

Book reviews

A Multidisciplinary Approach to Gestuality

Cornelia Muller, Alan Cienki, Ellen Fricke, Silva H. Ladewig, David McNeill, Sedinha TeBendorf, *Body - Language - Communication. An International Handbook on Multimodality in Human Interaction*
(Walter de Gruyter GmbH Library, Berlin/Boston, 2013)

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The body that communicates has represented, since Antiquity, a topic of interest to orators and professionals in that certain area we call today social sciences. Communication through signs was the first form of human interaction and is the basis on which articulated language has developed. By means of nonverbal communication, man has been able to convey the perceived information from the environment, to adapt to it and thus to evolve.

Nonverbal language has progressed over time. The inborn gestures and those learned through imitation teachings have been perfected and brushed throughout history because of the human desire to succeed in enriching each discourse, because of the desire to create a spectacular dimension for one's speech, to impress and to remain in the collective mind.

Body-Language-Communication, An International Handbook on Multimodality in Human Interaction is a complex volume that brings together some of the most well-documented nonverbal studies carried out by the pioneers of the field, by those with expertise also in related disciplines (anthropology, sociology, psychology, neurology, semiotics, etc.).

The book provides a perspective on the body as a part and partner of language and communication. In other words, the old dichotomy between the concepts of verbal and nonverbal communication is overcome in the book and the understanding of the body as an embedded part of language and communication is promoted. Body movements are treated as an integral part of a communication act, helping to decode messages, to extract meaning.

The Bible of non-verbal communication - as I like to call this book - sums up to 72 articles and is structured on 5 parts:

1. How the body relates to language and communication: Outlining the subject matter.
2. Perspectives from different disciplines
3. Historical dimensions
4. Contemporary approaches
5. Methods

In the first part of this book, the “utterance of visible action as a domain of inquiry” is analyzed. The author mentions in this manner every visible physical movement that an individual performs in different forms, under various circumstances, for some communication purposes. The concordance between what is said in a discourse and the body movements is studied to determine the impact the orator will have on the audience.

The authors claim that much of the nonverbal communication studies focus on the socio-psychological dimension of body communication and, theoretically, separate the body from language. Their approach sustains that the verbal part of the message supports the content, while the nonverbal one carries the emotional and social significance.

In the second part, the relation between body, language and communication is analyzed from the perspective of different disciplines. This book introduces an interdisciplinary approach and, as a result, addresses to researchers from various fields including: linguistics and communication, cognitive sciences, psychology, neurology, semiotics, anthropology, sociology, literature, history, computer science and engineering, and all who share an interest in the bodily forms of language and communication.

An interdisciplinary approach to gesture is welcome for a deeper understanding of the body's implications in language and communication. For example, with the help of cognitive sciences, psychology and neurology, the physical connections between the gestures and different parts of the activated human brain could be discovered, the interpretations given to various manifestations of the body communication could be advanced and certain categories of gestures, gestural typologies or patterns could be shaped.

Considering gesture through anthropology, sociology, history, linguistics and communication perspective, the authors who contributed to the conception of this complex volume analyzed the evolution of nonverbal communication, the potential of body movements to turn into linguistic signs and the social implications of gestures.

The third part of the book presents a documentation of the historical and multicultural dimensions of the relationship between gestures, language and discourse. Starting from the oldest forms of communication, from prehistoric gestures, advancing to the medieval outlook in Europe, outlining Renaissance philosophy and reaching the contemporary space of the 21st century, the authors seek to capture specific manifestations of gesture, the diversity of body movements along with the meanings on the universality of certain gestures (universal language). Likewise, in this section the relationship between gestures and different cultures is closely analyzed. Body communication is related to cultural affiliation, and so the meanings of the same gesture may differ from one individual to another if they come from different cultural spaces.

A comparative collection of contemporary approaches regarding the relationship between gestures and language in communication can be found in the fourth part of the book. Taking into account the technological context

underlying contemporary approaches, it may be perceived that neurocognitive science has major implications in recent research on nonverbal language. One of the unwavering conclusions of neurocognitive research on gesture is that body movements are inherently intertwined with language and communication. Also, from this part it can be found out how our gestures help us learn or what we need to understand through the social-interactive nature of gestures.

The last part of the book presents a collection of qualitative and quantitative methods for multiple forms of communication analyses. Among the detailed methods that are explained by the authors are: gestures documentation using video capture, sequential analysis of gestures, facial expression analysis using facial coding systems, etc. The methods proposed by the authors in this book are diversified and adapted to the contemporary technological context. Unfortunately, some of the methods presented are not at the fingertips of any researcher willing to carry out various research projects because they are based on highly advanced technology, extremely expensive and requiring special instructions for use.

As a final thought, I believe *Body-Language-Communication, An International Handbook on Multimodality in Human Interaction* is a book that targets various audiences, united by the passion for gesture and different forms of nonverbal communication. I also consider it important to mention that *Body-Language-Communication* is a volume that contains valuable information, theories, and methods for a specialist in this domain. Being based on highly-specialized language and concepts, it may be overwhelming to someone lacking background knowledge in this field.

Advertising for a Digital World

Faris Yakob, *Paid Attention, Innovative Advertising for a Digital World*
(Kogan Page Limited, London, 2015)

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Understanding media's changing relationship with consumers in a world being transformed by the digital, and how the advertising industry can regain its relevance, can be a difficult process. These are the main problems that Faris Yakob addresses in his book *Paid Attention, Innovative Advertising for a Digital World*.

In this book, the author underlines the idea that in the digital age, marketers can no longer buy attention because we shifted rapidly from a media environment defined by scarcity to one defined by abundance. He explains why the way we define strategy, creative ideas, media, content, and even the role of the consumer has to change. The author also encapsulates the ongoing radical transformations of marketing and communication as a practice.

The reader gets acquainted with theories regarding the human desire to spread their own ideas. We are often attempting to change other people's view of the world in one that resembles our own. And, the first step in doing that is to gain attention towards some of our own ideas. When it comes to paid attention, the one suitable for brands and companies, the classical AIDA model seems to be superseded by a subtle transition.

The author raises a question of immediate relevance for companies needing attention in the contemporary digital environment: Instead of paying professional media companies for attention, what if companies could earn it for themselves? In order to answer this challenge, Faris Yakob divided the book in three main parts, each focusing on a certain topic: the importance of paid attention and how much it is worth in relation with brands, the attention deficit disorders and attention in art and science.

The book guides the reader through the logocentric world we live in, from its very first section. He starts by explaining what brands are and offers an interpretation on their connection with myths. Faris believes that brands perform the role of myths in modern society and therefore they must be understood as a complex web of ideas and narratives. Brands enable us to make sense and create meanings for ourselves in the social world of consumption in which we participate. The author provides an interesting point of view concerning brands as having a language of their own that can be expressed via word or image or

sound, by means of television or print. Thus, the brandemes concept is emerging - the irreducible and inextricable parts of a brand.

The author offers an original perspective on the relation between brands and myths: brands are not the icons of myth, but the myth itself. Because like myth, when we build or interact with a brand we apply interpretation, we construct the meaning for ourselves. He suggests that this theory about brands and myths can lead to a number of new ways of thinking. It suggests that we must abandon the reductionism that attempts to hone brands to a single point and instead embrace complexity.

Then, the author introduces the concept of brandgrams based on Daniel Schacter's account of memories that are encoded in the brain as engrams. Concerning the encoding process, there are certain kinds of encoding that are more likely to promote higher recall. This explains why successful advertising often leverages existing referent systems by making our brain link the new content to cognitive entities that are already in our brain.

In the second section, the author addresses the topic of attention in relation with the problems and deficits on its perception in advertising, through numerous concepts and case studies that are useful for readers who want to further understand this theory. First, he details the idea that advertising is misunderstood mostly because all market research is misdirected. The drivers of human behaviour are complex, multivariate and largely subconscious, which suggests that research claiming to provide exact data on the effects of advertising is not sufficient. He believes that the most effective ads of all are those with little or no rational content because we are not rational beings, but emotional ones, like Dan Ariely says. That is why the attempt to provide a universal model for understanding how advertising works is misguided.

Faris Yakob notices that what triggers attention now is deviation because the marketplace gets increasingly more cluttered. This phenomenon conducts to what we know today as viral, a behaviour of the audience, not a property of the content. That is why instead of attempting to cause messages to become viral, we should be trying to understand what people would like to spread, and why. Because we cannot buy enough attention anymore.

The author also illustrates that the goal for brands is to break down the division between their consumers and themselves, making consumers feel like the owners and producers of the brand. Trying to create content that earns attention is a good idea, but it also opens us up to being in competition for attention with an infinite amount of content, made by everyone. But it is not about what you make, it is about its effect on the system. So, introducing a persuasive effect into this system is now the job of advertising. And content alone will not be enough to do that.

In the third section of the book, the author highlights the idea that, nowadays, advertising and content, as sale tools in the marketing field, are no longer sufficient, since they compete with practically infinite volumes of content created by people. The solution to differentiate in this conglomerate of ideas

generated by consumers is to be creative - a process placed at the intersection between art and science, that can be used to solve specific business problems through metaphors, original connections and creative patterns.

Some may think that creativity is some sort of genetic gift, some heroic act, when in fact, as Faris Yakob underlines, it is a faculty that needs to be practiced through continuous learning and combinations. Creativity is simply a way of thinking, a process, one that combines things in non-obvious ways in order to achieve something useful or beautiful, or both.

In a world where mainstream media is increasingly supplemented by the media of the masses, one of the leverage points for creativity is earning attention. But, creativity would be nothing without strategy that crafts business solutions, leveraging compelling insight into behaviour and cultural context, informing the needs and role of advertising.

The author examines the idea that businesses need now an integrative strategy that starts holistically and selects the best solution set from the range of options, rather than trying to put the same thing in every possible place. And, the way to engage with their customers in new ways, in new spaces, where everyone has an equal voice, is digital marketing.

In the end, advertising used to tell us how brands could solve business problems. Now it needs to solve problems and tell us about it, because everyone knows how most products work. Therefore, Faris Yakob's book offers a valuable contribution to the advertising field and a much needed insight. Being placed at the junction between practice and theory, it is a must read for anyone interested in this field.