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Human Communication Accommodation Habits and Jean Baudrillard's "Hyper reality" in John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* and *The Sot-Weed Factor*

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Abstract

Society exists only on accommodation and adjustment of members of a society. The first and second world wars taught that communication was the only medium of maintaining the global relationship with peace and harmony. The paper studies traces of the postwar global society Communication Accommodation Theory and Jean Baudrillard's "Hyperreality" in John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, or *The Revised New Syllabus* (1966) and *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960).

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Introduction

We now know much more about how the brain controls emotion and thought than we did only a few decades ago. In contrast, despite the significance of social interactions for mental health, research on the neurobiology of human social behavior has received relatively little attention. In this editorial, I provide examples of a few experimental methods that have been used to investigate the neurological bases of social behavior in humans in the hopes that they would inspire further academics to work on this intriguing and significant subject (Rahaman and Sharma, "Basic Modeling of 'Cognitive Sensors' Based on Literary Study of 'Thick Description' of Human Behavior"; Rahaman and Sharma, "Reading an Extremist Mind through Literary Language: Approaching Cognitive Literary Hermeneutics to R.N. Tagore's Play *The Post Office* for Neuro-Computational Predictions"; Rahaman and Aftab).

People are social beings by nature. We are not unique in this regard; it is difficult to imagine an animal for which the control of social behavior is not crucial. Even species lacking a nervous system have the potential to engage in behaviors resembling social behavior. Numerous social behaviors, including affiliation and aggression, the establishment of hierarchy, and territoriality, are shared by many animals, including humans (Rahaman and Bhagat; Rahaman). Even organisms with a basic brain, like ants, can do this. Human social behavior is undoubtedly more complicated than that of other ape-like creatures, yet it is nonetheless just as crucial to our survival and general well-being. Given the significance of interpersonal relationships for humans, it is not unexpected that many psychiatric diseases entail some disruption of typical social behavior and that abnormal social functioning manifests as one of the

primary symptoms in several disorders. Examples include borderline personality disorder, schizotypal personality disorder, autism, suicide attempts (Rahaman and Bhat) and social anxiety disorder.

Despite the significance of social interaction, little is known about the brain mechanisms that govern social behavior. Human social neuroscience is gaining popularity, but most of the recent research focuses on social cognition. Studies on the activation of various brain regions in reaction to faces with various expressions, for instance, are fascinating and significant, but they are not essential to understanding how social behavior is regulated. If facial responses were the primary predictor of social engagement, then blind individuals would not be able to establish sufficient social connections, and text messaging would not be nearly as popular as it is now. The argument is that human communication is the basic requirement of all kinds of human relationships. And it is undeniably related to social neuroscience. We examine the same further.

Definition of Communication Accommodation Theory

First conceived by communication professor Howard Giles in 1971, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was mainly about speech, but then adapted to involve verbal and nonverbal communication (Hordila-Vatamanescu, 2010).¹ Giles described developing the theoretical perspective in his graduate school days in the United Kingdom, and muses that he still is constantly noticing new ways people accommodate others, such as when his wife lost her voice for a few days, and others would whisper to her, thinking she was whispering for another reason (Gallois et al., 2016).

The theory is about convergence and divergence in accommodation and says that

communicators are likely to accommodate the person they are speaking with by adopting their mode of communication. Soliz, Thorson, and Rittenour say accommodation is performed for seeking approval, inclusion, affiliation, or interpersonal goals," while non-accommodation serves to highlight differences between people (2009, p. 821).

Divergent communicators maintain their own way of communicating, and then the communication differs from the other communicator. There is also the concept of over accommodating, as Hordila-Vatamanescu (2010)¹ says, and this means they exaggerate the accommodation. There are three types of over accommodation:

"The first is sensory where people tend to over adapt to others who are perceived as limited in their abilities. The second is dependency, where the person who is talking speaks to others as if they're in a lower status than them. Lastly, inter group occurs when the speakers place listeners in cultural groups without acknowledging individual uniqueness" (Hordila-Vatamanescu, 2010, p. 281).

Within CAT, however it occurs, it's important to note that communication happens within a context, as always, and that there is always negotiation of relationships within a conversation, including power within a relationship, when communicating. Based on these stereotypes of our group members, expectations may arise about people from the culture. Norms of accommodation may appear. When over accommodating happens, it may make the communicator seem condescending, which hopefully, the person does not desire. However, when done well, "communication accommodation becomes a mutual feeling of identification between the source and the receiver" (Hordila-Vatamanescu, 2010, p. 283).¹ Communicators begin to feel more similarity and commonality, which begets affection, or like ability. When people from different cultures accommodate by moving to Texas and trying to act friendlier to others, people will feel

more commonality, even if the person from another state wasn't used to acting friendly to acquaintances.

Communication Accommodation Theory and Jean Baudrillard's "Hyperreality": A Compare and Contrast

Communication accommodation is a communication theory which emphasizes the adjustments that people do while communicating. Howard Giles, the professor of communication at the University of California, developed the theory which is and according to him is when people try to emphasize or minimize the social difference between the others whom they interact with. The factors that lead to the accommodation activity are adjustments which can be made through verbal communication or through gestures. The theory evolved from speech adjustment theory, which demonstrates the value of psychological concepts to understand the dynamics of speech. But the theory encompasses more fields such as non-verbal and gestures.

Theory

Communication accommodation theory elaborates the human tendency to adjust their behavior while interacting. The reason behind this behavior is explained as to control the social differences between the interactants. Interactant refers to the close relations between each other with their communication. People accommodate their communication activities to get approval and to set a positive image in front of the interactant. The environment in which they are interacting also affects communication behavior.

There are two types of accommodation process explained in this theory.

- **Convergence**— convergence is a process where people tend to adapt the other person's communication characteristics to reduce social differences.

- **Divergence**-the process contradicts the method of adaptation and in this context the individual emphasis is on the social difference and nonverbal differences between the interactants.

The two processes usually are dependent on the characteristics of the interactant. People accommodated their communication while interacting with a person who has higher standards and other characteristics which they believe is better than them. And the divergent exhibits an opposite characteristic as it emphasizes the difference among the close relations with each other. Communication accommodation theory is influenced by social psychology and is guided by four major assumptions.

- While communicating there will be similarity and difference in speech and behavior. The characteristics that people exhibit are based on our experiences and the cultural backgrounds that we grew up in
- A conversation is evaluated by understanding the perception of the speech and behavior of the other. Through evaluation people decides to accommodate and fit in
- Social status and belonging is determined by language and behaviors. While people communicate, they tend to accommodate the behaviors of those who are in a higher social status than them.
- Norms guide the accommodation process which varies in the degree of appropriateness. Norms define the behaviors of people, and they are expected to act accordingly.

Application

The communication accommodation theory is applicable in various communication processes. In an organization the communication accommodation can be used to

communicate effectively among the employees as well as adapt while communicating to a senior employee.

The term hyperreality was coined by French theorist Jean Baudrillard to describe the postmodern, semiotic condition of society. In short, it is the condition in which we are unable to distinguish between reality, and our simulation of reality.

Baudrillard is often considered by scholars today as one of the most radical and controversial thinkers in the field of critical theory, with some to go as far as labelling his work as 'simplistic and outrageous' (Romano 2007).⁴ Yet to reject his philosophies would also do a discredit to several theorists who preceded him.

First published in 1981, *Simulacra and Simulations* provides the most thorough understanding of Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, though the formation of these ideas can be found in *Symbolic Exchange of Death* (1976).⁵ In this work, Baudrillard explicitly draws on his influences Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan, the former of which he praises for being the first 'to grasp technology as a medium rather than a 'productive force (at which point the Marxist analysis retreats), as the form and principle of an entirely new generation of meaning' (1993: 56). Baudrillard himself acknowledges that his model borrows from Benjamin's work on reproducibility, and thereafter McLuhan's medium theory, whilst at the same time recognizing the flaws in their arguments.

Other influences can be found in Daniel J. Boorstin's *the Image* (1962),⁶ who, on commenting on the social effect of technology, spoke of a world where 'fantasy is more real than reality, where the image had more dignity than the original' (1992: 204); and following this Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Also exploring the relationship between the Real and its sign, Debord wrote that 'all that was once directly lived has become mere representation' (1998:

12).⁷ As with Baudrillard, he examines society's preference for the false; yet Debord adopts a more Marxist approach in that he felt consumers were able to distinguish between the spectacle and reality. Richard Lane argues that Baudrillard, not thinking his analyses were 'radical enough', takes his 'work to its limits with a semiotic twist' (2000: 101). As such, Baudrillard sees a shift from the spectacle to the simulacrum, with any boundary between appearance and reality diminishing.

Baudrillard explains that our simulation of reality is comprised of simulacra: images and signs that stand in for the Real. In 'The Precession of Simulacra', the first chapter of *Simulacra and Simulations*, Baudrillard outlines the four 'phases of the image' (1994: 6)⁸ to illustrate the transition from a representation to a simulacrum:

- The first he details as an artificial representation that quite simply **reflects** reality, that which comprised of paintings or novels, for instance.
- Following this, the image 'masks and **denatures** a profound reality' (ibid).
- The third '**masks the absence**', and at this stage that problems arise over the ability to distinguish between reality and its representation, as the image appears as real as the Real.
- The fourth phase of the image, however, 'has **no relation** to any reality whatsoever' (ibid); rather it is a simulation of reality, generated 'by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal'.

Therefore, hyperreality is categorized by an image without origin, which in a technological context is accountable by the advent of digital technology and the loss of an indexical bond between sign and referent. In contrast to early cinema of the twentieth century where images were a 'mechanical reproduction of the real', nowadays digital technology 'allows for the creation of images without any referent in the outside world' (Nagib 2011: 6–7).⁹ Hence why

hyperreality is predominantly associated with technologically advanced societies.

In addition to the phases of the images, Baudrillard charts the orders of simulacra, first in *Symbolic Exchange of Death* and later developed in *Simulations* (1983).¹⁰ He presents his argument chronologically to examine how the hold and effect that simulacra has on social life has evolved over time. The three stages of appearance, he outlines, are counterfeit, production and simulation:

- The first, that which he associates with the Renaissance, is based on the 'natural' law of value — this meaning a simulacrum that embodies the ideal image of nature (1983: 83).¹⁰ In this period the false is born, yet the spectator can distinguish between the original and a fake.
- The second order of simulacra is centered on the 'commercial' law of value that occurs throughout the industrial revolution, whereby art had become mechanized and mass-produced (ibid: 83).¹⁰ In this age of mass-production, the original loses its meaning and significance amidst the multitude of copies. This is the moment in Baudrillard's work that alludes most to Walter Benjamin — echoing Benjamin's views on technological reproducibility, Baudrillard evaluates the loss of value between the original, and its copy. And just as Benjamin talks of 'exhibition value' (1935: 6),¹¹ Baudrillard assesses the market value of mass products in society. The primary difference in their work is that Benjamin, writing on his contemporary society and on the 'limits of reproduction' (Baudrillard 1983: 102),¹⁰ wrote optimistically on the effects of reproducibility. Naturally, Baudrillard goes on to write that this second stage was only an intermediate period that now leads us to...

- The third order of simulacra: that of simulation and a 'structural' law of value (ibid: 83). In a move away from Marxist theory and into postmodernism, he argues that we currently find ourselves under a 'neo-capitalist cybernetic order that aims now at total control' (ibid: 111), quite the opposite to the empowering of the proletariat that Benjamin had predicted.

The best examples that work to rationalize his ideas are Disneyland and the Watergate Scandal. Baudrillard claims that Disneyland 'is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real', arguing that the rest of America also belongs 'to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation' (1994: 12). This comparison poses a contentious debate over the Real versus the imaginary, yet he backs up his claim with the Watergate Scandal. He describes this political affair as 'the same scenario as in Disneyland', asserting that its purpose was 'to regenerate through scandal a moral and political principle' (ibid: 14). In exposing the scandal, society continues to believe in the rationality and morality of the government. Along with Disneyland, Watergate exists as a 'deterrence machine' (ibid: 13). These "machines" make society believe that 'the so-called return to order' (ibid: 14) following the scandal and the world outside of Disneyland are places of rationality and reality, when in fact they are merely heightened simulations.

Baudrillard further develops his argument of American life being a simulation on par with that of Disneyland in his 1988 book *America*. In this he writes that American films, 'including many of the better ones, are simply illustrations of American life' (1988: 101) — a copy of a copy, essentially. They are hyperreal at their very core. To grasp this fact, and thereby apply a critical reading to the study of film, would in fact help us to better understand our simulated reality.

Jean Baudrillard has been referred to as "the high priest of postmodernism." (<https://uh.edu/~cfreelan/courses/1361/BaudrillardQuotes.html>) Baudrillard's key ideas include two that are often used in discussing postmodernism in the arts: "simulation" and "the hyperreal." The hyperreal is "more real than real": something fake and artificial comes to be more definitive of the real than reality itself.

At times, however, Baudrillard adopts a less cynical position and envisions the masses' options for ironic and antagonistic resistance to the ongoing mediated spectacle of violence. He speaks for instance about "an original strategy" of "subtle revenge" and a "refusal of will."

This means that sometimes, Baudrillard downplays the ideological functions of the television industry and questions its control over the audience. Instead, he emphasizes the audience's mass self-seduction: "The group connected to the video is also only its own terminal. It records itself, self-regulates itself and self-manages itself electronically. Self-ignition, self-seduction. The group is eroticized and seduced through the immediate command that it receives from itself, self-management will thus soon be the universal work of each one, of each group, of each terminal. Self-seduction will become the norm of every electrified particle in networks or systems."

The poem stands as one of our earliest examples of debunking and disillusionment, in the most exact sense of that word. For various reasons, one of them being the need to lure and recruit settlers to populate exploitable territories, a spate of bonanza or "come-on" literature appeared, promotional tracts or "pamphlets of news" touting the "Good News" of America. Our unfortunate *sot-weed factor*—or Cook himself—might well have picked up a pamphlet like the one published in 1616 by one George Alsop, who had been an indentured servant in Maryland. It was entitled, "A Character of the Province of

Mary- Land," in which it was stated that "Tobacco is the current Coin of Mary-Land, and will sooner purchase Commodities from the Merchant, than money."

The hero of "*The Sot-Weed Factor*" is an easy mark in this new world. When he is defrauded of all his wealth and property, he seeks out a lawyer. But the lawyer turns out to be "an ambodexter quack," who poses as either solicitor or physician, and sometimes confuses the two professions. The impostor is one of the first in a long line of confidence men, scam artists and tricksters who make up a recurring theme in American humour and literature. Hooper's Simon Suggs is but one of a long line that includes the clever stranger who fills Jim Smiley's jumping frog, Dan'l Webster, with buckshot and Mark Twain's irrepressible pair of scalawags, the Duke and the Dauphin in Huckleberry Finn, wonderful masters of what Faulkner's narrator in *The Hamlet* would call "the art and pastime of skullduggery." The type naturally has its avatars in our own century; witness, in that novel, Pat Stamper, champion horse trader of Yoknapatawpha Country and, of course, that archangel of deceit, Flem Snopes. When characters like Sgt. Milo Minderbinder of *Catch-22* appear, we recognize the archetype. What a new country, a frontier, a "West," afforded was a perfect happy hunting ground for such human predators as the "ambodexter quack," shifty strangers who could easily invent themselves on the spot as the main chance demanded. Requiring little or nothing by way of credentials, having no brand or mark or record of past depredations, they could assume a myriad of disguises; establish authority by putting up a sign or asserting a claim. For example, on the coach to Plymouth, Ebenzer encounters one Peter Sayer, who is really Henry in disguise. Henry reveals that, while trying to ascertain his identity, he has become embroiled in the politics of Maryland, but has discovered that he was adopted as an infant by one Captain Salmon, after being found floating on a raft in Chesapeake Bay. He has also obtained part of a journal which reveals that his grandfather, Henry Burlingame, took

part in an expedition led by Captain John Smith that was attacked by Indians. To save his own life, and that of Burlingame, Smith undergoes a sexual trial with Pocahontas, the daughter of the Indian chief Powhatans. At this point, the journal breaks off, and Henry explains that he is searching for the remaining sections of the document.

"In *Giles Goat-Boy* Barth attempted a Messiah who might be the perfect American savior: a hybrid of a machine and a goat. Fathered by a computer, born of a virgin who immediately abandons him in a library dumb-waiter, made lame in the chute, raised as a goat among goats by a scientist soured on humankind, the Goat-Boy, Barth insists, follows the archetypal pattern of heroes, and will certainly grow into the Grand Tutor who will decipher what is 'passed' and what is 'flunked' in a universe run like a university.

Overlong, belaboring the analogy between student dom and humankind, *Giles Goat-Boy* is probably Barth's least successful novel. But it powerfully conveys his new way of dealing with that recurring figure in his work: the damaged, abandoned child, the inhuman man who cannot feel a thing. Even this weak novel shows Barth's genius for archetype as analogy, as the means of expressing, ennobling, and enlivening the anguish of the man paralyzed by depression.... As a goat he has lustiness without anxiety, no introspective bent, no awareness of depression. As Goat-Boy he fuses his experience above the human line and becomes a Comic Hero. For the answer to depression is entertainment, the fictions that for Barth demure than lighten the heart. Through analogy after analogy, Barth builds an emotional system where parody is the bridge over the feelings you have to the ones you do not, where it is possible to estheticize yourself into one of those beautiful people who are history's adornments.

John Barth's unsentimental awareness of the problems of intimacy offers comic visions of how to avoid it. In *Giles Goat-Boy*, for example, a masochistic girl and a boy who has

been raised among goats enter the belly of a computer to discover the mystery of everything. They make love in the machine. The girl finds release from her masochism, the boy from his animal insensitivity. The control of her self-destructiveness and his destructiveness is the monitor robot. Outside the computer they never achieve that happiness again....

John Barth is the brightest mark of a cultural faith in the self as a fabricated thing, a movable *objet d'art*. Barth's dazzling humour lights up an audience of role-players by taking the self-game one step further. Barth parodies how many people become actors and liars to avoid knowing who and what they really are.

1. While ill, Andrew Cooke grants power of attorney to Ebenezer and reveals that, after the death of their mother, Ebenezer and Anna were nursed by a woman named Roxanne Edouarde. In London, Ebenezer declares his love for the prostitute Joan Toast, but refuses to pay her fee, and confesses to being a virgin. . Joan's pimp and lover, John McEvoy, subsequently informs Andrew that Ebenezer has been leading a dissolute life, so Andrew sends Ebenezer and a servant, Bertrand Burton, to Maryland. From devotion to Joan, Ebenezer swears to remain a virgin. Before his departure, Ebenezer visits Charles Calvert, Lord Baltimore, who is the Governor of Maryland, and offers his services as a Poet Laureate of the colony.
2. On the coach to Plymouth, Ebenzer encounters one Peter Sayer, who is really Henry in disguise. Henry reveals that, while trying to ascertain his identity, he has become embroiled in the politics of Maryland, but has discovered that he was adopted as an infant by one Captain Salmon, after being found floating on a raft in Chesapeake Bay. He has also obtained part of a journal which reveals that his grandfather, Henry Burlingame I, took part in an expedition led by Captain John Smith that was attacked by Indians.

To save his own life, and that of Burlingame, Smith undergoes a sexual trial with Pocahontas, the daughter of the Indian chief Powhatans. At this point, the journal breaks off, and Henry explains that he is searching for the remaining sections of the document.

3. Ebenezer meets both Captain Mitchell and his son Tim, who turns out to be Henry Burlingame III in another disguise. Ebenezer and Henry visit Father Smith, a Jesuit priest who owns part of the journal sought by Henry. Smith relates how he was told by an Indian named Charley Mattasin the tale of Father Fitzmaurice, a missionary who fathered three children on Indian women of the same tribe. The journal gives further details of the capture of Captain Smith and Henry's grandfather, but to discover more, Henry turns next to locating a cooper by the name of William Smith.
4. At the next settlement, Ebenezer witnesses a chaotic outdoor court in session. He hears how William Smith was once indentured to a man named Ben Spurdance and how Spurdance tried to swindle Smith out of his share of land upon expiry of his indenture. The court is about to find in favour of Spurdance, but an outraged Ebenezer insists that the court punish Spurdance by signing the rights to Spurdance's land over to Smith. The judge agrees and gets Ebenezer to sign a document, whereupon Ebenezer discovers that Spurdance is the overseer of Malden, and that his father's estate has now passed to Smith. Ebenezer meets Mary Mungummory, a prostitute who was once the lover of the Indian Charley Mattasin. He hears that John McEvoy has travelled to Maryland in search of Joan Toast, and meets Thomas Tayhoe, a man who has been indentured to William Smith because of trickery on the part of McEvoy. Ebenezer offers to exchange places with Tayhoe, and this plan is accepted by Smith on the condition that Ebenezer marries

Susan Warren. After the marriage, Susan reveals that she is really Joan Toast.

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