

COMMUNICATION SEMINAR

FINAL REPORT

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Communication

In this report, rather than focusing upon the number of people who walk through a given door at any given time, or the perfect angle for chairs in a mental hospital, I thought I would try to look at communication within my own dwelling, as a microcosm in itself. And in doing so, I would like to paint a broad picture, unbounded by the scientific framework I tend to fall into. I would hope to create a personally human approach to my own dwelling.

I live in a two storied wooden building which can be glimpsed from the top of the science building. A three minute walk across the golf course, two turns down a gravel lane brings you to my traffic-free, truck garden and tree frontal, unpainted wooden place. Some people might call it an APATO, others a geshyuku (下宿). There are four rooms on the first floor, three on the second, all rented to single people ~~my~~ except for the extreme one on the second floor, which houses a poor family of three. The occupants, other than the family, are all working, so that in the day time the building is almost an empty shell, unfilled until very late at night. As the chart should show, each floor has its own toilet, sink and gas burners in the common hallway. The building, however, has only one exit, so that though each floor is self-contained, the entrance is common, and like a funnel for the structure, where shoes are removed and slippers slipped on or vice versa. The building, itself, is isided and backed by a residential area; a new house on the right, an old one on the left and back, yet the sides are very roomy, with an open area for cars to be parked. In front is a relic of the past - a truck garden surrounded by trees, improbably giving the entire area a very countrified atmosphere.

Outside

As a hairy, foreign barbarian, I feel somewhat out of place whenever I step out of my room or the building. Nevertheless, or perhaps

because of it, I do have a limited amount of interaction with people, even outside the building. A neighboring child, who shows signs of being a megalomaniac at age three, screams "monster" and charges whenever he sees me. An old grandmother, somewhat senile, who mistook me for a foreigner we knew a year ago, greets me (or who she thinks I am) when I take out the trash. The farmer, who tills the garden in front, is also a nodding acquaintance and we have at times exchanged words. As for everyone else, if I say hello, a response comes, but only on a forced interaction level. Never have I been into another person's house in the area. But lest this might seem "unfriendly" on either part, I doubt if the neighbors who have been there 25 years have ever been next door. There is never any neighbour-to-neighbour-stand-around-gossip-over-the-back-fence in this area. Most people, of course, are not there during the day, except perhaps for the young, old and non-working mothers. Most people leave early, and come back late. The air is quiet all day, no cars drive by, and few people can be seen. Sometimes I feel too conspicuous, because I know that my appearance is a shock in itself in such a neighborhood. (Shock not being the alienated California hippie description, but rather an environmental oddity) where the pace is slow, and in fact where there are few young people my age. However, I feel that this neighborhood is not much of a place for interaction anyway, it is only a resting place. Everyone has their friends at work, school or someplace else, and, as we mentioned in class, people often tend to not really want too much interaction as a means of preserving their own private enclaves. (probably complaining, at the same time, how unfriendly modern neighbors are)

Yes many work both ways

Correct
True - and a fairly significant difference

May not be - but might be. The cultural non-separation limits their perhaps

True in U.S. at least

INSIDE

Went out to meet my boiling tea-water;
Nemoto was there.
Today having met four times,
I conjured up only a wister.

Wonderful -
Bashō?

yes ||
 Neighborhood
 customs
 in
 Japan

Inside, my interaction is filled with intricacies. In fact, I know that there are many I have not found yet in the past 8 months. - Spent many hours thinking about what I should do in certain situations and what I shouldn't have done in others. This ranges from the problem of what to say to a person you have already said good morning to several times, or what not to say when you want to defend yourself against a downstairs neighbor's accusation that your drainage water is leaking into his room. - from a desire to be friendly, but not to seem like a bumbling American fool. When I first moved in, I was advised to introduce myself to everyone. I tried very hard, but because of the late hours kept by some people, it took a long time. Actually, I'm still not sure if the fourth room on the first floor is occupied or not; I've never been able to meet the fellow.

The building, as a structured conductor of communication, has channelled or focused most of my interaction, to people near the exit, either the first floor or the second, as I must pass these people's quarters everytime I enter or depart. In addition, these two vantage points in the building are occupied by the only two rooms with any status over the rest - the landlord on the first floor and the family on the 2nd to whom I must pay my gas bill. (they are old-timers who are more established than all the others & thus have been given a bill-collecting responsibility)

These two rooms also are the only 6-mat ones - all the others are 4 $\frac{1}{2}$. Thus every time I leave the building, I pass the room of the person I owe gas money to on the 2nd floor and the person I owe rent to on the first. If I am late for either of these payments, and the occupants of the respective rooms happen to be in the hallway, I must confess that I make a distinct effort not to show my face until they have returned to their rooms. Also, the family on the second floor have the room next to mine, and our doors are adjacent. Therefore, we are likely to meet in the hallway, on the way to the bathroom, the burners or the exit downstairs. Status and location have determined my interaction.

Exc

Once a month, I must personally pay both landlord and family, and therefore in the process am obliged to make some small talk. As I am an inferior ⁱⁿ the relationships, however, they always take any initiative in turning the conversation into one of substance or not.

The other cause of interaction in this building, and the way in which I really initially got to know most people beyond a 'hello' level, was by some disaster in the building, such as when I blew the fuse, or a water pipe burst. Then, for the first time, people came out of their individual rooms and mingled, discussing the situation in the hallway. Happenings of this sort are the only times I have ever seen people other than myself interacting together. None of the other residents of the building have ever visited each other's quarters as far as I know, (myself being an exception, having visited the landlord and having invited the downstairs woman into my room on a business matter. It may also be, again, that as a foreigner I attract a certain amount of interaction, more so than if I were a WATANABE-SAN. Returning from work late at night, I often encounter the man of the family next door, who also works until late night. On these occasions he often initiates long conversations with me about the world and Japan. We talk in the hallway, while I lean against my door, and he washes some clothes in the hallway sink. The conversation is terminated simply by a desire of either party to enter his room. Again I think this interaction is stimulated by my own exoticism, because he is the head of the family to whose wife I pay the gas bill, and because our rooms are so close together. Again, as with the surrounding neighborhood, I don't find much action just for the sake of plain friendship or loneliness within the building. Again, people seem to like to keep their quarters for themselves, to keep things private. Other than the young landlord (25) and myself, no one seems to invite people to their rooms, even from outside. I suspect that desire for companionship is fulfilled at school or work.

Again - effect
of cats (MST)
this is
v. critical

With no rules for privacy either spoken or written, everything seems to function amazingly well. Generally speaking, if someone is using a hallway, burner or the sink, then no one else will come out into the hall, even if only to go to the bathroom, because, I feel, a loss of privacy results, in addition to the stupidity and sometimes embarrassment of feeling that you are required to communicate with some pleasant or a smile. Also, night-time quiet hours are quite rigorously maintained, although there is no rule. Rather, everything operates by unspoken mutual co-operation.

Good point -
Wish to avoid
coerced
communication

INSIDE My Room

Most important in this building, is each person's individual room, where most communication really takes place, ~~and~~ where the most important communication takes place; between the occupant and guests, with himself, and with the room and the materials it is made of. As we have said in class, a room is not just an enclosure of space, it shapes space and characterizes it. It shapes communication and is a communicator at the same time.

My room, with the closet and GENKAW door closed, is almost a perfect cube of sides less than 9 feet.

the bottom;

Snake-woven

Strands of soft-grown straw

Blend in a scent of clow

Marsh fields.

Lovely

The top, and the beams cutting across white plaster;

A natural Awa

Warm like life

Textures the room

with the kinship of wood.

In scale for
Jap. size
OUT-SCALE
for
WESTERN

There are four and one half tatami mats in this room, and when I lie down or stand up and stretch my arms, I can always touch the opposite side of the cube, whether it be the ceiling or the wall. Of course, with an over six-foot height, I am a long match in a small box, but I have no real sense of being cramped, rather, a feeling of compactness and total security and efficiency. Everything can be reached with ease, and when it is so dark I cannot see, I can feel or sense without touching, the exact dimensions of my confines, and know that everything I own is in this area. (In contrast, in Western rooms, I often used to feel as though goods were lurking in the corners) The materials used in construction of the room also seem to reinforce the feeling of oneness in that no stone or metal or even real paint is used. The glass in the window is all that seems to break the "natural" construction. With no chairs, I am always living in a tactile range of these materials. The tatami is not just something to be viewed, rather it is to be felt and inhaled, along with the plaster and wood. Bricks, and plastic paint smell like factories; Straw, wood and plaster walls smell like the clearing in the middle of a forest. When my window is wide open, and the sunshine slides in over my sill-box flowers, the feeling is real. Colours as well as smells and feels are natural, white, wood brown, straw yellow and black tatami lining cloth colours make up the entire subdued spectrum.

Eye

POINT

Feel fixtures
with body
fingers

Another aspect of the room which I thought I would never live to appreciate.

While trees become

Stark and Slim

I fatten with

Cats and Food.

Heatless, the room puts me in the same general condition as the outside. Cracks in the walls and windows provide the interior with the same heat and humidity - the only difference being that it doesn't rain inside.

A morning's weather

Written in

A quality of light
Slits through my window
Shutters.

An advantage is that, being at ease with the outside, there isn't any of the feeling of deception one often receives on leaving a centrally-heated building. I wind up wearing the same clothes outside as inside. // Yes

A blanketed Red glow
Rays Warm to my feet
My breath
↳ White mist. // Beautiful

The kotatsu allows me to be comfortable in the coldest weather, to the extent that when the temperature really drops, it is both a physical and psychological escape from any discomfort, perhaps more of the latter.

↳ To give the impression the 'alone' in my room is a condition of communicating with the materials only would be wrong. Rather, it is impossible to avoid any human communication even when alone. The building is a whole organic unit and I know without looking anywhere how many people are in the structure, whether they are sleeping or watching television.

WALL moon-crescent light
Casts shadows
of neighbour's life. //

— And even when no noise issues at all. Thus there is never any true sense of aloneness.

Interpersonal communications within the room, is of course limited. At maximum, the room has held 7 people but that resulted in a total breakdown, with everyone so close there was too much eye contact and an uneasy feeling resulted. Maximum efficiency is attained with two people, at most three.

My friend smiles
There is only one door
Which she has closed
to keep out the cold.

And because of the room's shape and size, all communication is controlled. Anyone entering through the door knows that he is going to have to talk or do something because of the proximity to anyone else in the room. He is also likely to sit or not sit in certain places. In the daytime - perhaps by the window, but at night away from it (draft) - Or else against the wide wall, but never does anyone sit against the wall with the door or closet. Often, the very middle of the room seems to be the best place. It's also interesting, incidentally, to find, as others have too, the ~~it's~~ cultural structure of the rooms of the room tends to shape like cultural actions on the part of the inhabitant. Thus I find myself in rearranging knocking Japanese style on the tatami - something that used to

And still does for me, unfortunately

cause pain. Furniture or objects in the room are also great shapers of people's actions, and as mentioned before, in winter the kotatsu is an instant magnet. Usually it would be in the centre of the room, but since I am lazy & do not like to move it every night to make room to sleep, it is in the corner, and thus draws people there. I like it in the corner because, (perhaps my cultural psyche at work) I like to study in the ~~at~~ sunshine during the day & at night to have my feet slanted ~~not~~ under the kotatsu, my back against the wall, watching television. Which brings me to the other great influence of action. There seems to be no better way to destroy a room's total function than to introduce a TELEVISION.

Yes

Yes

Immediately people group around the best vantage points. In a 9ft. cube, this means almost backing into the neighbour's room to avoid having your RNA molecules overly irradiated. The moment the box is switched on, people in the room are activated like magnetised iron filings, they avert the eyes, heads

and postures in the direction of the light. The space ~~at~~ beneath my T.V. and beside it is occupied by books, my toaster and radio. The protrusion into space caused by this plus the myriad of electrical wires that protrude from it make any in the room consciously avoid sitting near this area. Also, I think people tend to separate themselves from a television, even when it is turned off. The thing seems to have a strange power that people don't like. As a result, the wall is also not utilised for leaning or sitting against or near. Therefore, in the end, the only places left to feel really at ease are by the window side, the one remaining blank wall, and of course, the most important place, the centre of the room.

yes

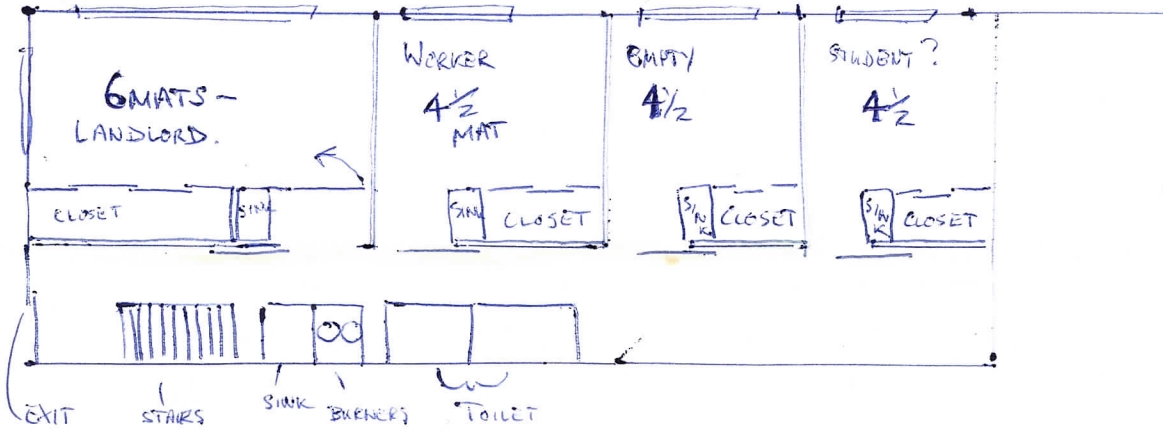
This report, in conclusion, has been one of observation, conjecture, and personal feelings.

But very sensitively, emotively & perceptively done.
 Science & poetry are both dependent on sensitive perceptions
 Relationships

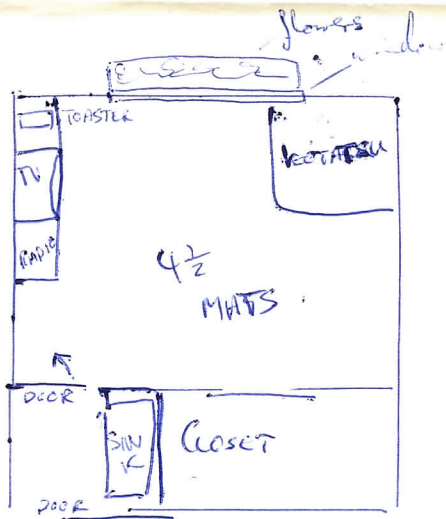
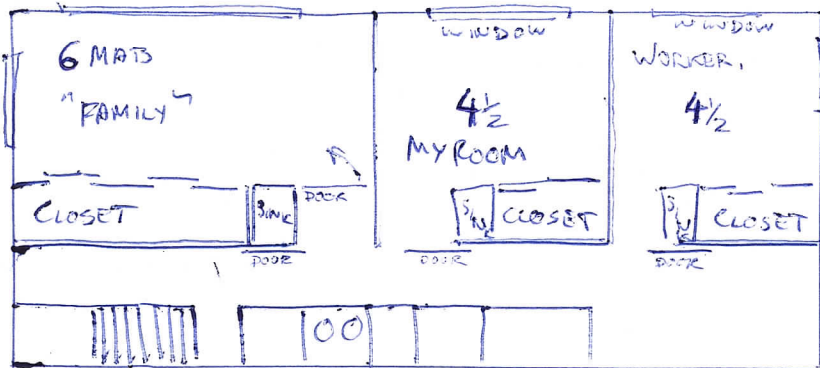
A.

A delight to read

1st Floor.



2nd Floor



Floor?
1st

Hallway