

THE COMMUNICABILITY AND OPERANCY OF SELF*

William Stephenson
University of Missouri

THE SELF

The self is central to all else in our theory of communication. The concept appears explicitly in Schachtel's *Metamorphosis* (1959) as emerging from "embeddedness" (p. 15), and as being accessible only in introspection (p. 16). Mary Douglas' *Natural Symbols* (1970, cf 1973) uses self as a central notion throughout her thesis, that self and society are represented as natural symbols, expressing the relation of the individual to his society, and that *meaning* arises from the tension between the two--sometimes self emerged in society, sometimes the two are far apart (1970: 112). We concur completely, but can go further, to make these notions into operations. Q started, too, with Jungian concepts (Stephenson, 1939), and we agree with Douglas that Jung's "glowing

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eulogy of spiritual poverty as a source of strength and self-knowledge" (1970: 152) is very dubious. But we could now test anyone who has foresworn the old religious symbols of Christianity, as a noble stripping of himself down to the "bare individual self," and determine whether indeed, by embracing Zen and other alien religious forms, he has exchanged beggarhood for the gorgeous dress of the Orient, to any gain (Douglas, 1970: 198).

The concept of self does not enter, of course, into MacKay's (1969) theory of meaning, or Meredith's (1967) informational system except by implication. The concept is currently appearing in scholarly literature, from all angles, for example Dickstein (1971) in literature, Gouldner (1970) in sociology, and Stent (1975) in science.

The nearest to our position about self is Kurt Koffka's (1935). As in his case, the concern is with behavior, not of the American variety, but of general scope, including what is ordinarily conceived as subjectivity (Stephenson, 1953a, 1953b). Like Koffka's, our concern is with concrete situations in which segregated parts are in functional-interaction (a psychophysical field in Koffka's case, under various "stresses and strains").

The human being functions in his behavioral field, we aver, by distinguishing the real world outside him from what is communicable within him. By the time a child is two years old it distinguishes its body from other objects. Our own developed being separates what is outside (real) from what is inside (our thoughts, dreams, feelings). With the advent of science we are slowly learning that what distinguishes reality from subjectivity is that we can bring about change in the real world by objective means--it is a world of accomplishment to use Koffka's term--whereas in subjectivity matters are obdurate in that respect. Dream of a golden sovereign as we wish, we cannot conjure one up out of any fourth dimension in a real world. There is not a shred of objective evidence,

therefore, for ghosts, spirits, souls, fairies, and the like other than as hallucinations or other well-attested projections from the subjectivity of a person.

The self to be described is therefore not hallucinatory, nor any other concretization. Nor is it merely hypothetical. It is represented abstractly, in spatial terms and mathematical language, but is intimately linked with *meaning*, as empirically determined.

We begin our exposition with Koffka's discussion of the mountain climber, Dr. Lammer, who fell into a crevasse in the Alps, and lost consciousness. In due course there was an experience of dull discomfort, and an awareness of fog...the discomfort and darkness fluctuating...then a light...a dream?...but pain again...and after a while, in a flash, all came together with the awareness that it was "me," Dr. Lammer, "I," victim of an accident. The Ego (as Koffka called this awareness) did not emerge with the first articulation of the field,

...not even with the feeling of discomfort, and apparently not even with the first conscious thought, though it was this which led very soon to the momentary establishment of the Self, which was, however, as yet quite unstable; it disappeared again and re-emerged with greater stability and better organization, the experience appearing as a dream. (Koffka, 1935: 324)

This Ego is obviously a central segregation in Koffka's psychophysical domain. He in no way thinks of it as a constant, however, like a cardboard figure. Nor is it confined within unbreakable boundaries. The sensitive person, Koffka remarks, placed in the society of a vulgar crowd, "will withdraw into his shell": his Ego will shrink, presumably to protect himself. At a poetry-reading, however, his Ego will inflate, trancelike—he will be the white knight, with prancing courser, tilting in playful quarrel with his

peers! The martyr at the stake, hopefully, will be unaware of his body, and suffer no pain. The fop will clothe his Ego with finery, not less his dandy body. Clothes will have reached the very core of his Ego--and such a core Koffka calls Self.

Thus, for Koffka, an Ego articulates out of consciousness, as in Dr. Lammer's case. Obviously its character has much, if not everything, to do with the experiences of one's life, one's way of living, one's feelings. Koffka, however, includes reflexes (which react without much Ego involvement, unless we yawn in the face of our guest!). Also what we are unaware of, about which psychoanalysis has much to say. Also, our memory. All such may be segregations in a person's behavioral field, along with his Ego, which is an articulation like the other elements. The Self is a more personal segregation.

Consider, for example, emotions. Are these not Ego-related, *par excellence*? Koffka says it all depends on the situation--and we agree. If we witness a terrifying accident in real life, what is our experience? It may be petrification, and we stand stone-like. Or it may be frenetic pity, the Self bursting with pity. (Sartre (1948) describes many such elaborations of emotion, with penetrating concern for concrete situations.) But if the disaster is only viewed on television, then the emotions--whether of terror, compassion, or whatever--may be mere segments in the person's subjective field, without Ego-involvement.

This of course is of great interest. To quote Koffka in this connection:

It seems more natural to say that emotions may be carried by (behavioral) objects as well as by myself, that they may enter into other organized units in the field as well as that unit which we call the Ego. *I should even be inclined to think that a field which contains no Ego organization may be highly emotional.* (Koffka, 1935: 327, ital-

ics added)

Put ourselves in the place of children confronting violence on television and the matter takes on considerable interest: the emotions could well be outside the child's Ego organization, and as such do neither much harm nor good; certainly, if Ego organization is essential for courses of action in life as we hold to be the case, the absence of it in situations such as we are describing suggests "playful" rather than "accomplishment" conditions. But where the emotional situation is incorporated into the Ego (as Koffka would say), matters are likely to be very different indeed with respect to courses of action: the emotions are projected into real life.

This applies to our wishes, desires, needs, and beliefs as well. They may or may not be directly incorporated into the Ego in a given situation, and this makes a difference with respect to the possible courses of action they mediate.

Koffka held that thoughts are in the same position. They can be experienced "outside" the Ego. He provides an example of a young man dreaming of himself and another student in class; a question is asked which he cannot answer but which his fellow-student answers correctly immediately. Authors, Koffka adds, get thoughts and speeches directly from their fictional characters, not from their own thoughts!

Thus, for Koffka the Ego is perceptual, a segregated part like any others, such as emotions, thoughts, memory. It incorporates these other elements situationally. It is formed in relation to consciousness (though Koffka disliked the word), and becomes "more and more stable, more and more independent of momentary conditions," so that eventually (again in Koffka's words) it is "a permanent segregated part of our total psychophysical field." At no time, he adds, is it ever completely at rest, or completely balanced; and it is fundamentally temporal, "always going somewhere." He reserved the

term Self for a special segregation:

The Ego has a core, the Self, and enveloping this core, in various communications with it and each other, are other sub-systems. (Koffka, 1935: 342)

This core concerned conditions of "high tension" in Koffka's behavioral field, for "real needs as distinct from the quasi-needs of our superficial intentions" (p. 342). The Self concerns the "more personal" part of the Ego-system.

So conceived, Koffka's Ego is an enduring system. He thought so highly of it that he made one of his very few prognostications for the future of the psychology he did so much, with his colleagues Kohler and Wertheimer, to develop: he believed that recognition of this Ego "could exert a far greater influence on the whole body of psychology than we can see at present" (Koffka, 1935: 331).

This is a sound beginning, and, we may hope, as sound a prognostication. The author got to know Koffka personally in 1939-40 as his college *confreere*, during Koffka's sabbatical at Oxford on a research project. We never discussed his Ego theory; instead, Koffka gently chided his host about the categorical nature of mental testing (R methodology); and it is probable that one gained courage from many walks after dinner at Corpus Christi College, with Koffka, that made it easier for a dyed-in-the-wool factorist from the Spearman School to break with its (and Cyril Burt's) R-methodological bonds. It is also of passing interest that the author's first acquaintance with any psychologist was with Koffka, who passed through Northumberland on his way to Smith College in America in 1925 (one guesses); two students at Durham University were invited to have tea with this distinguished German, and the present author was one of the two. Koffka was paying a visit to a fellow student of his Berlin days, a lady who was married and living in Northumberland--surely the first *ges-*

talt psychologist then in Britain, whom we never met, though we lived less than twenty miles apart.

SELF IN Q

Our theory of self is developed out of Koffka's, but we forego perceptual concepts for those of communicability. It is rooted in the methodology of the "single case" (Stephenson, 1974).

Consider the husband, late for work, whose wife has told him that "it is raining." The situation to be represented involves his outburst of irritability, not for any assumed irascibility, or for any cause of it in mischief between himself and his wife the night before, but for the subjectivity as such it entails. We collect a concourse for the situation, consisting of the statements he (and his wife) made, or could have made, about the situation, such as:

"Why does it always rain when I'm late?"

"Get the cat out of here."

"It never rains but it pours."

"Temper, temper."

"Some fool left the car windows open."

"There's trouble in the rain."

"So this is the gentle rain from Heaven."

"It's always grumble and complain."

"It's refreshing: we need it."

...and so on.

From this a Q sample is taken, balanced for valency (i.e., as many potentially positive as negative statements on provisional grounds).

The husband could then be invited to reflect on the situation, perhaps that evening, but it scarcely matters when if the situation has subjective significance, and to perform a set of Q sorts, one after another (suitably spaced in time to offset confounding one with another), with the following conditions of instruction:

- (1) Describe your *feelings* that morning you were late.
- (2) What is your more *usual reaction* to "it is raining"?
- (3) What did you feel your *wife's reactions* were that morning?
- (4) What is your *wife's usual reaction* to rainy mornings?
- (5) Describe *yourself, personally*, with the Q sample, i.e., what you think of yourself usually.
- (6) You felt like *kicking the cat*: describe what that meant to you.
- (7) If you hadn't gotten up *late*, how do you suppose you would have reacted?
...and so on.

The Q sorts would be correlated and factored, providing, by varimax solution, an operant set of factors in "simple structure," for example as follows, where "x" designates a significant factor loading:

Q sorts	Factors		
	A	B	C
1	x		
2		x	
3			x
4			x
5	x		
6	x		
7		x	

Three orthogonal factors are indicated, A, B, and C, in "simple structure": no Q sort is on more than one factor.

This is the structure of the husband's subjectivity, operantly arrived at. Just as in a Skinner Box a pigeon responds operantly irrespective of the precise instrumentation (except that it is reinforced by

food in some manner), so here, the factors are objective, *sponta sua*, each of its own accord, and in no way a prior categorization of meanings.

In this example the husband's self (5) is on factor A, along with variables (1) and (6), for his feelings that morning, and what it meant to want to kick the cat, respectively.

It is very different from factor B, which concerns his usual reaction (2) and what it would be if he hadn't gotten up late (7).

It is also different from C, which concerns his wife's reactions that morning (3) and her *usual* reactions on rainy mornings (4).

The statements of the Q sample have been synthesized into three different configurations, A, B, C, each with its own meaning. Chemists are familiar with such structures in the objective world of chemistry: mention has been made of the sugar hexose, with formula $C_6H_{12}O_6$, which is the same for fifteen other sugars, all different, each a different arrangement of the six carbon, twelve hydrogen, and six oxygen atoms (Elias, 1974: 34). Similarly in our case, the (say 50) statements of the Q sample have been arranged into three different (uncorrelated) configurations, our factors A, B, C, each of which must have properties as different from one another as those for hexose are different from glucose, fructose, galactose and the other sugars, with the self-same atom composition.

The meanings of the factors have to be inferred by the investigator (or by anyone else who cares to attempt it, including the subject himself), and this is as significant as any other matter in the methodology. The meaning, as Mary Douglas remarked, is elaborated upon as between the self and society, between the Ego (including self) and the functional environmental situation in our example, all from operations of the subject himself.

The structure is operant, objective, every bit as much as $C_6H_{12}O_6$ for hexose. The empirical core of our theory of communicability lies in these syntheses, the factors of statements from a concourse, mediated by the "focalizing attention" of the subject (Schachtel, 1959).

We should step back to reflect what is achieved in this. These structures have been gathered for hundreds of situations, in clinical psychology, communication research, advertising research. They maintain "self," but no longer only notional or categorical. They are, in Meredith's (1967) terminology, a geometrical documentation in multidimensional space. They are in no sense invariant, but symbols which have direct reference to measurements--the Q sorts, which, as we have said, are remarkable for the unit of measurement they involve, the same for everyone, for all Q sorts, all factors, all concourses (Stephenson, 1974). The documentation not only goes hand in hand with the instrumentation, but the latter doesn't obtrude; and what is provided is not merely a convenience, but the only possible guarantee of "public semantic conservation" (Meredith, 1967: 80), that is, of the possibility of common agreement as to meanings. The facts so brought to light are of a kind never reached before in the history of science. How important or interesting they may prove to be is a matter for the future to tell; but already, these structures offer a solution for Newton's long-lost Fifth Rule, and this could be of considerable importance indeed.

What the structures *mean* is of course their *raison d'être*. In the above simple example the structure indicates that the husband's conception of himself is in two segments (factors A and B), factor A representing himself in a *personal* sense, and factor B somehow *his*, but not *him*. From the fact that Q sorts (1) and (6) are on factor A, we can infer that the husband thinks of himself as irascible. Factor C suggests that he thinks of his wife as either unflappable, or else a termagant, for why,

otherwise, should he think of her under conditions (3) and (4) with the same configuration?

But there are also the meanings of the factors themselves as such to consider. These lie in the factor arrays of A, B, C, that is, in the configurations of the statements for each factor, every statement having a score in standard terms. The statements can be placed before us, in order of size of score from highest positive (+) to highest negative (-), with those scoring zero (0) in between. The meaning is not just a concatenation of the separate meanings of each statement so scored, but supraordinate to all, running from end to end of the array, as a single generalization. It offers the investigator the way to discoveries, to new conceptions, new meanings. This is not merely inherent in the factor arrays, but, with these, the concern is with Q sorts for several different conditions of instruction for the same factor, requiring an interpretation cutting across them, and not just the separate meaning of each. Thus condition of instruction (5) may indicate that the husband thinks of himself usually as *irascible*; condition (1), as *irritable*; condition (6) as *pettish*. Factor A may turn out to be something no one had noticed especially before, not even the wife, much less the husband, that his subjective condition is one of a peevish and moody quality and not really pugnacity, anger and passion. We use traits in this account merely illustratively: the Q sample would ordinarily point to more highly subjective matters in the concourse, and not to such personality structures necessarily. The wise student of subjectivity, indeed, would study Sartre's chapters on emotion in *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (1957) to guide his study, even of an outburst on a rainy morning, for a husband late for work.

The relation to Koffka's gestalt principles can now be seen. On the assumption that the subject will recognize the substance of the factors as in some sense belonging to him, the factor structure corresponds to *Ego* (in the given functional situation). If

any factor is denied by the subject, it must be a segmentation of which he is unaware, and the "unconscious" of psychoanalytic theory is precisely of this nature. Factor A is in the domain of Self (as Self-avowed); but we can expect expansion of it in other functional situations. Factor B is not attached ("incorporated") into the Self (A); on the assumption that the husband recognizes it as *his*, it is a surprising matter--as though a strong self-denial is at issue. Factor C is of course the husband's way of looking at his wife, a belief system, probably firmly segmented.

This is not a segregation of the person's "total psychophysical field" in a static sense; nor would we think of it as permanent. It is just one abstraction, for what seems a simple functional situation. But each segment is likely to be "enduring," and it is "going somewhere" in the sense of suggesting problems. We can suppose that strands of these segments will appear in factor structures for other situations in which the same person is actor.

The Self in Q, therefore, is a documentation in multidimensional space of the obvious truth that an individual is central to his own subjectivity. It begins and ends with communication; and wherever the concept Self enters, in common conversations, or in the works of a Schachtel, Mary Douglas, Gouldner, or Stent, or in existential psychology, it can be represented by operants in concrete behavior as surely as a thermometer reading documents a temperature.

*William Stephenson, 2111 Rock Quarry Road, Columbia,
MO 65201*

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