

The book cover features a dark, textured background. In the top right corner, there is a large, bright orange and red abstract shape that resembles a flame or a sun. Below this, a dark silhouette of a hand is visible, reaching upwards. The title 'Communicating' is printed in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below the title, the subtitle 'The Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection' is written in a smaller, italicized, white font. In the bottom right corner, there is another abstract shape, this one in shades of red and orange, with a dark silhouette of a hand reaching upwards towards it. The author's name 'Ruth Finnegan' is printed in a white, sans-serif font at the bottom center.

Communicating

The Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection

Ruth Finnegan

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For my grandparents and my grandchildren,
now and to come, and all the intervening
and extending links in between

Preface

As I sit here tapping into my computer I have memories of story-telling in West Africa with its songs, movements, and actively performing audiences, of the calls, colours and scents from sparkling displays of produce laid out to entice buyers in a Fijian market, and of the shared experiences, somatic and visual not just acoustic, of musical performances in England. I think of the gestures and unspoken signals of everyday living and of contacts across distance through telephones, letters, presents; also of those variegated family heirlooms, material contacts with earlier generations. I cannot forget either the experiences of reading authors from the long past, Homer's rhythms and cadences as well his words, and the body-stirring excitements of Greek dramatic metres, with their dances and choruses.

All these, it seems to me, are ways that human beings interconnect with each other – modes of communicating. And yet so many accounts seem not to take on this full multisensory range, presenting instead a thinner more parochial view of communicating, as if it is limited to words or, at best, to recent expansions in visual images and the ramifications of currently expanding information technologies. Words are indeed wonderful, and my personal and scholarly life has been imbued with them – but there is so much else too.

This book developed out of such reflections. Looking back at my own experiences, I felt the need for a wider view of communication. There seemed a place for a book which could draw together something of the many current insights into the importance of *all* the senses in our human interconnecting, of material objects, contacts across space and time, and the significance of experiential dimensions of human life, not just the cognitive. Too many of our assumptions and analyses have been logocentric or unidimensional, cutting out the dynamic processes of gesture, movement, dance, often even sound itself.

The book also grows out of my earlier research. In studying first story-telling in Sierra Leone, then oral poetries and performances in Africa and elsewhere, processes of literacy and orality, Fijian and English music-making, and urban tales, I have for long, I now realise, been involved not just with the anthropology of expressive art and performance but also, in the broad sense, with communication. Going in the same direction too, perhaps, was my initial training in the beautiful

works of Greek and Roman literature. Back in 1973 Robin Horton and I edited a collection on *Modes of Thought*. Now, a quarter of a century or so later, I wish to keep the comparative perspective of that work but to suggest a more multifaceted conspectus than we altogether envisaged then, and to direct attention not to thinking but to the multiply overlapping processes, intricate and thickly interwoven, through which people actively interconnect.

This book is about communication, then, but communication in a wider sense than adopted in many studies. It is narrow too in focusing on different dimensions from those pursued in many other specialist works. It looks to embodied performances and human artefacts rather than to 'texts', to multidimensional shared and active processes rather than the transfer of messages. It has little to say about evolutionary origins in prehistoric times, or about the brain, mental representations, technical transfers of data, the arguably capitalist tendencies of the modern mass media, or new globalising trends. Nor does it address detailed questions about the effects of human communicating and how far these should be judged 'good' or 'bad'. Rather it focuses on charting the modes by which people interconnect in the world – the multiple bodily resources we can draw on and the multifarious arts and artefacts which we humans create. In one way this is an unambitious undertaking: merely a kind of catalogue of the various modes and resources used in human communicating with some accompanying commentary. But that in itself is actually a staggering task – an attempt to capture something of the amazing creativity of human beings as they deploy an equally amazing range of resources.

Such an endeavour, even narrowed down, is necessarily interdisciplinary, with all the costs and benefits that that implies. It draws most directly on the insights and findings from anthropology, the discipline in which I am most rooted; I much value both its fertile combination of comparative perspective with meticulously detailed ethnography, and a series of illuminating recent studies, not as widely known outside the discipline as they should be. The comparative contexting and the examples from many areas of the world, not just the modern west, are important dimensions of my approach. Also relevant have been certain converging strands across a range of disciplines in both the social sciences and the humanities to do with emotions, 'the body', the anthropology of the senses, and a concern with process, not least the micro-processes and non-verbal dimensions of face-to-face interaction. I have also inevitably drawn on work in, for example, social history, social psychology, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (a specially rich and developing field), art history, material culture, and, not least, animal communication.

Any attempted synthesis must fail to do full justice to the subtlety of much of this work and inevitably omits many of the finer debates. Because I hope this book will be accessible to readers with a variety of backgrounds I have tried not to overload the text with detailed argument, references and up-to-the-minute reports (specialists, please forgive me for not citing all the important works); I have tried to add further references in brackets or notes to enable others to follow up – or dispute –

the interpretations here. Overall I would like to think that the book might open up new channels for those not aware of the riches of this transdisciplinary work, as it certainly has for me, even if the cost is a curtailed coverage of any one area.

Some short remarks on the book's format and presentation might be useful to the reader. First, it is in one way linear with an unfolding argument and series of descriptions. But in another way there is no right order: by the end the separate points have become inextricably mixed. We are now more conscious of non-linear communication, and of the possibilities of organising communication in multiple orders. It is the same here. Some will wish to start with the relatively abstract discussion of communication and theoretical perspectives in Chapter 1, others with Chapter 2's treatment of the basic resources that humans have for communicating. Others again may prefer the concluding chapters, or turn at once to the more detailed examples of modalities of communication in Part II, in a way the heart of the volume.

Second, the figures are integral to the book. They are not meant just to decorate it but to be part of the account. In practical terms, and as the social world now is, it would be hard to provide a properly multisensory volume. But the pictures can at least serve as some token that our communicating does not lie in words alone, nor just in visible written marks on a piece of paper, but is also realised in wider multi-dimensional processes – all part of the remarkable multiplex world of human communicating.

Finally, the book refers to examples from throughout the world. Scattered cases cannot of course prove a particular thesis; rather they are intended to illustrate the overall position taken up here and to open up our imaginative grasp of what can be involved. They are presented as examples of resources, processes or artefacts that *can* be used for communicating and in some cases have been so used; but it should not be assumed that they are always used in this way. Different people, groups, cultures or historical periods have differing conventions and occasions, and part of the multiplicity referred to in the title of this volume lies in the versatility of our manifold communicative processes.

Acknowledgements

A book on human interconnection should certainly have some acknowledgement to make to those others who have been embroiled in one way or another in the process of creating it. Not surprisingly I have many thanks that I wish to express here.

In a relatively formal sense – but no less sincere – let me thank first the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Open University for help with research expenses and for other support over many years and also, within it, the Pavis Centre for a generous grant towards the heavy cost of the illustrations. Among my favourite places are libraries, and I have happy memories of many. I have benefited especially from the marvellous collection in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and also, extensively, from the resources of the British Library both in central London and its great Inter-Library Loan service; though like others I still mourn the beauties of the old Round Reading Room I cannot fault the great service and wonderfully helpful smiling staff now in the ‘Humanities 2’ Reading Room at St Pancras. The Open University library has been an unfailing support for years and I am more grateful than I can properly express to my many colleagues and friends there, old and new. For the more recent stages, let me also acknowledge with real gratitude the friendliness and professionalism of those at Routledge, especially Christabel Kirkpatrick and Louisa Semlyen, and of Mike Hauser at M Rules, who between them so constructively smoothed the book’s final completion and production.

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I have very special thanks to Paul Smith and to John Hunt for their invaluable help with the illustrations: Paul for his support and expertise in searching out and advising on the illustrations both generally and severally, something I could never have managed on my own; and John for not only scanning them all in, advising on the detail, taking photographs, and producing the artwork but also, like Paul, for his creative suggestions, enthusiasm and staying serene when I was panicking. Let me thank them too not just for this recent help but also for the warmth and wonderful intellectual stimulation of their colleagueship over many years – I have learnt so much from each of them.

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Illustrations

The sources of the illustrations are given in their captions. Many are by now out of copyright but I wish to acknowledge permission to reproduce the figures listed below.

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In a few cases copyright holders could not be traced or did not respond despite our efforts; the publishers would be glad to hear from that have been omitted.

Finally, I also relish the creative cover by Nick Shah and his photographer Leo Chan, with its combination of abstract design and hint of eye, ear and moving hands; perhaps too the elusive photographed shadow of someone talking on the phone, multiform and subtle – like so much communicating.

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Part I

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