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Communicating History, Finnish and American Discourses: An Ethnographic Contribution to Intercultural Communication Inquiry

We have been keenly interested in the history of the field of communication and for that reason, we are deeply appreciative of the recent essays by Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz (1990) and Everett Rogers (1999). For related reasons, we are particularly interested in the previous essay by Leda Cooks (this issue), for it raises questions about appropriations from our history, how we can (or should) keep (parts of) the past alive in our works, and ways we can creatively design our future inquiries. Leeds-Hurwitz reminds us how deeply Edward Hall's theoretical contributions are tied to the specific practical communication problems of diplomats (see also Craig, 1999a). Rogers helps us understand how Georg Simmel's conceptual creations are tied intimately to actual social issues. Historical and intellectual biographies like these can help rekindle our appreciation of our ancestors' thoughts, deepen our sense of timelessness in our theorizing, renew our creative spirit, as well as draw our attention to alternative paths of inquiry that may have escaped our attention.

Our contribution to this dialogue addresses such issues and is developed in three phases. The first involves brief reflections on the importance of the history of communication research. The second pursues these reflections with attention to the works of one ancestor, Georg Simmel. Finally, the third develops a part of these reflections by investigating a segment of intercultural communication (ICC) through the cultural forms and social types active in that segment. Our main question is this: How do (and do not) threads of history become part of the practices of contemporary communication inquiry? Following the version of ethnography we employ, our response thus links communication theory and practices. We proceed by listing three of the benefits we take for granted as goals and outcomes of historical studies of communication:

1. Historical seeds of modern communication inquiry are many and have given root to a variety of contemporary intellectual stories. Look-

ing back at what has been sown in the past can help us see ahead to what intellectual fruits may be sustained and grown in the future.

2. What constitutes an historical seed of communication inquiry is going to vary depending upon the specific intellectual soil in which it took root, as well as the particular problems addressed and perspectives adopted in present inquiries.

3. Intellectual seeds and the stories about them are therefore diverse. Just as biodiversity can help sustain species, making a place habitable for each, so intellectual diversity can help cultivate a range of stories, with each among the others better than any one standing alone. Could we have an intellectual forest with just one species of tree? We think not. Yet, like any habitable place, things change, the current climate serving some seeds and stories, or some parts of stories, more than others. So it is with the works of Georg Simmel. In this particular case, though, the tree of Simmel has more branches still to climb.

Telling Simmel's Story: Amplifying Individual Types While Muting Interactional Forms

As Rogers (1999) points out, Georg Simmel (1950) was a central figure in the development of the Chicago school. Simmel was instrumental because of his creative intellectual vision and because of his popularity as a teacher, influencing George Herbert Mead and Robert E. Park, both later becoming faculty members in the Chicago school.

Everett Rogers's (1999) essay explicates a series of concepts that Georg Simmel, and later his colleague, Robert E. Park, developed. Chief among Simmel's ideas is the concept of "the stranger," defined by Rogers (1999, p. 61) as "an individual who is a member of a system but is not strongly attached to that system." The stranger is someone, quoting Simmel, "who comes today and stays tomorrow" (in Rogers, 1999, p. 61). This notion of the stranger relies on a relational dimension between individuals, from intimate to distant. Robert E. Park introduced the concept of "social distance" for this dimension, defined "as the degree to which an individual perceives a lack of intimacy with individuals who differ in ethnicity, race, religion, occupation, or other variables" (in Rogers, 1999, p. 64). As Cooks points out in the previous essay, theoretical ground is being laid here for a discussion of differences that are broadly based and suggest something about strangers at a distance.

Simmel's influence on Park led similarly to Park's quintessential formulation of these dynamics in the concept of "the marginal man," "an individual who lives in two different worlds, in both of which the individual is a stranger" (in Rogers, 1999, p. 64). Rogers ties these concepts to two others that he relates to ICC research. Communication between strangers, or those distant socially, can be understood as "heterophily,"

or "communication between two or more individuals who are unalike" (p. 65). Similarly, what is strange to a system can be brought in through another link, of "cosmopoliteness," or "the degree to which an individual has a relatively high degree of communication outside the system" (p. 66). The higher degree to which an individual is cosmopolite, or the higher number of cosmopolite individuals in a system, contributes to the system's "openness," or to its ability to exchange "information with its environment" (p. 66).

The concept of the stranger and its intellectual progeny have been used in very influential studies of ICC (e.g., see Gudykunst & Kim, 1984/1993/1997). The idea is useful in several ways. For example, it is used in reflecting upon various differences among people, in understanding what role one might play as a foreigner, or in tracking who brings new information into a system. Further, it captures one's role in another cultural community as an ethnographer (e.g., see Frake, 1980). Yet, Rogers concludes that the concept could have been used earlier and more broadly, leading the field down other paths, especially if the "social" features of these concepts had been developed. In particular, Rogers points to the relational quality of the terms as underdeveloped, for the set of concepts points to "the interpersonal relationships of the individual to other individuals or to the system of which the individual is a part, or both" (Rogers, 1999, p. 71). Perhaps, Rogers reasons, a focus on this "social" quality in Simmel's work would have led scholars of ICC to investigate, earlier, issues of uncertainty reduction with strangers, as well as empathy and network ties with more distant others (Rogers, p. 70).

We find Rogers's point a salient one and want to develop it. We think a key conceptual move is from individually based conceptions, and from social typifications of identities, to interactional studies of communication that take culture seriously. Notice, first, the degree to which the conceptualizations discussed above rely on typifications of individuals and relationships. Conceptualizing in this way cultivates what might be called an individualized view of social and communicative life. Specifically, each concept draws attention to types of individuals who have weak attachments to others and the system (the stranger), who have low intimacy with others (socially distant), who live distantly in different worlds (the marginal man), who interact with others unlike them (heterophily), or who interact in systems outside of their own (cosmopoliteness). Together, the concepts provide a typology of individuals, indeed, in relation to others, as Rogers says.

If one builds ideas in this way, a specific kind of theorizing about communication results. From this view, we understand communication to occur between (these) types of individuals and within (these) types of relationships. Further, processes of relating are seen to be deriving from

the types of individuals discussed above, resulting also in types, such as relating with others like oneself (homophily), with others unlike oneself (heterophily), or with others outside of one's system (cosmopoliteness). The principal idea about communication is, thus, a derivative of types that vary by individual and relationship within or between systems (e.g., social groups, etc.).

Conceived this way, communication becomes a typification of typified people and relations. Interactional practices in cultural places, communication as a situated and formative force in sociocultural lives are elided. Cultural features, social processes, interactional dynamics, actual conversations, and the like may become data, but are not within the scope of the theory, so conceived. Further, these conceptualizations about, and accounts of, culture makes communication dependent upon individual, relational, and social types, not the other way around. Communication becomes a secondary effect of these primary types, which are envisioned as its motivating forces, or its basic sources. As a result, individual and relational types become the generative engines of social life. This view has some utility and value, as is demonstrated in the literature cited above.

Another starting point that could complement the above would argue that society, individuals, and relations result (in part) from "forms of social interaction." Communication, thus, becomes a prominent nexus for and locus of societal, individual, and relational lives. Through the concepts of homophily and heterophily, Rogers implied this emphasis on forms of social interaction. This is especially germane to our dialogue for we find this to be a central, defining theme in Simmel's writings.

Simmel's general philosophy was constantly tutored by a twin attentiveness to social types and forms of interaction. His writings dealt with social types such as "the stranger, the poor, the miser and the spendthrift, the adventurer, and the nobility." However, he also examined these types within social forms of interaction such as "exchange, conflict, domination, prostitution, and sociability." The examples listed here are taken from a collection of Simmel's works titled *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*. In this and other works, Simmel sought to keep in view not just the typified people of concern, but something he thought was more basic, the forms of social life from which these types might derive, in which they live, and with which they coexist. As he put it in his essay written in 1917, "Society merely is the name for a number of individuals, connected by interaction. It is because of interaction that they are a unit" (1971, p. 10). A crucial point is this: The "number of individuals" becomes what it is, from this view, "because of interaction."

The social types at least coexist with forms of interaction. In his intellectual biography of Simmel, Lewis Coser (1971) wrote about "the essence" of Simmel's thought as an effort to hold in view specific "interests and purposes" with the "forms of interaction in which these interests and purposes are realized" (p. 180). In 1910, in the first paragraph of his oft-cited essay on "sociability," Simmel (1971) wrote of society as an integration of individuals and forms of interaction, these involving "a double sense":

> On the one hand are the individuals in their directly perceptible existence, the bearers of the processes of association, who are united by these processes in the higher unity which one calls "society"; on the other hand, the interests which, living in individuals, motivate such union. . . . To satisfy such urges and to attain such purposes arise the innumerable forms of social life, all the with-one-another, for-one-another, in one another, against-one-another, and through one another. (p. 127)

Whether or not individual "interests" and "urges" drive forms of interaction or the forms of action drive the urges, both are coactive in Simmel's writings, and both need to be considered together. Space limitations prohibit a detailed discussion of these concepts here, and, admittedly, Simmel was less than lucid about his notion of "form" (see Simmel, 1971, pp. 351–352; Coser, 1971).

However, there are two kinds of inquiry a reconsideration of Simmel can help us advance. One has to do with investigating the variety of forms in social interaction, conceiving of these as basic to societal life, and as therefore providing possible explanations of individual types, society, and culture, not the other way around. A second has to do with a concern central to Leda Cooks's essay, that is, the way some forms can come to be dominant. This, it turns out, also was a central preoccupation of Simmel's, himself a markedly marginal man (see Coser, 1971, pp. 194–196).

Simmel treated "power" in several ways, explicitly, for example, in essays on "domination" and "subordination and personal fulfillment" (see Simmel, 1971, pp. 96–120, 340–348). Simmel discussed each as a "form of interaction." As a result, he conceptualized domination as a social process, and as variously immanent in the hands of a person, or a principle, or a practice. A system of thought is at work here, one that sees interaction, social forms, and processes as the grand bedrock of society, with this itself consisting of everything from erotic urges and familial life, to conflict and domination. Such study is mentioned by Rogers (1999, p. 61), and Cooks argues for a more sustained attentiveness to social forms of societal life, including those of domination, fulfillment, and immigration.

Two points bear repeating, and both are captured in Simmel's insistence that human behavior "can be explained in terms of the individual's group affiliation, as well as the constraints imposed upon him by particular forms of interaction" (Coser, 1971, p. 178). First, Simmel understood society as deriving at least partly from interaction among groups of people, and, second, he proposed that explanations of social life could be offered in terms of the forms of those social interactions. Both are excellent starting points for a next generation of studies of intercultural and international communication.

Foregrounding Communication Practice as a Cultural Accomplishment, Partly in Forms

Other historical seeds for communication inquiry also have been planted. One particular lineage derives partly from Franz Boas, who argued that language serves to classify experience, that each language does so differently, and that this is a process of which people are mostly unaware (see Boas, 1911/1966; Lucy, 1992, pp. 11–17). Boas's student, Edward Sapir (1927/1949), argued further that language can be understood as a symbolic system, that each system differs in its overall arrangement, and, echoing Boas, that this arrangement remains largely out of one's awareness (see Lucy, 1992, pp. 17–24). Sapir asked: "Why are the forms of social behavior not adequately known by the normal individual?" (p. 548). His answer: because these forms are powerfully taken for granted in everyday practices, as fixed in, and fixing, one's sense of reality. As a result, they are difficult to scrutinize.

Benjamin Lee Whorf further demonstrated how linguistic forms operated overtly and covertly, especially influencing the practical thought and habitual interactions of speakers. Whorf suggested the phrase, "fashion of speaking," as a synthesis of the ideas that uses of a language are related to everyday thought, action, and views of the world (Whorf, 1956; Lucy, 1992, pp. 25–68). The concept of form, then, suggests an integral view of the linguistic devices used by people, the thoughts they invoke, and the habitual actions they perform. Building upon the ideas of Boas, Sapir, and Whorf, Dell Hymes (1962, 1972, 1996) called for explorations into "ways of speaking" through ethnographic studies of communication, thereby advancing the view that in communication are "ways of life," these ways being cultivated through "fashions of speaking." Conceptualizations of communication thus shift from individual and relational types, to social and cultural practices, to fashions and ways of living. As communication is interactionally fashioned, so too are ways of life.

Within the field of communication, Gerry Philipsen and others (e.g., Braithwaite, 1990; Carbaugh, 1996; Fitch, 1998; Katriel, 1991) have developed the work of Hymes and his predecessors. This program treats

communication as a cultural resource, giving special attention to the cultural forms communication takes (Philipsen, 1987), the ways communication creates "membering" and shared identifications within groups (Philipsen, 1989), and the ways speech (and communication practices broadly defined) presume and create codes of belief and value (Philipsen, 1997). This body of work has been reviewed elsewhere for its special contributions to communication inquiry (Carbaugh, 1995a).

In sum, Simmel draws to our attention a dual focus on types of persons and forms of social interaction. Others, from Boas to Philipsen, bring to our view various means of communication and its symbolic meanings, both of which are culturally variable, thus cross-culturally diverse. Further, our attention is drawn not just to types of persons and social interaction, but also to cultural forms and discourses that give each community its interactional shapes and meanings. It is this conceptual union of types of persons and symbolic processes, and attention to the fashions and forms of communication, that offer another way of theorizing, thus affording a special place for inquiries into intercultural contacts (Carbaugh, 1990).

As Craig (1999a, 1999b) and Cronen (2001) have argued, communication theory offers a kind of metadiscourse that is itself intimately tied to our everyday practices of communication. An ethnographic approach to communication is well suited to exploring just how this relationship between specific communication practices and theory is forged. As Cooks points out in the previous essay, we need focused explorations at the borders where cultures meet, examining actual interactions and the "dynamic discursive forces" of each. In the process, we understand communication at the nexus of theory and practice and at the borders between cultural worlds. This is a high demand to place on theory, but one whose time has come.

Studies of this kind have already begun. One focuses on the "dominant discourse" of "community" in a multicultural setting (e.g., Bauman, 1996), while others explore intercultural dynamics in workplaces with special attention to European and Asian styles of discourse (e.g., Clyne, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Young, 1994). Some have utilized the idea of communication as a cultural practice as a way of exploring particular forms and codes for identifying persons (Moerman, 1988). For example, Philipsen (1992, 1997) repeatedly demonstrated how culturally diverse communication practices are active in particular scenes of social life and advanced theory accordingly. Another ethnographic study examined cultural forms of communication in a particular educational setting and ways the one form dominated, even supplanted, the other (see, e.g., Carbaugh, 1998). Others have analyzed cross-cultural puzzles in leave taking (Fitch, 1991) and in international disputes involving the

harvesting of dolphins (Hall & Noguchi, 1993). Each such study seeks to understand cultural forms of social practices as bases for advancing communication theory (see Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992).

One Borderland: Culture in Finnish and U.S. Communication

Here we turn briefly to a televised interview, itself an example of such intercultural interaction. We have examined this segment as part of an extensive, several year ethnographic study of Finnish and American communication. We present this particular segment for several reasons: It involves an instance of communication that is public. In it, there are cultural forms at play for identifying self and other. Each such form is demonstrably part of different cultural discourses, each being "fashioned" in its own way, with each being "read" from the other discourse in another way. The segment is thus about, and is also conducted through, different cultural forms of social interaction. We use this segment here not to conduct a comprehensive analysis, but to suggest various possibilities for the ethnographic study of communication.

The segment below was part of a televised episode titled "Tango Finlandia," which was shown initially in February 1993 on the American program, *60 Minutes*. Since then, the episode has been rebroadcast every year in the United States, making it the most often shown episode in the history of this most successful television program. We have been trying to understand, among other things, why this is so by exploring ways this episode both instantiates and inhabits popular American and Finnish cultural discourses. It is also significant, for our purposes, that this episode was broadcast in Finland, in Finnish, in the fall of 1999. With that brief background, consider the following segment:[1]

40 Jan Knutas: (Finnish media personality)
41 we're a silent (.) brooding **hh* people
42 we think a lot
43 we like to ((lip smack)) keep our privacy **h*
44 and give (.5)
45 the fellow man (.5)
46 his privacy
47 keep a distance.
48 SAFER: (in a voiceover)
49 Jan Knutas is a Finnish author and producer for the
50 government radio service **hh*
51 Finns, he says (.)
52 have a difficult time making even
53 the most ***casual***? social contact **h*
54 with a stranger on a bus for example.

55 Knutas (cut to interview with Safer)
56 I begin to think that *hhh
57 I hope (.5)
58 the other person doesn't say something ~I
59 might have to engage in a
60 conversation now *hhhh hh
61 it's (.) it's a horrifying thought
62 and sometimes you have to~
63 (Footage of Jan Knutas and Morley Safer)
64 He actually says that *hhh
65 where are you going *h
66 And then it's oh god I have to talk now *hhh
67 even if I would like to say (.)
68 please leave me alone
69 and let me brood for an hour *hhhhh uhhh
70 aaaa I'm too polite to do that, so I go along (1)
71 and get irritated in the process

What we wish to highlight here are the ways in which this particular segment includes forms of social interaction that are culturally distinctive and that create, through cultural discourses, a sense of the other as a stranger or of otherness as strange. First, this segment appears as an early part of an American "news" program, *60 Minutes*, thus it employed a kind of journalistic interview between an American, Safer, and a Finn, Knutas. Both are public figures, an American journalist and a Finnish media figure, respectively. We draw attention, then, to a form of social interaction at work here, the interview, and to those participants explicitly being identified in it, Safer (identified earlier in the broadcast) and Knutas (identified on lines 49–50).

Second, this form of social interaction is being conducted in culturally distinctive ways. For example, the response of Knutas (41–47, 57–71) is highly cultural in what is said, how this is being structured, the stance from which it is structured, and in what is presumed by this way of addressing a foreign other. In short, Knutas's response is a Finnish way of telling non-Finns, especially Americans, about being a Finn. The kind of report Knutas provides, about a Finnish cultural self to (an American) other, is a well-known practice to some Finns and is done (by Knutas), perhaps unaware that the other (Safer) might misunderstand what is being said from the Finnish view. Knutas is also acting Finnish in nonverbal ways, including his "lip smack" on line 43 and his use of his eyes.

Safer, on the other hand, conducts the interview in a way that draws attention to the perplexing and peculiar features of a cultural other (lines

51–54). In the process, he assumes an American stance that is typically bemused by cultural variety (including Safer's facial expressions). He does so perhaps while being unaware of the degree to which it is working here—by Safer's not knowing that Knutas is giving a unique report, even a playful report, about Finnish character that is designed specially to pique an American ear. Thus, we observe, the interview form here includes Finnish and American versions, each placed on cultural footing, with each casting the other, and the self, in different lights. This interview itself is creating an intercultural communicative event and is being conducted (in part) according to locally distinctive norms, forms, and premises for interviewing, in this case, on TV (see also Briggs, 1986; Carbaugh, 1990, 1993).

Third, the interview segment is edited in cultural ways. This involves playing with basic elements in these forms of social interaction, such that the initial real-time sequences are being reversed, with specific visual images being strategically supplied from an American view. For example, regarding the resequencing of this talk, Safer can be heard to be paraphrasing Knutas (52–54), yet this occurs prior to Knutas's comment that is, perhaps, being paraphrased (56–71). In this way, Safer's comment provides a verbal frame for Knutas's comment, making it—Knutas's comment—sound like a Finnish confirmation of Safer's interpretation. The visual images surrounding this segment literally complete this picture by showing Finnish people on a bus looking (shying?) away from the camera, suggesting this as an appropriate image for "the horrifying thought" Knutas mentions and the "difficult time making . . . social contact" alluded to by Safer. Knutas's and Safer's words, along with these images, create a message, at least for some American viewers, that Finns like to "brood" alone and don't want casual social-visual contact.

From a Finnish view, however, Knutas's comments do something else. They describe not a people, but social situations in which the form of social interaction referred to here as "brooding" might be used. This kind of Finnish understanding rests on several cultural premises, for example, that Knutas's report is a way of reporting about Finns to Finns. To non-Finns, that this kind of report activates in its utterance a Finnish respect for privacy, and that privacy and a certain distance can mean respect for others and a positive valuing of silence. For Finns, these Finnish premises are inherent in Knutas's comment. However, they are not salient or relevant in American viewers' discourse about the segment. In this sense, the segment again demonstrates different cultural premises and preferences for forms of social interaction, different premises about ways of reporting cultural self to others, and different preferences for conducting social interaction in public. In other words, the very same

words, forms, and visual images play into, or inhabit, different cultural discourses, thus invoking different codes and meanings.

Finally, this segment appears within a larger journalistic story. One typical American (U.S.) version of this story involves the cultural casting or representation of a puzzling other, in this case "the silent expressionless Finn," followed by the presumed remedy—from a popular American view—that this other needs a socially expressive outlet. Curiously, the Americans believe that the tango is a remedy for the Finns. Yet, even with this outlet, Finns are still depressed and inexpressive emotionally. As this part of the story unfolds, the segment feeds a grand journalistic narrative about the curious and perplexing ways of others, reaffirming the (American) stance that the other is perplexing, while offering little by way of understanding that other, from their (Finnish) point of view.

Our preliminary investigations show how this segment, and story, are being read into broader Finnish and American cultural discourses. American verbal reactions to the episode follow this discursive sequence: We're baffled; Finns are inexplicably inexpressive, sad, and shy; this has to be a problem (explained because of weather, temperature, and lack of sun); here's our solution (rather than tango, Finns need to share their feelings and communicate). American cultural premises underlie this discursive sequence and presume a particular model for the person: Be an expressive individual who communicates and expresses feelings freely.

The very same words and images are read into a different, Finnish cultural discourse. Reactions to the episode are formed in this way: We don't know whether to laugh or cry, some of us are very angry, and some of us are humored. If there's humor, it is because Knutas is doing Finnish satire here, a black, self-deprecating humor. As a result, he's funny, but not to all Finns because his jokes on cultural truths are about values and understandings Finns share. However, others, especially Americans, don't understand these things about Finns. Popular Finnish premises underlie this discourse, for it presumes a particular model for the person: Speak when one has something to say that is worthy of others' consideration. Otherwise, be a silent, respectful, and reserved person who can and should watch and listen with emotions best being expressed subtly, nonverbally (see Auer-Rizzi & Berry, 2000; Berry, 1997; Carbaugh, 1995b; Lehtonen & Sajavaara, 1985; Nurmikari-Berry & Berry, 1999; Sajavaara & Lehtonen, 1997).

To summarize our treatment of the segment: The segment is part of a generic interactional form, the interview. In it, we can notice different cultural stances for interviewing and being interviewed. As a result, the same forms, words, and images carry into different cultural discourses with different meanings. Chief among these meanings are premises for

how to present one's culture to others, as well as what is culturally valued in that presentation for being a person. We must add that Knutas clearly knows and caters to both American and Finnish cultural discourses and plays some Finnish themes in a Finnish way he knows (especially U.S.) foreigners may not only puzzle over, but also delight in. We also must add that Knutas did not expect his "play" to be misunderstood or unappreciated by some Finns, which it was. A difficult consequence of this play is that, first, American viewers rarely if ever get his joke, whereas Finnish viewers may, or may not, and if so, may not appreciate it. As in all such play, there are serious, even dangerous elements at work (see Basso, 1979).

Part of the seriousness in this type of ICC is the introduction and cultivation within an American discourse of a perplexity about "Finnishness" and foreigners generally. Viewers are left with an impression of Finns or others as not like Americans, but offered little by way of understanding who "they" are, from their view. With a little more knowledge, and perhaps a little less drama, the broadcast could have elaborated upon positive values in silence, privacy, and solitude, but did not. Furthermore, had the part of Knutas's interview that preceded line 41 not been deleted from the broadcast, his reference to silence, privacy, and solitude would have sent a different message, for in this prior segment he discussed Finns as honest and conscientious people who never play roles and are trustworthy. In other words, rather than speaking sociably to surface matters, he described Finns as "hiljaisia, mietiskeleviä," quiet, thinking people. This, of course, provides a different context for interpreting his subsequent comments beginning on line 41. The intercultural dynamics are complicated further by differences between languages, between popular American English and Finnish. For example, "brooding" (line 41) is a term in American English but is quite unlike related Finnish terms such as "mietiskellä," which positively connotes a deeper, studied thoughtfulness, in silence.

There are deep intricacies in this interview form that our current work explores in finer detail, between the cultural moves being made and linguistic resources at work. We have endeavored here simply to suggest the ways this interview takes different and incompatible forms, culturally and linguistically, with the American English version dominating both this particular segment and the episode as a whole. In other words, as Simmel might say, we must not forget how cultural types inhabit interactions as these. Further, we should notice how American culture and the English language can subordinate an other's culture and language to its own concerns and notice how each cultural discourse is interactionally at play in ways that constrain them both.

On the Role of Communicative Forms as Explanations of Intercultural Phenomena

Revisiting Simmel helps remind us that social typifications like "the stranger" and "the marginal man," and cultural typifications like "Americans" and "Finns," are given shape and meaning in actual forms of social interaction, like the interview, reports about self to others, and how one conducts oneself in public. Keeping both the types and forms in view helps move our theorizing from individuals and populations to actual communication practices. By treating these practices as cultural accomplishments, we can draw attention further to the communal features that are active in them (see Braithwaite, 1990; Carbaugh, 1996; Fitch, 1998; Hastings, 2000; Katriel, 1991; Milburn, 2000; Philipsen, 1992). We can show better how different cultural discourses provide different accounts or explanations for producing and interpreting communication. We can understand better how media texts such as this one, which are distributed globally, are deeply active in local discursive practices. In the process, we can come to know not just typified persons, but cultural forms of social interaction. Although the world may appear smaller as transmissions of communication span the globe, people nonetheless live and act at least partly through their local forms of participation.

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Note

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