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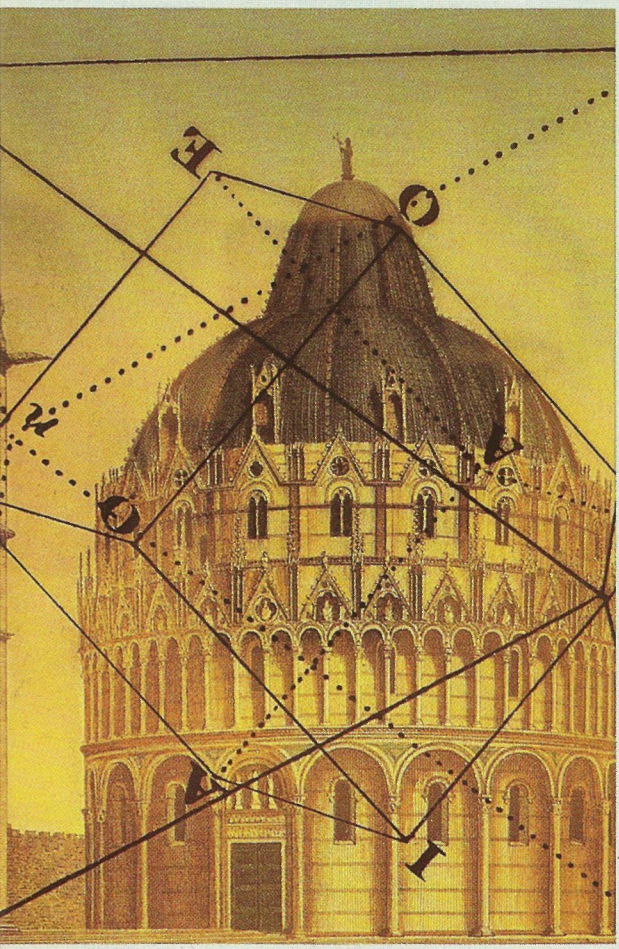

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The Hidden Dimension

ANTHROPOLOGY

People like to keep certain distances between themselves and other people or things. And this invisible bubble of space that constitutes each person's "territory" is one of the key dimensions of modern society. Edward T. Hall, author of *The Silent Language*, introduces the science of *proxemics* to demonstrate how man's use of space can affect personal and business relations, cross-cultural interactions, architecture, city planning, and urban renewal.

"This is a book of impressive genius, replete with unusually sharp observations." —Richard J. Neutra
Landscape Architecture

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THE SILENT LANGUAGE

THE HIDDEN DIMENSION

HANDBOOK FOR PROXEMIC RESEARCH

THE FOURTH DIMENSION IN ARCHITECTURE:
The Impact of Building on Man's Behavior
(with Mildred Reed Hall)

THE DANCE OF LIFE:
The Other Dimension of Time

HIDDEN DIFFERENCES:
Doing Business with the Japanese
(with Mildred Reed Hall)

BEYOND CULTURE

THE HIDDEN DIMENSION

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Generally speaking, two types of books interest the serious reader: those that are content oriented—designed to convey a particular body of knowledge—and those that deal with structure—the way in which events are organized. It is doubtful if an author has any control over which of these two types of books he or she writes, though it is desirable to be aware of the difference. The same applies to the reader whose satisfaction depends largely on unstated expectations. Today, when all of us are overwhelmed with data from many sources, it is easy to understand why people feel that they are losing touch, even in their own field. In spite of television, or possibly because of it, people feel a loss of relatedness to the world at large. Information overload increases the need for organizing frames of reference to integrate the mass of rapidly changing information. *The Hidden Dimension* attempts to provide such an organizing frame for space as a system of communication, and for the spatial aspects of architecture and city planning.

Books of this type, since they are independent of disciplinary lines, are not limited to a particular audience or field. This lack of disciplinary orientation will disappoint readers searching for pat answers and those who wish to find everything classified in terms of content and profession. However, since space relates to everything, it is inevitable that this book would cross disciplinary lines.

In writing about my research on people's use of space—the space that they maintain among themselves and their fellows, and that they build around themselves in their cities, their homes, and their offices—my purpose is to bring to

awareness what has been taken for granted. By this means, I hope to increase self-knowledge and decrease alienation. In sum, to help introduce people to themselves.

Regarding the organization of the book, I must mention that as an anthropologist I have made a habit of going back to the beginning and searching out the biological substructures from which human behavior springs. This approach underscores the fact that humankind is first, last, and always a biological organism. The gulf that separates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom is not nearly as great as most people think. Indeed, the more we learn about animals and the intricate adaptation mechanisms evolution has produced, the more relevant these studies become for humans in their search for the solution to many complex human problems.

All of my books deal with the *structure of experience as it is molded by culture,* those deep, common, unstated experiences which members of a given culture share, which they communicate without knowing, and which form the backdrop against which all other events are judged. Knowledge of the cultural dimension as a vast complex of communications on many levels would be virtually unnecessary if it were not for two things: our increasing involvements with people in all parts of the world, and the mixing of subcultures within our own country as people from rural areas and foreign countries pour into our cities.

It is increasingly apparent that clashes between cultural systems are not restricted to international relations. Such clashes are assuming significant proportions within our own country and are exacerbated by the overcrowding in cities. Contrary to popular belief, the many diverse groups that make up our country have proved to be surprisingly persistent in maintaining their separate identities. Superficially, these groups may all look alike and sound somewhat alike, but beneath the surface are manifold unstated, unformulated differences in their structuring of time, space, materials, and relationships. It is these very differences that often result in the distortion of meaning, regardless of good intentions, when peoples of different cultures interact.

As a consequence of writing this book, I have been invited to lecture to hundreds of architectural audiences all over the

United States and to consult on architectural projects. These talks and consultations have been instructive and constitute a body of data on social change. One of my objectives has been to communicate to architects that the spatial experience is not just visual, but *multisensory.* And that people differ in their capacity to visualize—in the quality and intensity of their visual imagery. Some people cannot visualize a house or a room or a garden or a street intersection until after the work has been completed. Architects do not have this problem, which is why they can be architects, but they forget that their clients may lack this ability. A third goal was to establish once and for all that while buildings and towns cannot make up for social injustice, and much more than good city planning is needed to make a democracy work, there is still a close link between mankind and its extensions. No matter what happens in the world of human beings, it happens in a spatial setting, and the design of that setting has a deep and persisting influence on the people in that setting.

My greatest success in promulgating these ideas has been among the younger architects. Bits and pieces of my research have been accepted and applied, but not the organizing frame which includes the idea that everyone receives all information about the environment *through his or her senses.* If one wants to understand the impact of the environment on human beings, it is necessary to know a great deal about the senses and how sensory inputs are handled in the brain.

I have always believed in the importance of aesthetics in architecture, but not at the expense of the people housed in the buildings. Unfortunately, today most buildings communicate in no uncertain terms that designing for people is low on our scale of priorities. All too often architects and planners are hamstrung by decisions made by financial experts concerned with "the bottom line." Financial calculations are seldom based on any understanding of human needs or the ultimate costs of ignoring them.

People need to know that they are important and that architects and planners have their welfare in mind, but it is a rare structure that communicates this basic message. In the context of international relations, it is also important to know that

the language of space is just as different as the spoken language. Most important of all, space is one of *the* basic, underlying organizational systems for all living things—particularly for people. Why these statements are true is the subject of this book.

No book reaches a point suitable for publication without the active cooperation and participation of a great many people, all essential. There are always particular members of the team whose roles are more clearly defined and without whose help the manuscript would never have reached the publisher. It is the contribution of these people that I wish to acknowledge.

The first need of authors is for someone to stick with them, to put up with their exasperated impatience when it is pointed out that they have failed to distinguish clearly between what they know and what they have written. For me, writing is something that does not come easily. When I am writing, everything else stops. This means other people must shoulder a heavy burden. My first acknowledgment is, as always, to my wife, Mildred Reed Hall, who is also my partner in my work and who assisted me in my research in so many ways that it is often difficult to separate her contributions from my own.

Support for my research has been generously provided by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. I wish to make special mention of a unique institution, the Washington School of Psychiatry. As a Research Fellow of the school and a member of its faculty for many years, I profited enormously from my interaction with its creative work.

The following editors aided me in the production of this manuscript: Roma McNickle; Richard Winslow and Andrea Balchan of Doubleday; and my wife, Mildred Reed Hall. Without their help I could not have produced this volume. I received valuable and loyal assistance from Gudrun Huden and Judith Yonkers, who also provided the line drawings for this book.

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Some of the material in Chapter X appeared previously in my article titled "Silent Assumptions in Social Communication," published in the proceedings of the Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Disease. Permission to use this material is gratefully acknowledged.

I

CULTURE AS COMMUNICATION

The central theme of this book is social and personal space and man's perception of it. Proxemics is the term I have coined for the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture.

The concepts developed here did not originate with me. Over fifty-three years ago, Franz Boas laid the foundation of the view which I hold that communication constitutes the core of culture and indeed of life itself. In the twenty years that followed, Boas and two other anthropologists, Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield, speakers of the Indo-European languages, were confronted with the radically different languages of the American Indians and the Eskimos. The conflict between these two different language systems produced a revolution concerning the nature of language itself. Before this time, European scholars had taken Indo-European languages as the models for *all* languages. Boas and his followers discovered in effect that each language family is a law unto itself, a closed system, whose patterns the linguist must reveal and describe. It was necessary for the linguistic scientist to consciously avoid the trap of projecting the hidden rules of his own language on to the language being studied.

In the 1930s Benjamin Lee Whorf, a full-time chemist and engineer but an amateur in the field of linguistics, began studying with Sapir. Whorf s papers based on his work with the Hopi and Shawnee Indians had revolutionary implications for the relation of language to both thought and perception. Language, he said, is more than just a medium for expressing thought. It is, in fact, *a major element in the formation of thought*. Furthermore, to use a figure from our own day, man's very perception of the world about him is programmed by

the language he speaks, just as a computer is programmed. Like the computer, man's mind will register and structure external reality only in accordance with the program. Since two languages often program the same class of events quite differently, no belief or philosophical system should be considered apart from language.

Only in recent years, and to just a handful of people, have the implications of Whorf s thinking become apparent. Difficult to grasp, they became somewhat frightening when given careful thought. They strike at the root of the doctrine of "free will," because they indicate that all men are captives of the language they speak as long as they take their language for granted.

The thesis of this book and of *The Silent Language,* which preceded it, is that the principles laid down by Whorf and his fellow linguists in relation to language apply to the rest of human behavior as well—in fact, to all culture. It has long been believed that experience is what all men share, that it is always possible somehow to bypass language and culture and to refer back to experience in order to reach another human being. This implicit (and often explicit) belief concerning man's relation to experience was based on the assumptions that, when two human beings are subject to the same "experience," virtually the same data are being fed to the two central nervous systems and that the two brains record similarly.

Proxemic research casts serious doubt on the validity of this assumption, particularly when the cultures are different. Chapters X and XI describe how people from different cultures not only speak different languages but, what is possibly more important, *inhabit different sensory worlds*. Selective screening of sensory data admits some things while filtering out others, so that *experience as it is perceived* through one set of culturally patterned sensory screens is quite different from experience perceived through another. The architectural and urban environments that people create are expressions of this filtering-screening process. In fact, from these man-altered environments, it is possible to learn how different peoples use their senses. Experience, therefore, cannot be counted on as a stable point of reference, because it occurs in a setting that has been molded by man.

The role of the senses in this context is described in Chapters IV through VII. This discussion was included to give the reader some of the basic data on the apparatus man uses in building his perceptual world. Describing the senses in this way is analogous to descriptions of the vocal apparatus as a basis for understanding speech processes.

An examination of how the senses are used by different peoples, as they interact with their living and non-living environment, provides concrete data on some of the differences between, for example, Arabs and Americans. Here at the very source of the interaction it is possible to detect significant variations in what is attended and what is screened out.

My research of the past five years demonstrates that Americans and Arabs live in different sensory worlds much of the time and do not use the same senses even to establish most of the distances maintained during conversations. As we shall see later, Arabs make more use of olfaction and touch than Americans. They interpret their sensory data differently and combine them in different ways. Apparently, even the Arab's experience of the body in its relation to the ego is different from our own. American women who have married Arabs in this country and who have known only the learned American side of their personality have often observed that their husbands assume different personalities when they return to their homelands where they are again immersed in Arab communication and are captives of Arab perceptions. They become in every sense of the word quite different people.

In spite of the fact that cultural systems pattern behavior in radically different ways, they are deeply rooted in biology and physiology. Man is an organism with a wonderful and extraordinary past. He is distinguished from the other animals by virtue of the fact that he has elaborated what I have termed *extensions* of his organism. By developing his extensions, man has been able to improve or specialize various functions. The computer is an extension of part of the brain, the telephone extends the voice, the wheel extends the legs and feet. Language extends experience in time and space while writing extends language. Man has elaborated his extensions to such a degree that we are apt to forget that his humanness is rooted in his animal nature. The anthropologist Weston La Barre