder van jullie.
zie pagina 125

DEZELFDE BEWEGINGEN IN GEBARENICONEN

of

of

The **starting point** of a *movement* is important; in fact, the beginning contains the most information. At the beginning, a movement is briefly stationary.
But the **hand shape** of that *movement* is actually important at the end point; in other words, you get most information at the end. At the end, the hand shape is stationary the longest.

Sometimes the **movement** is the most important component of a sign and sometimes the **hand shape** is more important.
The movement starts with the dominant hand.

1 See page 26: 'Gebarentaal – De taal van doven in Nederland',
  Liesbeth Koenen, Tony Bloem, Ruud Janssen en Albert van de Ven
  Nijgh & van Ditmar, 1993 – Uitgeverij Atlas, 1998 – Vi–taal, 2005.

Reading order of a sign icon

GEBARENICOON
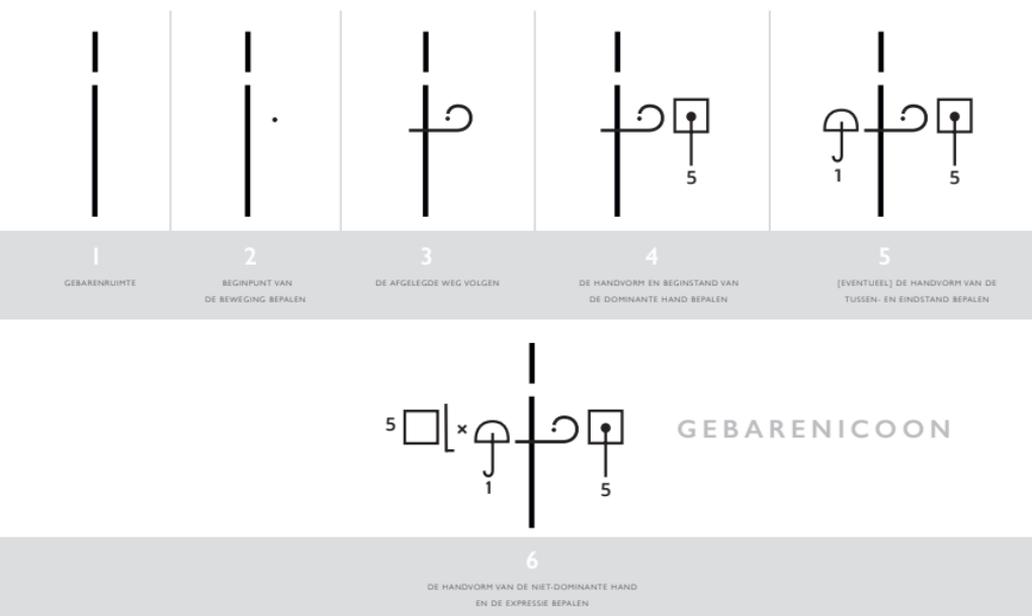
1 - signing space

2 - determine starting point of the movement

3 - follow the path followed

4 - determine the hand shape and starting position of the dominant hand

5 - determine the hand shape of the intermediate and end position

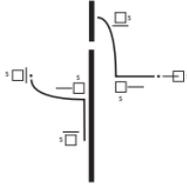**6 - determine the hand shape of the non-dominant hand and expression**

Everyone knows the expression 'to your left, to my right'. In the depicted sign icon, the origin of the movement is on the left for the signer, but on the right for the observer.

In our Dutch script, the sentence **ends** with a full stop. In Sign Icons, the sign **starts** with a full stop.
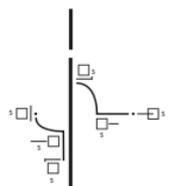
Four times a box [1]
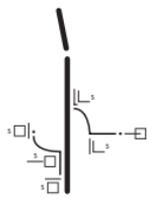

doos *(grote gebarenruimte)* **doos** **doos** *(standaard gebarenruimte)* **doos**
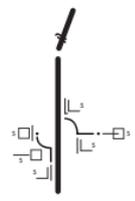
doos *(kleine gebarenruimte)* **doos** **doos** *(fluisterruimte)* **doos**

A box, signed from large to small and still you do not know how big it is. The space you are in, and the distance that you want to bridge and your emotion determine the size of the sign. Compare it to speaking loudly and softly.

In the sign icon, the shape similarity of the movement also remains visible and you can clearly see when the hand shape changes from stretched to angled.

If the hands, when signing, start moving independently of each other then you can indicate this with a number at the origin (the full stop).

---

1 See page 26: 'Gebarentaal – De taal van doven in Nederland',
Liesbeth Koenen, Tony Bloem, Ruud Janssen en Albert van de Ven
Nijgh & van Ditmar, 1993 – Uitgeverij Atlas, 1998 – Vi-taal, 2005.

Sign icons
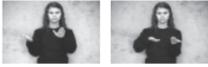
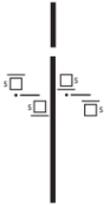**ASL deceased** / overleden
(*Source*: Spread the sign)

Crowdfunding
(*bron*: Vlaams Gebarentaalcentrum)

Goud
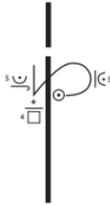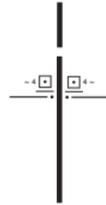(*bron*: Gebarencentrum)

Accessoires
(*bron*: Gebarencentrum)

overleden | crowdfunding | goud | accessoires

In sign icons, you want to precisely define the start position and the end position. The sign must therefore be articulated well. In many videos of loose signs, you see that the start positions are unclear and are sometimes even neglected.

Sign icons can provide insight when analysing signs.

Expression

'Stickman' always has a circle for a head, but in Sign Icons the head is a line. This has the advantage that the proportions of the face are easier to indicate.

A hand (and the rest of the body) also has expression! Expressions can be indicated by punctuation marks:

< SMALLER
> BIGGER
✕ CONTACT POINT / INTERFACE
+ CONTINUE TOGETHER
! EXPRESSIVE
~ SMOOTH / INTERNAL MOVEMENT OF HAND

Expression

As in the rest of the sign icon, the expression is only indicated for what is necessary, what is important, or what has been mutually agreed upon.

Development of sign writing in general can be interesting / meaningful for:
– emancipation of sign language
– analysis of signs
– need among teachers – and sign interpreters
– jargon in education
– innovation (also for apps and search engines)
– easy to learn / also for children
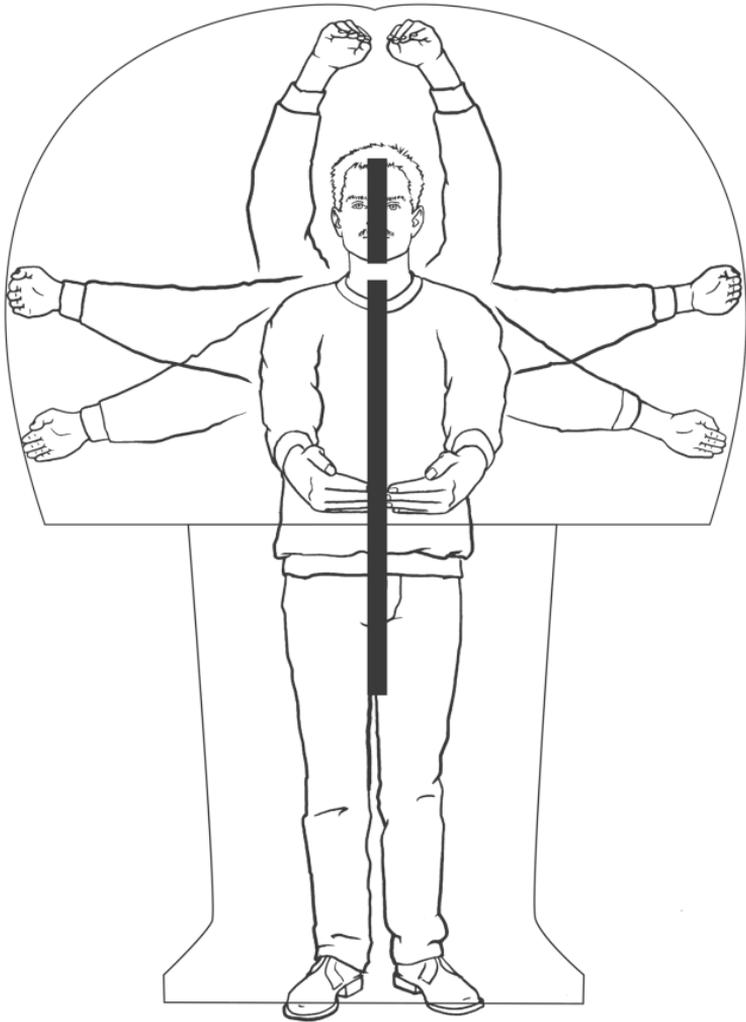
THE SIGNING SPACE
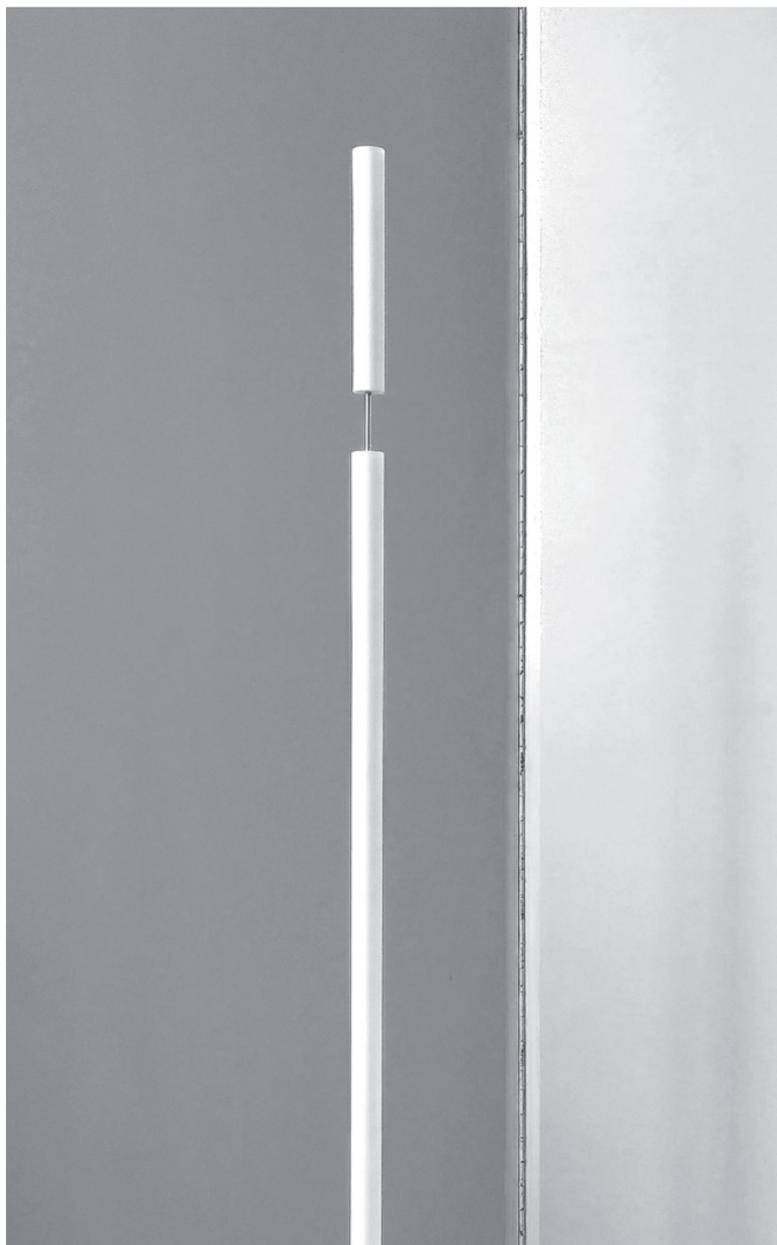
THE ICON FOR THE SIGNING SPACE

Poetry in sign language
Wim Zonneveld

In a video, a figure stands directly in front of the camera. He begins to speak, not with sound but with signs. Even for an uninitiated person, the performance is extraordinary. Hands are active, taking shapes, moving in space, high and low, in front of the chest. Accelerations

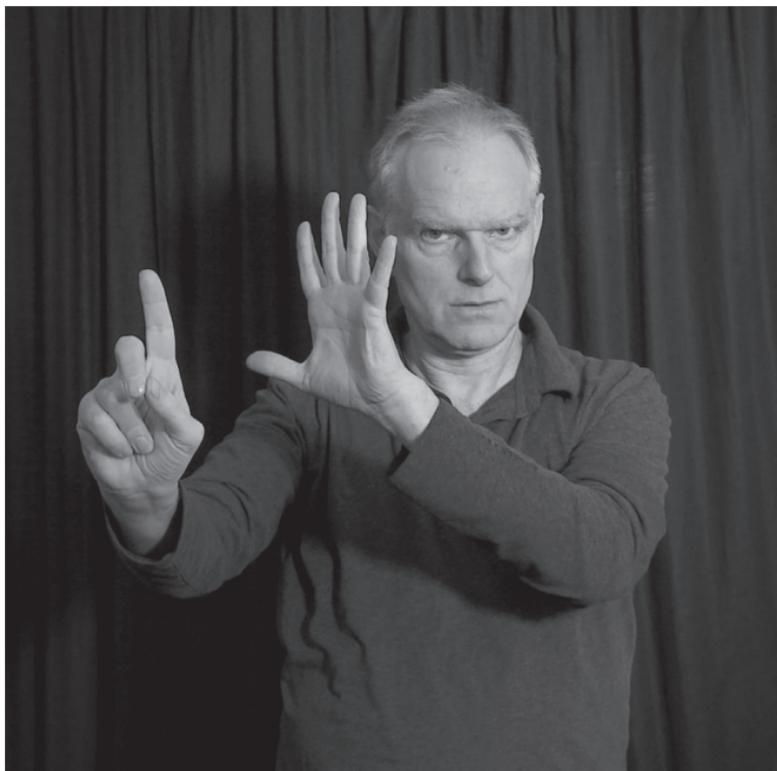follow delays and vice versa. After a minute and a half, the performance is over. The figure looks into the camera and calms down. That was a poem in sign language. Poetry in sign language? Is that possible? Visually, without sounds, without rhyme? Yes it is, why not.[1]

---
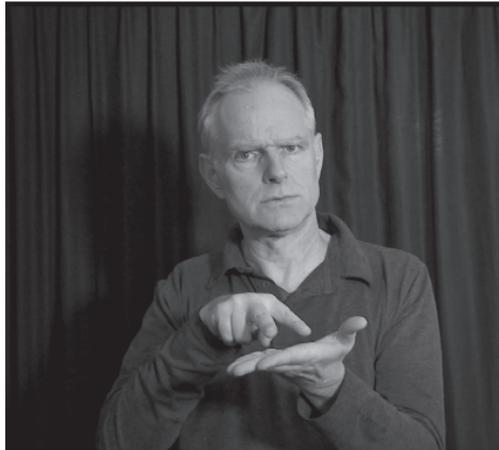
1 At this exhibition, the poem 'What is the word' by the well-known Irish poet and playwright Samuel Beckett can be viewed, performed in Dutch Sign Language by Tony Bloem, prominent member of the Dutch deaf community and lecturer in Dutch Sign Language at the HU University of Applied Sciences in Utrecht.

Poetry is a linguistic art form in which a message, idea or emotion is cast in a form that deviates from the normal use of language and that is, at the same time, both restrictive and creative, sometimes experimental. To complicate things when they can be simplified is a truism about poetry. But language does not become poetry by adopting a complicated pose during an inflated reading. Restrictive form implies that poetry imposes patterns on itself, not usually adhered to or even needed by ordinary language. Known restrictions are a repeated pattern of rhyme (night x might), alliteration (a grape of grief), a fixed number of syllables per line (three lines of 5–7–5 syllables: the haiku, usually with nature elements as theme) or a fixed metrical foot (iamb, trochee, anapest and the like).

The concepts of resemblance and contrast are typical of poetic language. Rhyme and alliteration agree and contrast in elements of words. In metrical foot, a repeating pattern of contrasting stressed and unstressed vowels, or short and long syllables, is used. In the haiku, the formal contrast lies in the equal and different numbers of syllables. These concepts can also be used in the meaning (gladly even!): 'Better the little that the righteous have / than the wealth of many wicked' are two lines from the biblical Psalm 37.

Stylistic figures are usually quick to catch the eye, especially in poetry in written form. They can have a substantive function, directly connected to the message of the poem, but that is not necessarily the case. When Lucebert, in a poem with a 6–7–6 line structure, closes each 'strophe' with alliterating words (including 'grape of grief' and 'silence stills the tempest') it is surely no coincidence. But when in Old Germanic poetry in a work of thousands of lines two or three words per verse

alliterate with each other, it does mean that the poet has chosen a form, but not that all those thousands of words are each connected in a special way with the substantive idea behind the poem and that the poet keeps asking attention for that. The poet is certainly not complicating it that much for himself or for the reader or listener.

To prevent the form from dominating, the poet has two means at his disposal. The first consists of precisely conscious violations of the chosen pattern. A dull thump can be avoided by an unexpected placement of emphasis: such as when Gorter in his famous iambic May continues the line 'waves rose as white rams on' with a trochaic beginning, but neatly continues with 'with bunches of foam and horns on their heads'. The relative scarcity of such lines shows that the poet is aware of the chosen pattern, but does not want to burden the listener or reader with the strictest, dullest form of it. And the more violations, the more the poet leans towards 'free verse', a form of poetry that, in terms of form, is closest to prose.

Now, look (and listen) to the opening lines of *May* from this perspective.

A new-born springtime and a new-born sound:
I want this song like piping to resound
So often heard at summer eventide
In an old township, by the waterside –
The house was dark, but down the silent road
Dusk gathered and above the sky still glowed,
And a late golden, incandescent flame
Shone

The second consists of creative violations at word level. In word choice, word combinations and 'neologisms'. In some cases, this happens subtly and in moderation.

'De stille straat vergaarde schemer' ('the silent road dusk gathered') from the beginning of May is a choice of words also marked by alliteration, in which an action is attributed to an object that usually belongs to people: 'vergaren' ('gather'). When Willem Kloos begins a poem with 'De bomen dorren in het laat seizoen') ('The trees wither in the late season'), he uses an adjective as a verb, to immediately awaken the reader. With another it goes further and the language material is chosen with great emotion and barely restrained anger. An example of this is the work of Lucebert, who speaks of 'the tumultuous calm', 'this poem shames', 'the auburn crane of birds', a 'marsh rider', 'pavement knowledge', 'health suffering'. A well-known iambic poem by Leopold begins with 'In mijn oud woonhuis peppels staan' ('In my old home poplars stand'), a violation of the normal word order, and in a 4 x 4 verse structure it includes the four times repeated emotionally charged and verb-less line 'mijn lief, mijn lief, o waar gebleven' ('my love, my love, aww where gone').

Recent linguistic research has shown that sign language contains individual signs and signs combined into sentences with elements similar to those in spoken language. With all the differences in execution (differences in 'modality'), concepts such as sound, syllable, rhythm, intonation and lexical content also seem to be applicable to sign language. Components such as hand shape function as building blocks, as well as the location (in the space) of the performance, small and large movements, direction of vision, meaningful pieces like 'classifiers', and so on. When we realise, moreover, that notions of similarity, contrast, message and creativity are abstract and independent of the medium used, it becomes a lot less surprising that poetry in sign

language should obviously be possible. And not just possible, but beautiful, in its own way.

Some examples. For the equivalent of rhyme or alliteration, signs can be selected on the same hand position, on the same movement, the same place in the space. If emphasis can break dullness, using a one-handed sign in an otherwise two-handed passage can have the same effect. Or the use of sudden and unexpected finger spelling, via signs from the alphabet. If a haiku needs structure: alternate signs in the vertical plane with signs in the horizontal plane (V–H–V), two-handed with one-handed (2–1–2). If nature is a theme, e.g. 'Autumn': slow down the pace when showing falling leaves and apply the same slowdown further on for drizzle (similarity) or speed up for a downpour in a storm (contrast). If 'Water in the Amsterdam Canals' is to be represented, create a neologism for 'water' that incorporates 'light sparkle'. The possibilities are manifold.

The British researcher Rachel Sutton-Spence analysed sign language poems in a series of publications and examined them on these elements. A striking example is her analysis of the poem 'Three Queens' by the English deaf sign language poet and activist Paul Scott, which creatively depicts the history of British Sign Language by relating it to the reigns of three iconic English queens: Elizabeth I (16th century), Victoria (19th century) and Elizabeth II (present day). It is widely regarded as one of the most powerful poems in and about BSL in that language (and can be found on YouTube).

Sutton-Spence finds many of the figures described above in the poem. In addition to frequently recurring specific hand positions, the number 'three' gives structure to the poem. It is represented directly at the beginning for the queens, and then often incorporated indirectly

and subtly. The sign for 'flag' occurs once for each queen. Signs with an inherent repetition have three of them, such as 'walking around', performed several times with three slight sways. Personal descriptions consist of three parts, from head via chest to waist. And so on. Standard word order is broken. In everyday signing conversation, an object is usually signed first, after which it can be referred to with a 'classifier': 'ball', then simply 'round object'. Here: 'object' (found in a shell), then 'p–e–a–r–l', finger–signed.

Neologisms and other creative expressions abound. The nine children of Queen Victoria are not directly represented by the sign for 'nine', but by 'five' on the left and 'four' on the right; then the index finger of the right hand is used to indicate a particular child in the line on the left. (Do it yourself: your almost irrepressible tendency will be to indicate the largest number with your dominant hand). At the end of the poem, three queens look at a flying flag together. Two are placed to the left and right of the signer with the sign for 'crown' in the space (unusual: crowns do not float), so that the signer himself in the middle becomes the third; the grave, 'royal' facial expression then automatically applies to all three.

Left: **Queen Victoria (described earlier), walking around her kingdom looking around, accompanied on the left and right by two monk scribes. (She will have three encounters with 'novelties': with a potato, with a cigar and with a group of sign language speakers).**

Right: **The sign for '(flying) flag' is performed, placed high in the air; three people (indicated by two hands and the signer) look at it.**

Source**: YouTube, sign metaphor website, performed by Paul Scott himself in Bristol, September 2009.**

Comment dire   29.10.88

folie –
folie que de –
que dé –
comment dire –
folie que de ce –
depuis –
folie depuis ce –
donné –
folie donné que ce que de –
vu –
folie vu ce –
ce –
comment dire –
ceci –
ce ceci –
ceci-ci –
tout ce ceci-ci –
folie donné tout ce –
vu –
folie vu tout ce ceci-ci que de –
que de –
comment dire –
voir –
entrevoir –
croire entrevoir –
vouloir croire entrevoir –
folie que de vouloir croire entrevoir quoi –
quoi –
comment dire –
et où –
que de vouloir croire entrevoir quoi où –
où –
comment dire –
là –
là – bas –
loin –
loin là là-bas –
à peine –
loin là là-bas à peine quoi –
quoi –
comment dire –
vu tout ceci –
tout ce ceci-ci –
folie que de voir quoi –
entrevoir –
croire entrevoir –
vouloir croire entrevoir –
loin là là-bas à peine quoi –
folie que d'y vouloir croire entrevoir quoi –
comment dire –

comment dire

Samuel Beckett (translation Hisgen van der Weel)

hoe zeg je dat

waanzin –
waanzin om te –
om te –
hoe zeg je dat –
waanzin op grond van dit –
al dit –
waanzin op grond van al dit –
gegeven –
waanzin gegeven al dit –
gezien –
waanzin gezien al dit –
dit –
hoe zeg je dat –
dit dit –
dit dit hier –
al dit dit hier –
waanzin gegeven al dit –
gezien –
waanzin gezien al dit dit hier –
om te –
hoe zeg je dat –
zien –
een glimp opvangen –
te denken een glimp op te vangen –
behoefte te hebben te denken een glimp op te vangen –
waanzin om behoefte te hebben te denken een glimp op
   te vangen –
van wat –
hoe zeg je dat –
en waar –

waanzin behoefte te hebben te denken een glimp op
   te vangen van wat waar –
waar –
hoe zeg je dat –
daar –
daarginds –
helemaal daarginds –
ver weg –
ver weg helemaal daarginds –
vaag –
vaag ver weg helemaal daarginds wat –
wat –
hoe zeg je dat –
gezien al dit –
al dit dit –
al dit dit hier –
waanzin te zien wat –
een glimp op te vangen –
te denken een glimp op te vangen –
behoefte te hebben te denken een glimp op te vangen –
van vaag ver weg helemaal daarginds wat –
waanzin behoefte te hebben te denken een glimp op
   te vangen van vaag ver weg helemaal daarginds wat –
wat –
hoe zeg je dat –

hoe zeg je dat –

How to say the unnamable in sign language
Ruud Hisgen and Adriaan van der Weel

On YouTube, you can see a recording from Swedish televi-
sion of an interview with Samuel Beckett in 1969.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYwScABAciA]

At the time, Beckett was staying with his life partner
Suzanne in the Riadh Hotel in Nabeul, Tunisia where he
was on holiday. The Swedish Academy had announced on
23 October that they had awarded the Irish–French writer
the 1969 Nobel Prize in Literature. His French publisher,
Jérôme Lindon, had already warned him in a telegram:
'Chers Sam et Suzanne. Malgré tout ils t'ont donné le
Prix Nobel – Je vous conseille de vous cacher.' ('Dear Sam
and Suzanne. Despite everything they have bestowed the
Nobel Prize for literature on you – I advise you to hide.')
According to James Knowlson in his 1996 biography Dam-
ned to Fame, The Life of Samuel Beckett, Suzanne reacted
to this news by sighing 'what a disaster!'.

Beckett was not interested in fame or fortune and there-
fore did not attend the award ceremony on 10 December.
He made frantic attempts to hide from the press, but

finally agreed to one interview on the condition that no questions would be asked. The fascinating result can be seen on the film recording, where he allows his silence to speak volumes.

To Beckett, to fall silent was the highest thing a writer could achieve – and he wanted nothing more – but to do so he first had to write, to shape his thoughts into words that others could read or hear. Beckett's life's work, then, is marked by a lifelong attempt to bring words to a halt, to find the word that makes all other words redundant.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with ....' is how the opening of the Gospel of John reads. But what if you have become convinced that the essence of the Supreme Father, the Holy Spirit and the Supreme Son consists of little more than empty words... Where can you find salvation and comfort? Hamm says in the play Endgame (1957/58), after fruitlessly trying to pray: 'The bastard! He doesn't exist!'. The human condition may make an unbeliever feel helpless, distraught and despe–rate, but fortunately Beckett's work has a humorous tone that sheds some light on the bleak situation.

The quest for the right word led Beckett to write mainly in French after the Second World War. There were proba–bly too many memories and too many meanings attached to his mother tongue English. He was unable to distance himself from it in the way he needed in his quest. He did, however, translate almost everything he wrote, resulting in a unique double oeuvre, since the French and English texts differ quite a bit.

Twenty years after the Nobel Prize, on 22 December, just before the celebration of the 'bastard's' birth on Christmas Day 1989, Beckett drew his last breath in his hometown of Paris. Since his birth in Dublin on Good Friday 1906, he had lived for over 83 years and nine months, over 730,000 hours of breaths. For Beckett was an obsessive counter and calculator. The final texts he wrote and published some 10,000 hours before his last breath were 'comment dire' and (in his translation) 'what is the word'.

'What is the word' is included in his Collected Poems (ed. Seán Lawlor and John Pilling, Faber, 2012) but it is questionable whether we can speak of a poem at all. We could just as easily categorise this text as a theatrical monolo-

gue, scenario, libretto, radio play, choreography or even a film scenario. All these genres come together beautifully in Ruud Janssen's video of Tony Bloem's recitation, which translates the Dutch text into sign language. Their production is simultaneously a poetry recital, theatre monologue, opera, mime performance and feature film.

In his quest for the right word, Beckett consistently surpassed all the limitations that traditional genres had imposed on the creative artist. He is best known for his plays ('Waiting for Godot', 1953), but he also wrote a great deal of prose and poetry, as well as a libretto for an opera, choreography and mime performances. Sometimes not a word is spoken on stage and only movements can be seen.
He also created work for television and radio. And in 1963, he even wrote the scenario for a film that was titled 'Film'.

In this 24-minute black-and-white film (directed by Alan Schneider), Buster Keaton plays the leading role. It

was one of his last appearances in film. The scenery and costumes in Film suggest that the story takes place in the year 1929, the year in which the studios said good-bye to the silent film and introduced the sound film. The film is often shown as if it were a silent film, but that is a misunderstanding. Although not a word is spoken in it, a woman urges her husband to be quiet with a loud 'pssst'. That is also the only thing that can be heard in the film, but it is not a silent film, just like the interview that Swedish television had with him in 1969.

To Samuel Beckett, silence was the highest thing a man could achieve. Had Beckett been able to complete a nice round one million life-hours and had he been able, at the age of 117, to go to Ruud Janssen's exhibition in the Alphabetum at West in the Museum Quarter, he would certainly have been delighted with Tony Bloem's inter-pretation of 'what is the word' in sign language.

Ruud Janssen came into contact with sign language in 1977 during his study of graphic and typographic design at the Royal Academy of Art and also graduated in this field. A fruitful period of pioneering and research followed, together with Daria Mohr (Het Werkteater, Amsterdam). In 1983, he received the Frans Duwaer Award from the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts for the graphic standardisation of the Dutch Handwriting in a book edition. In 1986, together with Tony Bloem, he founded the design bureau Vi-taal. This was followed by a long series of small and large projects in which bilingualism, Dutch as well as Dutch Sign Language, were always a priority. Examples are bilingual children's books 'Foei, Poes' and 'Kom buiten kijken' (Leopold, 1988), TV series 'De Gebarenwinkel' (VPRO, 1989), documentary 'De gebarenmakers' (IKON, 1992), book 'Gebarentaal – De taal van doven in Nederland' (Eureka priis, 1993), exhibition 'Kijk!Taal' in the University Museum Utrecht (1998), and the theatre play 'King Kong in Klein Carré' toured the Netherlands. As well as information in sign language about the introduction of the euro (MinFin, 2000). A next step is the development of the notation system 'Sign Icons' and with this he appreciates the visual aspect of sign language in a renewed form.
www.vitaaldenhaag.org
www.haagsekunstgrepen.nl

Wim Zonneveld (1950) is Emeritus Professor of English Language and Culture at the Utrecht University. Specialised in theoretical linguistics and in particular phonology, he became interested in sign language in the 1990s because of the parallels in language acquisition and the similarities in the structure and the performance of sounds and signs. As a member of the board of the Vi-taal Foundation, he advises on activities and grant applications, and he acted as Ruud Janssen's sparring partner in setting up and developing Sign Icons.

Ruud Hisgen and Adriaan van der Weel studied at the universities of Leiden, Dublin and Sydney. Hisgen works as a teacher and author at the language institute Direct Dutch (The Hague), which he founded in 1985. Van der Weel is an anglist and book historian at Leiden University. Together they translated work mainly by British and Irish writers, including James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. In 1998, also together, they wrote a study about Beckett's last 'novel', Worstward Ho (1983), published in their translation as Slechtstwaarts voort (2000). This year they are finishing a book on reading.

Yael Keijzer (1996) is a philosopher, writer and team member of West Den Haag. She is specialised in existentialism and philosophy of consciousness and perception (phenomenology). In 2020 she graduated with 'Love as Magic: A Phenomenological Perspective on Intimacy in Simone de Beauvoir' and since then she has been regularly publishing articles for the West website, including for the physical catalogue of the Gregor Schneider exhibition in 2021 with the essay 'The Spirituality of Dead Spaces'.

The **Alphabetum** is an artistic space to explore the formative and formal aspects of language. These aspects are mostly considered separate. Typographers and type-designers are primarily focused on the letterform and writers mostly do not pay attention to the forms of the letters they form into words. The ambition of the Alphabetum is to reveal that these two properties of written language are much more interlinked than is commonly acknowledged. A letter is a letter because it resembles
a letter; and because it resembles a letter it is a letter.

Joseph Beuys said that every human being is an artist. Hans Hollein translated this idea into space and time, suggesting that everything is architecture. John Cage proposed that everything we do is music. Would it therefore not be acceptable to declare that every thing is type? When we look at art, music and architecture from a more general point of view, we see that all three disciplines have emerged from the languages we created. We might even argue that art, architecture and music are themselves languages. It is noteworthy that Beuys's, Hollein's and Cage's statements are not formulated in art, architecture and music, but in letters, forming words, combined in statements. Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that the limits of our language are the limits of our world. Could it also be the case that the limits of the alphabet are the limits of our language? This would bring us back to the typographic tautology. A letter is a letter because it resembles a letter, and because it resembles a letter,
it is a letter.

The Alphabetum, inaugurated in February 2019, is part of the program of the national art institution West Den Haag.

This publication in Dutch

West

ALPHABETUM VIII
2021