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EMBODIED INFORMATION IN FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

From E. Goffman (1963) *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*, Free Press of Glencoe, Collier-Macmillan.

THE EXCHANGE OF WORDS and glances between individuals in each other's presence is a very common social arrangement, yet it is one whose distinctive communication properties are difficult to disentangle. Pedantic definitions seem to be required.

An individual may give information through the linguistic means formally established in society for this purpose, namely, speech or recognized speech substitutes such as writing and pictorial signs or gestures. One speaks here of an individual sending messages to someone who receives them. But the individual may also give information expressively, through the incidental symptomatic significance of events associated with him. In this case one might say that he emits, exudes, or gives off information to someone who gleans it.

[...]

The information that an individual provides, whether he sends it or exudes it, may be embodied or disembodied.¹ A frown, a spoken word, or a kick is a message that a sender conveys by means of his own *current* bodily activity, the transmission occurring only during the time that this body is present to sustain this activity. Disembodied messages, such as the ones we receive from letters and mailed gifts, or the ones hunters receive from the spoor of a now distant animal, require that the organism do something that traps and holds information long after the organism has stopped informing. This study will be concerned only with embodied information.

[...]

In everyday thinking about the receiving senses, it is felt that ordinarily they are used in a "naked" or "direct" way. This apparently implies a restriction on boosting devices — mechanical, chemical, or electrical — except as these raise the faulty sense of a particular individual to average unassisted strength: glasses, for example, but not binoculars; hearing aids but not microphones. Electric lighting would have to be allowed as merely raising a room to day-time standards.

When one speaks of experiencing someone else with one's naked senses, one usually implies the reception of embodied messages. This linkage of naked senses on one side and embodied transmission on the other provides one of the crucial communication conditions of face-to-face interaction. Under this condition any message that an individual sends is likely to be qualified and modified by much additional information that others glean from him simultaneously, often unbeknownst to him; further, a very large number of brief messages may be sent.

Now the individual can, of course, receive embodied messages by means of his naked senses without much chance of these communication roles being reversed, as when he spies on persons through a crack in the wall or overhears them through a thin partition.² Such asymmetrical arrangements may even be established as part of an occupational setting, as in the procedure by which psychoanalysts or priests observe their clients without being as easily observed in return. Ordinarily, however, in using the naked senses to receive embodied messages from others, the individual also makes himself available as a source of embodied information for them (although there is always likely to be some differential exploitation of these monitoring possibilities). Here, then, is a second crucial communication condition of face-to-face interaction: not only are the receiving and conveying of the naked and embodied kind, but each giver is himself a receiver, and each receiver is a giver.

The implications of this second feature are fundamental. First, sight begins to take on an added and special role. Each individual can *see* that he is being experienced in some way, and he will guide at least some of this conduct according to the perceived identity and initial response of his audience.³ Further, he can be seen to be seeing this, and can see that he has been seen seeing this. Ordinarily, then, to use our naked senses is to use them nakedly and to be made naked by their use. We are clearly seen as the agents of our acts, there being very little chance of disavowing having committed them; neither having given nor having received messages can be easily denied, at least among those immediately involved.⁴

The factor emerges, then, that was much considered by Adam Smith, Charles Cooley, and G. H. Mead; namely, the special mutuality of immediate social interaction. That is, when two persons are together, at least some of their world will be made up out of the fact (and consideration for the fact) that an adaptive line of action attempted by one will be either insightfully facilitated by the other or insightfully countered, or both, and that such a line of action must always be pursued in this intelligently helpful and hindering world. Individuals sympathetically take the attitude of others present, regardless of the end which they put the information thus acquired.⁵

[...]

Copresence renders persons uniquely accessible, available, and subject to one another. Public order, in its face-to-face aspects, has to do with the normative regulation of this accessibility. Perhaps the best explored face-to-face aspect of public order as traditionally defined is what is sometimes called "public safety." Its basic rules are few and clear, and, in Western society today, heavily reinforced by police authority.

[...]

For our present purposes, the aspect of public order having to do with personal safety will be passed by. I will be concerned with the fact that when persons are present

to one another they can function not merely as physical instruments but also as communicative ones. This possibility, no less than the physical one, is fateful for everyone concerned and in every society appears to come under strict normative regulation, giving rise to a kind of communication traffic order.

[...]

In American society, it appears that the individual is expected to exert a kind of discipline or tension in regard to his body, showing that he has his faculties in readiness for any face-to-face interaction that might come his way in the situation.

[...]

One of the most evident means by which the individual shows himself to be situationally present is through the disciplined management of personal appearance or "personal front," that is, the complex of clothing, make-up, hairdo, and other surface decorations he carries about on his person. In public places in Western society, the male of certain classes is expected to present himself in the situation neatly attired, shaven, his hair combed, hands and face clean; female adults have similar and further obligations. It should be noted that with these matters of personal appearance the obligation is not merely to possess the equipment but also to exert the kind of sustained control that will keep it properly arranged. (And yet, in spite of these rulings, we may expect to find, in such places as the New York subway during the evening rush hour, that some persons, between scenes, as it were, may let expression fall from their faces in a kind of temporary uncaring and righteous exhaustion, even while being clothed and made up to fit a much more disciplined stance.)

I have already suggested that a failure to present oneself to a gathering in situational harness is likely to be taken as a sign of some kind of disregard for the setting and its participants.

[...]

An interesting expression of the kind of interaction tonus that lies behind the proper management of personal appearance is found in the constant care exerted by men in our society to see that their trousers are buttoned and that an erection bulge is not showing.⁶ Before entering a social situation, they often run through a quick visual inspection of the relevant parts of their personal front, and once in the situation they may take the extra precaution of employing a protective cover, by either crossing the legs or covering the crotch with a newspaper or book, especially if self-control is to be relaxed through comfortable sitting. A parallel to this concern is found in the care that women take to see that their legs are not apart, exposing their upper thighs and underclothing. The universality in our society of this kind of limb discipline can be deeply appreciated on a chronic female ward where, for whatever reason, women indulge in zestful scratching of their private parts and in sitting with legs quite spread, causing the student to become conscious of the vast amount of limb discipline that is ordinarily taken for granted. A similar reminder of one's expectations concerning limb discipline can be obtained from the limb movements required of elderly obese women in getting out of the front seat of a car. Just as a Balinese would seem ever to be concerned about the direction and height of his seat, so the individual in our society, while "in situation," is constantly oriented to keeping "physical" signs of sexual capacities concealed. And it is suggested here that these parts of the body when

exposed are not a symbol of sexuality merely, but of a laxity of control over the self – evidence of an insufficient harnessing of the self for the gathering.

[...]

One of the most delicate components of personal appearance seems to be the composition of the face. A very evident means by which the individual shows himself to be situationally present is by appropriately controlling through facial muscles the shape and expression of the various parts of this instrument. Although this control may not be conscious to any extent, it is nonetheless exerted. We have party faces, funeral faces, and various kinds of institutional faces.

[...]

An interesting fact about proper composition of the face is that the ease of maintaining it in our society would seem to decline with age, so that, especially in the social class groupings whose women long retain an accent on sexual attractiveness, there comes to be an increasingly long period of time after awakening that is required to get the face into shape, during which the individual in her own eyes is not "presentable." A point in age is also reached when, given these youthful standards of what a face in play should look like, there will be viewing angles from which an otherwise properly composed face looks to have insufficient tonus.

The disciplined ordering of personal front is one way, then, in which the individual is obliged to express his aliveness to those about him.

Notes

- 1 Compare the usage by T. S. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Hoeber-Harper, 1961), p. 116 ff.
- 2 An asymmetrical communication relation of this kind, Polonius notwithstanding, is of course more practical when boosting devices, such as concealed microphones, are employed. In Shetland Isle pocket telescopes were commonly used for the purpose of observing one's neighbors without being observed in the act of observing. In this way it was possible to check constantly what phase of the annual cycle of work one's neighbors were engaged in, and who was visiting whom. This use of the telescope was apparently related to the physical distance between crofts, the absence of trees and other blocks to long-distance perception, and the strong maritime tradition of the Islands. It may be added that every community and even work place would seem to have some special communication arrangements of its own.
- 3 In the asymmetrical case, where a person is being spied upon by direct or indirect means, he may greatly modify his conduct if he suspects he is being observed, even though he does not know the identity of the particular audience that might be observing him. This is one of the possibilities celebrated in Orwell's *1984*, and its possibility is one of the force operative is socially controlling persons who are alone.
- 4 When two-way television is added to telephones, the unique contingencies of direct interaction will finally be available for those who are widely separated. In any case these mediated 'point-to-point' forms of communication can be characterized by the degree to which they restrict or attenuate the communicative possibilities discussed here.

- 5 As R. E. Park suggested in "Human Nature and Collective Behavior," *American Journal of Sociology*, 32 (1927), 738:

In human society every act of every individual tends to become a gesture, since what one does is always an indication of what one intends to do. The consequence is that the individual in society lives a more or less public existence, in which all his acts are anticipated, checked, inhibited, or modified by the gestures and the intentions of his fellows. It is in this social conflict, in which every individual lives more or less in this mind of every other individual, that human nature and the individual may acquire their most characteristic and human traits.

- 6 The difficulty of engaging in this kind of protective concealment is one of the contingencies apparently faced by men with leg paralysis. See E. Henrich and L. Kriegel (eds) *Experiments in Survival* (New York: Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, 1961), p. 192.

Pierre Bourdieu

BELIEF AND THE BODY

From P. Bourdieu (1984) 'Belief and the body', in *The Logic of Practice*, Oxford: Blackwell.

PRACTICAL SENSE IS A QUASI-BODILY involvement in the world which presupposes no representation either of the body or of the world, still less of their relationship. It is an immanence in the world through which the world imposes its imminence, things to be done or said, which directly govern speech and action. It orients 'choices' which, though not deliberate, are no less systematic, and which, without being ordered and organized in relation to an end, are nonetheless charged with a kind of retrospective finality. A particularly clear example of practical sense as a proleptic adjustment to the demands of a field is what is called, in the language of sport, a 'feel for the game'. This phrase (like 'investment sense', the art of 'anticipating' events, etc.) gives a fairly accurate idea of the almost miraculous encounter between the *habitus* and a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history, which makes possible the near-perfect anticipation of the future inscribed in all the concrete configurations on the pitch or board.

[...]

In a game, the field (the pitch or board on which it is played, the rules, the outcome at stake, etc.) is clearly seen for what it is, an arbitrary social construct, an artefact whose arbitrariness and artificiality are underlined by everything that defines its autonomy — explicit and specific rules, strictly delimited and extra-ordinary time and space. Entry into the game takes the form of a quasi-contract, which is sometimes made explicit (the Olympic oath, appeals to 'fair play', and, above all, the presence of a referee or umpire) or recalled to those who get so 'carried away by the game' that they forget it is 'only a game'. By contrast, in the social fields, which are the products of a long, slow process of autonomization, and are therefore, so to speak, games 'in themselves' and not 'for themselves', one does not embark on the game by a conscious act, one is born into the game, with the game; and the relation of investment, *illusio*, investment, is made more total and unconditional by the fact that it is unaware of what it is. As Claudel put it, 'connaître, c'est naître avec', to know is to be born with, and the long dialectical process, often described as 'vocation', through which the various fields provide themselves with agents equipped with the *habitus* needed to make them work, is to the learning of a game very much as