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BODY LANGUAGE
AND
SOCIAL ORDER
communication
as behavioral control



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*To Dr. O. Spurgeon English
"Spurg"—therapist, teacher, chief, and friend—
who would never be satisfied
with a doctrinal way
of looking at people.*

*BODY LANGUAGE
AND
SOCIAL ORDER*

*communication
as behavioral control*

preface

Since the time of the Greek philosophers, Western man has idealized the rational mind and attributed nonrational events to tricks played by the gods, demonical possession, original sin and, finally, instincts. There persists to this day the dichotomous view that language expresses thought and the body expresses emotion. No less an authority than Darwin (1872) described this viewpoint.

In the last thirty years or so another view of human behavior has developed. Efron (1941), Birdwhistell (1952), and since then many others have described body movement as a traditional code which maintains and regulates human relationships without reference to language and conscious mental processes. And the ethologists have described a great many behaviors that occur among all primates to bond them together and sustain their power structures. In this newer tradition, language and thought are given an uncustomary role; they are believed to comment on, make judgments about, and conceal or rationalize actions that are already going on.

Thus, at present, there are in the behavioral sciences two schools of thought about bodily behavior. In the psychological school, "nonverbal" communication is considered to be the expression of emotions, as it has al-

ways been in Western thought. From the communicational point of view (held primarily by anthropologists and ethologists) the behaviors of posture, touch, and movement are studied in relation to social processes like group cohesion and group regulation.

We will see in this book that these views are not incompatible.* The behaviors of human communication are both expressive *and* social or communicational.

I have belonged in my career to both of these approaches. In the 1950s I was a practicing psychotherapist and psychoanalyst and did research in the psychology of communication. Since 1957 I have done research in kinesics and language in relation to culture and social organization. One purpose of the book is to put these approaches together and produce a more holistic view of human communication.

In the last few years a broad interest in body language has developed outside the formal sciences of man. Unfortunately, this interest has taken a largely psychological slant, such that bodily behaviors are merely given psychodynamic meanings. Thus, we are led to believe that crossing the legs "means" that one fears castration or that a particular facial expression or touch "means" that one loves his mother or the like. Such simplistic views ignore twenty years of research, a systems revolution in modern thought, the social, economic and political contexts of human behavior and the cultural differences in American society.

Middle-class Americans seem to have a tendency toward this kind of oversimplification. We often ignore the determining role of cultural, social, economic and political processes in human affairs. We settle, rather, for inferential statements about drives, motivations, wishes or feelings. This kind of one-dimensional naïveté makes us vulnerable to political and economic machinations and leads us to be insufficiently responsive to ecological events that threaten survival.

In this book we shall, to be sure, attend to how kinesic behavior is related to personal and individual experience, but on the whole we will be painting on a larger canvas. We will examine facial expressions, posture, body movement and touch in relation to language and the larger contexts of group processes and the social order as a whole.

The psychologically oriented reader is forewarned that if he expects a glossary on the psychodynamic meanings of various movements and gestures or a "How-to-Do-It" book on seduction, salesmanship or gaining popularity he will be disappointed.

- * If the observer focuses on one member of a group and considers only that member's thought or purposes he will see his behavior as an expression. But when the observer looks at this behavior in terms of what it "does" in the larger group then a communicational view has been adopted.

acknowledgments

The approach used in this book derives from the structural linguists (Šapir, 1921; Pike, 1954), from the systems theorists (Bertalanffy, 1950, 1960) and from the behavioral structuralists and human communication theorists (Birdwhistell 1952; Bateson, 1955, 1956, 1970) and the Palo Alto group (1956).

My formal participation in this approach began with Dr. Ray Birdwhistell in Philadelphia about 1958. There it was sponsored by the Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute and the Temple University School of Medicine. We were especially aided by Dr. O. Spurgeon English of Temple and by Drs. William Phillips and Richard Schultze of the Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute. In 1966-67 the work was supported by the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Palo Alto, where the author was a Fellow. Since 1967 the Bronx State Hospital, the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and the Jewish Family Service of New York have enabled the work to continue. Dr. Israel Zwerling, head of the Department of Psychiatry at Einstein and Director of the Bronx State Hospital has been especially helpful in providing a context.

A number of colleagues have helped to shape these ideas. Birdwhistell and Bateson have been important colleagues since the beginning. At the Center at Palo Alto, Drs. Glen McBride and I. Charles Kaufman were especially helpful. In New York, Drs. Victor Gioscia, Andrew Ferber, Edgar Auerswald, Harley Shands, Adam Kendon, Joseph Schaeffer, Norman Ashcraft, and Clarence Robins have continuously provided ideas.

The work has also been sustained by a research staff including our secretaries, Barbara Catena and Bonnie LeCount; our technician, Ralph Williams; and our graduate students, Robert McMillan, Ronald Goodrich and Caroline Hancock. Photographs have been contributed by Roy Loe, Edward Paul, Jacques VanVlack, and others. I would especially like to thank Adam Kendon, who helped to conceive the book.

contents

preface xii

acknowledgments xiv

introduction 1

PART ONE

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF KINESICS

13

CHAPTER ONE

the kinesic reciprocals 15

CHAPTER TWO

the postural-kinesic frames of interaction 27

CHAPTER THREE

kinesic behaviors of discourse 40

PART TWO

THE REGULATORY NATURE OF KINESICS

57

A. TRANSACTIONAL ORDER 61

CHAPTER FOUR

cues and signals for ordering a transaction 61

B. BEHAVIORS THAT COMPLICATE ORDER 75

CHAPTER FIVE

kinesic behaviors that do not belong to the situation 75

CHAPTER SIX

variations in kinesic form and style 86

CHAPTER SEVEN

kinesic manipulations 97

C. BEHAVIORS THAT MAINTAIN ORDER 104

CHAPTER EIGHT

monitors 104

CHAPTER NINE

social order 122

PART THREE

COMMUNICATION IN INSTITUTIONAL
AND POLITICAL CONTROL

133

CHAPTER TEN

the control of mobility 135

CHAPTER ELEVEN

the control of ideation 146

CHAPTER TWELVE

control by scapegoating 159

PART FOUR

COMMUNICATION IN THE CREATION
OF DEVIANCY

169

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

binding 171

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

double-binding 184

metalogue 199

references 204

introduction

Primate Communication

TERRITORIALITY

Each mammalian species has an ecological niche in which the conditions are suitable for it to live. Within this niche, flocks, prides, troops, or kinship units cluster and live together. Each such group marks off a territory which it defends from the intrusion of other animals. The boundary of this territory tends to keep group members in as well as aliens out. The group remains in close communicational contact (within sight, hearing, or smelling distance) within its territory either permanently or for the mating season, depending on the species (Wynne-Edwards, 1962; Lorenz, 1966; McBride, 1964; Goodall, 1967).

In many species, pairs of adult animals define a subterritory within the ecological niche. Here they breed and rear their young. The males compete with each other for a prized piece of turf. Those who win the best territories get the females; those who do not win territory do not mate and may well fall to predators. Territory, thus, is necessary for the survival of the individual, the family, and the species.

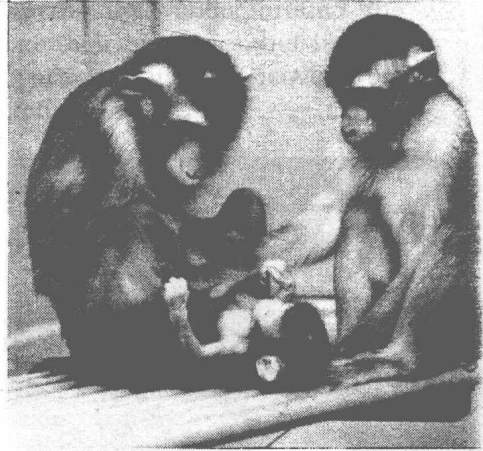
Man has always preferred to believe that he is not like other animals, but the fact is that he resembles other animals in a number of respects, not only in his behavior, but in his system of territories. Fixed territories are staked out by people at many levels of organization from homes to neighborhoods to nations. Within these divisions, small groups use bounded territories for work, play, and living. There are smaller bounded spaces which individuals claim as private turf. These territories are bounded with walls, fences, markers, and other visible features, and they are defended by laws, guards, dirty looks, and the like. As is the case with other animals, many of these boundaries serve not only to keep outsiders out, but also to keep members in, thereby maintaining social cohesion.

The concept of territoriality is fundamental to an understanding of social order. Primates and many other mammals spend their lifetimes living together within their territories. Gibbons live in very small groups like the nuclear families of modern Western societies (two parents and their offspring). But other nonhuman primates live in larger kin units of maybe a dozen to fifty or more animals. Man lived in "extended" kinship units until about three centuries ago. Then small nuclear units began to split off and live in separate domiciles in the industrializing urban centers of Europe. In modern America this nuclear family is the traditional unit, although many peoples still favor the larger kinship unit and they group in households of more than two adults when housing makes this possible.

BONDING BEHAVIOR

From time to time the members of a primate group come together in very close physical contact. They service each other and thus service the bond between them (McBride, 1967).

Here a macaque family is gathered in order to service the child.



Courtesy Dr. I. Charles Kaufman

A similar event occurs here in a human family.



Adult mammals also service each other. They mate, groom each other, and sometimes make physical contact in play.

Social cohesion (and the bonding behaviors that maintain it) is so important to primates that individuals may develop severe disorders on separation.



The infant macaque shown here exhibits the classical picture of anaclitic depression. This occurs when monkey infants lose their mothers (Kaufman and Rosenblum, 1966). Human infants develop similar behavior. If the human infant is fed by a substitute mother he may survive starvation, but he does not learn to sit up, walk, or talk. (Spitz, 1963).



An adult human may show a similar posture of depression when he loses a close kinsman or is forced to live alone. He may stop eating, withdraw from contact, or commit suicide in such circumstances.

Some primates (e.g., the chimpanzee) do wander around the territory separately, and humans do leave their territories, but in such cases the bond is serviced by using parting rituals on leaving the primary group and greeting rituals on returning.

Chimpanzees vocalize and use embracing, handshaking, and kissing when they meet.



Courtesy Baroness Jane Van Lawick-Goodall

Western man generally uses a salutation, a wave, a brief raising of the eyebrows, and a smile when he sees someone he knows. Then in close distance he makes a tactile exchange like handshaking, embracing, or kissing.



RECIPROCAL

Animals sometimes fight, although nonhuman animals rarely kill each other unless their territorial arrangements are severely disrupted. Most aggressive behavior in animals consists only of threats. By these threats they (1) maintain a territorial boundary and (2) hold their positions in the hierarchy of power and dominance.



Courtesy Dr. I. Charles Kaufman

Here a large male macaque displays dominance behavior to the smaller female who has approached his family. The display is made by confronting her with his body, moving or leaning toward her, jutting his head or his jaw, and looking her in the eyes. Humans display dominance in a similar manner.

If this display does not back down a macaque adversary, a more overt threat may be made; e.g., showing the teeth or making biting movements in the air. Humans might add a clenched fist and a verbal threat.

The macaque does not usually proceed to an actual fight in order to maintain social order. The *threat* is sufficient to defend turf or put down an upstart. This is also true in the case of behavior that increases affiliation or enhances the social bond. Suggestions of play, the early behavior of courting, or a look of empathy can stand for the entire sequence of action. The physical action of sexual consummation or physical servicing need not necessarily be completed.

This is also true in human behavior. A person may merely protrude his chest or jut his jaw to suggest what could happen if all did not go well, or he may merely carry out the early steps of courtship in order to invite a warm response or suggest a positive kind of relationship.

In short, animals (including man) can face each other and engage in exchanges or displays of aggressive or affiliative behavior that do not necessarily escalate to physical engagement. Elements of an action represent the entire action, whether or not it reaches consummation. Any escalating nonlanguage face-to-face interaction we call a "reciprocal."