

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

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Through non-verbal communication man may demonstrate behavior as meaningfully as he does through spoken language. Non-verbal language may be communicated in conjunction with speech in face-to-face encounters or may occur independently. It can be observed at random in public places such as elevators, bus stops and parks or in private places such as social gatherings or offices. Further, each individual emits behavior in an unconscious context through facial expression, dress, posture, laughter, space dynamics, use of time and other phenomena. In face-to-face meetings he is aware of his ability to convey meaning and in addition he emanates behavioral cues--communications--over which he has no control. When he is not engaged in an encounter he may control his behavior if he believes others are watching. Whether he controls it or not, it is still capable of giving off cues with which observers interact. When he is aware he is alone he may continue to behave as though in the presence of others or he may discard forms customary to his public manner.

Since interaction occurs both within and without an awareness context¹ and is capable of maintenance, transformation and the production of emergents, the writings of Edward T. Hall and Erving Goffman may be discussed in terms of significant contributions to the sociology of interaction. Goffman's The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,² along with his method of dramatic analogy, have been treated previously.⁴ This paper will attempt to integrate some of Goffman's later works with Hall's⁵ in terms of symbolic interaction processes carried on through nonverbal communication.

Hall treats culture as communication⁶ and communication as culture, the cues enabling individuals to ascribe meaning to what others do. Emphasis is made that no one is ever fully aware of what he communicates to someone else. It is "not what people talk about but what people do and the hidden rules that govern people."⁷ Hall and his colleague, George L. Trager, define ten types of human activity entitled Primary Message Systems⁸ through which man communicates. Spoken language is one of these. The remaining nine are nonverbal and may briefly be outlined as follows:

1. Association. Out of this system flows interaction mediated by such phenomena as subordination and superordination, elaborations relative to social status, leadership and forms of protocol. Group life implies ranking and role-prescriptions.

2. Subsistence. Geared basically toward survival, this system has been articulated from simple food-gathering into complex communications patterns involving the evolution of societal and international

economies and division of labor, resulting in a proliferation of occupations and professions. Here, too, may be located interaction processes based upon dietary laws, table manners and menus.

3. Bisexuality. Sex-role behavior is a significant part of socialization and may vary from one culture to another as well as intraculturally along class lines. Hall states that masculine and feminine role-prescriptions are learned behaviors. Within this system the scope of symbolic interaction processes is perhaps especially comprehensive. It may include differentiation in naming, dress, education and occupation. In addition, courtship style, marital role-enactment, incest taboos, divorce, remarriage and inheritance are based on cultural message patterns within this system.

4. Territoriality. Hall defines this term as the "taking possession, use and defense of a territory on the part of living organisms." Concepts of space are frequently unconscious. Man's outer boundary is not his skin but a psychological "space-bubble" which expands and contracts depending on his particular degree of involvement in interaction and upon others' involvement with him. Culturally defined, space concepts assist in identifying perception of stimuli in terms of such constructs as privacy, intrusion, social distance and rejection. A multitude of spatial cues releases responses. Territoriality may revolve about a source of national or individual tension; it may determine utilization of various areas for specific purposes, whether within a house or a nation. Occupation of a specific space may designate status as in seating arrangements at a formal dinner or the large, well-furnished office of a major executive.

5. Temporality. This concept concerns time, its use, measurement and meaning. Probably derived from the agricultural cycle, its social consequences are intricately related to interactional processes. Time emanates infinite messages. Some societies manipulate it, buying, spending, selling, saving or wasting it; being early, late, or "on" time. Others are enfolded by time, experiencing no past but an ongoing present. Still others, with a profound sense of history, must rework the past before dealing with the "now." The context of interaction is sensitive to such communications, as in the glance at a wristwatch, gait, postures of relaxation, and protocols regarding meticulous promptness or casual arrival. Where artificial illumination exists, time may be viewed in a different context. Time dictates when men work, thus when they sleep, eat and take leisure.

6. Learning. Hall writes that "once people have learned to learn in a given way it is extremely hard for them to learn in any other way."¹⁰ Signals expressive of previous learnings are frequently transmitted and received nonverbally. Teaching may likewise take place without spoken language. Cues are emanated which define some of the knowledge an individual has acquired, what learnings he deems important, and what or if he might further desire to learn.

7. Play. This human activity has many dimensions. Interaction within the category of play concerns why people laugh and when, the functions of games, and frequently, the element of competition. Humor may be utilized to express playfully that which cannot be communicated in a serious manner without disrupting the interaction, thus relating it to vulnerability, degradation, or embarrassment.

8. Defense. The system of defense relates not only to warfare but also to medicine, religion and law enforcement. Man has recognized that potentially destructive forces exist in nature, in societies, and within himself. The threatening gesture is a symbol of defense; the "I-me" dialogue relates the "generalized other" to approved or disapproved behaviors pertaining to acquired moral norms.¹¹

9. Exploitation. This category refers to man's adaptation to his environment and deals with his use of materials so as to extend himself beyond his basic capabilities. Atomic weaponry is the extension of the arm raised in hostility; power tools replace digging and fabricating by hand; writing and publishing extend and store thought; the savings account, investments and insurance store work. Hall suggests that "all man-made material things can be treated as extensions of what man once did with his body or some specialized part of his body."¹²

It is obvious from the brief descriptions above that a complex network of communications lies within cultural systems through which individuals interact symbolically. Kuhn suggests that "the whole epistemology of symbolic interaction, from Cooley to Cassirer, rests on the proposition that language is necessarily interposed between man and raw reality so that he can never confront it directly."¹³ With this idea in mind a brief examination of some of Goffman's work is in order. Completely aside from the dramaturgic context, Goffman chooses to analyze "appropriate" behavior, the peaceful ongoing traffic of interaction in public and private places, as contrasted with the symptomatically abnormal behavior of the mentally ill or the aberrant collective behavior of the mob. Thus he deals with the individual's method of behavior management, his own, and through manipulation, that of others when in their company and, in some instances, out of it. Goffman's concern is with propriety systems and it is here that he and Hall complement each others' domains, although Hall, an anthropologist, expresses the cross-cultural implications more explicitly. For example, when Goffman states that in some places one's mere presence may be an impropriety,¹⁴ this construct may be projected onto the Hall system in terms of bisexuality, territoriality, defense or other categories, depending upon the circumstances.¹⁵ Goffman further suggests that "the regulations of conduct characteristic of the situations and their gatherings are largely traceable to the social occasion in which they occur."¹⁶ Depending upon the nature of the circumstances, articulation of Hall's associational or play systems may be involved. Goffman distinguishes between focused and unfocused interaction. The first occurs when individuals gather in a close grouping and deliberately maintain an object of attention, as in a conversation at a cocktail party.

The second is a totally nonverbal form, consisting of communication exuded through sheer temporal and spatial congruence. This author asserts that "in every society these communications possibilities are institutionalized."¹⁷ It is impossible not to give off cues: behavior management takes the form of attempting to give off the precise cues-- thus the message--the sender wishes transmitted, although this is not the sole effect.¹⁸ Through conventional signs the actor emanates involvement situationally appropriate. The purposeful gait is acceptable in this society while aimless strolling and periodic halting among adults are apt to be suspect. The appearance of total disengagement is apparently threatening: the person seizes a magazine, feigns a dignified sleep, gazes studiously at some neutral point in the distance. People require involvement shields when they cannot "keep up the play," whenever it becomes inappropriate to undertake an activity publicly. Certain places are assigned culturally and subculturally for the pursuit of specific activities, such as play, sex and defense, which exemplify some of Hall's territoriality dimensions.

Goffman characterizes a variety of engagements relative to which cues are manifest, for example, "leave-taking rights,"¹⁹ which in certain settings might also be termed rites.²⁰ Messages may be "in the air," so to speak, reinforced by qualities of attention, preoccupation, stirring, and perhaps verbal summation of the discussion. Failure on the part of the subordinate to recognize the messages may result in an embarrassing, if tactful, dismissal.

In Interaction Ritual,²¹ Goffman undertakes to project a "sociology of occasions." This construct revolves about social organization, involving the co-presence of individuals and the emergents produced. He offers the concept of a "line," a "pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself."²² If the person does not take a line deliberately in a dramaturgic sense, his co-participants will assume he has done so regardless. "Face" is considered as a positive social value, a reflection of the self, somewhat in the Chinese usage. Thus to maintain face implies poise and reflects socially acceptable attention upon one's self, friends, occupation or other referents. One's line helps to preserve face, and as in other of Goffman's writings, the team supplies face as needed during the course of the interaction. The significance of face to the sociology of interaction would appear to lie in the following statement:

While his social face can be his most personal possession and the center of his security and pleasure, it is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it. Approved attributes and their relation to face make of every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell. ²³

Social skill is related to face-work. Modification and adaptation are required not only in behalf of other actors but ultimately in terms of satisfaction in role-fulfillment.²⁴ Ritual is implied throughout, that is, the learned patterns which people internalize and normalize, which they contribute to social interaction, all the while striving through their conscious behavior to maintain a type of interaction which reinforces equilibrium of self. Discrepant behavior patterns may indicate that 1) previous damage to the self is compensated for by negative behaviors which may give temporary relief to the actor but usually shut down the interaction, if not the social occasion; 2) the actor is ignorant of the social requirements of the gathering and is emitting cues which indicate that his presence is incongruous; depending upon his status in terms of the gathering and upon the team reactions (sympathy, morale and avoidance of disruption), these cues may be overlooked;²⁵ 3) the actor may be mentally ill. Inappropriate behavior is frequently a symptom of mental disease.

The point has been previously made that communication is culture. Therefore in cross-cultural or even cross-subcultural relations it is obvious not only that spoken language will differ, effectively inhibiting the opportunity for extended verbal communication, but, more significant here, the other Primary Message Systems will "speak" out of their cultural base, not the visitor's.²⁶

Of numerous message anomalies existing cross-culturally, differences in temporality and territoriality are the most subtle, perhaps, because they have been so internalized they escape our own detection or conscious acknowledgement. Americans of a given social class, for example, know why they stand or sit at a given distance on a given occasion only insofar as it seems "right" or appropriate. They are aware in their own terms, culturally defined and learned, of course, that physical distance is related to a definition of the situation. Thus when their "space-bubble" is encroached upon by someone "speaking" a different spatial language, the message is misinterpreted, sometimes with disconcerting or even serious results.

In The Hidden Dimension,²⁷ Hall explores man's perception of personal and social space, giving this domain of study the term proxemics. One of his theses is that individuals living in different cultures live in different sensory spheres, so that stimuli which are perceived not only may be selected through different screens of reference but are consequently interpreted in an altogether different context of experience, thus producing different sets of emergents.²⁸ Man has various learned situational personalities. Hall states that the "simplest form of the situational personality is that associated with responses to intimate, personal, social and public transactions."²⁹ Not all forms may mature within an individual, thus creating areas of conflict when the situation calls for responses based upon one of these four dimensions.

The same strictures apply to concepts of temporality. Even American humor has had something to say regarding time in its relation to anxiety,

compulsion and hostility. For this purpose Hall has identified four isolates regarding temporality which have basic congruence to interaction. These are urgency, monochronism, activity and variety.³⁰

1. Urgency. This construct relates to demand and its consequent interpretation of the speed with which time passes. Urgency, except for basic physiological needs, is culturally-derived.³¹ The individual with an urgent time requirement about some aspect of his life may be anquished at the way time "passes slowly," attaching a subjective gloss to the manifest fact that time is objectively uniform. Lack of urgency regarding time is a frequent irritant to the American visitor unaware of cross-cultural differences.

2. Monochronism. This term refers to doing one thing at a time. In business and professional relations, the American expects to have the undivided attention of his co-conferee. Telephone messages may be deferred and other interpretations rather summarily put aside. Thus in other cultures amid a rather joyous and confused atmosphere, the visitor finds an absence of monochronism and tends to feel status threat since his concern is not treated singly and concluded.

3. Activity. Other cultures credit dormancy as activity, which contrasts with American situationally appropriate involvement cited by Goffman earlier in this paper. Thus the Arab is "doing something" when he sits motionless and "unoccupied" in public. Contemplation or even a "mind-at-rest" gains more currency in other cultures; it is considered an approved and even a wise way in which to spend time.³²

4. Variety. To distinguish between intervals or durations of time lies the concept of variety. The individual changes tasks, rests, recreates, vacations and engages in numerous different activities, all of which serve to mark off the passage of time. In the culture where little variety and no schedules exist, it is not difficult to understand why temporality has another flowage rate, or why past, present and future tend to merge. The more affluent society, then, with its many extensions of the Exploitation system, provides more occasions and materials with which to obtain variety, thus marking off beginnings and endings, boundaries and categories.

Communication is a circular process, changing and developing as it continues. Much of its content is nonverbal and some need not involve face-to-face co-presence. So that sender and receiver have an opportunity to interact, knowledge of a common language is required. Over and above spoken language lies a network of cultural message systems, the understanding of which is equally, if not more important to the integrity and reality of interaction. To be able to identify something distinctive in the message systems of another culture implies having first identified the nature of some of one's own. The objective is improved communication, not in itself a guarantee of social improvement, but perhaps a means through which issues may be identified and clarified.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a discussion of four types of awareness contexts see Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, "Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction," in Symbolic Interaction, eds. Jerome G. Manis and Bernard M. Meltzer (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967), pp. 429-444.
2. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959).
3. Kathryn Peterson, unpublished paper, "The Dramatic Analogy and Symbolic Interaction," May, 1968. Department of Sociology, University of Kansas.
4. Erving Goffman, Behavior in Public Places (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1963); Asylums (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961); Encounters (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961); and Interaction Ritual (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967).
5. Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959); The Hidden Dimension (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966); and with William Foote Whyte, Intercultural Communication (Ithaca: New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, 1960).
6. Hall, The Silent Language, pp. 37-39.
7. Ibid., p. 41.
8. Ibid., pp. 45-62.
9. Ibid., p. 51.
10. Ibid., p. 53.
11. While the concept of reference groups is implicit in all of the foregoing, the Primary Message System of Defense seems to lend itself particularly appropriately to Kuhn's concept of the "orientational other." See Manfred H. Kuhn, "The Reference Group Reconsidered," in Manis and Meltzer, op. cit., pp. 171-184, especially pp. 181-182.
12. Hall, op. cit., p. 60.
13. Kuhn, op. cit., p. 177.
14. Goffman, Behavior in Public Places, op. cit., p. 11.
15. In crosscultural situations adaptations take place. For example, the Saudi-Arabian capitol, Riyadh, is "off-limits" politically; Mecca is closed to non-Moslems; wives are barred from conservative Arab social gatherings.

16. Goffman, Behavior...p. 20.
17. Ibid., p. 33.
18. A young woman viewed waiting in an airport, manages through conservatively correct posture and a book to which she devotes some attention to convey that she wishes to dissociate herself from a nearby girls' group interested in eliciting responses from young men a short distance away. Her dress, use of cosmetics, hairstyle, luggage, etc., also enable the observer to glean information as to why she may wish to manage her behavior in this means.
19. Goffman, Behavior...pp. 110-111.
20. In law firms, the armed forces and other formalized youth-age, subordination-superordination settings, the senior officer and his wife leave first. Sometimes they leave when they would enjoy staying, aware that junior officers on lesser incomes are paying baby-sitters. Departure time is agreed upon in advance, the couple rises on a quiet signal from one to the other, makes farewells and leaves, thus freeing others to go or stay.
21. Erving Goffman, Interaction Ritual, op. cit.
22. Ibid., p. 5.
23. Ibid., p. 10.
24. The wife of an American official may relinquish her accustomed partnership role in a host-hostess dyad when her husband and she entertain conservative Arabs in their home. A more passive role tends to enhance the guests' evaluation of the husband as a man who exercises "proper control" over his family and carries over into diplomatic or business relationships in which Arabs engage with him later. Thus her role-enactment assists in creating a psychological climate beneficial to the management of a specific system-mandate.
25. Premier Krushchev became somewhat notorious for his idiosyncratic public behavior. While this received much publicity at the time, it was officially overlooked due to his diplomatic status.
26. Thus, segregating the sexes at a social gathering, or prohibiting the one or the other, is not only a cross-cultural phenomenon but has its subcultural aspects within this society.
27. Edward T. Hall, The Hidden Dimension (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966).
28. Crossing one's legs while seated is a conventional gesture for both sexes in American society assuming it falls within established canons of bisexuality and regard for dress. In Southeast Asian areas, however, the exposed sole of the shoe on the crossed leg, if facing toward a person from that region, constitutes a gross insult.

29. Hall, The Hidden Dimension, p. 109.
30. Hall, The Silent Language, pp. 137-141.
31. The newcomer in Polynesian areas of the Pacific Basin learns to ask, "Does this party start on mainland or Polynesian time?" The distinction between conventional continental-American promptness is approximately two hours.
32. Even the American in a library is suspect if he "looks off into space," rather than be discovered reading or writing. If asked what he is doing he will seldom respond, "I'm thinking," and is more apt to say, "Just daydreaming." Americans and English frequently find the solution to problems of thinking more amenable when accompanied by solitary physical exercise such as walking. This may possibly comprise a more culturally acceptable medium.