

THE GRIP OF CULTURE: EDWARD T. HALL

Edward T. Hall is an anthropologist and one of the founders of intercultural communication study. His works have played a key role in describing how people's view of the world and behavior are largely determined by a complex grid of unconscious cultural patterns. In *The Silent Language* (1959) Hall outlined a broad theory of culture and described how its rules control people's lives. In *The Hidden Dimension* (1966) he introduced proxemics, the study of our culturally determined perception and use of space. In *Beyond Culture* (1976) he progressed further towards an integral vision of culture.

THE SILENT LANGUAGE

People communicate through a whole range of behavior that is unexamined, taken for granted. This process takes place outside conscious awareness and in juxtaposition to words. What people do is frequently more important than what they say. Nonetheless, people of European heritage live in a "word world" and tend not to perceive the relevance of communication through the language of behavior. Even though language molds thinking, other cultural systems have a pervasive effect on how the world is perceived, how the self is experienced, and how life itself is organized.

Culture may be defined as "the way of life of a people, the sum of their learned behavior patterns, attitudes and material things." Culture controls behavior in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual. Hall attempts to bring those patterns to awareness. He develops a method for the analysis of culture, through defining the basic units of culture, its building blocks or "isolates," and then tying these isolates into a biological base so they can be compared among cultures, moving up to build a unified theory of culture. *The Silent Language* outlines a theory of culture and a theory of how culture came into being. Its key message is that we must learn to understand the out-of-awareness aspects of communication, our cultural unconscious. The book's ultimate purpose is to "reveal the broad extent to which culture controls our lives." Culture hides more than it reveals and it hides most effectively from its own participants. The real challenge is not to understand foreign cultures but to understand one's own, to make what we take for granted stand out in perspective. This can be achieved mainly through exposing oneself to foreign ways, through the shock of contrast and difference.

Culture is not one thing, but many. Hall identifies ten primary kinds of human activity he labels Primary Message Systems. Each is rooted in biology, can be examined by itself, and gears into the overall network of culture: 1) Interaction, 2) Association, 3) Subsistence, 4) Bisexuality (cultural differentiation between men and women; concepts of masculinity and femininity tend to be regarded as "human nature," but vary widely from one culture to the next), 5) Territoriality, 6) Temporality, 7) Learning and Acquisition (culture is shared behavior; most culture is acquired and therefore cannot be taught; language is first acquired, then taught; learning, a key adaptive mechanism, came into its own when it could be extended in time and space by means of language; people reared in different cultures acquire culture in a culturally specific way, they learn how to learn differently; in the process of learning they acquire a set of trait conditions

and assumptions in which learning is imbedded), 8) Play, 9) Defense, and 10) Exploitation (use of materials, development of physical extensions to the body to meet environmental conditions). Culture is a complex series of interrelated activities, with roots buried in the past, in infra-culture, behavior that preceded culture but later became elaborated by humans into culture.

According to Hall's theory, culture operates on three levels: formal, informal, and technical. While one of these modes of behavior dominates, all three are present in any given situation. Formal activities are taught by precept and admonition, through a process charged with emotion: the learner tries, makes a mistake, and is corrected. The main agent of informal learning is a model used for imitation. Whole clusters are learned at a time, usually without awareness that they are being learned at all or that there are patterns or rules governing them. Technical learning is usually transmitted in explicit form from a teacher to a student. Some societies are predominantly formal in their behavior, and invest tradition with an enormous weight. Americans have emphasized the informal at the expense of the formal. The informal is made up of activities and mannerisms that were once learned, but that are done automatically. Technical behavior is fully conscious behavior. Science is largely technical. When violations of a formal mode occur, they are accompanied by a tide of emotion. Formal systems are characterized by a great tenacity. The formal tends to change slowly, almost imperceptibly. The formal, informal and technical exist in a relationship of continuous change. Regarding change, different cultures are analogous to different species in the sense that some of them, being more adaptive than others, have a greater capacity for survival. Taken at any given point, culture seems to be made up of formal behavior patterns that constitute a core around which there are certain informal adaptations, and which is supported by a series of technical props. Change is a complex circular process. It proceeds from formal to informal to technical to new formal. Small informal adaptations are continually being made in daily life. These adaptations, when successful, eventually become technicalized as improvements, and these accumulate imperceptibly until they are suddenly acclaimed as "break-throughs." All change originates in the out-of-awareness nature of the informal.

Culture is communication and communication is culture. Since most of what is known about communication has been learned from the study of language, Hall projects some principles of language (language as it is spoken, not written, writing being a symbolization of a symbolization) into other less elaborated and specialized communication systems. He devises a common terminology for all forms of communication, including language. Every message can be broken down into three parts: sets, what you perceive first (for example, words); isolates, the components that make up the sets (sounds); and patterns, the way in which sets are strung together in order to give them meaning (grammar, syntax).

A set is a group of two or more constituent components that is perceived as separate from other events. They are the first things to be observed, their number is unlimited, and the interpretation of their significance depends upon knowledge of the patterns in which they are used. There are formal, informal and technical sets. Formal sets, for example, are things that people take for granted and which seem natural: words, buildings, governments, families, the months of the year, etc. A large part of the vocabulary of a culture is devoted to sets. Sets are valued, assigned to categories (which reveal patterns), and treated differently (formally, informally, and technically) in

different cultures. By themselves, sets are neutral. In patterns, they take on complex meanings.

The second element, the isolate, proves to be a tricky one. Hall encounters some difficulties identifying precisely the constituents of cultural sets. He alludes to the isolate as “an illusive abstraction, almost a phantom” and speaks of “cultural indeterminacy”: “when working with cultural data, one can only be precise on one analytical level at a time and then only for a moment.” (Might this be a result of the projection of rules that apply specifically to language into less complex communication systems?). The principle of indeterminacy can be extended to the whole theory of culture: the more precise the observer is on one level, the less precise he/she will be on any other.

Patterns are those implicit rules by means of which sets are arranged so that they take on meaning. They determine experience, channelling people’s senses and thoughts. They are cultural, shared by a group. There is no such thing as “experience” in the abstract, as a mode separate and distinct from culture. This leads to a principle of relativity in culture: there is no experience independent of culture against which culture can be measured. The idea that people are bound by hidden cultural rules and not masters of their fate usually encounters resistance. These rules are so constant that they are not recognized as rules at all. Patterns are ruled by laws of order, selection, and congruence. There are formal, informal, and technical patterns. In the case of informal patterns, when a rule is made explicit, “put into words,” it is recognized immediately by others in the same culture since it has already been acquired. Informal patterns are learned by selecting a model and copying her/him; formal patterns are learned by precept and admonition; technical ones are spelled out.

The handling of time is one of the key elements of culture. Americans tend to think of time as something fixed in nature. Their view of time is characterized by discreteness, linearity, necessity for scheduling, and orientation toward the future. Formal sets of time include days, hours, minutes, weeks, months, seasons, years, etc. Formal isolates include ordering (e.g., days of the week), cyclicity, valuation (time should not be wasted), tangibility (time as commodity), duration, and depth. The vocabulary of informal time (minutes, seconds, years) is often identical with that of technical and formal time. The context usually tells the hearer what level of discourse is being used. Informal isolates include urgency (related to the impression of time passing rapidly or slowly), monochronism (doing one thing at a time—American culture is characteristically monochronic), activity (distinction between active and dormant phases, whether one is busy or not; some cultures are ageric, agency-oriented, and others non-ageric), and variety. “Our demand for variety and for something new would seem to exceed that of almost any other culture in the world today. It is necessary to an economy like ours.” In these informal isolates, one finds the building blocks that make the values and driving forces of a culture vis-à-vis time. The handling of time is revealing of how unconscious implicit patterns work in a culture, and how tenaciously people hold on to them. They exist like the air around us.

Space is organized differently in each culture. In Latin America, for example, the interaction distance is much less than in the US. People cannot talk comfortably with each other unless they are very close to the distance that evokes either sexual or hostile feelings in North America. Every living thing has a physical boundary that separates it

from its external environment. There is a second boundary outside this physical one: the organism's territory. The act of laying claim to and defending a territory is termed territoriality, which is highly elaborated in humans, and greatly differentiated from culture to culture.

Culture is not only imposed upon humanity, it *is* humanity in a greatly expanded sense. Culture is the link between human beings and the means they have of interacting with others. By broadening their understanding of the forces that make up and control their lives, people could learn where they are and who they are. It should rekindle their interest in life, free them from the groove of habit, and prevent them from being pushed around by the more voracious, predatory, and opportunistic of their fellow humans. Bringing to awareness what has been taken for granted should contribute to increased self-knowledge and decreased alienation.

THE HIDDEN DIMENSION

The subject of this book is space as a system of communication. It deals with people's perception and use of personal, social, architectural, and urban spaces. "Proxemics" is the term coined by Hall for the interrelated observations and theories of the use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture. As in *The Silent Language*, the main thesis of this work borrows from Benjamin Lee Whorf's idea of language (language conceived not just as a medium of expressing thought, but as a major element in the formation of thought) and applies it to all human behavior, to all culture. Proxemic research confirms, according to Hall, that people from different cultures inhabit different sensory worlds, so that experience as it is perceived through one set of culturally patterned sensory screens is quite different from experience perceived through another.

Different cultural systems are rooted in biology and physiology. Humans are distinguished from other animals by virtue of what Hall terms "extensions" of their organism. Extensions improve and specialize certain functions. The computer is an extension of certain functions of the brain, the telephone extends the voice, the wheel extends the legs and feet, language extends experience in time and space, and writing extends language. These extensions have been developed to such a degree that we are apt to forget that humanness is rooted in animal nature. Extensions have taken over, and are rapidly replacing nature. The relationship between humans and the cultural dimension, of which proxemics is only a part, is one in which both humans and their environment participate in molding each other. Humans are in a position of creating the worlds in which they live, which determine what kind of an organism they will be. This is a disturbing thought in view of how little is known about human nature.

Comparative studies of animals help to show how people's space requirements are influenced by their environment. Territoriality is behavior by which an organism lays claim to an area and defends it against members of its own species. Among other functions, it ensures the propagation of the species by regulating density. In addition to territory that is identified with a particular plot of ground, each animal is surrounded by a series of bubbles or irregularly shaped balloons. Some mechanisms (personal and social distances) are observed during interactions of members of the same species, others when individuals of different species meet (flight, critical, and attack distances). Personal distance is the normal spacing that non-contact animals maintain with their

fellows. Social distance is a psychological distance that contains a group, maintaining a bond. Hall points to the need to reconsider Malthus' doctrine that relates population to food supply. In the light of evidence from the study of crabs, stickleback fish, deer, and muskrats, he supports the thesis that increase and decrease in animal populations are controlled by physiological mechanisms that respond to density. As the number of animals on a given area increases, stress builds up until it triggers an endocrine reaction that lowers the fertility rate, increases susceptibility to disease, and collapses the population. Predators would not play a decisive role in controlling population, but develop a subtle symbiosis with their prey, providing a constant environmental pressure that contributes to improve the species.

Hall describes experiments carried out on rats (by ethologist John Calhoun) that document the role of stress from crowding as a factor in population control. Rats under extreme conditions of population density develop what is termed a behavioral "sink": severe disruptions of courting, sex behavior, reproduction, nest building, care of the young, territoriality, and social organization, as well as physiological effects. The dramatic results of crowding range from aggression through various forms of abnormal behavior to mass die-off. The stress generated by crowding has been an efficient device in the service of evolution because it employs the forces of intraspecies, rather than interspecies, competition. In the case of humans, the shift by our ancestors from reliance on smell to reliance on vision as a result of environmental pressures (shift from ground-dwelling to arboreal life) endowed them with a greater capacity to withstand crowding. (This shift redefined the human situation. The human ability to plan has been made possible because the eye takes in a larger sweep; it codes more complex data and thus encourages abstract thinking.)

Hall goes on to examine the nature of the human receptor systems, and how the information received from them is modified by culture. People's relationship to their environment is a function of their sensory apparatus and how this apparatus is conditioned to respond. There are visual, auditory, olfactory, kinesthetic, tactile and thermal perceptions of space. Regarding thermal perceptions, Hall describes the high capacity of the skin to emit and detect radiant heat and thus communicate emotional states and chemically influence other people's emotions, temperature having a great deal to do with how we experience crowding. According to Hall, we live an increasingly insulated, automated, sensory-deprived life in manufactured environments; urban spaces (of North America in the '60s) "provide little excitement or visual variation and virtually no opportunity to build a repertoire of visual experiences. It would appear that many people are kinesthetically deprived and even cramped." Perception of space is closely related with the sense of self. People can be considered as having visual, kinesthetic, tactile, and thermal aspects of their selves, which may be either inhibited or encouraged to develop by their environment.

Vision, the last of the senses to evolve, is by far the most complex. Vision is synthesis. It is not passive but active, a transaction between a person and her/his environment. A person learns while he sees and what he learns influences what he sees. There is a visual field (retinal image) and a visual world (what is perceived). Sensory data from other sources, such as body (kinesthetic) feedback, are used to correct the visual field. Vision as a synthetic process means there is no stable, uniform "reality" that is recorded on a passive visual receptor system. Perceptual worlds vary between people and between

cultures. This influences their manner of orienting themselves in space, and how they get around.

Art can be a rich source of data on human perception. The art of a culture reveals a great deal about the perceptual world of that culture. The artist provides the reader, listener or viewer with properly selected cues that are not only congruent with the events depicted but consistent with the unspoken language and culture of the audience. Artists help order the cultural universe. By studying the art of the past it is possible to learn something from our own responses about the nature and organization of our visual systems and expectations, as well as develop some notion of what the perceptual world of early people may have been like. Among several examples, Hall discusses the early Egyptian experience of space. Their preoccupation was more with the correct orientation and alignment of religious and ceremonial structures to the cosmos than with enclosed space per se. The Western idea of a religious edifice is that it communicates spatially. Chapels are small and intimate while cathedrals are awe-inspiring and remind one of the cosmos by virtue of the space they enclose. Hall discusses several moments in the evolution of Western visual arts since the Renaissance in terms of the distinction between the visual world and the visual field, between what one knows to be present and what one sees.

Literature can also be a key to perception. Hall promotes the use of literary texts as data (rather than simply as descriptions) on how space has been experienced and perceived in different cultural contexts.

There are three proxemic levels: infracultural (rooted in the past, applied to behavior on lower organizational levels that underlie culture, such as territoriality, spacing, and population control), precultural (related to the senses, the physiological base shared by all human beings, to which culture gives structure and meaning), and microcultural (proxemic differences between cultures). Proxemics as a manifestation of microculture has three aspects: fixed-feature, semifixed-feature, and informal.

Fixed-feature spaces are one of the basic ways of organizing the activities of individuals and groups. They include material manifestations as well as hidden, internalized designs that govern behavior. Fixed-feature patterns include buildings, the layout of towns and cities, and the internal spatial organization of houses. Americans have become dependent on the uniform grid pattern of their cities. Western systems stress the lines, which they name. "In Japan, the intersections but not the streets are named. Houses instead of being related in space are related in time and numbered in the order in which they are built. The Japanese pattern emphasizes hierarchies that grow around centers." People carry around internalizations of fixed-feature space, which is the mold into which a great deal of behavior is cast. In discussing semifixed-feature space, Hall distinguishes between sociofugal spaces (which tend to keep people apart, such as railway waiting rooms) and sociopetal spaces, which tend to bring people together (tables at a sidewalk café). The structuring of semifixed-features can have a profound effect on behavior. Distinctions between fixed-feature space and semifixed-feature space, and between sociofugal and sociopetal spaces, vary from culture to culture.

Informal space refers to personal and social distance among humans. Hall distinguishes four distances kept by people in social situations, each with a close and a far phase: intimate, personal, social, and public. These communicate not only internalized

proxemic patterns, but also how people feel toward each other. People sense distance as other animals do. They are surrounded by a series of expanding and contracting fields. Their perception of space is not passive but dynamic, related to action—what can be done in a given space. This proxemic behavior occurs out of awareness, is culturally conditioned and entirely arbitrary. Hall provides a classification of distances (which applies to an American, middle-class, healthy adult population of “mainly natives of the northeastern seaboard” in the ’60s): a) Intimate distance –close phase (CP): the distance of love-making and wrestling, comforting and protecting –far phase (FP): 6 to 18 inches; b) Personal distance: the distance consistently separating the members of a non-contact species, a small sphere or bubble that the organism maintains between itself and others –CP: 1 _ to 2 _ feet –FP: 2 _ to 4 feet; c) Social distance: the distance of impersonal business, the phases communicating degrees of involvement and formality –CP: 4 to 7 feet –FP: 7 to 12 feet; d) Public distance –CP: 12 to 25 feet –FP: 25 feet or more.

Hall moves on to compare the proxemic patterns for people of different cultures. Such comparative analysis is intended to serve a double purpose: first, to shed light on our own out-of-awareness patterns and, by means of this, to contribute to improved design of living and working structures and cities; and second, to contribute to intercultural understanding. Proxemic patterns play a role in humans comparable to displayed behavior in lower life forms: they simultaneously consolidate the group and isolate it from others by reinforcing intragroup identity and making intergroup communication more difficult.

In the US, space is used to classify people and activities (e.g. corner office), whereas in England, it is the social system that determines who you are. Proximity is important in America; in England it means nothing. In regard to the need of walls as a screen to the ego, Americans would be placed somewhere between the Germans and the English. “When an American wants to be alone he goes into a room and shuts the door—he depends on architectural features for screening... The English ... have in effect internalised a set of barriers, which they erect and which others are supposed to recognize.” The French, like other Mediterranean cultures, pack together more closely than northern Europeans, the English and Americans. Crowded living means higher sensory involvement. “The French are more involved with each other. The layout of their offices, homes, towns, cities, and countryside is such as to keep them involved.” For the French, “the city is something from which to derive satisfaction.” Hall emphasizes the different size of cars. American cars prevent the overlapping of private spheres inside the car and isolate the traveller from the kinesthetic experiencing of the road. There are two major European systems for patterning space. The “radiating star,” which occurs in France and Spain, is sociopetal. The “grid,” originating in the Middle East, adopted by the Romans and carried to England at the time of Caesar, is sociofugal. The radiating star connects all points and systems. This pattern of flow from and into a series of interlocking centers touches all facets of French life.

In Japanese culture, the concept of a center that can be approached from any direction is an important theme. Furniture tends to be located in the center of a room. American rooms can seem bare to them because the centers are bare. To Americans the walls of a house are fixed; in Japan they are semi-fixed. A house and the zone immediately surrounding it are considered as one structure. Westerners think of space as the distance between objects, as “empty.” The Japanese are trained to give meaning to spaces, to

perceive the shape and arrangement of spaces, for which they have the word *ma*. In their perception of space, the Japanese integrate vision with other senses. A Japanese garden involves a visual and kinesthetic experience of space. Hall describes the concept of privacy in the Arab world as opposed to American culture. Pushing and shoving in public places is characteristic of Middle Eastern culture. They have no concept of a private zone outside the body. The ego is hidden inside the body. It is possible that population and environmental pressures (the desert) have resulted in a cultural adaptation to high density. Olfaction plays an important role in interaction. Arab upper middle-middle class homes, however, are enormous by Western standards. They avoid partitions because Arabs do not like to be alone. They do not mind being crowded by people, but have a high sensitivity to architectural crowding. Arabs look each other in the eye when talking with an intensity that makes most Americans uncomfortable.

The implosion of the world population into cities is creating a series of lethal behavioral sinks. The growth of both the number of cars and population creates a chaotic situation without self-correcting features. In America, it is necessary to consider the cultural differences between minority groups and the dominant culture, which are basic and have to do with such core values as the use and structuring of space, time, and materials. In the major cities of the US, people of very different cultures are in contact with each other in dangerously high concentrations. There is no melting pot in American cities; the major ethnic groups maintain distinct identities for several generations. Hall suggests the introduction of “design features that will counteract the ill effects of the sink but not destroy the (ethnic) enclave in the process.” This means designing spaces that will maintain a healthy density, a healthy interaction rate, and a continuing sense of ethnic identification. Psychologists, anthropologists, and ethologists should be part of city planning departments. Scale is a key factor in planning towns, neighborhoods, and housing developments. Crowding is linked with physical and social pathologies, illness and crime. The degree to which peoples are sensorially involved with each other and how they use time determine not only at what point they are crowded but the methods for relieving crowding as well.

Time and the way it is handled have much to do with the structuring of space. Monochronic time is characteristic of low-involvement people, who compartmentalize time; polychronic people, who are more involved, tend to have several operations going at the same time. Density requirements are different. The Italian piazza and the Spanish plaza serve both involvement and polychronic functions, whereas the American Main Street reflects both a different structuring of time and a lesser degree of involvement. City planners have built lawlessness into urban ethnic enclaves by letting them turn into sinks. They should consider reinforcing the human need to belong to a social group akin to the old neighbourhood where one is known, has a place, and people have a sense of responsibility to each other. Apart from the enclaves, everything in American cities is sociofugal, driving people apart and alienating them from each other. Cars play a significant role in this. They consume space in which people could meet. They create sensory deprivation, insulating people from their environment and from human contact. City planning of the future should find methods for computing and measuring human scale and involvement ratios; make constructive use of the ethnic enclave, reinforcing positive aspects of each culture that provide identity and strength; conserve large outdoor spaces; and preserve useful, satisfying old buildings and neighborhoods.

The Hidden Dimension emphasizes that virtually everything that people are and do is associated with the experience of space. The sense of space is molded and patterned by culture. According to Hall, Americans suffer from an “a-cultural bias”. They direct their attention more toward content (function) than toward structure (form), and the importance of culture is minimized; “...we have consistently failed to recognize the reality of different cultures within our national boundaries.” In the '30s and '40s people feared economic cycles; today ('60s) we should be alarmed by population cycles. Western people have developed extensions of themselves and then proceeded to screen their senses, ignoring their animal nature, so that they could get more people into smaller places. Hall compares the situation with the overcrowding of cities in the Middle Ages, which was punctuated by disastrous plagues. Animal studies show the operation of an endocrine control system that regulates the population. Animals stressed from overcrowding suffer from exactly the same diseases as humans: circulatory and heart diseases. Animal studies show that crowding is neither good nor bad per se, but rather that overstimulation and disruptions of social relationships as a consequence of overlapping personal distances lead to population collapse. In order to solve urban problems we must begin by questioning our basic assumptions concerning the relationship between people and their environment. They should be considered as parts of an interrelated system.

The central point of this book is that people cannot divest themselves from their own culture. Even if small fragments of culture are brought to awareness, they cannot be changed because they are very personally experienced and because people cannot act or interact at all in any meaningful way except through the medium of culture. People and their extensions constitute an interrelated system. Their relationship is a continuation and a specialized form of the relationship of organisms in general to their environment. The ethnic crisis, the urban crisis, and the education crisis are interrelated. They are facets of a larger crisis, a natural growth of humans having developed a new dimension—the cultural dimension—most of which is hidden from view.

BEYOND CULTURE

There are two main crises in the world today. The most visible is the population/environment crisis. There is also the crisis of humankind's relationship to its extensions, institutions, ideas, as well as the relationships between individuals and groups. There are no technical solutions for these crises. Solutions are related to power. The future depends on the ability to transcend the limits of individual cultures. To do so, people must first recognize and accept the hidden dimensions of unconscious culture. Unless human beings can learn to pull together and regulate consumption and production patterns, they are headed for disaster. In order to cooperate, they must know each other's ways of thinking. People are unnecessarily hard on themselves; they waste their talents. The human species has not begun to tap its potential. Pessimism is reinforced by folklore, religion, philosophies, and institutions. Once people began evolving their extensions, they got caught in what Hall terms extension transference; they became alienated and incapable of controlling the monsters they created. Humans have advanced at the expense of that part of themselves that has been extended, and as a consequence have ended up repressing human nature in many forms, failing to develop important aspects of their capabilities. This process results in emptiness, frustration, and displaced anger. Part of the problem lies in the tension between creativity and diversity

and the specific limiting needs of institutions, which have evolved as specialized solutions to specific problems. The only way to escape the hidden constraints of covert culture is cultural literacy, to involve oneself consciously with the parts of life one takes for granted. Beneath the clearly perceived, explicit culture, lies a whole other world, which, when understood, will change our view of human nature.

Western people have created chaos by denying that part of themselves that integrates while enshrining the parts that fragment experience. There are many different legitimate ways of thinking. The West values, above all others, the linear system called “logic,” inherited from the Greeks, and considered synonymous with the truth. People in the West are alienated from themselves and from nature. They labor under a number of delusions, one of which is that life makes sense—that the world is, despite massive evidence to the contrary, sane. They live fragmented, compartmentalized lives in which contradictions are sealed off from each other. People have been taught to think linearly rather than comprehensively and they do it not through conscious design but because of the way in which deep cultural undercurrents structure life in subtle but highly consistent ways. Paradoxically, studying the models designed to explain nature tells more about their creators than about the part of nature being studied. In the West, people are more concerned with the content or meaning of the model than with how it is organized, or its performance, and its intended purpose. All models are incomplete. They are abstractions and therefore leave things out. What is left out is more important than what is included because it is what gives structure and form to the system.

Anthropologists agree on three aspects of culture: it is not innate, but learned; its various facets are interrelated; it is shared and it defines the boundaries of different groups. Culture is people’s medium. There is no aspect of life that it is not touched and altered by culture. However, it is the most obvious and taken-for-granted and therefore the least studied aspects of culture that influence behavior in the deepest and most subtle ways. An example of this is “how white Americans are prisoners of their own time and space systems.” American time is monochromic: it emphasizes schedules, segmentations, and promptness. Time determines everything people do, including how they relate to each other. Monochronic time is learned, arbitrary, and imposed. It is so integrated into culture that it is treated as the only natural and “logical” way of organizing life. Yet it is not natural or inherent to people’s rhythms and creative drives. Organizations, particularly business and government bureaucracies, subordinate people to the organization mainly by the way they handle time-space systems.

Once a species begins to use the environment as a tool, it sets into motion a series of new and often unforeseen environmental transactions that require further adjustments. No organism can survive without altering its environment, if merely to reorganize the chemicals in its immediate vicinity. This is done through two complimentary processes, which act as adaptive mechanisms and controls: externalizing and internalizing. Extensions allow humans to solve problems, to evolve and adapt at great speed without changing the structure of the body. They make possible an efficient sharing of human talents. Extensional systems, flexible at first, frequently become rigid and difficult to change. Hall terms “extension transference” the intellectual maneuver by which an extension is confused with or takes the place of the process extended. Worshipping idols, common to all cultures, is an early example of this factor. Extension transference means alienation from self and heritage. It occurs in social sciences (“not data, but methodology is thought of as the real science”), technology, education (Hall compares

the situation of learning in US schools to that of sex in Freud's 19th-century Vienna: "A natural, powerful, pleasurable drive that binds people to each other is not only feared but hated..."), etc. Extensions enhance a particular function of the organism. An extended function reveals something of the process from which it springs: there is a discovery factor as well as an emergent property. The diversity of extensions, of culture, reveals the diversity of human talents; art and science are models of certain functions of the human mind. Extensions are also reductionist in their capabilities: they are not capable of reproducing all the functions of the organ or activity that is extended. Extension systems tend to be treated as distinct and separate from their user and to take on an identity of their own, as illustrated by religions, philosophies, and literature. Extensions have a life of their own and tend to take over. They fragment life and dissociate people from their acts. Their rapid evolution carries the risk of destroying the biotope. There is a need to understand how different extensions work and the influence they exert upon us. Human nature has changed little in the last 2 million years. The extension transference syndrome leads to overlooking or repressing people's basic humanness.

Unlike animals, many of whose responses are innate, much of people's communicative behavior evolved independently of their physiology, and like language, it is cultural. What is characteristic of humans and gives them their identity is culture, the total communication framework: words, actions, postures, gestures, tones of voice, facial expressions, the way one handles time, space, and materials, the way one works, plays, makes love, and defends oneself. Everything people do is modified by learning and therefore malleable. Hidden controls are experienced as innate because they are ubiquitous and habitual. Cultures are consistent. The part of the human nervous system that deals with social behavior is organized according to a principle of negative feedback. One is only aware of the existence of a system of controls when things do not follow the hidden program. This is most frequent in intercultural exchanges. "It's only in strange territory that one needs a true externalised, tangible chart." The rules governing one's own cultural system can be discovered only in a specific context or real-life situation. Today, extensions have made the world shrink and people are constantly interacting with members of different cultures. It is necessary to transcend one's own culture by making explicit the rules by which it operates. There are three ways of exposing this hidden structure: in culture-contact situations, when one is raising the young and is forced to explain things, and at times when traditional cultural institutions begin to crumble.

Two things get in the way of understanding culture: the linearity of language and the deep biases and built-in blinders that each culture provides. Language is poorly adapted for describing culture. Culture is rooted in the old mammalian brain, a part of the brain that synthesizes (treating things as wholes) but does not verbalize, not in the symbolic brain, the neocortex. The old brain understands and integrates one's own culture on a preverbal level.

Kinesics, the way one moves and handles one's body, is one of the most basic modes of communication and was established before the emergence of mammalian life. All living things internalize and respond to rhythms. Unlike other mammals, we have specialized the language of the body so that it is integrated and congruent with everything we do. Therefore, it is culturally determined. Each culture has its own characteristic manner of locomotion, sitting, standing, reclining, and gesturing. People in interactions are "in

sync”; they move together in a kind of dance, but they are not aware of their synchronous movement and do it without the need of music. When two people talk to each other, their movements are synchronized. Synchrony is perhaps the most basic element of speech and the foundation on which all subsequent speech behavior rests. People are tied to each other by hierarchies of rhythms that are culture-specific. Hall describes a film of a school playground made by one of his students: “Gradually, he perceived that the whole group was moving in synchrony to a definite rhythm. The most active child, the one who moved about the most, was the director, the orchestrator of the playground rhythm.” In everyday life we are immersed in an ocean of rhythm. The way in which people handle synchrony is both rooted in biology and determined by culture. Synchrony or the lack of it is an index of how things are going and can be an unconscious source of tension. Music and dance, by extension transference, are looked upon as activities that are produced by artists and are independent of the audience. This is not so. People’s relationship to all art forms, not only music, is more intimate than supposed. Rhythms and synchrony are classed as having little meaning in the West, because Western cultures are relatively low-context. In high-context, highly involved cultures, rhythm does have meaning. Nonverbal systems are closely tied to ethnicity.

One of the functions of culture is to provide a screen between people and the outside world. Culture designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore. What people choose, either consciously or unconsciously, to take in is what gives structure and meaning to their world. What one pays attention to is largely a question of context. Theoretically, it would be possible to arrange all human activities along a continuum according to the proportion in which events influencing the outcome were consciously considered. A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit part of the message. A low-content (LC) communication is the opposite: the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. American culture is located toward the lower end of this scale. China is on the HC end. Some cultures oscillate between both. “In Japan there are two sides to everyone—(their) warm, close, friendly, involved, HC side that does not stand on ceremony, and the public, official, status-conscious, ceremonial side, which is what most foreigners see.” All levels of communication, including language, are determined by context. Good art is always HC. Contexting involves two different but interrelated processes: one inside the organism and another outside. The first occurs in the brain and is a function of past experience (programmed, internalized contexting) and/or the structure of the nervous system (innate contexting). External contexting comprises the situation and/or setting in which an event occurs (situational/environmental contexting). Meaning is made up of the communication, the background and pre-programmed responses of the recipient, and the situation. In general, HC communication is economical, fast, efficient, and satisfying; however, time must be devoted to programming. HC actions are rooted in the past, and highly stable. LC communications do not unify, but they can be changed easily and rapidly. This is why evolution by extension is so fast—extensions in their initial stages of development are LC. There is a need to balance two apparently contradictory needs: the need to adapt and change (by moving in the LC direction) and the need for stability and tradition (HC).

Internal contexting makes it possible for human beings to automatically correct the distortions and omissions of information in messages. One of the main consequences of the evolution of the neocortex and the eye has been to equip the human species with the

ability to work with patterns to a greater degree than other life forms. Organisms lower on the phylogenetic scale than humans are more easily fooled by mimicry, which is the antithesis of the contexting, pattern-recognition process. The human eye is a HC system. Most Western peoples have been trained to think in a way that focuses on specifics, to the exclusion of everything else. Most classification methods, for instance, provide a lot of information that is hard to integrate into usable, intelligible patterns. This is true of four major institutions, which absorb great amounts of energy and talent: business, government, science, and education. "Western science, striving for replicability and rigor in methods is conducted with a view to eliminating context."

Situations are the building blocks of individual lives, institutions, and culture. The situational frame is the smallest viable unit of a culture that can be analyzed, taught, transmitted, and handed down as a complete entity. These frames contain linguistic, kinesic, proxemic, temporal, social, material, personality, and other components. Situations include greeting, working, eating, bargaining, fighting, governing, making love, going to school, cooking, hanging out, etc. People learn a culture in gestalts, complete units, which are contexted in situations and can be recalled as wholes. People do not learn to perform by combining parts that are memorized according to rules that they must think about in the course of a transaction. People master hundreds of "situational dialects," which are used in specific situational frames. Situational frames are relatively HC. Situational behavior appears to be basic to all vertebrates. The suppression of and failure to recognize people's situational needs in the Western world has resulted in many distortions. Our time system, for instance, has done much to alienate Western people from themselves. People are situationally aggressive, loving, sexual, hard-working, playful, hierarchical, territorial, competitive, bound by time, materialistic, communicative, etc., and different individuals are endowed with different proportions of these traits. However, if these traits are suppressed by the situational inventories of the culture, this can lead to trouble. An improper balance leads to neurosis; denial of a person's nature, to psychosis. No culture has developed a perfect balance of people's situational needs. This is due in part to the fact that humans domesticated themselves with little knowledge of their own basic nature.

Closely related to situational frames is the concept, borrowed from ethology, of action chains. An action chain is a set sequence of events in which usually two or more individuals participate. Action chains can be short (shaking hands) or long (courting, labor disputes). They operate on an out-of-awareness, non-verbal level.

The development of language, by extension transference, has led to the connecting of intelligence with verbal facility. Education stresses verbal facility at the expense of other important parts of the mind, which are either ignored or downgraded. We have been detached from the rest of life and seldom see ourselves as part of nature. People, even within the confines of a single culture, learn (and also perceive, think, and remember) in many different ways. According to Einstein, he did not think in words, nor did his important insights come to him in mathematical terms. Instead, he had physical images coupled with visual images that represented complete entities which then had to be laboriously broken down and translated into mathematics and words. The human being, the animal with the most highly evolved brain, is above all a learning organism. We live in an artificial and two-dimensional, fragmented, manipulative world of advertizing and propaganda, which represses the multisensory character of human existence. Culture exerts a dominant influence on memory and thinking. Psychologists

make a distinction between memory and imaging that probably shouldn't be made. Visual and auditory imaging and memory have been extensively studied, while other forms of memory (tactile, proprioceptive, thermal, interoceptive, and olfactory) have been neglected.

The mind is internalized culture. Western cultures have institutionalized learning and in the process produced great affronts to human nature. In order to reverse this trend, more must be known about human origins. Education reforms should take into account what is known about how the human nervous system works, stores, and retrieves information in a variety of sensory modes; humans as primates; the relation of school size to learning; and the acceptance of the reality of culture and the necessity of preserving the cultural values of different ethnic groups. There are three integrated brains, which evolved from different sources in response to different evolutionary pressures: the reptilian brain or brain stem (vital functions and space orientation: territoriality and responses to crowding), the old mammalian brain or limbic system (emotions and reading of the environment), and the new brain or neocortex (symbolic behavior). The reptilian foundation was laid around half a billion years ago, when reptiles began storing information in their brains for future use. This is the common feature that underlies all education and learning. The brain works in several different ways. The American educational system assumes a brain that compartmentalizes and localizes knowledge, a stimulus-response organ in which a single stimulus leads to a uniform response. The mind that results from this process is one with little experience in creative thinking and solving real-life problems. The creative brain is a forgetting mechanism. In the brain and its organization one finds a series of models of the mental processes people had to perform in the past that were essential to survival, such as hierarchies of responses related to the strength and relevance of inputs. People can be trained to perform in ways that bypass the natural and analytical capabilities of the brain. Educational institutions (and culture) are founded in this bypassing capability. Young primates spend most of their time playing. Their learning processes are not separated (as in schools) from life. Primates learn primarily from their peers, not from adults. Humans are also endowed with a tremendous capacity for activity. But those who can't sit still are stuck with the hyperactive label and are treated as anomalies and frequently drugged. The fact that the brain is, among other things, a forgetting organ is seldom recognized in schools. Schools are poor educationally but are good agents of society. Students learn that schedules are sacred and rule everything; bureaucracies are for real, the institution is enshrined at the expense of the individual; education is a game in which there are winners and losers, with little relevance to either the outside world or the subject being studied; size is valued, large classrooms and schools are preferred (even though there is evidence that the ideal size of a working group is between 8 and 12 individuals and that smaller schools, of 600 or less, produce happier and more productive, socially conscious, responsible citizens). "In the US we have managed to transform one of the most rewarding of all human activities into a painful, boring, dull, fragmenting, mind-shrinking, soul-shrivelling experience."

Culture is an irrational force. Irrationality appears to be an intrinsic part of life, yet it does not yield to logic. The irrational constitutes a significant portion of normal behavior. In all people, institutions, and cultures, as well as all relationships, there are inevitably things that do not make sense and are counterproductive. This is hard to see because irrationality seldom looks irrational from the inside. There are five varieties of irrationality: situational (something in the situation causes people to behave

counterproductively), contextual (which comes from the application of the logic of one context to another), neurotic (caused by forces at work in the culture), bureaucratic and institutional (bureaucracy is the subject of extension transference per se—established to serve humankind, the service factor is soon forgotten; bureaucracies have no conscience, no memory, and no mind; they are self-serving, amoral, and live forever, fuelled by custom, human frailties, and the will to power), and cultural (due to the imperfect adjustment of all cultures to their environment). The process of extension transference is irrational. Individual irrationality is thought of as a product of the particular psychodynamics of the person, whereas cultural irrationality is widely shared and therefore thought to be normal. “Our attitudes toward consumption and material goods and our apparent lack of interest in curbing waste at a time when our resources are running out is clearly insane.”

Culture has always dictated where to draw the line separating one thing from another. From birth to death, life is punctuated by separations, many of them painful. Paradoxically, each separation forms the foundation for new stages of integration, identity, and psychic growth. Hall alludes to “identity-separation-growth dynamisms, which can also be classed as boundary-ambiguity syndromes...” Humans in aggregate resist separations. One of life’s important strategies, albeit informal and out-of-awareness, has to do with what one is going to give up: appetites of every kind, neurotic dynamisms, ambition, greed, dependence on material things, security of a home with parents, the need for power over others, quick temper, nationalism, firm belief in a single religion, etc. Hall alludes to the process of identification as “the most important psychological aspect of culture,” that which bridges the culture with the individual. Identification is defined as the transference reaction of one person with the feelings and responses relevant to another, and it includes the feelings toward parts of the self or aspects of the personality that have been “dissociated” and projected onto others. The unconscious, out-of-awareness identification process is one of the strongest cements that bind cultures into cohesive wholes. People under the aegis of cultural identification regard others as an unpredictable and uncontrollable part of themselves. People must transcend culture; the greatest separation feat of all is to gradually free oneself from the grip of unconscious culture.

From Sergio Missana – Spain