

BODY LANGUAGE AS A  
TIMELESS COMMUNICATION  
VEHICLE IN WESTERN ART

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of body language as a vehicle of timeless communication in visual art. The argument is made that body language can serve as such a vehicle because its meanings have remained consistent through centuries and are comprehensible to all members of western culture. Then, two works of art are extensively examined and interpreted through body language studies: Francisco Goya's "The Third of May, 1808" (1814-15), and Vincent Van Gogh's "Self Portrait" (1889). Body language expressions which are discussed include: gaze, posture, facial expression, spatial behavior, bodily contact, physical appearance, colour, and light. The author states how these body expressions function as cues in the understanding of the content of these two paintings.

In the final chapter a brief discussion is provided the use of body language in four contemporary works of art: Chuck Close's "Kent", (1970-71), Andy Warhol's "Marylin", (1964), Arshile Gorky's "The Calendars", (1946-47), and Barnett Newman's "The First Station", (1958).

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## CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Search for Continual  
Vehicles of Mass Communication  
in Western Art

Without knowledge of the context and the artist's code naive subjects rarely hit on the intended meaning. . . . Not that this failure of getting the message speaks against the artist or his work. It only speaks against the equation of art with communication. - E.H. Gombrich<sup>1</sup>

The various forms all had meaning to me. It is the spectator's privilege to find his own meaning here. I feel they will relate to or parallel mine.  
- Arshille Gorky<sup>2</sup>

Among the various fashions that influence discussions of works of art these days, one particularly disturbs the artist, -- that the understanding of a work of art is entirely a subjective affair. We are told that what a person sees depends entirely on who he is, what he is interested in, what he has experienced in the past, and how he chooses to direct his attentions. If this were true the artist would have to believe that what he sees in his painting or sculpture is only there because he is looking at it and that another observer will see nothing of the sort. - Rudolf Arnheim<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>E.H. Gombrich, "The Visual Image," Scientific American, 227:95-96 (September, 1972).

<sup>2</sup>Diane Karp, "Arshille Gorky's Iconography," Arts Magazine, 50:83 (March, 1976).

<sup>3</sup>Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception (Berkeley, 1954), p. 80.



There is a general acceptance of work of art as a symbol of an artist's feelings, beliefs, and ideas. An artist's selection, depiction, or creation of imagery is dependent on his interests.

Arnheim states the problem. Whenever a work of art is discussed by viewers there is always the question, "Can we assume we know what it means?" The answer often heard is, "We can't really say because we didn't lead the artist's life, we don't know his concerns, problems, or intentions. Furthermore, images have different meanings for different people. Meaning depends a lot on what a person knows, how he has experienced his knowledge, and his likes and dislikes.

The acceptance of that answer negates art as communication and makes the works of an artist a self-analysis which only he can read.

The use of symbols is common to everyone in daily life. Traffic signs, money, newspapers, television programs, advertisements are concrete representations of the concepts of law, economic exchange, mass communication of events, entertainment, physical needs and desires, and mathematics. Man is a symbol using, symbol creating organism. Scientists believe that this ability was a major factor in his rise above the other animals.<sup>4</sup> The act of

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<sup>4</sup>Mukeijee Raahakamal, Symbolic Life of Man (Bombay, 1959), p. 1.

symbolizing is so common to our existence that almost any object in our lives can be viewed as the physical illustration of the mental concepts of religion, morality, physical necessity, luxury, status, wealth, philosophy, mortality, life itself. Even before making tools such as the simple hammer and nail, man had to have a conception of a method for solving a problem, and then, an image of a device capable of fulfilling the method. The tools then become symbols of the problem and the solution.

The process of symbolizing becomes even more apparent when properties of one context are placed visibly in another. This process is essential to representation of any type in the arts. An artist is not an entity floating freely in space, but a human being existing on planet earth. He must draw the representation of his thoughts from his mortal existence. When the average man looks at a painting he does not expect to see only pigment on canvas but representations of the artists' knowledge.

Hopefully, the understanding of these images would be available to the majority of people; if only because cultural interaction is based on the sharing of knowledge. This thesis is an examination of some possible vehicles of communication in the visual arts that are understandable to the populace of Western culture. This author believes that such vehicles should have a timeless quality and should be relative to the average man's experience.

The discussion is restricted to Western culture because the establishment of bases for multi-cultural communication would require volumes of cross cultural comparisons. In fact, the establishment of multi-cultural vehicles of mutual communication may be impossible because Western society and many other cultures do not even share similar manners of reasoning. Western society's daily philosophy is concerned with logic, monochronic time which emphasizes segmentation,<sup>5</sup> the rights of the individual and the identity of each person.<sup>6</sup> It also emphasizes a sense of competition among men in order to establish hierarchies. The Japanese find Western logic strange and ineffective in arriving at decisions because it fails to consider all the exceptions and variabilities that can occur.<sup>7</sup> They use a larger, more inclusive frame of thinking. Also, they use polychronic time, which emphasizes that several things are happening at once, and stresses involvement of people and completion of transactions.<sup>8</sup> They do not think in terms of individuality but inclusion in groups.<sup>9</sup> In Japan, the actions of one man are not seen as his own responsibility;

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<sup>5</sup>E.T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York, 1977), pp. 9-19.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

but of his group and particularly, the leader of the group. If the Mailai massacre had been committed by the Japanese they would not have blamed the subordinate, Lt. Calley, but a general would have resigned for failure to maintain control of his subordinates.<sup>10</sup> The image and workings of the group are one reason the Japanese try to maintain amenities and cordialities. The act of showing anger is a loss of control which disrupts the cohesive character of the group.<sup>11</sup> In Western culture, however, to show anger is a means of establishing one's individual rights.

Before beginning the search for suitable vehicles of communication it is necessary to establish what can be considered communication in the visual arts through a large time period.

Geoffrey Hellman believes that there is a sphere of meaning within a cultural tradition.<sup>12</sup> He states that even when the interpretation expressed by a given community is not an exact reflection of the beliefs expressed by a work of art for its original audience, there may be a suitable affinity, looser than translation, to those originally expressed beliefs. This reinterpretation is an outgrowth or extension of the original.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>12</sup>Geoffrey Hellman, "Symbol Systems and Artistic Styles," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 35:290 (Spring, 1977).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

His example is that much of Bach's sacred music expressed "Christian fear of God" for the Lutheran congregation. In a modern, civil community, the same work may not express any equivalent beliefs. Even if the civil community were capable of applying an equivalent it need not play the same role as the original for the Lutherans, or for the community. Yet, this doesn't mean that there are not attitudes expressed by the music that play a similar role in overall understanding. Man is capable of seeing "Christian fear of God" as a more general phenomenon called "awe of forces beyond mortal control." This is a belief that, in translation, the Lutheran congregation might well have understood. There is then a transfer of expression from one belief to another which, though not a translate in the exact sense, nevertheless includes it. One could theorize that here is a general instrument through which interpretations evolve and culture continues.

Similar examples in the visual arts are not hard to find. Goya's painting "The Third of May 1808" painted in 1814-15 (illustration 1, p. 7), represents the execution of unarmed persons by military groups. In this instance, the visual arts may have the advantage over music because they can present a graphic illustration of the subject matter.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>15</sup>H.W. Janson, History of Art (New York, 1970), p. 479.



ILLUSTRATION 1 - Francisco's Goya. , "Third of May, 1808."  
1814-15. (Turn page to side).

Is this level of communication satisfactory? Man deals continually with generalities in daily life. It is necessary so that one is not being continually tied down with an overabundance of useless information. When someone says, "I am going to my house," the word house is a satisfactory degree of communication. The house could be new, old, brick, stone, peat, wood, one-story, two-story, four-story, or it could be a flat. Whatever it is, the word house implies a permanent dwelling, as opposed to a nomadic one, in which a unit, usually a family, resides.<sup>16</sup> House is more specific in describing a family dwelling than the words 'warehouse,' 'hotel,' 'office building,' or 'school,' although all of them share physical attributes; walls, ceilings, floors, doors, windows, etc. The word house, therefore, can be understood as general and specific at the same time. Yet, it is satisfactory as communication in daily life.

Goya's painting is specific and general at the same time. The actions in it could represent a large number of executions by the military in human history; but the concept of it as an example of the atrocities of war is specific in comparison to all the atrocities of mankind. So it also is satisfactory as communication in daily life.

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<sup>16</sup>David Guralnik (ed.), Webster's New World Dictionary (New York, 1971), p. 362.

Furthermore, this type of communication echoes Gorky's statement, (see footnote 2), concerning the spectator's ability to parallel the artist's meaning.

Panofsky states that content in art exists on three levels. The first is called intrinsic meaning or content. These are the ideas that reveal the basic concerns of a time period, nation, social class, or religious or philosophical belief. They are qualified by an artist and condensed into his work.<sup>17</sup>

The second level is that of conventional subject matter. In it, themes or concepts are connected with singular artistic motifs, or combinations of them. Motifs recognized as carriers of conventional meaning are called "images." The combinations of "images" are what ancient art historians named "invenzioni." Today, they are called stories or allegories. Iconography is the identification of allegories.<sup>18</sup>

The third level Panofsky names primary or natural subject matter and he subdivides it into factual and expressional. Configurations of line and color, or shaped lumps of clay, bronze or stone act as representations of natural objects like human beings, plants, animals, dwellings, tools, etc. By seeing their mutual relationships

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<sup>17</sup> Jan Bialostocki, "Iconography and Iconology," Encyclopedia of World Art, 1971, VII, 776-777.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 775-776.



as events and by discerning expressional qualities like the sad nature of a pose or gesture, or the homelike and serene atmosphere of an interior one recognizes the world of pure forms as the bearer of primary or natural meaning. The forms of primary or natural meaning make up the world of artistic motifs.<sup>19</sup>

All three, or two, or one of these levels can exist in one work of art.

Leonardo's "Last Supper," painted between 1495-98, illustrates the High Renaissance concerns of religion, classical tastes, and the artistic sciences of perspective and organized space.<sup>20</sup> It also depicts the story of Christ's "Last Supper" and his betrayal by Judas. The animated gestures and poses of the disciples exhibit the character of the moment when Christ reveals that one of them has betrayed him.<sup>21</sup>

Rembrandt's "Doctor Tulp's Anatomy Lesson" of 1632, shows the Dutch Baroque interest in the development of medical science. The forms of the facial reactions of the pupils illustrate their concentration or boredom with the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 775.

<sup>20</sup> Helen Gardner, Art Through the Ages (New York, 1970), p. 453.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 453.

event.<sup>22</sup> The naked and dissected body shows a practical manner of learning about human anatomy.

Edvard Munch in "The Scream" of 1893, used long wavy lines, coupled with facial expression and body gesture to create an image of fear.<sup>23</sup>

It should be apparent that whereas the third level can exist alone, the other two are dependent on it to give them form.

Intrinsic meaning can only be fully understood through a knowledge of the history of cultural symptoms.<sup>24</sup> The concerns of a past nation, class, religious or philosophical attitude is the work area of a specialist, an art historian or anthropologist. The normal individual generally has a knowledge of history that spans his own life time. He may, from school, from being well read, or from watching historical movies and documentaries have some general education of past periods. Still, it would be extremely doubtful that this would be specifically significant enough for him to understand the concerns of all societies of Western history through art. There is very little chance that if he saw Raphael's "The School of

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<sup>22</sup>William Fleming, Art and Ideas (New York, 1968), p. 372.

<sup>23</sup>Janson, p. 513.

<sup>24</sup>Bialostocki, p. 777.

Athens," 1500-31, he would recognize the figures of Plato and Aristotle and know that the fresco reflects the Renaissance preoccupation with the four domains of learning--theology, philosophy, love, and the arts.<sup>25</sup>

Since interpretation in the intrinsic sense depends upon a bulk of information, which is not in the repertoire of the average man, it is not a valid basis for mass communication in art.

A large knowledge of stories and allegories, their recognition and meanings, is likewise restricted to the specialist, individuals who have studied extensively literature, mythology, and religion.<sup>26</sup> The average person has usually come into contact with some of the stories of the Bible, particularly, the life and sacrifice of Christ, perhaps with the legends of the Trojan wars, maybe the myths of Hercules, but it is unlikely they know the story of the "Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus" or what the "Birth of Venus" represents. It is true that stories and allegories are often about moralities, events, or lessons of wisdom that are relatable to daily existence. For instance, the myth of "The Judgement of Paris," represented by Rubens in 1638, may parallel the character of a modern beauty pageant. However, it is necessary that the third level of form and

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<sup>25</sup> Janson, p. 370.

<sup>26</sup> Bialostocki, p. 777.

atmosphere illustrate sufficiently the comparisons between the painting and the pageant. Otherwise, the viewer might see it as a man offering three women an apple for sexual favours. It is the dependence on the recognition of motifs as images of particular stories and also the connection of these stories with definite lessons or wisdoms that make Panofsky's second level of content a difficult form of communication. The common man does not carry sufficient mental information, concerning motif recognitions and their subsequent allegorical meanings, to make conventional subject matter a large producer of communication.

It is the third level that offers the only probable area of ample understanding. Shapes and atmosphere make up every situation of visual experience. It is possible that their various emotive properties are common to everyone's existence. In order to explain the presence of these properties in art, an identification of some of their visual representations is needed.

Suzanne Langer defines art forms as "affective symbols" in which meaning is perceived as quality.<sup>27</sup> A work of art is imbued with mood or emotion that correlates with what it visually represents. It functions as a symbol to formulate experience and present it objectively for

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<sup>27</sup> Rosario Ausunto, "Symbolism and Allegory," Encyclopedia of World Art, 1971, XIII, 802.

contemplation, logical intuition, and then recognition and understanding. A good work of art formulates the appearance of feeling, of subjective experience, the character of so called inner life, the emotions we all feel.<sup>28</sup>

Langer makes the choice between discursive and non-discursive symbols. Discursive symbols correlate names and concepts. They are verifiable, duplicable, and have a defined syntax and order. A knowledge of word meanings and grammar is a knowledge of discursive symbols.<sup>29</sup>

Non-discursive symbols depend upon personal perceptions, intuition, and direct insight for understanding. They do not have a socially defined syntax and order.<sup>30</sup> Form and atmosphere are non-discursive symbols. Their meanings are not based upon preordained rules but rather on the manner in which they are used. Their meanings rely on their relationships with the other elements with which they co-exist. A dark atmosphere can have two separate effects. If used in connection with dampness, heavy breathing, clinking chains, and cries of pain, it can be

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<sup>28</sup>Suzanne Langer, Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures (New York, 1957), p. 133.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

part of a terrifying experience. When it appears simultaneously with soft moans of pleasure and two figures in a bed making love, it can seem romantic and sensuous. A dark atmosphere is a non-discursive symbol because its meaning is relevant to the system in which it is used.

Both discursive and non-discursive symbols have been used in art. The crucifix is a good example of the continual appearance of discursive symbols in art. Its meaning of Christian faith and sacrifice has lasted for two thousand years. The bone of contention with discursive symbols is that their recognition and meanings are not always consistent, but can change through time. The swastika, originally a symbol of the ancient Greek cross, synonymous with well being,<sup>31</sup> became through the Nazi party, an emblem of terror and facism. Winston Churchill's two finger "V" for victory sign was used in the nineteen-sixties as a peace sign. A difference of twenty years changed its meaning.<sup>32</sup> The "Manu Pantea," a hand sign of the Middle Ages, used three fingers and the thumb to represent the relationship of the Holy Trinity. This meaning was almost common knowledge in the tenth century.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>J.A. Bates, "The Communicative Hand," The Body as a Medium of Expression, ed. Benthall J. and Polhemus T. (London, 1975), p. 179.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

Today it is lost to anyone but scholars. Although some discursive symbols are strong and their meanings exist through time, others lose or change their spirit over a relatively short period. Discursive symbols exist in Panofsky's first two levels of content. They, as a group, have the problem of instability of meaning and, therefore, are an unreliable form of continual communication.

Non-discursive symbols, since their meaning is based upon the context or situation in which they are used, are not easily identified. Langer says that the interpretation of art is through the non-discursive mode.<sup>34</sup> One form of communication in which meaning is also based upon context, and which is heavily represented in the visual arts, is that which the kinetic scientist, Ray Birdwhistell, and the psychologist, Michael Argyle, call bodily communication.<sup>35</sup> The areas of communication in which they apply their research are: facial expression; gaze; gestures and bodily movements; posture; bodily contact; spatial behavior; and, clothes, physique and other aspects of appearance.<sup>36</sup> These are the vehicles of communication as depicted in art which this paper will examine. For reasons of simplicity, this paper will confine its discussion to painting. Also included as

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<sup>34</sup>Langer, p. 68.

<sup>35</sup>Michael Argyle, Bodily Communication (London, 1975), pp. 251-252.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

vehicles will be color and light because they are part of physical appearance and spatial behavior. Their properties can change the nature of situations, and consequently the context of the other vehicles. Henceforth, so that there is not a confusion of terms these vehicles of communication will collectively be called 'body language.'

The selection of these elements as vehicles reflects Langer's idea that mood or emotion is correlated with what art visually represents.<sup>37</sup> The facial expression of a smile, depending upon the context in which it is used, can visually represent happiness, pleasure, or contentment. If seen in a painting, on a person's face in conjunction with the act of making love, it is understood as a sign of sensual pleasure. If seen on the face of a man watching his family engage in domestic activity, it can represent contentment.

The selection of body language as the vehicle to be discussed is not meant as a negative reflection on other elements of paintings, or as an insistence that they are the only vehicles possible. The thesis merely wishes to use them to show that communication, as earlier defined, is possible between artist and viewer over time. There are other features, such as texture which also may have recourse to human experience that would allow them to serve as

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<sup>37</sup>Langer, p. 133.



vehicles. Certainly, it can be argued, as Arnheim has done, that the formal properties, line, shape, balance, space, and dynamics, are adequate means of communication, but this paper does not wish to be a repetition of Arnheim. He also states:

The face of a person is more readily perceived and remembered as being alert, tense, concentrated, rather than being triangularly shaped, having slanted eyebrows, straight lips and so on.<sup>38</sup>

This statement reflects the concept of the thesis examination. Whereas line and shape can show feeling, they are often used to form representational matter, such as spatial behavior or facial expression. These representations carry with them their own variable messages taken from and illustrating human experience.

The arena of pigments in which these properties are most clearly illustrated visually is that of European oil painting between the years 1500 and 1900.<sup>39</sup> In the history of art, this period is the most continual of representational form and space, as opposed to abstract or flat forms and space. For reasons of clarity, the major discussion of how body language can transmit feeling, will be confined to works of this period. Naturally, these paintings must contain

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<sup>38</sup>Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception, The New Version (Berkeley, 1974), p. 455.

<sup>39</sup>John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London, 1972), p. 84.

human beings. This restriction does not mean that body language does not function in other types of painting such as surrealism, cubism, pop art, abstract expressionism, etc. In the conclusion of the thesis some examples of how these vehicles are used in more modern styles of painting will be discussed.

A further tapering of subject matter is required. Philip Beam<sup>40</sup> and John Berger<sup>41</sup> both ask the question, "Why does one artist remain popular while another fades into obscurity?" A simple but shallow answer would be that authorities tell the populace which paintings are great and thus insure the artist's fame. Neither Van Gogh nor Gauguin were recognized as "masters" until after their deaths. Rembrandt died in obscurity. The art authorities of their times did not always choose wisely. Another and better answer is that the art which endures has an alphabet taken from characteristics of nature and human life which remains significant to every generation.<sup>42</sup> Masters like Goya used this alphabet to paint timeless meaning. Others, like Alma Tademas were forgotten<sup>43</sup> because they buried their meaning

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<sup>40</sup> Philip Beam, The Language of Art (New York, 1958), p. 133.

<sup>41</sup> Berger, pp. 87-88.

<sup>42</sup> Beam, p. 133.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

under masses of historical costumes, settings, and accessories. The thesis limits its theories of communication to paintings which have remained famous; the major works of masters like: Michelangelo; Leonardo da Vinci; Durer; Titian; Franz Hals; Rembrandt; Rubens; Delacroix; Courbet; Van Gogh; Gauguin, etc. This qualification makes the time span selected for the examination of the theory more relevant.

## CHAPTER TWO

Establishment of Body Language  
as Mass Communication  
Through Time

Before examining body language as a vehicle of communication in the arts, two vital principles must be established. One is that the populations of the different nations of Western culture can relate to and comprehend each other's bodily expressions. The second is that there are reasons to believe that these comprehensions are not the result of recent developments but are constant through centuries.

The Western European peoples have fought, plundered, conquered, intermarried, raped, allied and traded with each other throughout their recorded history. Rome once ruled most of them. They share Christian forms of religion. Their family structures, educational concepts and facilities, medical practices, and styles of dress are similar. The laws and courts of the different nations, more often than not, reflect the same ideals of morality. Their forms of government have mutually evolved, with the exception of Spain, from feudal states to democratic administrations. The bulk of the early settlers that came to North America, and established its social and moral codes, also came from these European states.

The plays, poems, philosophies, histories, and novels of the different nations have been translated into and enjoyed in the various languages. Operas, symphonies, and theatre companies, all playing the works of fellow countrymen, have travelled Europe. Painters, sculptors, and architects have moved from country to country, learning, working, and exhibiting. In Renaissance times, Rome was the centre of the Christian world and artists from the northern countries came to study its frescoes, architecture, and monuments. It was not uncommon for famous artists to work for several different patrons. Leonardo da Vinci worked for the Duke of Milan, the French Court, and the city of Florence.<sup>1</sup> Rubens had a large international market. Often works of art were given by one King to another as gifts. The Bronzino painting, "Venus, Cupid, Time, and Love" was given, by the Grand Duke of Milan to the King of France, as a present.<sup>2</sup>

It would be remarkable if sharing these and many other characteristics and interactions, the populations of Western Europe and North America did not experience a wide range of similar emotive experiences.

Despite all this, an assumption often made is that groups like the English and Italians are incapable of

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<sup>1</sup>H.W. Janson, History of Art (New York, 1970), p. 349.

<sup>2</sup>John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London, 1972), p. 154.

understanding each other because their emotive natures are different. The English are seen as emotionally reserved while the Italians are viewed as emotionally energetic. A test by Argyle, Kimako Shimoda and Pio Ricci Bitti discredits such an assumption. They had Italian, English, and Japanese subjects assess emotional performances given by persons from each country. The English correctly identified their own, the Italian, and the Japanese emotions correctly, 62%, 53%, and 28% of the time, respectively. The Japanese identified the English emotions 57% and the Italian emotions 58% of the time. They only chose their own emotions correctly 45% of the time.<sup>3</sup> Percentages of over fifty are considered positively high in psychological studies where judgement is usually dependent on two or three isolated cues. Argyle states that these findings prove the English and Italians quite capable of judging each other's emotional states well.<sup>4</sup>

The most popular medium of entertainment today is video in the forms of television and cinema. American programs like Bonanza, Gunsmoke, Bionic Man, and Leave it to Beaver, have been enjoyed on European television. Jaws, the Exorcist, Last Tango In Paris, Star Wars, and many other movies have played to packed theatres in North

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<sup>3</sup>Michael Argyle, Bodily Communication (London, 1975), pp. 76-77.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

America and Europe. There is the Cannes festival in which films from all over the world are awarded prizes for quality by international judges. Such awards can often influence the critical and financial success of a film. It can be hypothesized that the understanding of these television programs and films is based on the translation of spoken dialogue. Argyle states, however, that in normal situations, non-verbal signals outweigh verbal signals by five to one, and that when they are in conflict, the verbal messages are virtually ignored.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the body language used in popular video have to be non-confusing and communicative in order to insure popularity and financial success in Western markets.

Marshall McLuhan believes that television is a cool medium which needs viewer participation to complete poorly defined pictures. The constant use of the close-up focus on actors' pretended mental states creates in viewers, a desire for deep involvement with the image.<sup>6</sup> So, according to McLuhan television not only relates experiences to people, but also actively involves them in emotional occurrences.<sup>7</sup> The viewer has to participate in the program's emotional

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Argyle, "Syntaxes of Bodily Communication," Body as a Medium Expression, ed. Benthall J. and Polhemus, T. (London, 1975), p. 152.

<sup>6</sup>Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., p. 371.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 371.

situations for television to be successful as communication. If this is true, actors are really communicating their television roles through body language.

McLuhan further states that mankind is moving through mass media towards a global village.<sup>8</sup> This could be seen as an implication that the body language seen on television is only relevant to mass communication in present times. That is to say, that mutual forms of body language have only been developed in the last twenty-five years.

One method of relating body language of past and present would be to compare the body expressions of the art of former times with famous modern images. Goya's central figure, wearing the white shirt and yellow pants, in "The Third of May, 1808" is almost identical to the young girl in the famous photograph of the Kent State Killings of 1970 (illustration 2, p. 26). The situations that caused both expressions are similar. In Goya's painting, armed soldiers are executing unarmed citizens. At Kent State University, demonstrating but unarmed students were fired upon by the National Guard. Both figures, in photograph and painting, express shock, terror, and a plea for aid. (A skeptic's viewpoint may be that such similarities are random coincidence and prove nothing without a wider range of comparative situations and expressions).

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.





ILLUSTRATION 2 - Cover of Newsweek, May 18, 1970,  
Kent State University.

An individual who is not skeptical of such coincidences is John Berger. In "Ways of Seeing" he argues that modern day publicity relies heavily on the language of oil painting. Berger feels that one can take the advertisements in modern magazines, walk through a shopping district looking into the display windows, then survey the pages of an illustrated museum catalogue and see how much they encompass each other.<sup>9</sup> A few other indicators of equal experience between the two media that he finds are: the likeness between the gestures of store mannequins and mythological figures; the similar poses used to denote stereotypes--serene madonnas and mothers, free wheeling secretaries and Kings' mistresses; and, representations of past domestic wives and modern hostesses.<sup>10</sup> Illustrations 3 and 4, p. 29 taken from "Ways of Seeing," show two types of comparative poses and situations that occur. In illustration 3, J.A.D. Ingres' painting of "Jupiter and Thetis" is very like in body poses, body contacts and facial expressions to a modern day advertisement.<sup>11</sup> In Ingres' painting, the god Jupiter is adored by a young woman. In the advertisement, of illustration 3, a man makes all other men faceless, and thus, himself god-like,

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<sup>9</sup>Berger, p. 138.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

because of some product he uses. This product makes women physically worship him. In illustration 4, a close-up comparison of the woman in Ingres' "La Grande Odalisque" and a cheesecake photograph in a modern girlie magazine shows both women responding with charm and sensuality to the viewer.<sup>12</sup> In this case, the viewer is likely meant to be male. Berger thinks, and this author agrees, that certain images, conveying definite mental and physical stimulations, common to the past are still to be found today in advertisements promoting commercial products.

Mime and the circus are two of several modes of entertainment employing body language that have been present since early Western culture. The great French mime Marcel Marceau has performed in many countries and has had few problems in conveying the intentions of his acts.

The circus has existed since Roman times. The Roman circus is more famous for its gory gladiator bouts, but it contained acrobatic, juggling, magic, and trained animal acts. In medieval times, bands of troupadors and acrobats performed throughout Europe.<sup>13</sup> In 1770, the circus as we know it, was born when the equestrian Astley founded a riding ring in London.<sup>14</sup> In 1887, the Cooper and Bailey

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Bouissac, Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach (London, 1976), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.



ILLUSTRATION 3  
Juxtaposition of  
J.A.D. Ingre's  
"Jupiter and Thetis", 1811  
with a Modern-Day  
Advertisement.



ILLUSTRATION 4 - A close up  
comparison of the woman in  
Ingre's "La grande Odalisque,"  
1814, with a cheese-cake photograph  
in a modern 'skin' magazine.

circus, from America, toured the world to great success, entertaining royalty and commoners alike.<sup>15</sup> During all this time, the character of circus acts has remained remarkably similar. The physical supports of acts may have changed, machines and steel replacing muscle and wood, but acrobatic, animal and clown performances go through many of the same routines now as they did then.<sup>16</sup> In the Roman era, a featured act was a tight rope walking elephant. Today, the same act can be seen in many circus shows.<sup>17</sup>

An objection against the circus serving as a context in which body language continues through time, would be that the nature of its performances is simple and produces but three responses; awe, suspense, and fear. Certainly, these elements are contained in circus acts, but the acts can also demonstrate a much wider range of experiences, from illustrations of amorous love to trust and discipline. A lion tamer's act, for example, can be regarded as a wide variety of manifestations of sensations dependent upon the costume he selects and his and the animals' performances. The lion tamer may wear a superhuman wardrobe; tights, cape, and an emblem. In such a suit, if he smiles and looks

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<sup>15</sup> Hubbard Freeman, Great Days of the Circus (New York, 1962), p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Bouissac, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

confident, his actions would appear as phenomenal feats of physical superiority and courage. If he appears dressed in a uniform, stiff-faced, and runs his animals through a series of regimented routines, his piece would become a display of disciplined timing and training. When dressed as a gentleman, in a tuxedo and tie, the trainer's polite behaviour would contribute to an act seen as cool, polished, and austere. In a clown's suit, the trainer's performance can be full of precarious comedy and his safety seem based on bumbling good luck.<sup>18</sup>

The manner in which the lion tamer uses his animals also influences his audience's responses. Standing close to the lion, with its head upon his shoulder, the trainer and his animal, swaying to music, can be seen as intimate lovers.<sup>19</sup> The lion tamer will sometimes ride a lion, in which case he refers to man's trust, dependence on, and mastery of domestic animals.<sup>20</sup> In addition, he can carry the animal across his shoulders like a lamb and be the good shepherd, kind and responsible. Finally, at the end of an act, the lion tamer can carry a leopard off in his arms, appearing as a loving and protective father figure.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 105-106.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

All these options of dress and action could be viewed in circus acts today and yesterday. A Roman uniform and that of a nineteenth century soldier may not be made of the same materials, but they have qualities which place them apart from the dress of the average citizen of each time. Epaulets, weapon belts and metal breastplates are not civilian attire but are associated with military groups. The clown's brightly coloured costume and funny face were as accessible in the past as they are now. Furthermore, what sets a clown or soldier apart from a normal civilian and adds validity to his character are his actions. Actions define a person's role and a soldier's or a clown's role has changed little between ancient and modern times.

To exist and be financially successful a large circus has to appeal to an international audience.<sup>22</sup> It is obvious then, that its code of communication is not restricted to a particular group, nation or class, but is shared by people speaking various languages and experiencing different ways of life.<sup>23</sup> In "Circus and Culture" Paul Boussar writes:

A circus performance tends to represent the totality of our popular systems of the western world. It actualizes all the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

fundamental categories through which we perceive our universe as a meaningful system. According to this cosmological view of the circus, the constituents of the acts are symbols or tokens of their class, and their identification constitutes an important part of the decoding process. A circus performance is easily understood because, in a way, it is redundant with respect to our culture; and it is gratifying because it enables us to grasp its totality in a limited time and space.<sup>24</sup>

Now, if a circus act can pick symbols or tokens of emotive categories, it is not impossible for an artist to do the same. Leonardo, Rembrandt, Franz Hals spent hours and days in public taverns and markets drawing the populace. It is very likely that they became experts in the psychological properties of gesture, pose, spatial situations, and other body languages. Leonardo wrote:

A good painter has two chief objects to paint--man and the intention of his soul. The former is easy, the latter hard, for it must be expressed by the gestures and movements of the limbs.<sup>25</sup>

There are several visible comparisons between the manner in which circus acts and paintings depicting humans are defined and formed. In a circus act, the elements are:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Helen Gardner, Art Through the Ages (New York, 1970), p. 452.



the social behaviour of the performer as he enters the ring, during the act, between sequences and as he leaves; the performer's costume which he can choose from several possibilities; the accessories a performer uses and the style of their decoration; the technical performance of the artist during the act; the lighting effects; the music; linguistic messages.<sup>26</sup> Except for music and linguistic messages, a painter can use all these factors. His figures can take part in social behaviour. They can be seen emotionally leaving or entering spaces, or they can appear separately from the action. Pieter Bruegel's "The Peasant Dance," 1567, (illustration 5, p. 35) shows figures dancing and intimately kissing. Kissing is social behaviour linked with sex and romanticism. Dancing is an amusement associated with social interaction and celebration. Michelangelo's "Fall of Man and Expulsion from Paradise," 1508-09, (illustration 6, p. 36) depicts Adam and Eve in shame as they are forced from Eden.<sup>27</sup> This is an example of emotional behaviour by two figures departing a particular space. Leonardo's Christ in "The Last Supper," 1495-98 (illustration 7, p. 38), sits calmly reposed, while around him, the disciples excitedly discuss the news he has just

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<sup>26</sup>Bouissac, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup>W. Fleming, Art and Ideas (New York, 1968), p. 278.



ILLUSTRATION 5 - Pieter Bruegel  
"The Peasant Dance." 1567  
(Turn page to side).



ILLUSTRATION 6 - Michelangelo  
"Fall of Man  
and Expulsion  
From Paradise."  
1508-1509  
(Turn page to side).

told them concerning his betrayal.<sup>28</sup> He is a figure between sequences, having finished one, regarding the results, and perhaps preparing for further activity.

Certainly, the manner in which a figure is dressed, whether in armor, a uniform, plain clothes, rags, or rich fabrics, helps define his position in life. The objects an artist places in painting can have associations. Both Rembrandt and Van Gogh painted themselves holding palettes and brushes (illustrations 8, p. 38 and 9, p. 39). It would be unusual for these tools not to identify them as painters. The ornamentation of jewelry, clothing, or furnishings, by being complex or simple, can make an atmosphere active or still, and thus, contribute to excitement, or repose and dignity. Some ornamentations refer to Arabic, Japanese, or other foreign motifs and, consequently, are: exotic and unusual in nature. The artist can depict figures in technical behaviour which influences their character definition. In "The Stone Breakers," 1849 (illustration 10, p. 40), Gustave Courbet has two figures involved with the mechanics of smashing large stones. Such activity defines them as labourers and places them in a lower economic and perhaps, deprived class of society.<sup>29</sup> The artist's technical handling of paint can influence the emotive nature of a physique or

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<sup>28</sup> Janson, p. 350.

<sup>29</sup> Gardner, p. 664.

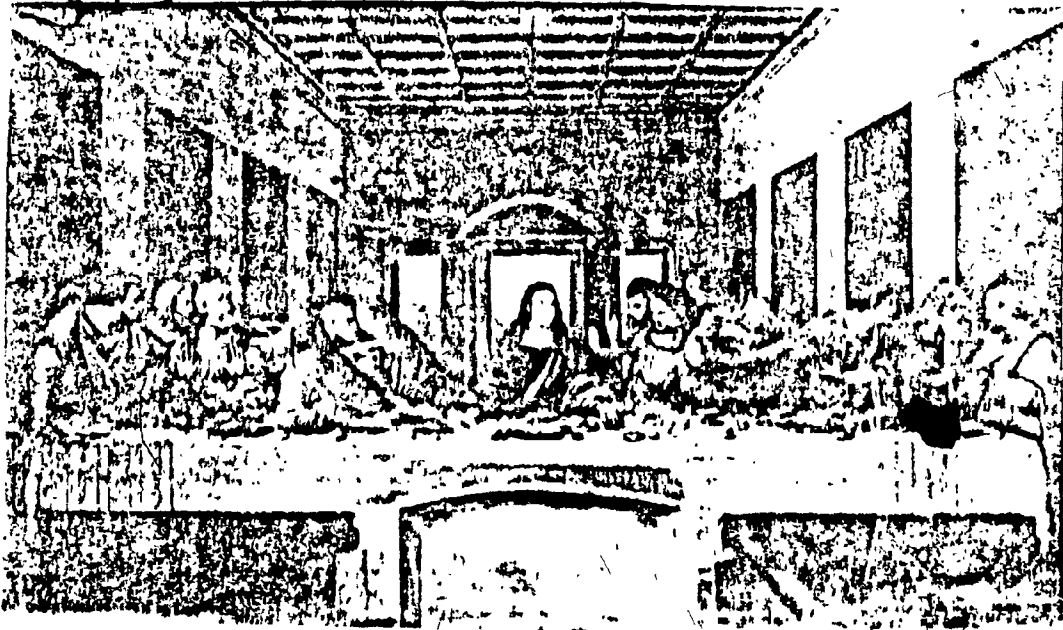


ILLUSTRATION 7 - Leonardo da Vinci  
"Last Supper." 1495-98.



ILLUSTRATION 8 - Rembrandt  
"Self Portrait" 1660.



ILLUSTRATION 9 - Vincent Van Gogh  
"Self Portrait." 1889.



ILLUSTRATION 10 - Gustave Courbet  
"The Stonebreakers." 1849.

surface by making it rough, robust, and actively alive or smooth, refined, and calm. Spot lighting in both circus acts and painting can individualize and dramatize figures. A generally even light in both media can aid in making all figures equally important and events seem more common and normal.<sup>30</sup> All these examples can be referred to the various sections of body language earlier defined. The purpose of this paragraph is to demonstrate that circus performers and artists are involved in making comparable selections of expressions as forms of communication. The circus is traditional entertainment using tried and proved body language as a continual vehicle of communication to varied audiences. Painting, using the same types of vehicles, can also be communication through time to different audiences.

Painting is distinct from circus acts and video media in that it is the representation of singular moments while the others are series of actions. It could be argued that the expressive powers of body language lie in sequential events as opposed to singular ones. Betsy Edith Birch Kahan ran a study in which judges were asked to scale emotions based on two stimuli. These were filmed sequences and selected stills that were regarded as the best examples of expressions. The judges showed no difference in the

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<sup>30</sup>Bouissac, p. 15.



accurate perception of emotion based upon the two stimuli.<sup>31</sup> Kahan's study concluded that some singular images carry more information than others and that these high powered images can carry the message as well as sequences of actions. A great artist would be an expert in choosing high powered images.

It would be foolish to believe that everyone's body expressions are exactly the same. Argyle believes that a range exists which carries a set of characteristics that are applicable to everyone's personal set of expressions.<sup>32</sup> The Boussar statement reflects and supports this idea. This range of characteristics provides individuals with a tool to capably understand the body language of others.

The concept of a range of recognition is supported by studies of the manner in which Western man learns and thinks. The child psychologist Jean Piaget has found through clinical examination that children learn by grouping. When they encounter a new factor they place it in the category with which it shares the most and strongest properties. As a form begins to belong to a group, it

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<sup>31</sup>B. Kahan, "Perception of Non Verbal Behaviour," Dissertation Abstracts International, 34(6-B), p. 2969B.

<sup>32</sup>Argyle, Bodily Communication, op.cit., p. 108.

assumes the common characteristics of the pack.<sup>33</sup> For example, if a boat floats then anything that floats has some common properties with boats, perhaps shape or material of construction.<sup>34</sup> Originally, children learn to classify in terms of one criterion by constructing hierarchical systems of inclusion, but as they grow older they gradually learn to do separations by classifying on the basis of several criteria at once, by making up a cross classifactory matrix.<sup>35</sup> In terms of body language, bodily contact is the ultimate behaviour associated with interpersonal relations; sexual, dependent, affiliative, etc.<sup>36</sup> When someone purposely touches another person it is demonstrative of emotive human interaction. This can be viewed as the first criterion of a group. A second or cross classifying criterion would be the type of touch, soft or hard. It would define the contact as being friendly or hostile. The group of all soft contacts would have affiliative associations while the hard would have violent connotations. These would exist until other elements entered and changed the groups.

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<sup>33</sup>J. Piaget and B. Inhelder, Early Growth of Logic in the Child (London, 1964), p. 208.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>36</sup>Argyle, Syntaxes, op. cit., p. 157.

Piaget states that a computer cannot recognize as many different varieties of forms as human beings.<sup>37</sup> Humans have the ability to generalize consistently into groups and to place physically different forms into common classes.<sup>38</sup> A smile towards someone or body contact are both possible indicators of affiliation. There are also multiple varieties of body language which indicate the same feelings. A warrior with his foot on his fallen foe's chest is demonstrating superiority. A woman, head held high, dressed like a queen, and sitting in a chair on a raised platform is likewise indicating superiority. The common factor is height above others, but two variants are dress and body positions. A human being is very capable of understanding a variety of body languages as indicative of one feeling.

Piaget found that when a person has a new external influence exercised upon his brain, it causes two complimentary processes that allow him to grasp it. First, the mind adapts itself to the influence. This involves a sort of motor schema related to the form. It is called imitation. Drawing is imitation.<sup>39</sup> The eyes perceive an object and send an image to the brain. The mind uses the motor skills of the hand to place a representation of the

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<sup>37</sup> Piaget and Inhelder, p. 208.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

object on paper. The hand is really drawing the qualities of the object. While the mind is adapting itself to the influence, the second process occurs. The adaptation implies that between the new forms and the old habits, is a certain continuity.<sup>40</sup> This means that the new forms contain some qualities that belong to and help incorporate it into already existing groups. As a person grows older, this area of existing groups becomes larger and larger, so that any form, unless it has qualities outside this world, can be incorporated into a group. A new object is seen and it is large and hard. Large is a known quality, associated with the group "strong." By assimilation, the new object is seen as strong. The group now changes to include the element hard. When the individual next decides to make himself strong he will use the old quality large by puffing out his chest and the new quality hard by tensing his muscles.

The preceding discussion, on grouping, assimilation, and imitation, is an important concept. It is true that no two persons have the exact same experiences, but everyone knows the feelings of superiority, love, happiness, hate, sadness, etc. When someone sees an example of pride and superiority it may not be the exact image they have of that feeling, but contained in it will be qualities that allow

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

them to classify it. If a person has never seen the 'queen-like lady in the raised chair,' but is aware of the 'warrior above his foe,' the quality 'height above other persons' will aid in classifying the image in the group containing 'superiority.' The group will also expand to contain 'queen-like women.' This is how man learns and it is communication and understanding. Piaget writes:

It is only after having assimilated the activities of external bodies to his own muscular activity that the child turns this new made instrument upon himself and thanks to it becomes conscious of his internal experience. Experience changes assimilation's rules within a person and fresh schemes are constantly emerging under pressure.<sup>41</sup>

Argyle believes that people can relate to the body language in works of art:

There are also bodily reactions to works of art. When there are human figures in a picture, the observer may empathize with them; that is, he may imagine their feelings or bodily actions and start to share these feelings or to enact similar behaviour himself.<sup>42</sup>

When standing in front of a work of art, the viewer does what comes naturally. He assimilates the elements of the image, particularly the body language, and applies them to his own groups of classifications. His experiences and

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<sup>41</sup> Piaget and Inhelder, p. 286.

<sup>42</sup> Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 387.

the experiences in the painting may not be exactly the same, but they will share characteristics that allow the viewer to frame and recognize content in his own consciousness. The situations in the painting group themselves with his knowledge and provide him with an avenue to the meaning of the work.

The performers of a circus act are often related as a family. Circus families traditionally pass the contents and expressions of their acts from generation to generation. The flying Wallendas, an acrobatic high wire act, can trace their circus family back to eighteenth century Bohemia.<sup>43</sup> New members learn the procedures and expressive forms by imitating the seasoned performers.<sup>44</sup> Imitation is a natural part of life. Learning to walk, talk, play games, learn roles, are all imitation. An individual imitates his peers, parents, and idols. A chain can pass physical and mental actions through time. Some psychologists believe that many of man's physical expressions of emotions are descended from his animal ancestors. (Illustration 11, p. 48), shows two emotional displays of man; the "gritted teeth angry display" and the "open mouth laughing display." These can be seen as descending from the "bared teeth hostile display" and the

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<sup>43</sup>Ron Morris, Wallenda, A Biography of Karl Wallenda (New York, 1976), p. 2.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

"relaxed open mouth display" of animals.<sup>45</sup> Research and conclusions in this area are insufficient to make it more than theory. It is believed that culture modifies emotional displays too much for such man to animal comparisons to be accepted as precise.<sup>46</sup> However, it could be hypothesized that some forms of physical expressions of emotions have been with man always.

One of the worst reasons for the condemnation of art as communication is whether or not people like it. Part of a person's growing process is learning that people do not always share the same values. Piaget's studies show that as children mature they cease to alter reality in terms of themselves and become more flexible in yielding to the demands of external factors and experience.<sup>47</sup> Man realizes that in order to exist and survive in society, he must learn to understand situations that he may not enjoy. Many people do not like their jobs, yet they know that in order to economically survive, they must learn the character of the job. Otherwise, they will not be able to function at it and will be fired. In front of a work of art, the body language, or other elements, can be communicative to a viewer. He

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<sup>45</sup>R.A. Hinde, "Comparative Study of Non Verbal Communication," Body as a Medium of Expression, ed. Benthall, J. and Polhemus, T. (London, 1975), p. 123.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>47</sup>Piaget and Inhelder, p. 295.

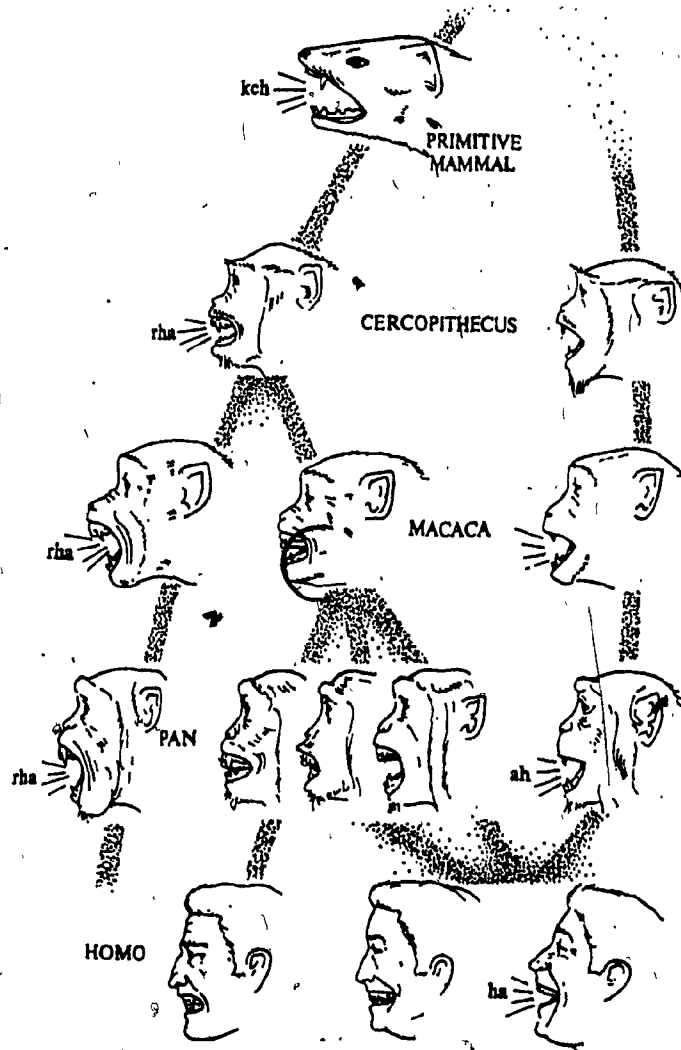


Figure 11. The phylogenetic development of laughter and smiling as suggested by homologues in existing members of the phyletic scale leading to *Homo*. On the left is the speciation of the *silent bared-teeth display* and the *bared-teeth scream display*. The *sbt*-display, initially a submissive, later also a friendly response, seems to converge with the *relaxed open-mouth display* (on the right), a signal of play (from Van Hooff, 1972).

ILLUSTRATION 11 - The "gritted teeth angry display" and the "open mouth laughing display" of man can be seen as descending from the "bared teeth hostile display" and "relaxed open mouth display" of animals.



then has the option to condemn or praise it. This evaluation can be dependent upon the subject matter, or the manner in which the content is expressed. Whatever the decision, liking or disliking the work of art will be based upon communication.

In the preceding pages of this chapter, a basis for discussing body language as vehicles of communication has been established. Television and cinema are media that use body language to communicate to vast audiences. Advertising and the circus performance are communication that rely upon traditional forms of body language to reach viewers. All the peoples of the Western world may not have the exact same experiences, but contained within their experiences will be qualities that allow them to identify the content of the body expressions of others. In the third chapter studies of body language will be applied to two works of art. These applications will serve as demonstrations of how body language can communicate meaning in art across time.

## CHAPTER THREE

The Interpretation of Two Works of Art  
Through Body Language

Francisco Goya "Third of May, 1808,"

1814-1815

Vincent Van Gogh "Self Portrait,"

1889

In daily life the average person is continually entering the presence of other individuals; in the process, he constantly needs to ascertain the character of situations. To have a comprehension of the full factual nature of a situation it would be helpful to know all the relevant social data about the other participants. Furthermore, to grasp the total importance of the situation, it would be necessary to be aware of the outcome or end-product of the activity. This information is rarely available. Instead people employ substitutes, cues, tests, expressive actions and status symbols as predictive devices. People rely upon appearance. The more humans are concerned with realities which are not available ~~to~~ direct perceptions, the more they concentrate attention on physical actions and appearance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Irving Goffman, "Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," The Users of Communication in Society, ed. Combs, J. and Mansfield, M. (New York, 1976), p. 68.

The public's understanding of an art work relies upon the appearance of the work. Generally, people do not know, and often do not care about, the lives and philosophies of artists. If an artist wishes his art to endure and communicate he must contain his message in the visual appearance of his work. The average person depends upon personal knowledge to interpret the meaning of art. Body language is one means which can be used in art to convey messages. Although body language forms may be more easily identified in representational images people may also respond to them in more abstract styles of art.

The two paintings chosen to be examined through body language in this chapter are Francisco Goya's "The Third of May, 1808," 1814-15, (illustration 12, p. 58), and Vincent Van Gogh's 'Self Portrait,' 1889, (illustration 8, p. 38).

Jansen,<sup>2</sup> Fleming<sup>3</sup> and Gardner<sup>4</sup> express parallel feelings about Goya's paintings. Their opinions are best summarized in Jansen's statement:

The picture has all the emotional intensity of religious art, but these martyrs are dying for Liberty, not the Kingdom of Heaven, and their executioners are not the agents of Satan but of political tyranny - a

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<sup>2</sup>H.W. Jansen, History of Art, (New York, 1970), pp. 479-480.

<sup>3</sup>W. Fleming, Art and Ideas, (New York, 1968), p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Helen Gardner, Art Through the Ages (New York, 1970), p. 638.

formation of faceless automatons  
impervious to<sup>5</sup> their victims' despair  
and defiance.

This quote implies that within Goya's painting is contained a clear identification of good and evil, and instead of a military execution, there are strong reasons for believing that an atrocity is being committed. Furthermore the body language used in the painting carries messages concerning the courage of individuals in the face of inhumanity, and the evils of persecution and destruction.<sup>6</sup>

In letters to his brother, Theo, Vincent Van Gogh wrote:

Ah portraiture, portraiture with the  
thought, the soul of the model in it,  
that is what I think must come.<sup>7</sup>

Most individuals know the feelings and care of their soul better than those of other people. Van Gogh's letters reflect his feelings about his personal life throughout his painting career. In the year this self-portrait was finished, he noted:

I did not need to go out of my  
way to try and express sadness  
and the extremity of loneliness.<sup>8</sup>

These words state a common theme of Van Gogh's life. In his letters to Theo throughout the years he refers

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<sup>6</sup>Gardner, pp. 638-639.

<sup>7</sup>Irving Stone, Dear Theo, The Autobiography of Vincent Van Gogh, (New York, 1969), p. 283.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 478.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. VIII.

to his sadness, loneliness and lack of human interaction.<sup>9</sup>

Van Gogh, a tortured man, was always in search of tranquility. He believed that friendship and human exchanges of feeling were necessary for comfort and happiness.<sup>10</sup>

In his final years his soul was never calm nor his mind untroubled. He often felt alone, rejected and even persecuted.<sup>11</sup>

Van Gogh's self-portrait conveys feelings of sadness, and a desire for contact and communication with other people. Yet, simultaneously, there is an element of defensiveness about his self-portrait, an implication that he does not feel warm human contact will come, and perhaps he will be rejected and hurt. This portrait was finished in the year following the first confinement of Van Gogh in a mental institution.<sup>12</sup> It is also the year after his arguments and consequent falling out with Gauguin, a man with whom he was certain he could communicate because they had similar lifestyles, problems and concerns for art.<sup>13</sup>

Two works of art are being examined because this comparison affords the opportunity not only to demonstrate a variety of body language forms, but also to realize two

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 404.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

types of experiences in art accessible to viewers. In the Goya, the audience is witnessing an occurrence and their reaction is to that event. In the Van Gogh, the onlookers encounter an individual and their reaction is to the character of that man. Viewers are given a chance to meet a soul captured in paint ninety years ago. One would consider that Van Gogh's painting is but the capturing of a man in a momentary mood which will have changed. However, the spectator's reliance upon appearance to form opinions and Van Gogh's statement that the soul of the model must be portrayed suggests that when the viewer leaves the painting he will carry an impression of the artist's character.

Important to this paper's examination is an awareness that in separating a single body language form from its context there is an artificial isolation of the form.<sup>14</sup> In relation to this paper's concerns, it must be remembered that the meaning of a work of art is contained in the simultaneous interaction of its various forms of body language. No single form of the language will decide the meaning of a painting. At the conclusion of the examination, the characteristics of the various body language forms will be grouped in relation to their painting.

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<sup>14</sup>R.A. Hinde "Comparative Study of Non Verbal Communication," The Body as a Medium of Expression, ed. Benthall, J. and Polhemus, T. (London, 1975), p. 134.

Each group of characteristics will determine the meaning or feeling of their respective painting.

A short description of each painting is necessary in order to establish a verbal identification of visual reference points to emotional content. In Goya's painting, French soldiers are on the verge of firing rifles with the aim of killing a group of unarmed Spanish citizens, while in the background another group of citizens attend the execution. In the lower left-hand corner, a Spaniard lies dead in a pool of blood. It is unimportant, in relation to this paper's concept of continual communication in art, that the citizens are Spanish and the soldiers are French. This author's interpretation of Jansen's statement concerning the emotional content of Goya's painting makes no reference to nationalities. The terms 'Spanish' and 'French' are meant to serve only as verbal aids in the identification of visual representations. To most spectators, the humans portrayed in the painting could be citizens of a number of countries, although it is possible that they would be seen as originating in a land bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

In the Van Gogh self-portrait an audience sees a three-quarter view of a middle-aged man's head and torso. The man is holding a painter's palette and brushes.

Spatial behavior consists of orientation, proximity,

territorial behavior and movement in a physical setting.<sup>15</sup> Orientation is the angle at which one person faces another; visually at a line perpendicular to the plane of their shoulders so that directly facing is zero degrees. This angle refers to the orientation of the body, not the head or eyes.<sup>16</sup>

Illustration 12, p. 58, represents four common spatial orientations of human interaction and attitude. Number one represents cooperation-discussion. Number two represents cooperation-intimacy. Number three represents competition-opposition. Number four represents avoidance.<sup>17</sup>

In Goya's painting the body orientation of the foreground group of Spanish citizens towards each other is number two of illustration 12, cooperation-intimacy. Therefore, they are identified as a group sharing some type of affiliative relationship. The body orientation of the soldiers towards each other is also number two of illustration 12, and likewise identifies them as another group sharing some type of common opinion. The body orientation of these two groups towards each other is

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<sup>15</sup>Michael Argyle, Body Communication, (London, 1975), p. 301.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>17</sup>M. Patterson and L. Sechrest "Interpersonal Distance and Impression Formation," Journal of Personality, 38:165 (June 1970).



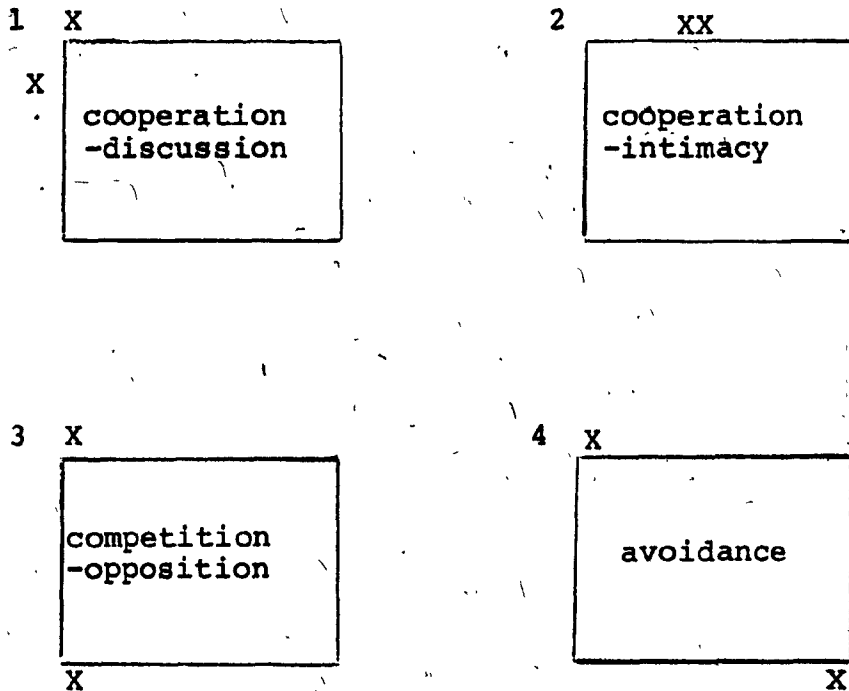


ILLUSTRATION 12 - Four common spatial orientations of human interaction and attitude.

number three of illustration 12, competition-opposition.

This orientation serves to emphasize a conflict of beliefs between the citizens and the soldiers.

Since there are no other personified forms contained within the painted area of Van Gogh's self-portrait, the body orientation of his figure must refer to subjects outside the painting's physical measurements. Considering that Van Gogh was interested in conveying the soul of his model, (see footnote 7, chapter 3), it is not presumptuous to believe that his figure's spatial orientation is towards viewers of the painting. The best view of the painting is obviously from directly in front. Van Gogh's body is then approximately positioned at a forty-five to sixty degree angle to the viewer. Argyle states that the spatial orientation of colleagues towards each other when they are having a friendly conversation is from a forty-five to ninety degree angle.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the body orientation and social attitude expressed by Van Gogh's figure corresponds to number one of illustration 12, cooperation-discussion.

Miles Patterson conducted tests to determine the most socially active distance between persons. Four feet

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<sup>18</sup>Michael Argyle "Syntaxes of Bodily Communication," The Body as a Medium of Expression, ed. Benthall, J. and Polhemus, T. (London, 1975), p. 160

was found to be the space at which people could best judge and communicate emotions.<sup>19</sup> It is an approximation of the distance at which friends or associates sit apart to have discussions.<sup>20</sup> However, four feet was also considered to be the most socially active distance because participants could easily deduce each others emotion regardless of whether or not they shared a developed relationship.<sup>21</sup> Distances of less than two feet were found by Patterson to be intimate spaces normally restricted to situations involving strong physical, emotional or mental bonds<sup>22</sup> - for example, sexual relationships, steadfast friendships, or family interactions. Extremely close proximities can cause embarrassment if there are no qualifications for intimate relations.<sup>23</sup> Patterson states that visible degrees of intimacy decrease as distances between people increase.<sup>24</sup>

Studies by E.T. Hall have ascertained four proximity distances in relation to the types of social interaction possible between persons.<sup>25</sup> The first, spatial separations

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<sup>19</sup>Patterson and Sechrest, p. 165.

<sup>20</sup>Argyle, Syntaxes, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>21</sup>Patterson and Sechrest, p. 165.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-163.

<sup>23</sup>A. Mehrabian "Significance of Posture and Position in Communication of Attitudes," Psychological Bulletin, 71:362 (May, 1969).

<sup>24</sup>Patterson and Sechrest, p. 162.

<sup>25</sup>Mehrabian, p. 363.

of sixteen to eighteen inches, is indicative of intimate interpersonal situations. The second, from thirty to forty-eight inches, is typical of casual, personal interaction. The third, from seven to twelve feet, is characteristic of social consultative situations. The fourth, distances of thirty feet and more, is representative of public interaction situations.

There are obvious exceptions to the proximity distances suggested by Patterson and Hall. An example is the small spaces between strangers in crowded public transportation systems. In this type of situation, people tend to regard each other as physical forms rather than as emotional beings.<sup>26</sup> During occurrences in which violations of normal proximity distances are unavoidable, people usually ignore or depersonalize each other.

Obviously the physical dimensions and social characteristics of Patterson's and Hall's proximity distances are comparable. Patterson's very intimate spaces of area separations of less than two feet relate in terms of size to Hall's intimate interpersonal distances of sixteen to eighteen inches. Since both use the descriptive word 'intimate', Patterson and Hall mutually imply that human spatial proximities of these small distances demand a mental bond or familiarity between interactors. People do

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<sup>26</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 320.

not willingly share an intimate situation unless they agree upon the involved activity. The most socially active proximity distance of four feet determined by Patterson corresponds to the thirty to forty-eight inch space of casual, personal interaction deduced by Hall. A socially active situation is one in which people take part in casual, personal interaction.

The human proximity distances ascertained by Hall and Patterson are physically practical. They are logically proportional to the types of information that interactors can understand about each other through an interpretation of physical activities or appearances. The distance between interactors helps decide the specifics of their characters which they communicate to, and comprehend about, each other. These character specifics are visually indicative of the social situation in which the interactors are involved.

In proximity distances of less than two feet, interactors can touch each other. The type of touch (ie., soft, hard, petting and patting) and the area of touch, (ie., hand, face, waist) between interactors are usually indicative of the nature of their emotional involvement<sup>27</sup> - friendly, violent, sexual, comforting, et cetera.

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<sup>27</sup>Argyle, *Syntaxes*, op. cit., p. 157.

Furthermore, the physical character of a touch can confirm attitudes expressed by other body language forms or verbal expressions. For example, a soft, embracing touch affirms sentiments conveyed by words of affection and a smile.

Except in angry situations, touching indicates that interactors trust or accept each other, and often that they are involved in intimate activities.<sup>28</sup> Pleasant physical and emotional intimacy is impossible without either trust or acceptance. In addition, when placed in close physical contact or in touching, people can feel each other's tensing muscles or vibrations from shuddering. Physical tensing or shuddering can be a manifestation of fear and disgust.<sup>29</sup>

Emotional displays of this sort may be indiscernible to more distant participants because they can be quickly covered by dominant expressions like smiling or laughing.<sup>30</sup> Physical contact can, therefore, be the most direct, honest, and consequently the most intimate, form of communication. In proximity distances of less than two feet, people can whisper.<sup>31</sup> This low level allows individuals to relate

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> P. Ekman and W. Freisen "Head and Body Cues in the Judgement of Emotion, A Reformulation," Perceptual and Motor Skills, (January to February, 1967), p. 719.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 723.

<sup>31</sup> Ted Polhemus, "Social Bodies," The Body as a Medium of Expression, ed. Benthall, J. and Polhemus, T. (London, 1975), p. 26.

private information to trusted associates without being exposed to non-confederates. Finally, in spaces smaller than two feet, and under supportive lighting conditions, interactors can clearly see minute physical details which many people consider very personal.

Generally, members of Western civilizations do not find warts, moles, body hair (i.e., womans' moustaches, mens' nostril hairs), pore openings, blackheads, or crow's-feet and other fine lines in the skin attractive. Yet frequently, a large segment of people's self esteem is based upon the degree to which other members of their society find them appealing.<sup>32</sup> As a result, people may feel uncomfortable when they provide other humans with a solid knowledge of the minute parts of their physical character. They may also feel intrusive when they view these details on persons who are not close friends or relatives. These features may be so disliked because they grow more pronounced with age. In order that interactors may not feel embarrassed by such an acute awareness of these features, they must be engaged in a relationship that warrants a high degree of physical familiarity. Thus, for persons to feel comfortable sharing a small spatial proximity, their relationship should fulfill intimate or emotional needs.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

At thirty to forty-eight inches apart it is impossible for interactors to view the same degree of minute physical details as when they are in spatial proximities smaller than two feet. Nevertheless, they can recognize such special features as: the colour of the iris and the clarity of the pupils; defined wrinkles; the oiliness and cleanliness of the skin; skin tension; the wave, length and directional movement of small clusters of entwined beard and head hairs; specifics concerning the condition, style and quality of clothing. These distinct physical traits help mould mental images stored in the memory. For example, a man with dull, bloodshot eyes, dirty, tangled hair, a sagging heavily-wrinkled face, and wearing an expensive tweed suit, rumpled and foodstained, will be judged by his cohorts as tired and depressed. If these qualities become continual aspects of his appearance, they will imbed themselves in the minds of his cronies and become important facts in descriptions of his physically and mentally-exhausted character. This space is the type used by friends or associates for discussions.<sup>34</sup> A part of casual, cordial interaction is a concern among participants for each other's mental and physical welfare.

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<sup>33</sup>Ray Birdwhistell, Kinesics and Context, Essays on Body Motion Communication, (New York, 1970), p. 108.

<sup>34</sup>Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., p. 301.



Repeatedly contained in the opening remarks of conversations are inquiries between the involved persons about their different states of health, minds, families and finances. Voice levels between persons thirty to forty eight inches apart can be soft and confiding. These subdued voice tones can help create feelings of fellowship among those taking part in casual, personal interaction. Such tones imply that the information being discussed is meant for the ears of the favored persons, not people in general.

Taking forty-eight inches to be the most socially active distance, regardless of whether or not interactors are close acquaintances, is reasonable because, given a simple upward-~~downward~~ movement, the eyes can view the entire length and width of a human body. In the process of ascertaining someone's emotional state, it is very helpful to see as much of his figure as possible. All parts of the human body can display activities or qualities that define the nature and intensity of feelings.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, when a viewer is concentrating his attention upon a subject from a distance of four feet, his gaze includes only a small area around the studied person. This small peripheral field aids in the examination of the person's emotions because it almost completely negates any possible visual distractions.

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<sup>35</sup> Birdwhistell, p. 214.

The observer can easily maintain his concentration on the subject's physical characteristics and feelings because there is little else in his visual field.

In the intimate dimension of distances smaller than two feet, people are usually certain they know each other's emotional state. This mutual knowledge will have determined the physical character of the behavior in which they are engaged. For example, if two sisters feel sorrow, they may be holding and comforting each other. In order to preserve his own mental and physical safety, an individual seldom consciously allows other humans to enter his intimate space when he is uncertain of their emotions and resultant behavior.<sup>36</sup> Intimate interaction, especially physical contact should be the most sincere form of human communication.

When separated by the larger distances of four feet, people may not be quite as knowledgeable about the nature of their relationship. Two persons may be interacting in order that each can create a private opinion of the other's personality. The physical manifestations of feeling and character which each finds on his counterpart's figure can determine how they will continue to behave together. A spatial proximity of four feet is applicable to these searches for expressions of temperament because such

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<sup>36</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 289.

a distance can provide an observant interactor with a fairly detailed awareness of another's physical appearance, and help to maintain his interest in this information. The body language so interpreted can then lead to more intimate activities, maintain the present level of the relationship, or cause hostility between interactors. At a spatial proximity of four feet, people can make coordinated efforts to reach out and touch. A handshake is a physical symbol of acceptance that occurs at the end of a situation when participants find their personalities compatible. However, an individual can also avoid physical contact from disliked persons because few humans have a forty-eight inch reach. A spatial proximity of four feet is a distance separation that aids people in making choices about the emotional directions of their personal associations.

Whereas a distance separation of four feet can be used by interactors to develop the nature of their private relationships, the seven to twelve foot spatial dimension is used for the more detached activity of interested observation.<sup>37</sup> The ability to touch one another and the realization of detailed physical appearances may sometimes forcefully create even unwanted senses of familiarity between humans. Nancy Jo Felipe and Robert Sommer ran tests in which their assistants invaded the casual-personal,

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<sup>37</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 301.

and intimate spaces of strangers without any invitation, or practical reason; the distance separations ranged from twelve to sixty inches.<sup>38</sup> The individuals whose spaces were violated consistently exhibited hostility, adopted self-protective postures, or fled the spatial proximity.<sup>39</sup> The negative attitudes expressed by the victims were more clearly evident when the intimate spaces were entered, but they were also readable in the casual-personal spaces.<sup>40</sup> Felipe and Sommer concluded that people become uneasy when the presence of an alien person is pushed upon them.<sup>41</sup>

Naturally, when separated by distances of seven to twelve feet, humans cannot touch each other. When interactors are having conversations at these distances they should speak in firm and slightly-amplified voices.<sup>42</sup> This level inhibits the discussion of personal feelings at large social gatherings and in public places because the words might be overheard by strangers or enemies and cause their speakers embarrassment. Moreover, with these spatial separations it is difficult for persons to see, on each

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<sup>38</sup> Nancy Jo Felipe and Robert Sommer, "Invasions of Personal Space," Social Problems, 14:211 (Fall, 1966).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>42</sup> Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., p. 301.

other, some exclusive physical details, such as eye color, which are part of every individual's concept of self-image.<sup>43</sup>

The inability of interactors to see such precise details or to touch, and the non confidentiality of, loud voice levels can contribute to an absence of familiarity. However, an observer may be interested in a subject for reasons other than forming a personal relationship. Social-consultative spaces divide judges, juries and defendants in courtrooms. Facial expressions, the refinement of facial features (i.e. nose, lips, chin) deep creases and furrows in the skin, the movement of thick strands as they curl, wave or layer straight over each other to form the texture and grooming of head and beard hair, height, weight, physique, muscle tension, the color, ornamentation, style and general condition of clothing and jewelry are easily visible from a seven to twelve foot distance and can form opinions about a person's nature. A man smiling with classically handsome facial features (i.e. small refined nose, cleft chin, high cheek bones), relaxed, smooth brows, styled wavy hair, a firm muscular body, and wearing bright, tailored, apparently-clean pressed clothing, and carved, gold-colored jewelry imbedded with diamonds will be seen as healthy, happy, fastidious, extroverted and confident.

Most people want to select their own friends. \* The

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<sup>43</sup>Polhemus, p. 24.

choices they make are based upon their interests, likes and dislikes, social class and occupation. However, in the course of existence most people are forced into contact with other humans whose friendship they have no desire to cultivate. To live in a society and fulfill needs, ambitions and duties, the majority of individuals must interact with persons they do not wish to know well. Whether or not a man's lawyer is the type of person he would pick as a close friend is inconsequential if his legal needs are satisfied by the counsel's abilities. In fact, professionals like lawyers, use social consultative spaces in their offices to separate themselves from their clients.<sup>44</sup> These proximity distances enable them to judge a patron's character and his reactions to their services but do not compel them to feel involved personally with a customer.

An observer's gaze includes a larger area around a subject when they are separated by a spatial range of seven to twelve than when they are divided by a distance of four feet. This surrounding area, especially if it is part of the studied individual's home or work area, may contain objects that will also help to create opinions about his character.<sup>45</sup> Quite often a person will deliberately decorate his living or working quarters in a manner that

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

emphasizes certain values.<sup>46</sup> For example a lawyer's office could be furnished with thick, plush carpeting, teak and leather furniture, bound, gilded law books, well done but conservative art (serene landscapes), framed diplomas, and photographs of his wife and children. This decor should benefit his practice by suggesting to his clients that he is financially successful, professionally competent and socially dependable. Spatial separations of seven to twelve feet can supply information that will allow people to form impressions of each other but do not coerce them into personal situations.

During the course of his normal day, whether at home, work or play the average person seldom pays little beyond momentary attention to human figures who are thirty feet and more away. Few people possess or completely control rooms that are thirty long. In outdoor public places only important individuals like political leaders, have the power to regulate large spaces to emphasize their character.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, when an observer is regarding another human from a distance of thirty feet, the area that surrounds the subject can easily contain interesting forms that have no relation to his character. These extraneous elements, particularly if they exist in the space that

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 197-198.

divides the examiner and the inspected individual, will interfere with a personality study. For example, a man watching another person who is sitting on a park bench thirty feet away can have his attention diverted by a beautiful woman walking between them, or an airplane in the sky behind the subject's head. Both of these disturbances are beyond the control of either the observer or the subject, but need not happen in smaller, privately-owned territories.

Conversations are almost never held at large distance separations because it is mentally unsettling and physically uncomfortable to continue to yell beyond a few minutes. At a proximity distance of thirty feet, an onlooker can survey another human's height, weight, physique, hair and skin clothing, the general outline and shape of his facial features, the overall cut, texture and condition of his hair (i.e. long-short, straight-curly, flat-bushy, thick-thin), and the colour and style-function of his clothing (leisure clothes, business suit, workman's overalls, uniform, et cetera). \* This type of information is relevant to an optical analysis of a person's character. However, the data is frequently too broad in scope to allow an interpreter to do any more than connect a human subject with a stereotyped role and its allied values - businessman, labourer, housewife, prostitute, professor, student, policeman, gangster, et cetera. Smaller spatial proximities



permit viewers to translate physical details that can individualize persons from general groups. For example, collections of long-haired, burly men wearing jeans, boots and leather jackets, and standing near motorcycles, are often associated with negative social sentiments. Many people, if they visually discern such a gathering, will make a wide detour in attempt to avoid a potentially unpleasant encounter. Yet, in the event that a closer inspection of one motorcyclist revealed that he was smooth-shaven and wore a small crucifix on a chain around his neck, a peace sign on his belt buckle, clean, pressed jeans and polished boots, a viewer would likely make a more precise diagnosis of his character. Instead of being seen as a wild hooligan, the cyclist could be recognized as a gentle, neat, religious individual who liked freedom and open spaces. At a spatial separation of thirty feet, an observer can see another person's facial expressions and body gestures, but only excessive exhibitions of mood, such as a temper tantrum, really demand scrutiny. On a busy street people may not notice a man smiling and humming thirty feet ahead. Nevertheless, they should consciously acknowledge, at the same distance, a dancing person who is loudly chanting and laughing. The sheer energy expelled by overtly intense demonstrations of humour invariably attracts public attention. Numerous individuals will often intentionally dodge openly emotional figures because they do not want to

be drawn into situations that may become dangerous or are a waste of time. In summary, when people are divided by distances of thirty feet or more, extended, worthwhile interaction, in either a personal or consultative sense, seldom takes place. In order for individuals to engage in communication that is meaningful, in relation to their private or social needs, they should interact in smaller spatial proximities. Under most conditions large distances merely enable an observer to link a human subject with stereotypes, common, social values and clique roles.

The notable exceptions to the absence of significant communication between persons separated by large distances occur when spectators view performances at entertainment or civic happenings - theatre, nightclub acts, circus shows, concerts, political rallies. These events are manufactured situations where acoustics and lighting are regulated to enhance the presentations of talented persons. Spectators make concentrated efforts to rivet their attention upon the characters portrayed by trained individuals. The seating space is arranged to aid viewers in funelling their gaze towards raised platforms or other specifically outlined areas. These stages are decorated with props which are meant to heighten the emotional nature of certain scenes or compliment the parts played by major performers. Actors, nightclub singers, comedians, rock musicians and circus stars wear makeup and costumes. They use these visual

stimuli to emphasize particular personality traits of the roles they personify.

In Circus and Culture Paul Bouissac writes that the traditional circus comedian act consists of a white-faced clown and the clown proper, called the "auguste."<sup>48</sup> The white-faced clown is meant to embody the soul of refined culture.<sup>49</sup> He is classified by the assemblage of "overdetermined signs"; his flesh colour and facial features are hidden by white paste, and lines are painted to create thick lips and asymmetrical eyebrows; his hair is neat and inconspicuous; his perfectly tailored costume is made of rich fabrics and sparkling threads and he wears the shoes of a dancer.<sup>50</sup> The white-faced clown can play complicated musical instruments, and is graceful and authoritative.<sup>51</sup>

The "auguste" wears a mask which exaggerates natural bumps and colours;<sup>52</sup> he usually has a bright, red ball on the end of his nose. The hair on his head is thick and undisciplined.<sup>53</sup> His clothing consists of elaborate,

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<sup>48</sup>Paul Bouissac, Circus and Culture, a Semiotic Approach, (London, 1976), p. 164.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

clashing fabrics patched together and is always too small or too large, while his shoes are enormous and floppy.<sup>54</sup>

Sometimes he is dressed in the rags and ornaments of a hobo.<sup>55</sup> The "auguste" behaves like a baffoon. He makes silly mistakes and has crude manners. His character is the inverse of that of the white-faced clown.<sup>56</sup>

Together, the two clowns represent the basic dichotomy between elegant, civilized society and wild, unmanageable nature.<sup>57</sup> Their costumes and actions enable them to create situations that reflect the difference between an acceptable cultured demeanor and abnormal behavior.<sup>58</sup> Frequently, a spectator's sympathies lie with the "auguste" because of his pitiful physical condition and his obvious inability to adapt to society. The "auguste", through his strange appearance and conduct, is a social outlaw. Yet, it is not uncommon for citizens to wish that they, too, could break away from the polite expectations and legal regulations of organized society.

The circus clowns perform their burlesque in a ring positioned in the middle of a large tent or arena

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

with the audience's seats surrounding the ring.<sup>59</sup> Often the stands are darkened so that only the central circle remains illuminated while a coloured beam of light may heighten the emotional expressions of an individual clown; flood lights can supply a tint that accentuates the overall mood of the entire performance.<sup>60</sup> Music accompanying the entertainment and its melody should contribute to the atmosphere of a comedy sketch.<sup>61</sup>

Entertainment and civic events are social-consultative situations. The manipulation of space, acoustics and light, combined with the support of costumes, makeup and props, facilitates the transmission of specific messages from the performers to their audience. Spectators acknowledge their consumption of this precise communication by laughing at it, applauding, or booing the performers. The viewers' opinions about the subject matter and their appreciation of its presentation are reflected in the intensity of their applause or the fury of their scorn. The audience can also read the proximity distances between performers and by relating these spaces to their own experience, they can better understand the meanings of the stage proceedings.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

A spectator can also read the proximity distances that exist between human figures who are represented as interacting in paintings. In "The Body and Social Metaphor" Donald MacRae writes:

We can measure either through the movement or by the dimensions of the body... measuring involves the doubling and the redoubling of a human dimension, and this doubling I would suggest is bound up with the bilateralism of the body and the duplication of the limbs. Ideas of measure, of proportion, of due restraint come from the body as well as ideas of scale: we talk of human scale in our environment and also in our social relations. Man really is the measure of all things.<sup>62</sup>

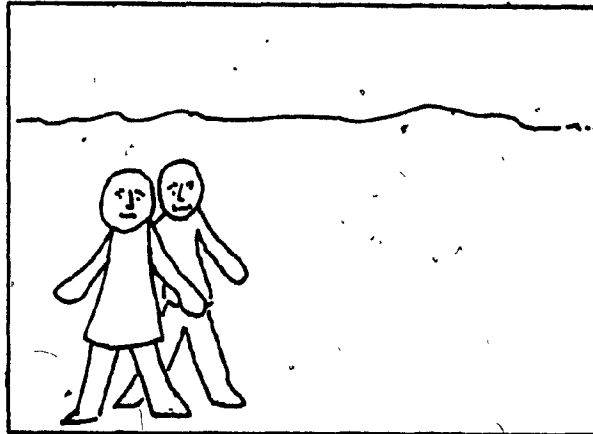
To estimate the size of distances between human forms portrayed with pigments, a viewer can base his calculations on the proportions of the painted figures. The limb lengths or body heights of the painted figures can serve as yardsticks with which to measure their proximities to each other. For example, if two adult males of average height, A and B, are positioned at the same pictorial depth in a painted landscape and are divided by a space comparable to either's height, then it can be estimated that they are five to six feet apart. Furthermore, if B stands deeper in the pictorial depth than A, their proximity distance can be reckoned by simultaneously reading their contrast in size,

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<sup>62</sup> Donald MacRae, "The Body and Social Metaphor" *The Body As A Medium of Expression*, ed. Benthall, J. and Polhemus, T. (New York, 1975), p. 65.

the distance between them in a straight line, and a comparison of, where each stands in relation to the painting's bottom edge and horizon line. For example, if B is slightly smaller than A, stands almost directly behind him, and is only a fraction of an inch further away from the painting's bottom edge it should be apparent that they coexist in an intimate interpersonal space. (See illustration 13, p. 81). However, if B is only one-third the size of A, stands in the extreme right side of the painting and is bisected by the horizon while A's head is below the line and he is positioned in the left half of the canvas, it will be obvious that they are far apart or at a public interaction proximity. (See illustration 14, p. 81).

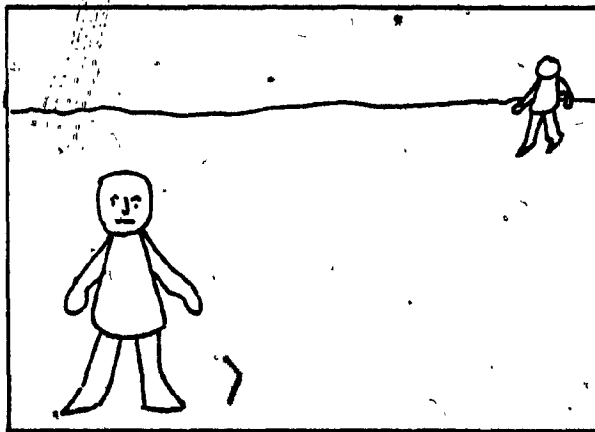
In Goya's painting the fourth soldier in the firing line and the Spanish citizen in the white shirt are at similar depth levels, (see illustration 15, p. 82). In the reproduction of "The Third of May, 1808," the fourth soldier's form is  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches long. The Spanish citizen in the white shirt is kneeling and only three-quarters of his body is shown. The length of this form is  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches. The addition of the remaining quarter to the Spanish citizen's figure would make it  $2\frac{5}{6}$  inches long. Therefore, this citizen and the fourth soldier have almost exactly the same height proportionally. A measurement of the direct distance between them is four inches; consequently, their proximity distance is approximately the height of



-horizon line

-paintings bottom edge

ILLUSTRATION 13. If B is slightly smaller than A, stands almost directly behind him and is only a fraction of an inch further away from the paintings bottom edge it is apparent they coexist in an intimate interpersonal space.



-horizon line

-paintings bottom edge

ILLUSTRATION 14. If B is one-third the size of A, stands in the extreme right side of the painting and is bisected by the horizon line while A's head is below the line and he is positioned in the left half of the canvas, it is obvious they are at a public, interaction proximity.



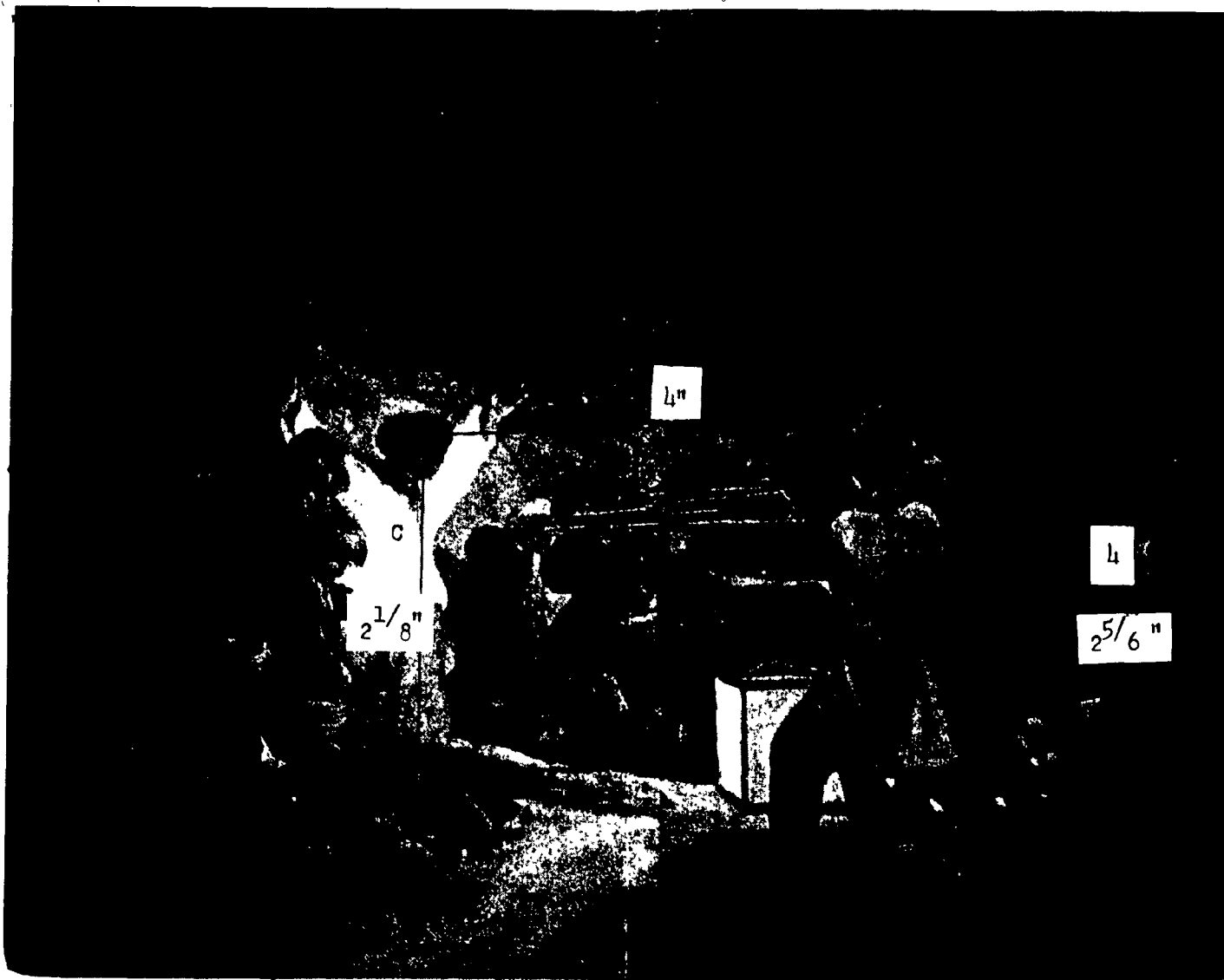


ILLUSTRATION 15. Francisco Goya "The Third of May, 1808." 1814-15

The Spanish citizen (figure C) is kneeling and only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of his body is shown. In the reproduction this form is  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches long. The addition of the remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  would make the citizen's figure,  $(2\frac{1}{8} \times \frac{4}{3})$ ,  $2\frac{5}{6}$  inches long. The fourth soldier's form is  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches long. The distance between the soldier and the citizen is 4 inches. Therefore their proximity to each other is  $\frac{4}{2\frac{3}{4}} = 1\frac{5}{11}$  or approximately  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times the length of the  $2\frac{3}{4}$  soldier. If his height is 5 feet 3 inches their proximity distance is  $63 \times 1\frac{1}{2} = 95\frac{1}{2}$  inches or approximately 8 feet. If his height is 6 feet their proximity distance is  $6 \times 1\frac{1}{2} = 9$  feet.

the French soldier multiplied by one and one-half. In 1824 the average height of an adult European male was five feet three inches.<sup>63</sup> If this measurement is used as a base on which to calculate the length of the distance between the soldier and the citizen, their proximity to each other would be established at approximately eight feet. The use of a modern average human height of six feet would place their proximity at nine feet. In either case, since the soldier and the citizen are members of their respective groups, the proximity distance between the French execution squad and their Spanish victims is used for social consultation. (For the measurements and calculations on which the figures in proceeding paragraph are based, see illustration 15, p. 82).

Personal space, an area surrounding every human's body, is used for self-protection.<sup>64</sup> It can be measured for each individual by approaching him from different directions - front, back and side.<sup>65</sup> The points at which a person stops the intrusion of other's fence the envelope that is his personal space.<sup>66</sup> The size of this area varies

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<sup>63</sup> John Lavater, Introduction to the Study of the Anatomy of the Human Body, (London, 1824), p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

for each individual, but there is usually a larger space in front than in other directions.<sup>67</sup> A human's personal space is an area that he allows only close friends or relatives to enter. Under peaceful conditions the personal space of some persons has been measured at seven square feet.<sup>68</sup> However, in situations with overtones of impending violence, personal spaces of twenty-two square feet have been recorded.<sup>69</sup> Quite often when a human's personal space is violated, he will turn his head or body away from the intruder, hunch up his body, or quickly depart.

Personal territory is the property that an individual controls or owns, such as his home or workspace.<sup>70</sup> Temporary personal territories are places like restaurant booths, tennis courts, library tables and hotel rooms.<sup>71</sup> Humans signify their rights to these areas by depositing personal belongings that act as markers.<sup>72</sup> The physical activities which set up temporary or permanent personal regions are called "territorial behavior."<sup>73</sup> The actions of an individual when he moves

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

into someone else's territory, accepts another human in his terrain, or places barrier objects between himself and other persons, are called "movement in a physical setting."<sup>74</sup>

The French soldiers establish one boundary of their personal territory by pointing their rifles and bayonets towards the Spanish citizens. The small distance between the sharp tips of the poniards and the citizens' bodies is clearly evident in illustration 16, p. 86; it is as if the Spanish could reach and touch the blades. In the foreground a kneeling Spaniard has his head bowed, hands clutched together, and body hunched. Although he is undoubtedly despairing over his hopeless situation, he may also be reacting to an attack on his personal space by a soldier's bayonet.

One way in which a person exhibits his feelings about another human during social interaction is the direction in which he leans his body.<sup>75</sup> Naturally, this affects the size of the distance separation between interactors. It may also reflect an individual's true opinion of others when circumstances prevent more overt expressions of sentiment. A forward body lean demonstrates an affinity for another human being but a body lean away

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>75</sup> Mehrabian, p. 369.

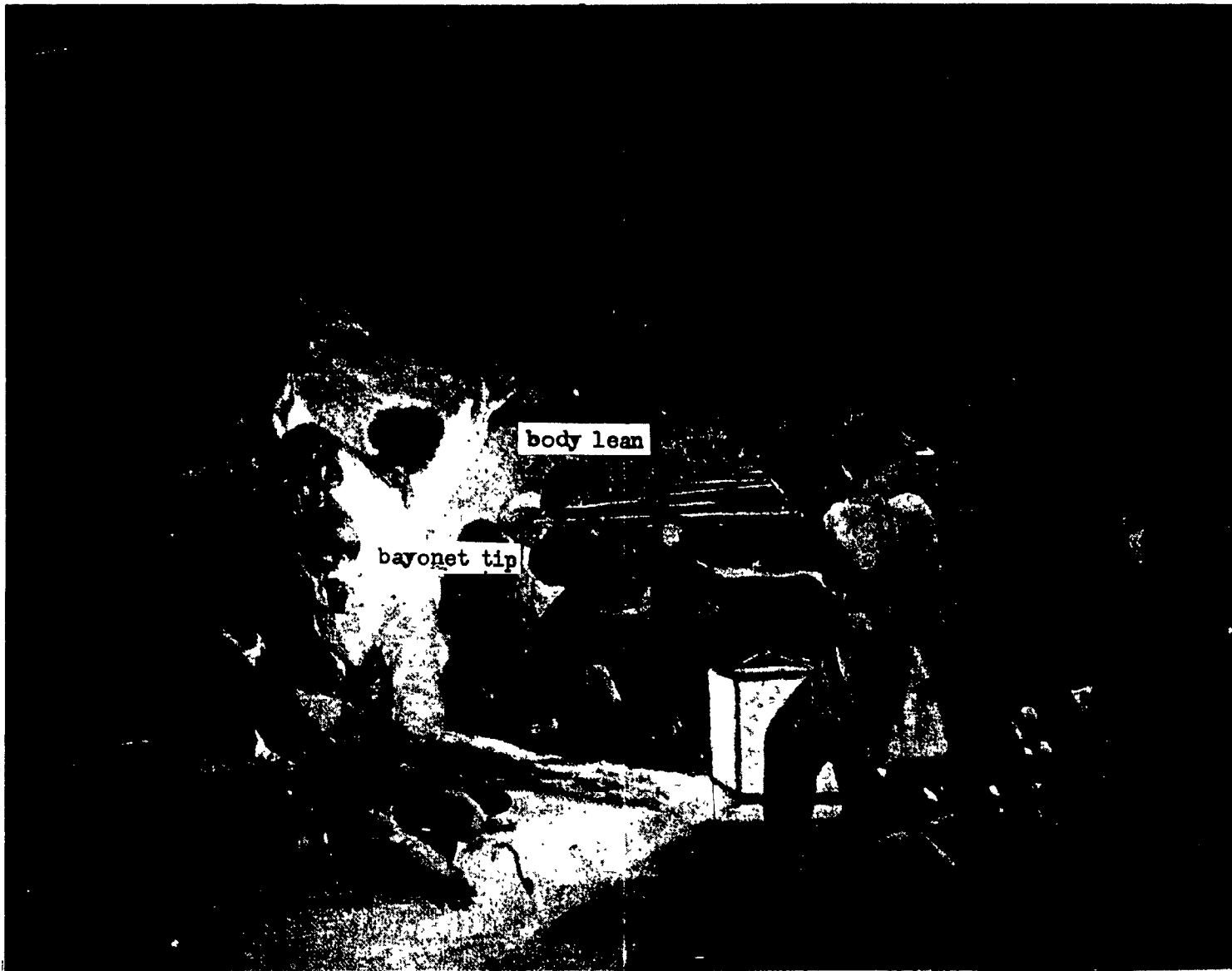


ILLUSTRATION 16. Francisco Goya "The Third of May, 1808." 1814-15

- A) The bayonets of the French soldiers may be piercing the Spanish citizens' personal spaces.
- B) The body lean of the background Spaniards is towards the men being executed and away from the French soldiers.

from a person indicates a dislike.<sup>76</sup>

In Goya's painting three members of the background group of Spanish citizens lean towards their condemned countrymen and away from the French soldiers. (See illustration 16, p. 86). This implies that their sympathies lie with the victims of the execution and that they abhor the firing squad.

The figures presented in "The Third of May, 1808" are painted smaller than life size. Realistic size is not necessary for the recognition and interpretation of images because the shapes and spatial behaviors of figures and objects remain unimpaired by a change in scale.<sup>77</sup> People do not object to a three inch photograph serving as a representation of a man.<sup>78</sup> A viewer's approach to the situation presented in Goya's painting resembles a modern man's attitude while he is watching humans interacting in television programs. The viewer realizes that the condensed forms and their actions emulate real life situations.

Therefore, the spectator is an interested observer of the events in Goya's painting. He can emotionally respond to the execution, but he will not feel that he physically participates.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Rudolf Arheim, Art and Visual Perception, The New Version, (Berkeley, 1974), p. 187.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Human figures which are portrayed life-size in paintings can fashion a different relationship with a viewer. The physical presence of their dimensions can be compared to the bulk of a living person. Consequently, the proximity distance that a viewer takes to a life-size painted figure can mimic a social encounter with a living being.

Illustration 17, p. 89, is a human anatomy diagram which represents the relative proportions of the male and female body. It is taken from Victor Perard's Anatomy and Drawing, which was published in 1929, a date midway between the year Van Gogh painted his portrait and the present year. The diagram depicts a male's head as being  $2/15$  of the entire length of the figure. This fraction corresponds to the description of the proportions of the body in a modern medical text.<sup>79</sup> It also corresponds to the proportions of the body described in an artist's anatomy book dated 1888.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, it can be estimated that the length of the head of a male between five and six feet tall should range from eight to ten inches. (See illustration 17, p. 89, for the mathematics on which these numbers are based). Perard's anatomy

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<sup>79</sup> H. Kempe, H. Silver and D. O'Brien, Current Pediatric Diagnosis and Treatment, (Los Angeles, 1978), p. 13.

<sup>80</sup> Mathias Duval, Artistic Anatomy, (London, 1888), p. 179.

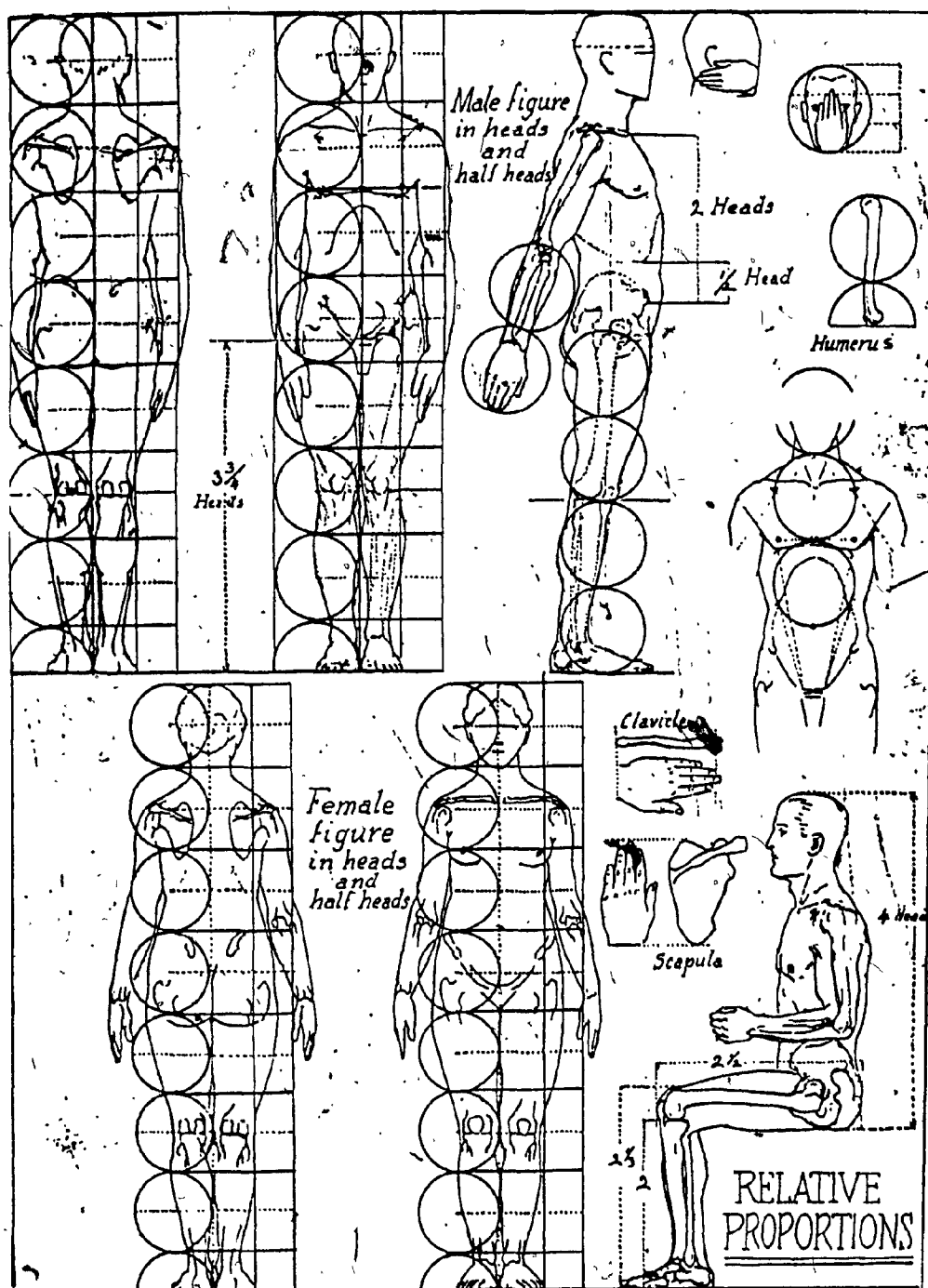


ILLUSTRATION 17. Relative Proportions of the Human Body. Victor Perard. 1929.

The head is  $\frac{2}{15}$  of the length of the entire male figure. Consequently a man five feet tall should have a head length of  $60 \times \frac{2}{15} = 8$  inches. A man 6 feet tall should have a head length of  $72 \times \frac{2}{15} = 9.6$  inches, approximately 10 inches.



diagram also indicates that the space between a male's chin and his breasts should be the same length as his head.

The reproduction of Van Gogh's portrait used in this thesis is  $5 \frac{5}{8}$  inches long by  $4 \frac{5}{16}$  inches wide. The actual painting is  $22 \frac{1}{2}$  inches long by  $17 \frac{1}{4}$  inches wide.<sup>81</sup> The reproduction is  $\frac{1}{4}$  the length and  $\frac{1}{4}$  the width of the original painting. In the reproduction, the length of Van Gogh's head is  $2 \frac{5}{8}$  inches. Therefore, in the actual painting his head should be approximately  $10 \frac{1}{2}$  inches long. The faces presented in Perard's anatomy diagram do not have beards. It can be reasonably argued that Van Gogh's beard adds an extra inch to the length of his head. His portrait head without the beard could be  $9 \frac{1}{2}$  inches long. In either case the length of Van Gogh's painted head is comparable to life size. Furthermore, the space between the tip of his beard and the bottom edge of the illustration is  $2 \frac{1}{2}$  inches. This area is meant to represent a portion of Van Gogh's neck and chest and is similar in measurement to the length of his head. (For the measurements and mathematics on which the numbers in this paragraph are based, see illustration 18, p. 91). The parts of the figure presented to viewers by Van Gogh's portrait mirror in actual size the same segments of a living person. Consequently, the space between the spot where a

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<sup>81</sup>Janson, p. 508.



5 5/8"

4 5/16"

ILLUSTRATION 18.

Vincent van Gogh. "Self-Portrait" 1889.

The measurements of the reproduction are length 5 5/8 inches and width 4 5/16 inches. The actual painting is 22 1/2 inches long by 17 1/4 inches wide.

Therefore, the reproduction is

$$\frac{5 \frac{5}{8}}{22 \frac{1}{2}} = \frac{1}{4} \text{ the length and } \frac{4 \frac{5}{16}}{17 \frac{1}{4}} = \frac{1}{4}$$

the width of the original painting.

Van Gogh's head length in the reproduction is 2 5/8 inches. Consequently, his head length in the original painting should be  $2 \frac{5}{8} \times 4 = 10 \frac{1}{2}$  inches.

viewer stands, and Van Gogh's portrait figure should resemble a real proximity distance of human interaction. However, the distance which a visual interpreter stands from a painting is not principally based on the size of its portrayed humans but rather on the dimensions of its stretched canvas. In order to grasp the meaning of a painting, a viewer must read the characteristics of its contained forms and the means by which they interact. Yet this does not create a problem with a viewer's proximity to the single human in Van Gogh's self-portrait because the figure of the artist occupies most of the picture's space. Moreover, his figure is positioned in the forefront of the picture plane; there is no area represented in the painting that would further separate Van Gogh from a viewer.

To define empirically the common distance which spectators stand from either Goya's or Van Gogh's painting it would be necessary to conduct proximity tests in the rooms in which the works are hung. It is impossible for this author to run such experiments. Theoretically this author feels that the distance a viewer stands from a painting depends upon his ability to perform two interrelated activities: seeing the painting as a whole so that he might decipher the relationships between all the contained images and simultaneously absorbing as much detail as possible. Arnheim supports this belief when he writes:

"In order to be comfortably visible the relevant portion of the visual field must be large enough to be sufficiently discernible in its detail and small enough to fit into the visual field."<sup>82</sup>

A painting 22 1/2 inches long by 17 1/4 inches wide can be easily contained in an observer's gaze from a distance of four feet. The personal details provided by Van Gogh about his physical appearance are of the type indigenous to casual, personal interaction. A viewer can contemplate the lines under Van Gogh's eyes and the blue of his irises, and can notice short brushstrokes representing small clusters of hair in his beard and eyebrows. (See illustration 19; p. 95). Furthermore, the space surrounding Van Gogh in his self-portrait compares in size, to the area surrounding the form of a human subject when an observer regards him from a distance of four feet. Van Gogh constructed his self-portrait in a manner which encourages a viewer to feel that he is engaging in a casual, personal situation with the artist's self-image.

Goya's painting is 13 feet 4 inches long by 8 feet 9 inches wide.<sup>83</sup> At a distance separation of four feet, a spectator's gaze could not contain the entire length of this painting. At a proximity distance of thirty feet, an observer's visual field could include many shapes outside

<sup>82</sup>Rudolf Arnheim, Visual Thinking, (Berkeley, 1969), p. 26.

<sup>83</sup>G.H. Hamilton, 19th and 20th Century Art, (New York, 1970), p. 54.

the edges of the painting's frame. In a museum these elements could take the form of a sculpture or a different painting. The presence of another interesting image in his visual field would interfere with a viewer's study of Goya's piece. A spectator should stand at a distance of seven to twelve feet from Goya's painting. Goya does not represent many personal details of his human figures, but does provide some features which are associated with a social, consultative situation. An observer will have a total awareness of the facial expressions of the Spanish victims. Moreover, he can see heavy creases in the palms of the foreground Spaniard in the white shirt, and notice brushstrokes that serve as thick strands of a citizen's hair. (See illustration 20, p. 96). The size of Goya's painting and the type of individual detail he provides about his portrayed figures will not make a viewer believe he is physically participating or personally involved in the execution. However, the spectator may feel that he is being consulted about the morality of the incident.

A line on a canvas running from a viewer's bottom left corner to the upper right corner will be seen as ascending and a line going from the upper left corner to the bottom right, descending.<sup>84</sup> Humans read pictures in the

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<sup>84</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, op.cit., p. 34.



blue iris

lines under eye

short brushstrokes  
representing small  
clusters of hair

ILLUSTRATION 19. Vincent Van Gogh. "Self-Portrait," 1889 (detail)

The personal physical details than Van Gogh represents in his self portrait are of the type that is indigenous to casual personal interaction.



ILLUSTRATION 20. Francisco Goya "Third of May, 1808" 1814-15 (detail)  
 The Spanish victims exhibit some physical features which are visible in social consultative situations.  
 (Turn page to side).

same direction as they read text.<sup>85</sup> This predictable behavior can be used to influence a viewer's opinions of the character of persons represented in paintings. On a stage the forces of good usually enter from a viewer's left while the powers of evil come from the right.<sup>86</sup> When the curtain rises, the audience looks first to the left side of the stage. Consequently, the audience is inclined to identify with the characters positioned there.<sup>87</sup> Figures on the right side of the stage will seem in opposition to the audience's favorites;<sup>88</sup> thus they may seem to be adversaries of the heroes/heroines.

The Spanish victims are positioned on the viewer's left of Goya's painting. They will be the figures on whom the viewer initially centres his attention. Therefore, an observer should side with the Spanish citizens and subsequently regard them as admirable humans. On the other hand, the French soldiers will be seen as opposing the Spanish and may be perceived as their wicked oppressors.

Since a painting is read from left to right, pictorial movement toward the right is regarded as demanding

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 35.



less effort.<sup>89</sup> A figure which transverses a painting from right to left may seem to be struggling against some resistance, perhaps because the movement conflicts, rather than moves, with the visual flow of an observer.<sup>90</sup>

Van Gogh's figure enters into the space of his painting from the right edge of the canvas and continues towards the left side. This linear movement could contribute to any feelings of turmoil contained in the painting.

The face is an extremely important region for the communication of emotions because it is highly expressive and able to send implicit messages about a person's feelings.<sup>91</sup> Body language studies have demonstrated that people tend to connect facial expressions with seven main emotions: happiness, surprise, fear, sadness, disgust (contempt), anger and interest.<sup>92</sup> Each of these emotions is the principal expression for a category of similar feelings.<sup>93</sup> For instance, happiness is the common synonym for the feelings of joy, satisfaction, contentment, elation, gaiety and hilarity.<sup>94</sup> In 1824 John Lavater published a

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Norman Lewis (ed.), The New Roget's Thesaurus in Dictionary Form, (New York, 1976), p. 188.

book, specifically designed for the use of artists, which organized similar emotions into categories. For example, he states that the emotion of joy has the following subdivisions: contentment, smiling, gaiety, loud laughter, and rapture.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, Lavater believed that comparable emotions would be conveyed with similar facial expressions, but with perhaps different body poses.<sup>96</sup> The resemblance between Lavater's system for the classification of emotions and the results of modern researchers in body language is not surprising since the main facial expressions for emotions are innate.<sup>97</sup>

Persons's blind from birth display emotional expressions which are indigenous to cultures throughout the world.<sup>98</sup>

Tests conducted by body language scientist Paul Ekman have shown that people can correctly correlate facial expressions with the seven main emotions sixty-six percent of the time.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, judges involved in experiments similar to Ekman's based their opinions of the subjects' feelings on mental comparisons of their facial expressions with those

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<sup>95</sup> Lavater, p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 17-18.

<sup>97</sup> Hinde, p. 117.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., p. 218.

of persons whom the judges knew or by identifying themselves with the subjects. Sometimes these identifications were so strong that the faces of the judges acquired the facial expressions of the subjects.<sup>100</sup> The correct identifications of emotions in Ekman's experiments were based entirely upon facial expressions; only the heads of subjects were shown.<sup>101</sup> Judges would exhibit an even higher percentage of correct identifications of emotions if they were aware of the corresponding causes for those emotions.<sup>102</sup>

Many studies of facial expressions have used posed models. As a result their expressions are probably more extreme and less inhibited than natural ones.<sup>103</sup> However, other studies have used photographs of spontaneous behavior and their accuracy of correct identifications was almost seventy percent.<sup>104</sup> Consequently, there appears to be a minimal difference in a viewer's ability to identify emotions through either posed or natural facial expressions.<sup>105</sup>

Illustration 21, p. 101, is a juxtaposition of the facial expressions of the dominant Spanish victims, labelled

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<sup>100</sup>Diana Thompson and Leo Meltzer, "Facial Expression", Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology V. 68 (2), 1964, p. 134.

<sup>101</sup>Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 114-115.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

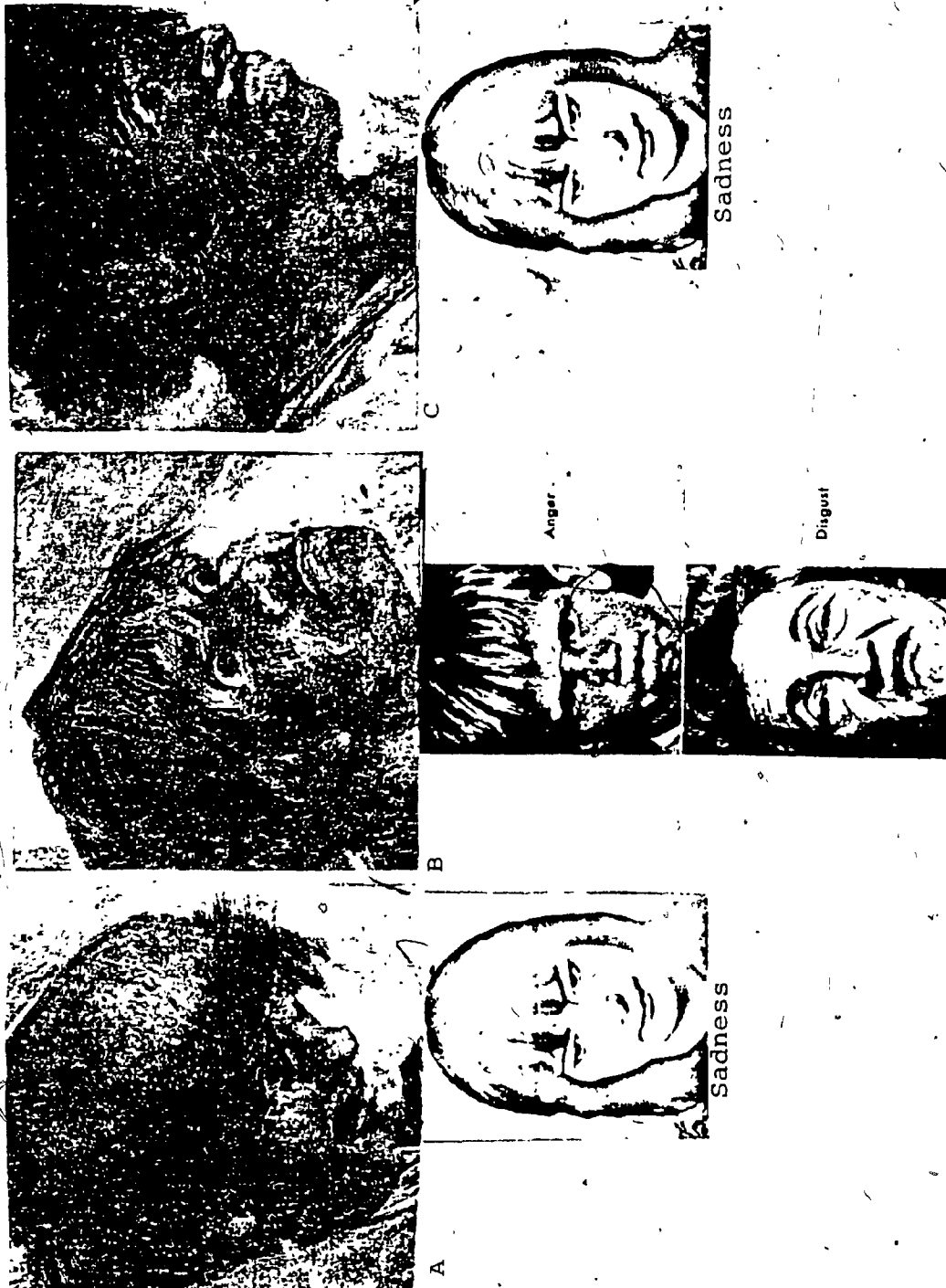


ILLUSTRATION 21. Juxtaposition of the facial expressions of the dominant Spanish victims with facial expressions taken from modern body language texts. (Turn page to side).



Figure A  
Vincent Van Gogh "Self  
Portrait." 1889. Detail  
of facial expression.



Figure B  
Mathias Duval  
Facial repre-  
sentation of  
sorrow.

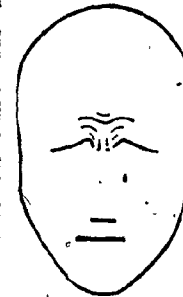


FIG. 71.  
Diagram representation of  
sorrow.

Figure C  
Mathias Duval  
Schematic face  
of sorrow.

PERCENT (ROUNDED) RESPONSES TO FACES IN EACH DESCRIPTIVE RESPONSE CATEGORY  
AND MODAL INTENSITY RATING OF PREDOMINANT JUDGEMENT (IN PARENTHESES)

Descriptions	Blank	Control	Neutral	Happy	Sad <sub>1</sub>	Angry <sub>1</sub>	Fiendish	Angry <sub>2</sub>	Sad <sub>2</sub>	Happy Sheepish
Elated	1			03			03			03
Happy	2			81 (4)						36 (3)
Neutral	3	89 (5)	38 (4)	39 (3)					06	
Sad	4		08		42 (5)			03	30 (3)	
Angry <sub>2</sub>	5		22 (2)		13	38 (4)		33 (5)		
Furious	6					17	03	33 (4)		
Amused	7		03	08		03				19 (3)
Sheepish	8	06	03		03				03	21 (3)
Mischievous	9	06		08		11	16			06
Fiendish	10					03	73 (5)	12	03	
Depressed	11				17	03			08	
Apprehensive	12		06	06	19	03			22 (3)	12
Afraid	13		03		03				03	
Horried	14	03				03				
Other	15	06	11	03		03			06	

Michael Argyle: Emotions perceived in schematic faces

ILLUSTRATION 22.

A, B, C with facial expressions taken from modern body language texts. Comparisons identify the emotion of figure A as sadness, the emotion of figure B as anger and contempt, and the emotion of figure C also as sadness.

Illustration 22, p. 102, consists of four components. Figure A is a detail of Van Gogh's self-portrait which shows his facial expression. Figure B, a facial representation of sorrow, is taken from Mathias Duval's *Artistic Anatomy*, (1888). Figure C is a schematic face which depicts the emotional expression of sorrow; it is also drafted from Duval. Figure D is a chart of schematic faces representing various emotions borrowed from Argyle's *Bodily Communication* (1975). Van Gogh's facial expression (A) and Duval's facial expression (B) are very similar. Duval's schematic face of sorrow (C) and Argyle's 'sad face 2' (circled in figure D), are also extremely alike. Van Gogh's facial expression in his self-portrait is rooted in sadness.

A human looks at another human mainly to collect information about his personality.<sup>106</sup> However, when an individual concentrates his gaze on another person, he actually sends two signals. The first implies that his communication channel is open and visual data can be

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

received.<sup>107</sup> The second indicates that he wishes to communicate with the other person; this is particularly true if he attempts to establish eye to eye contact. A gaze can be used to communicate a wide range of experiments that include such diverse feelings as affiliation, dominance, sexual desire, anger and hatred.<sup>108</sup> The recipient of a gaze decodes its meaning by reading the facial expression of its sender and by interpreting the nature of the situation in which he is involved.<sup>109</sup> For example, a man is sitting in a bar with his wife. A second man comes over to their table and begins to flirt with the woman. If the husband stares directly at the face of the second man, curls his lower lip and bares his teeth, the Don Juan will know he is treading on dangerous ground.

In Goya's painting the foreground Spaniard in the white shirt and the citizen directly on his right (figures C and B, illustration 23, p. 105) both stare at the faces of the French soldiers. The gazes of the two Spaniards should indicate to the soldiers that these citizens wish to communicate specific feelings. The French soldiers stare directly down their rifle barrels and avoid eye contact with the Spanish citizens. Gaze studies conducted by

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

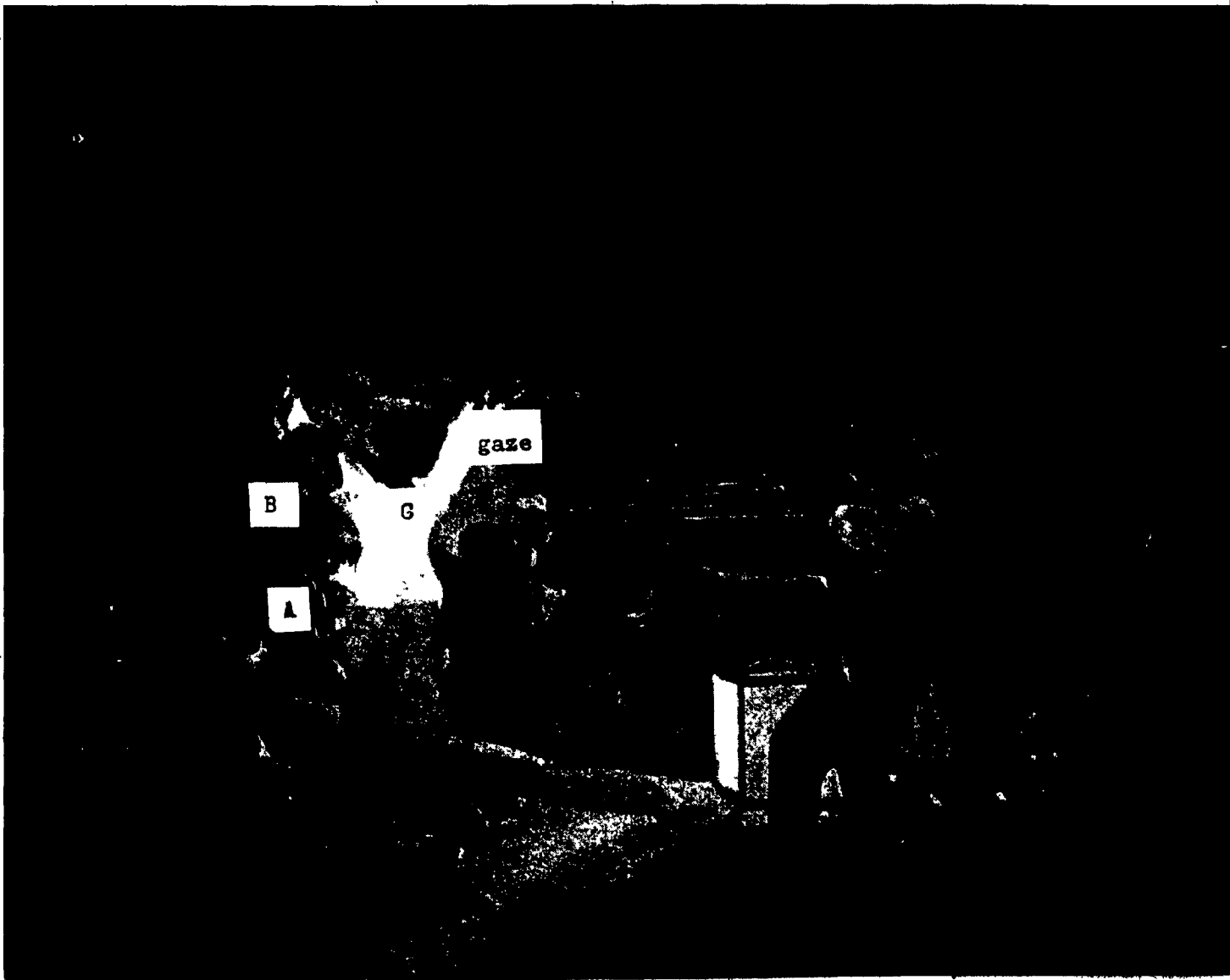


ILLUSTRATION 23. "Francisco Goya "Third of May, "1808"  
1814-15

- a) Identification of three Spanish victims as figures A, B, C.
- b) Two Spanish citizens (C and B) stare at the faces of the French soldiers.



R.V. Exline have found that when people are implicated in unethical acts they avoid eye contact with other persons.<sup>110</sup> Other experiments by R.E. Klech and W. Nuessle have determined that people connect persons who frequently look at others during social interaction with positive qualities such as maturity, sincerity and friendliness.<sup>111</sup> Persons who tend to avoid gazing at the faces of others are associated with negative qualities like coldness, evasiveness, indifference and immaturity.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, in Goya's painting the two Spaniards gazing at the soldiers should be associated with favourable personality traits, while the French servicemen would be linked with negative personality characteristics.

In Van Gogh's painting the gaze of the figure is directed towards the area immediately before the painting, the space in which viewers stand. Furthermore, the gaze is on an even level rather than being directed either up or down; therefore, it should be aligned with a spatial region containing the heads of viewers. Consequently, viewers will feel that they are engaged in an exchange of gazes. This feeling should suggest that Van Gogh's figure desired to communicate with them. Observers may also sense that

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

communication channels are open and the figure is reading their physical characteristics. Finally, Van Gogh will be associated with positive personality traits because his self-portrait figure seeks interaction with viewers through its gaze.

Human posture is important for a study of communication between individuals or groups. The three main forms of human posture are: standing; sitting (including kneeling and squatting); and lying.<sup>113</sup> Each of these has wide variations corresponding to the different positions of arms and legs, and the assorted angles of the body.<sup>114</sup> A person's posture can be determined by his physical activity, the mood and intensity of his emotional state, his attitude toward other humans, or his personality.<sup>115</sup>

The postures of the French soldiers in Goya's painting directly relate to the physical activity of their aiming rifles. The postures of the Spanish victims are partially based on their emotional responses to being threatened with death. In addition, their postures are reflections of their attitudes towards the French soldiers.

Since Van Gogh's figure is a self-portrait, its posture should make a statement about his character.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

Furthermore, the posture may express Van Gogh's outlook concerning his personal interaction with other humans.

Although an individual's emotions are usually indicated by his facial expressions, some postures may also convey specific feelings.<sup>116</sup> Illustration 24, p. 109,

consists of four stick figures whose postures express the feelings of anger, indifference, self-satisfaction and excitement. In Goya's painting the foreground Spaniard in the white shirt (figure C, illustration 23, p. 105) displays a posture similar to that of the excited stick figure. The citizen on his immediate right (figure B, illustration 23, p. 105) assumes a posture comparable to the stick figure representing anger.

Through a relaxed-tense dimension<sup>117</sup> a person's posture frequently demonstrates the intensity of the emotion displayed in his face.<sup>118</sup> Listless feelings, like depression, display extreme intensity through relaxed, sagging postures, while aroused emotions, like anger, indicate great intensity through very tense postures.<sup>119</sup> The social scientist Donald MacKae implies that passive feelings may be accentuated by postures which display downward movement while energetic

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp. 279-280.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>118</sup> Ekman and Freisen, p. 273.

<sup>119</sup> Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., pp. 279-280.



Anger



Indifference



Self-satisfaction



excitement

ILLUSTRATION 24. Four stick figures whose postures express anger, indifference, self-satisfaction and excitement.

emotions may present uplifted postures.<sup>120</sup>

In Goya's painting the foreground Spaniard in the white shirt (figure C, illustration 23, p. 105) stands with his head tilted back, right arm raised and fists clenched; his posture reflects tense anger. The Spaniard kneeling with his hands clasped (figure A, illustration 23, p. 105) has a sagging bowed body and his posture emphasizes his deep despair.

Body lean, touching, proximity gaze and spatial behavior are the important clues in interpreting interpersonal attitudes.<sup>121</sup> However, an individual's posture may reflect his attitudes toward other persons. Tests conducted by the body language scientist Peter Machota have found that observers were more drawn to subjects who assumed open arm positions than those whose postures were closed. Persons with arms drawn across their bodies were judged as being cold, rejecting, shy and passive.<sup>122</sup> Posture studies have also found that people have a greater tendency to use an arms akimbo position (hands on hips) with disliked, rather than favoured persons.<sup>123</sup> Social psychologists Norman Ashcroft and Albert Scheflen believe that a defence of privacy can be

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<sup>120</sup>MacRae, pp. 65-72.

<sup>121</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>122</sup>Mehrabian, p. 367.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

stated by placing an arm across the body, crossing the legs or turning away.<sup>124</sup> Psychoanalysts have based interpretations of body positions on the personalities of their patients. They have discovered that arms folded or wrapped around the body serve as self-protection and indicate withdrawal.<sup>125</sup>

In Goya's painting the foreground Spaniard with his hands clasped (figure A, illustration 23, p. 105) positions his arms in front of his body. He is attempting to withdraw spiritually from the horror of his predicament. The victim in the white shirt (figure C, illustration 23, p. 105) has his arms outspread and could be seen as attempting to appeal to the French soldiers.

In Van Gogh's self portrait the figure holds a palette and brushes in front of its chest. Consequently, the figure's left arm must also be positioned across the chest, (see illustration 25, p. 112). Therefore, the arm, hand, palette and brushes create a barrier and indicate a reluctance on the part of the figure to engage in open interaction with viewers.

There has been little research done on the connection between personality and posture. Nevertheless, body

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<sup>124</sup> Norman Ashcroft and Albert Scheflen, People Space - the Making and Breaking of Human Boundaries. (New York, 1976), p. 49.

<sup>125</sup> Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., pp. 280-281.



ILLUSTRATION 25. Vincent Van Gogh. "Self Portrait" 1889

- a) Defensive posture - arm in front of body.
- b) Facial features.

language scientists like Argyle believe that people may use posture to create impressions of their character.<sup>126</sup> For example, a person may adopt a stiff military posture to imprison his anxiety and exhibit his strength of character, or a quiet, humble manner to demonstrate his inner peace.<sup>127</sup> Posture may also be affected by a person's body-image because people often try to accentuate portions of their body which they like. Girls may be proud to show off large breasts, or men, firm muscles.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, people may attempt to conceal segments of their body which they dislike. Adolescent girls often slouch in order to hide small breasts.<sup>129</sup> Consequently, the portions of his body which a person chooses to emphasize may have an influence on how others perceive him.

Ray Birdwhistell states that it is natural to think of man's body as split into two segments, upper and lower. The upper part contains the brain and the heart, and is civilized and humane. The lower region houses the sex organs and anal cavity, and is associated with evil and waste. The upper part is good, the source of reason and subject to learning. The lower part is brutal, controlled by animal

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



instinct, and is the source of passion.<sup>130</sup>

Donald MacRae contends that social order is represented in terms of the divisions of gross anatomy - the sovereign head, the noble heart, the base gut, the labouring hands, and so on.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, MacRae believes that the upper part of the body is connected with concepts of health and vitality because the mouth consumes food and the digestive tract transforms it into energy. The lower orifices are associated with discharges and excrement, products often considered dangerous and grotesque.<sup>132</sup> Slang words which describe the lower orifices and their functions and products are often used for swearing or making crude remarks.<sup>133</sup>

In Goya's painting the foreground Spanish victims are kneeling and their overlapping figures hide segments of their lower bodies. The lower bodies of the background Spaniards are partially hidden behind the hill on which their compatriots kneel. Furthermore their overlapping figures also hide portions of their lower bodies. Goya emphasized the upper parts of the Spaniards' bodies and, consequently,

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<sup>130</sup> Ray Birdwhistell, "Background Considerations to the Study of the Body," The Body as a Medium of Expression, ed. Benthall J. and Polhemus T. (London, 1975), p. 57.

<sup>131</sup> MacRae, p. 72.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

allied them with humane, civilized values. The upper portions of the bodies of the French soldiers are hunched into the activity of aiming rifles. Their lower regions form the largest parts of their figures. Furthermore, the upper portions of the soldiers lean into the picture plane so that their lower regions appear closer to viewers. Goya accentuated the lower parts of the soldiers' bodies so that viewers could identify them with brutal instincts and crude behavior.

In his self-portrait Van Gogh depicts only the upper part of his body. Consequently, his figure can only be associated with positive personality characteristics such as reason and vitality.

The hands, and to a lesser extent the head and feet, can produce a wide variety of gestures.<sup>134</sup> Biologically the hands have evolved for gripping and handling solid forms, but they can also be used to communicate.<sup>135</sup> Yet, gestural communication can be confusing because it often involves the employment of signals with predetermined meanings. Every society has a number of gesture-symbols whose meanings only its members comprehend.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the meanings of these gesture-symbols can change over time.

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<sup>134</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 251.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 257-258.

Frequently various groups from different time periods have used the same gesture to communicate different messages. Winston Churchill's V for victory hand sign, popular during the Second World War, was a symbol for peace during the nineteen sixties and is used by Neopolitan school boys as a request for washroom privileges.<sup>137</sup> The interpretation of gestures portrayed in paintings from past centuries is, therefore, a risky affair.

However, some gesture-symbols appear to have meanings common to many nationalities and time periods. A few examples include: head nod - agreement; shake fist - anger; wave hand - goodbye; rub stomach - hunger; yawn - boredom; point - give direction.<sup>138</sup> Perhaps these gestures - symbols have such wide usage because their physical shapes are simple and visually reflect their meanings. For example, when a student raises his hand he elevates part of himself above the general head level of the class and subsequently draws the teacher's attention.

Gestures may also represent a person's emotions. Human movements which display emotions are spontaneous and may have originated with man's animal ancestors.<sup>139</sup> They

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<sup>137</sup> J.A. Bates, "The Communicative Hand," The Body as a Medium of Expression, ed. Benthall J. and Polhemus T. (London, 1975), p. 79.

<sup>138</sup> Argyle, Bodily Communication, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

consistently convey meanings to other people and are visually similar to the gestures of other primates.<sup>140</sup>

The body language scientist M.H. Krout supervised experiments (1954) which found that emotional gestures have usually consisted of touching some part of the body.<sup>141</sup>

Krout's experiments determined twenty-four gestures which appear to be associated with emotions. Three standard examples are: hand to nose - fear; finger to lips - shame; making a fist - anger in males.<sup>142</sup> Further gesture studies by Ekman and Freisen in 1967 found that a feeling of fear could be portrayed by head and body movements which block vision (a defence against further fear arousal), by movements which orientate the body for escape, or by shaking clasped hands up and down in front of the chest.<sup>143</sup>

In Goya's painting two Spaniards (circled in illustration 23, p. 105) cover their eyes with their hands. The actions of the foreground citizen display his fear of death while the gesture of his compatriot in the background illustrates a horror of the impending execution. A kneeling Spaniard in the foreground (figure A, illustration 23, p. 105)

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>141</sup> Maurice Krout, "An Experimental Attempt to Determine The Significance of Unconscious Manual Symbolic Movements", The Journal of General Psychology, V. 51, 1954, p. 140.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ekman and Freisen, p. 719.

clasps his hands together in front of his body and thus exhibits his fear of the assault of the French soldiers. The citizen on his immediate left, (figure B, illustration 23, p. 105) has clenched fists which emphasize his state of anger. The raised arms and hands of the foreground Spaniard in the white shirt indicate an effort on his part to centre the attention of the French soldiers on his figure.

Finally, gestures may be used by individuals to express their attitudes towards other persons. While emotional gestures usually involve self-touching, gestures which express feelings about other persons are generally directed towards the bodies of those other persons.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, hands placed in front of the chest denote defence, reaching out movements may indicate a desire for intimacy, open exposure of the lower half of the body can suggest sexual invitation, and restless movements of the legs signal a desire to flee another person's presence.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, interpersonal gestures should correspond to posture;<sup>146</sup> a person reaching out for friendly contact should have an open, relaxed posture.

In Van Gogh's self-portrait the left hand of the

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<sup>144</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 266.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

figure holds a palette and brushes in front of the chest. This gesture is actually an indication of the figure's defensive posture since the palette, brushes and hand create a visual barrier which protects the figure's body.

The clothes and accessories (jewelry, badges, tools, weapons), a person wears, his physique, facial features and hair length will provide clues about his social role and personality.<sup>147</sup>

People from Western cultures wear clothes to protect themselves from nature's elements and to hide segments of the body which arose sexual desires.<sup>148</sup> However, social scientists also believe that clothing may indicate a person's social class by the amount of conspicuous consumption involved in its design and materials, and by whether or not it is suitable for manual labour.<sup>149</sup>

Therefore, denim and flannel are materials of the working class because they are inexpensive and durable while silks and linens are materials of the upper class as they are finely woven, delicate and expensive. Argyle believes that occupations are generally recognizable, in a broad social sense through clothing.<sup>150</sup> For example, a man wearing a

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

suit on a weekday, in the downtown sector of a city, will be regarded as a businessman while another man wearing overalls and a hardhat will be regarded as a labourer. Policemen, soldiers, postmen, firemen and others wear uniforms which identify them with public services.<sup>151</sup> Paradoxically, a number of experiments have found that wearing a uniform has an initial effect of making a person less conscious of himself as an individual and less socially responsible.<sup>152</sup> Uniforms are usually typified by severe lines of design and the addition of accessories such as metal buckles and belts, badges, braid, and heavy leather belts, straps, holsters, cases and boots.

Physiques are also frequently interpreted in terms of personality traits. Studies by W. Wells and H. Siegel (1961) found that fat persons were regarded as warm-hearted, sympathetic, good-natured, agreeable, and dependent on others, while muscular persons were viewed as having strong characters and being adventurous, and thin people were seen as nervous, tense, pessimistic and quiet.<sup>153</sup> Other studies on the actual correlation between physique and personality have found that the opinions of the judges in Wells' and

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>153</sup> W. Wells and H. Siegel, "Stereotyped Somatotypes," Psychological Reports, v. 8, 1961, p. 78.

Siegel's studies were frequently correct and that there is a slight relationship between physique and personality.<sup>154</sup>

People do have partial control over the shape of their bodies; obesity can be controlled by dieting, muscularity increased by regular exercise, and a thin body filled out by large, regular meals and a relaxed life-style.<sup>155</sup>

Tests conducted by P. Secord, W. Dukes and W. Bevan (1959) found that some facial features were regularly linked with personality traits. People with thin lips were regarded as conscientious, with thick lips as sexy, with a high forehead as intelligent, with protruding eyes as excitable and with dull eyes as not alert.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, their tests indicated that persons with continual smiles on their faces were seen as friendly, cheerful, easy-going, kind and well-adjusted, while persons with persistent facial tension were viewed as determined, aggressive and quick-tempered.<sup>157</sup>

However, associations between facial features and personality traits are rarely valid, although persistent facial expressions usually exhibit a person's regular mood and can cause permanent facial changes such as wrinkles.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 336.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>156</sup>P. Secord, W. Dukes and W. Bevan, "Personalities in Faces, An Experiment in Social Perceiving," Genetic Psychology Monographs, V. 49:276, 1954.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>158</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, op. cit., p. 226.



Head and facial hair is usually cut and styled; it is rarely left to grow wild.<sup>159</sup> The anthropologist C.R. Hallpike believes that long hair has widespread symbolic meaning. It signifies being beyond the control of society and long hair is often worn by social outcasts, hippies, intellectuals, musicians, artists and ascetics.<sup>160</sup> A Freudian analysis suggests that long hair represents sexuality and cutting it symbolizes castration.<sup>161</sup> Studies by D.G. Freedman (1969) found that many women see bearded men as more masculine and mature.<sup>162</sup>

In Goya's painting the clothing of the Spanish citizens is simple and does not display any ornamentation which would make it look expensive. Furthermore, although there are individual differences in the vestements and colours worn, the clothing of all the Spaniards appears to be made from similar rough materials and is of a loose, baggy fashion. The plain quality and fashion of the Spaniard's clothing identifies all the citizens as members of a lower economic class. Moreover, the Spaniards have stocky, solid bodies and this implies that they perform manual labour and have strong, outgoing, warm personalities.

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

It is extremely difficult to observe the physiques of the French since their backs are to viewers of the painting and their bodies are covered by long, heavy coats. The exact duplication of dress on all the French figures, and their accessories of rifles, bayonets, sabres, knapsacks, thick belts and straps identify them as soldiers.

In Van Gogh's self-portrait his face is thin, the skin sunken under the cheek bones. This gauntness, plus a furrowed brow and a frown set on the lips (see illustration 25, p. 112),<sup>163</sup> should link Van Gogh's figure with such personality traits as tenseness, nervousness, pessimism and determination. Furthermore, a high forehead makes Van Gogh's figure appear intelligent. The figure's short hair and even beard perhaps reflect a wish on the artist's part to be acceptable in society. The figure's simple garment is painted in thick brushstrokes and such strokes create the impression that the garment is constructed from a heavy, rough material. Van Gogh's self-image displays no signs of material wealth. The palette and brushes held by the hand should identify the figure as a painter. The overall impression created by the figure's physique, facial features and clothing is, one of an impoverished artist.

Colours have traditional meanings in Western culture.<sup>163</sup> In most countries black is the colour of

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<sup>163</sup> J.J. de Lucio Meyer, Visual Aesthetics, (London, 1973), p. 88.

mourning and despair,<sup>164</sup> white the colour of purity.<sup>165</sup>

Red is a colour associated with strong emotions and can have several meanings such as love or unity and has even been used by several nationalities as the colour of revolution.<sup>166</sup>

Warm yellow, the colour of gold and the sun, signifies joy, riches and glory. Van Gogh believed yellow to be the colour of creation. By contrast, a pale, dirty yellow may stand for greed, cowardice and envy.<sup>167</sup> A muddy, sickly green is

also associated with envy and jealousy. Pure green symbolizes hope; its meaning is based on the relaxing and rejuvenating powers of nature. Green is used in the decoration of hospitals and schools because it is the colour of life, growth and health.<sup>168</sup> Blue is a colour associated

with the intellect. Many people relate blue to the clear open sky; blue supposedly helps a person to think with a fresh, unclouded, logical mind. However, dark blue is often associated with sadness as in "I've got the blues" or "blue

Monday."<sup>169</sup> Purple was traditionally used by the church and royalty to signify importance. They felt that purple was

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

such an intense and stirring colour that the masses could not help but notice it and be impressed. Studies have shown that people find large areas of purple or violet unbearable. The impact purple made on the masses was aided by the colour with which it was frequently displayed, the colour of glory, brilliant yellow.<sup>170</sup> The argument against the connection of colours with their conventional meanings is that it is hard to determine whether or not the meanings attached to the colours are a result of natural impulses or merely faithful adherence to arbitrary meanings established by tradition.

The word "tonus" refers to the state of continual muscular activity carried on by the body.<sup>171</sup> The body is never entirely still, except in death. Different levels of muscular tension and relaxation reflect the tonus condition of the body.<sup>172</sup> Tonus changes can be measured and afford excellent clues to the effects of colour. Studies have shown that red light can greatly increase muscular tension, bright orange can also produce a significant level of rigidity and yellow creates a slight muscular tautness, whereas green tends to relax the body and blue definitely

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>171</sup> Faber Birren, Colour Psychology and Colour Therapy (Syracus, New York, 1978), p. 130.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

decreases muscular activity.<sup>173</sup> The body, therefore, reacts to colour in two directions; warm colours, like red, orange and yellow, stimulate the body while cool hues like green and blue, relax. The neutral point, where no specific tonus reaction to colour occurs, is with a yellow-green hue.<sup>174</sup>

Other studies have ascertained that red is the most dominant and dynamic of colours. Red light can hasten the healing of wounds, accelerate the growth of plants, increase hormonal and sexual activity, and raise blood sugar levels.<sup>175</sup> Psychologically red increases restlessness and nervous tension. Psychotherapists have used red to elevate their patients' moods and counteract melancholia; it tends to bring people out of themselves and direct their attention to the world around them.<sup>176</sup>

Orange has many of the same properties as red, but people do not usually like it as a pure colour; instead they prefer its tints, salmon and peach. These tints are very pleasing in hospitals, schools and homes because they cast a cheerful glow on the skin.<sup>177</sup> Orange stimulates the appetite

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

and is often used in the decoration of food services and restaurants.<sup>178</sup>

Yellow is used to identify many safety signs and devices. It is the most highly visible of colours and usually stands out from all the others.<sup>179</sup> Yellow is believed to have a favourable effect on the human metabolism but is neutral in relation to biological growth.<sup>180</sup>

Psychologically, green aids people in withdrawing from outward stimulus and provides an ideal environment for mental concentration and meditation.<sup>181</sup> Humans generally find that green and bluish-green aid in the creation of relaxed, livable environments because they tend to reduce nervous tension.<sup>182</sup> However, green and blue lights shone on the face and body turn the lips black and give the flesh a cadaverous aspect, an appearance people find revolting. The police have cast green light on the faces of suspects in mirrored rooms to help force criminal confessions.<sup>183</sup>

Blue light retards the growth of plants, decreases hormonal activity, and inhibits the healing of wounds, and lowers the blood pressure and the pulse.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, it is

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

hard to focus attention on objects surrounded by a pale blue colour because their shapes will seem blurred.<sup>185</sup>

Consequently, blue environments are conducive to internal pondering, but do not contribute to concentration on external stimuli. Blue is popular for decorating homes because it is restful and sedate.<sup>186</sup> Finally, blue has been prescribed to cure thumping headaches, high blood pressure of a nervous origin, and insomnia.<sup>187</sup>

Purple, an equal combination of red and blue, has no biological effects; however, large areas of purple also blur eye focus.<sup>188</sup>

White is a perfectly balanced colour, clear and natural in its effects. White has no effect on the emotions and does not influence biological activities.<sup>189</sup> Perhaps the reason white is commonly associated with purity is that it provides a relief from the mental and physical effects of other colours. Black is always associated with negativity in Western societies, possibly because it is the colour the Caucasian body turns as it decays.<sup>190</sup> Black has no

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

psychotherapeutic value, unless negativity is a desired emotional response.<sup>191</sup>

The effects of colour on humans also depend on whether or not their tones are brilliant or dark. Warm colours become even more stimulating and aggressive as their tones grow brighter. Cool colours become more passive and subduing as their tones grow darker.<sup>192</sup> The human pulse is generally retarded by dark tones and accelerated by bright ones regardless of the colours involved.<sup>193</sup> Thus, interpretations of colours must not only consider their warm or cool hue but also their degree of brightness. Warm, bright colours actually make the body temperature rise and the flesh warmer because they stimulate the autonomic nervous system and thus increase blood pressure and pulse rate. Conversely, cool dark colours relax the nervous system, decrease blood pressure and pulse rate, and consequently make the flesh relatively cooler.<sup>194</sup>

The overall tone of Goya's painting is dark and would deaden the blood pressures and pulse rates of viewers. The French soldiers are dressed in drab, dull uniforms and stand in shadows; consequently, they should be associated

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.



with cool, detached feelings. The overcoats of the two soldiers most forward in the picture plane are tinted greenish-blue, a nauseating tone which will repulse viewers and link the French troops with sickness and death. The only warm colours presented in the painting are in the clothing of the Spaniards or contained in the areas surrounding their bodies. Therefore, the Spanish citizens should seem warmer and more alive than the French soldiers. The most conspicuous Spaniard (figure C, illustration 23, p. 105) is dressed in a white shirt and warm yellow pants and can be identified with peace and vitality. This white shirt creates one of the few spots in the painting where a viewer's gaze can find relief from the execution's gloomy atmosphere. Moreover, the high visibility of the white shirt and yellow pants should aid the citizen in his attempts to attract the soldiers' attention. The Spaniard kneeling with his hands clasped (figure A, illustration 23, p. 105) wears a dull bluish-green garment and its cadaverous tone reflects his despair and acceptance of death. The ground in front of the Spanish victims is streaked with red, a colour which obviously represents the blood of those already dead. However, the spilled blood also implies that warmth and vitality flow through the veins of the living Spaniards. (For an indication of the colours discussed in the preceding paragraph see illustration 26, p. 131).

Van Gogh's self portrait is basically painted in

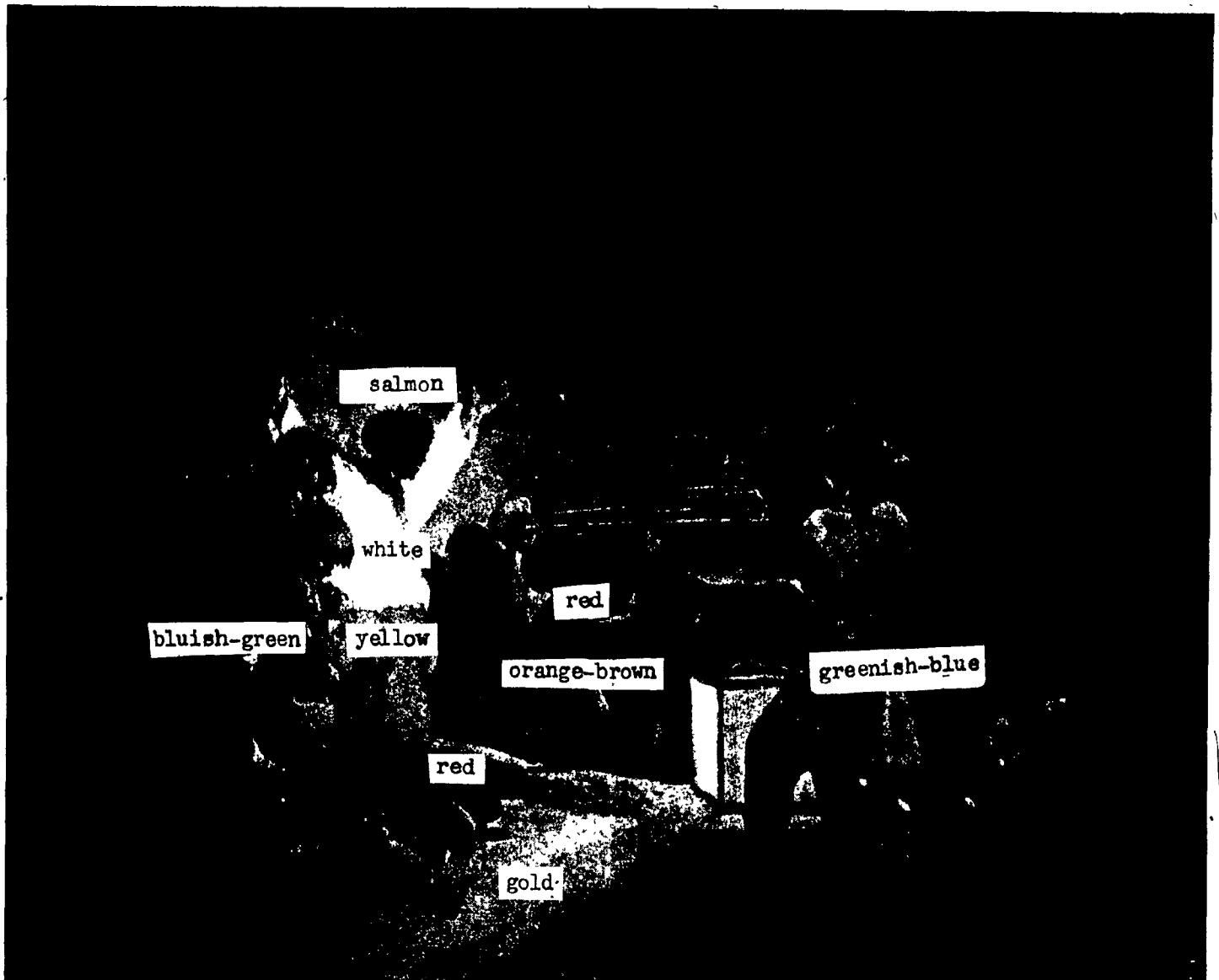


ILLUSTRATION 26. Francisco Goya "The Third of May 1808, 1813-14."  
(Colour guide).

assorted shades of three colours. Dark blues form the atmosphere around the artist's figure. Pale and dark blues compose the garment worn by the figure. Gold is the main colour of the head hair, beard and palette, and the figure's flesh is represented by various shades of bright yellows. The colour composition of the self-portrait is essentially one in which warm, bright colours are enclosed by dark, cool hues. Therefore, the colours have been arranged to convey the feeling of a warm, energetic being existing in a cold, despondent environment. Furthermore, the dichotomy between the warm yellows and the cool blues creates within Van Gogh's painting a mood of conflict and tension. (For an indication of the colours in Van Gogh's self-portrait see illustration 27, p. 133).

The knowledge that light is essential to the health and growth of living matter is one of mankind's oldest and most common wisdoms. The sun has been worshipped by many cultures and sun-bathing has been regarded as therapeutic since Babylonian times.<sup>195</sup> Light, natural or artificial, must be present for humans to accomplish the majority of their physical or mental activities. Darkness is normally associated with sleep and other forms of inactivity. In *The Body as a Social Metaphor*, Donald MacRae contends that sleep, trance and all other states of the body which involve a loss

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<sup>195</sup>Ibid., p. 75.



ILLUSTRATION 27. Vincent Van Gogh  
Self-Portrait 1889  
(Colour guide).

of consciousness are connected with images of death.<sup>196</sup> The fuels which are burned to create artificial light also produce heat, an element extremely important to human comfort and survival. Therefore, light is generally allied in the human mind with warmth and vitality while darkness is often linked with coldness and death.

The scene in Goya's painting occurs at night; a lantern provides the light for the execution. Rays from this lightbox fall on the forms of the Spaniards and thus further ally them with warmth and vitality. Although the fronts of the soldiers are also undoubtedly illuminated by the lantern, viewers can only see their backs which are cast in shadows. Consequently, the French can only be linked with dark sensibilities. It is extremely unlikely that the Spaniards would willingly provide light for the execution; therefore, the lantern, like their lives, must be in the control of the soldiers. There is something cold and unfeeling about a group which would utilize an object associated with brightness and warmth to take the lives of fellow men.

There is no light source present in Van Gogh's self-portrait. However, the side of his figure which faces viewers is brighter than the side which moves into the picture plane. This difference indicates that the figure's left side is being illuminated by lights from outside the

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<sup>196</sup> MacRae, p. 70.

dimensions of the painting. Consequently, Van Gogh implies that interaction with the external world brightens his figure's existence.

In summary, Goya's painting represents three groups of men interacting at an execution. In the foreground soldiers, standing in a line, aim rifles at a group of civilians, while in the background another group of civilians watch. The simple quality and style of clothing worn by members of both civilian groups indicate that they belong to the lower class. The stocky physiques of the citizens and the warm colours found both in their clothing and the areas immediately around their bodies suggest that they are good-natured and energetic people. The light which illuminates their figures reinforces their warmth and vitality. Moreover, viewers should sense that the civilians are reasonable and humane because the upper portions of their bodies are emphasized. Therefore, it is apparent that Goya portrayed the civilians in a manner which implies that they are moral and warm.

The soldiers are dressed in dull, somber uniforms and stand in shadows; they can be identified with dark sensibilities. The overcoats of the two soldiers who seem closest to viewers are tinted greenish-blue, a colour shade associated with death and decay. The lower regions of the soldiers' anatomies form the greater part of their bodies and, consequently, link them with crude, brutal instincts.

Goya painted the soldiers in a manner which indicates that they are cold and brutal.

The line of soldiers and the foreground group of civilians have an orientation toward each other that signifies competition-opposition. When viewers read Goya's painting, the first figures they visually encounter are the foreground civilians. Hence, viewers should empathize with the victims and regard the soldiers as oppressors. This impression will be reinforced by the activities of the civilians in the background. By leaning toward the foreground civilians and away from the soldiers, the background civilians express two attitudes: that their sympathies lie with the victims and that they abhor the soldiers. One background figure expresses his horror of the situation by burying his face in his hands. Furthermore, the overall dark colour tone of the painting implies that the scene is gloomy and tragic. Consequently, viewers of Goya's painting should see the execution as the killing of good persons by a brutal force, and thus recognize it as an atrocity.

The foreground civilians exhibit a variety of expressions in the face of death. One figure, towards the back of the group, exposes his fear by hiding his face in his hands. Another civilian (figure A, illustration 23, p. 105), signals a withdrawal from life by clasping his hands in front of his body. This figure's hopeless acceptance of death is further reflected in his sad facial expression,

sagging posture, and the cadaverous tint of his garment. The citizen in his immediate left (figure B, illustration 23, p. 105) holds clenched fists, stands in a tense posture, and displays an enraged facial expression. By staring directly at the faces of the soldiers he angrily defies them and thus exhibits a brave, indomitable spirit which cannot be crushed by tyranny. The citizen in the white shirt (figure C, illustration 23, p. 105) also stares at the faces of the soldiers and he further seeks to command their attention by raising his hands high. This citizen expresses grief, yet he signals through his gaze and open posture that he wishes to engage in amicable communication with the soldiers. By making this appeal the citizen implies that he feels differences between humans can be reasonably resolved, a remarkably civilized attitude considering the dreadful nature of his predicament. The shirt worn by this figure is significant because its white colour should not only aid him in attracting the soldiers' attention, but also emphasize the virtue of his peaceful outlook.

The soldiers and their victims are separated by a distance used for social consultation. Whereas social consultative spaces do not force people to become personally involved they do allow a person to recognize another's emotional state and to analyze his character. Moreover, Argyle states that, given the proper body orientations and



proximity distances, communication between persons should occur through body language channels.<sup>197</sup> Therefore, the soldiers who face the foreground civilians are quite capable of reading the emotional expressions of their victims. Yet, they demonstrate that they are coldly indifferent to the feelings of others by not even raising their heads to regard the faces of the civilians. Furthermore, the soldiers may be callously violating the personal spaces of some civilians with their bayonets, an act which would denote a total insensitivity to their victims. The diverse feelings expressed by the civilians indicate that each one has his own personality, but the soldiers exhibit no signs of individuality. Their singular characters are buried beneath the monotony of their actions and uniforms, and each soldier exists merely as a member of a brutal force. The dictionary defines a soul as the vital or essential part of a person, which rules his realms of reason and will, and embodies his spiritual or emotional warmth.<sup>198</sup> It is logical to believe that each individual's personality, expressed through his appearance and actions, is the outward reflection of his soul. The soldiers have subjugated their individual personalities to a regimented appearance and a

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<sup>197</sup>Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

<sup>198</sup>David Guralnik (ed.), *Websters New World Dictionary* (New York, 1971), p. 709.

thoughtless adherence to brutal orders, and consequently have entombed their souls. They are "faceless automatons", mindless creatures that shun the warmth and vitality of humanity.

Goya's painting represents an atrocity because it portrays the execution of good, warm persons by a cold, brutal force. One victim displays courage by defying the soldiers, while another exhibits a different sort of courage by conquering his grief and nobly attempting to engage his oppressors in amicable communication. Finally Goya's imagery implies that acts of brutality and persecution destroy their perpetrators' collective human spirit.

Van Gogh's body in his self-portrait has an orientation toward viewers which is used for cooperation-discussion. The distance that observers stand from the painting should be one common to casual-personal situations and the physical details Van Gogh provides about his appearance are of a type common to this sort of interaction. Furthermore, Van Gogh directed the gaze of his self-image towards the space in front of the painting and thus signalled a desire for communication with viewers. In addition, the artist portrayed himself in a fashion that viewers should find amiable rather than offensive. Only the upper parts of Van Gogh's anatomy are shown; consequently his body should be associated with positive

personality traits like reason and compassion. Van Gogh's high forehead signals his intelligence and his neatly-trimmed hair displays an effort to be socially acceptable. Moreover, the bright yellow of Van Gogh's complexion create the impression that he has a warm and energetic personality. Consequently, it can be reasonably argued that Van Gogh portrayed himself as a person seeking cordial interaction with others. However, Van Gogh's act of holding a palette and brushes in front of his body indicates a hesistancy to participate completely in open communication. This defensive posture implies that Van Gogh was somewhat afraid of human interaction, possibly because he would be hurt emotionally. His figure's movement against the standard left to right visual flow of observers also suggests that he was tense and suspicious about how others would react. Moreover, the dichotomy between the warm yellows of his flesh and the cold blues of his surroundings support the concept that Van Gogh was locked in a struggle with his own isolation. Yet, by choosing to indicate that his figure is illuminated by light from outside the painting's dimensions, Van Gogh signals his belief that interaction with the external world will brighten his existence. Van Gogh's face expresses sorrow, a natural reflection of his loneliness, but his gauntness and furrowed brows emphasize the tenseness of his efforts to participate in communication. Van Gogh, then presents

himself as a sad, lonely man desiring pleasant interaction with others, but also indicates his apprehension about such activity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Theories Concerning the Use of Body Language  
in Modern Art, Concluding Remarks

Prior to the twentieth century Western artists were generally involved with the portrayal of images in a representational manner. However, in this century artists have developed and employed a wide variety of styles which range from photo-realism to complete abstraction. In this chapter the author will briefly discuss how body language may be used to convey content in four modern works of art. The four paintings to be examined are Chuck Close's "Kent", 1970-71, Andy Warhol's "Marilyn", 1964, Arshile Gorky's, "The Calendars", 1946-47, and Barnett Newman's "First Station", 1958. In effect, these four paintings reflect on movement from realism to abstraction.

When viewers encounter "Kent" (100 by 90 inches,<sup>199</sup> illustration 28, p. 143), or any other of Chuck Close's large portraits, they will feel forced into an unsolicited intimacy with the image.<sup>200</sup> Physical features, such as pore openings, acne, fine skin lines, and beard stubble, which are normally associated with intimate, interpersonal spaces are clearly visible in Close's portraits from distances used for

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<sup>199</sup>Linda Cathcart, American Painting of the 1970's (Buffalo, 1978), p. 18.

<sup>200</sup>Michael Greenwood, "Towards a Definition of Realism, Arts Canada, XXXIII:14 (January, 1977).



ILLUSTRATION 28: Chuck Close, "Kent", 1970-1 (detail).

dispassionate observation. Upon initially seeing a Close painting many people feel intimidated by the sheer size and precise details of his faces.<sup>201</sup> Yet, after spending some time with a Close painting like "Kent" the author found himself feeling an affinity towards the subject. In Social Interaction Michael Argyle states

Interaction leads to liking and it is very probable that liking leads to interaction.<sup>202</sup>

Close's portraits force people to interact but their expressions and appearances are neither violent nor disgusting. Consequently, viewers may develop a liking for the faces Close portrays.

In "Marilyn" (40 by 40 inches,<sup>203</sup> illustration 29, p. 144) Andy Warhol also portrays a face much larger than life size. However, Warhol's representation of the famous sex goddess does not exhibit features such as pore openings, skin blemishes, facial hair or wrinkles. Instead "Marilyn" is portrayed with smooth, warm, pink flesh and bright, yellow-gold hair. Moreover, the actress's thick parted lips and "bedroom" eyes create a sensation of overt sexuality. By ignoring normal minute physical details and emphasizing warm, bright colours and sensual characteristics

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<sup>201</sup>Ibid.

<sup>202</sup>Michael Argyle, Social Interaction (London, 1969), p. 211.

<sup>203</sup>Lucy Lippard, Pop Art (New York, 1966), p. 77.



ILLUSTRATION 29: Andy Warhol, "Marilyn", 1964 (detail).



Warhol gives Marilyn Monroe the artificial beauty common in many modern advertisements. Consequently he portrays her as a plastic symbol of sexuality, a true "pop art" figure.

In 1963, after seeing an exhibition of Arshile Gorky's drawings in Tokyo a Japanese art critic stated

In short this drawing by Gorky gives us the feeling of American everyday life ..... It seems to suggest to us the surroundings of the life the American painter lived in America.<sup>204</sup>

The drawing discussed by the critic was one of the preliminary sketches for Gorky's painting "The Calendar" (illustration 30, p. 147). Gorky based these sketches on the interior of his home in Sherman, Connecticut; an old farmhouse which had been renovated by a modern architect.<sup>205</sup> One of the guiding principles behind modern architecture and design is Louis Sullivan's slogan "form follows function."<sup>206</sup> This statement implies that the architecture of buildings and the shape of furniture should functionally satisfy their user's physical or mental needs. For example, a good work table should have a large, flat, smooth top which is a comfortable height from the ground. Gorky's method of

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<sup>204</sup>H. Rand, "Calendars of Arshile Gorky," Arts Magazine, 50:76 (March, 1976).

<sup>205</sup>Ibid.

<sup>206</sup>Helen Gardner, Art Through The Ages (New York, 1970). p. 687.



ILLUSTRATION 30: Arshile Gorky, "The Calendars", 1946-47.

preparing for "The Calendars" painting was to sketch images in his residence over and over again, each time attempting to make them more spontaneous and abstract. Yet he also hoped to maintain some of the properties of the original objects.<sup>207</sup> In "Calendars of Arshile Gorky" H. Rand contends that the artist dwelled on subject matter which reflected the joys of a family and home because he was orphaned at an early age.<sup>208</sup>

The foreground area of Gorky's painting is open and spacious while the background is filled with shapes of different sizes which are contained within large rectangular areas. Near the centre of "The Calendars" is a dark round image (outlined in illustration 30, p. 149) which contains bright orange flames,<sup>209</sup> and a small brown circle. This round image rests in a large, angular, tan coloured shape that reaches to the upper edge of the painting. In "Objective Sign and Subjective Meaning" Roger Poole suggests that it is natural to associate certain shapes with physical sensations. For example, sharp objects (knives, needles, broken glass) may be allied with pain, round shapes (sun, wombs, embraces) can be linked with warmth, and rectangular shapes (walls, sidewalks, doors)

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<sup>207</sup> Rand, p. 74.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

may be connected with flatness and rigidity.<sup>210</sup>

Consequently, the round image in Gorky's painting may be associated with warmth, especially since it contains bright orange flame shapes and the angular area in which it rests can be regarded as upright, flat and solid. In reality the round image is an abstraction of a fireplace in Gorky's livingroom and the angular area is the wall in which it is set.<sup>211</sup> Rand suggests that the overall effect of "The Calendars" is similar to looking across a large living area toward shapes which form furniture, decorations and walls.<sup>212</sup> By maintaining original physical properties of the image he abstracted, Gorky conveyed an impression of his home environment in his painting.

It may be difficult for the average viewer to realize that Barnett Newman's "Stations of the Cross" are concerned with the Passion of Christ at the Crucifixion.<sup>213</sup> However, viewers may sense that these paintings reflect a religious experience and deal with themes of despair and hope.

Upon reading "The First Station" (illustration 31, p. 150) the colour a viewer initially encounters is black,

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<sup>210</sup> Roger Poole, "Objective Sign and Subjective Meaning", *The Body as a Medium of Expression*, ed. Benthall J. and Polhemus, T. (London 1975), p. 89.

<sup>211</sup> Rand, p. 76.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>213</sup> Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York, 1971), p. 96.



ILLUSTRATION 31: Barnett Newman "First Station", 1958.

a hue associated with tragedy. To the right of the black exists a large expanse of white, a colour allied with peace and purity. In the extreme right section of the painting, the white expanse is broken by a white line delineated by swirling black, gestural brushstrokes. This line may embody the entire mood of the painting because it demonstrates the survival of purity within the confusion of turmoil and despair. Consequently, when a viewer reads Newman's painting he will immediately encounter despair, then peace, and finally realize that purity can withstand the onslaught of tragedy. It should seem obvious that the thick, violent black brushstrokes reflect the roughness of the artist's gestures in putting them on the canvas. In contrast the smooth surface of the white areas reflect the gentle care taken in their creation. The difference between the black and white surfaces, therefore, further emphasizes the dichotomy between a gentle spirit and an anguished state of mind. The human scale of Newman's painting (7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 60 inches)<sup>214</sup> can engulf viewers in its broad expanse of conflicting colours. This engulfment and the realization that purity can survive despair may parallel in viewers' minds the overwhelming ecstasy of a religious revelation.

The original purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate that images in art can communicate similar meanings to

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<sup>214</sup>Hess, p. 94.

various peoples across large time periods. The author has demonstrated that body language is one means that artists can utilize to ensure the continuity of their messages. Although body language may not provide access to the content in all works of art, the assumption that a knowledge of an artists estoteric code is always necessary for an interpretation of his imagery has been questioned. The body language experiences of all members of Western culture are not exactly the same, but they should have similar characteristics that will allow people to interpret the meaning of some works of art.

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