

# Space Can Kill: Proxemics in the Sociofugal and Sociopetal Realms

Dr. Marilyn Books

Some thirty inches from my nose  
The frontier of my Person goes,  
And all the untilled air between  
Is private pagus or demesne.  
Stranger, unless with bedroom eyes  
I beckon you to fraternize,  
Beware of rudely crossing it:  
I have no gun, but I can spit.

W. H. Auden

"Prologue: The Birth of Architecture" (1965)

**Key words :** proxemics, demesne, sociofugal, sociopetal, haptics

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## I Introduction

Ethnographers indicate that individuals harbor a perception of proxemics that is appropriate for various types of exchanges; interlocutors also establish a comfortable distance for speech events and nonverbally claim this as their personal demesne. Research supports the hypothesis that the invasion of this claimed territory can have serious adverse effects on intercourse. Thus, if an individual is to carry out a satisfactory communication encounter, the preferred personal distances of each must be within the awareness of both participants and must be respected. As stated by the anthropologist Edward Twitchell Hall, in *The Hidden Dimension* (1966) differing cultural backgrounds for defining and organizing space, which are internalized in all people unconsciously, can lead to serious failures of communication and understanding in intercultural communication settings. (Henceforth, where a page number is provided to the exclusion of the author or year of publication, it refers to this publication of Hall's.)

Hall exemplified how space can cause annihilation in the animal world. When the numbers of crabs multiply beyond their "critical space," the hard-shelled crabs devour those in the soft-shelled stage until the population is reduced to a level where all have sufficient room (16). Christian's study supported this: when there was a population explosion in animals, it resulted in increased susceptibility to disease, and mass mortality from hypoglycemic shock (1963). As for humans, Langer, in his publication, *The Black Death*, relates that from 1348 to 1350, after rapid population expansion, one quarter of the population of Europe died as a result of the Black Plague. Granted it was due directly to bacteria, *bacillus pestis*, but it was intensified by lowered resistance brought on by the overcrowding, and there is the fact that the plague abruptly ended when the stress of crowded city living was reduced (1964). As a species, man is highly territorial but we are seldom aware of it unless our space is somehow violated. Spatial relationships and territorial boundaries directly affect our daily experiences.

Hall boldly promulgates, "Space relates to everything" (x). He adds, "Space is one of the basic, underlying organizational systems for all living things" (xii). Archer in the video, *Personal Space: Exploring Human Proxemics*, similarly claims that space affects all relations (1989). Space produces definitive bodily effects, as is evidenced in these lines from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, on the sense of dizziness evoked from atop the cliffs of Dover. Edgar is persuading the blind Gloucester of the great height and the great distance.

Come on, sir: here's the place: stand still. How fearful  
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!  
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
Show scarce so gross as beetles: halfway down  
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dread trade!  
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:  
The fishermen that walk upon the beach  
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark  
Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy  
Almost too small for sight: The murmuring surge,  
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes  
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,  
Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight  
Topple down headlong.

Winston Churchill, in a speech in the House of Commons, England, cogently debated against widening the space between the face-to-face positioning of the opposition in the House of Commons, on the grounds that it would destroy the established patterns of government. He had a profound understanding of the effect of space on humans, and argued for the retention of the narrow aisle during the discussions on restoring the chamber after the war. He uttered this succinct phrase, "We shape our buildings and they shape us." Lawrence and Low (1990) claim that the environment expresses culturally shared ideas and sustains relations of inequality between people. Maintaining control over one's space is a key factor in personal well-being and satisfaction; observing spatial interactions in everyday life is a key to personal awareness.

There were several goals for this study for the researcher, her students, and the reader:

1. to broaden their minds about the behavioral and social factors that influence personal and environmental space and design,
2. to attain an awareness of how individuals and groups respond to the proximity of others and their environmental settings psychologically, behaviorally, and physiologically, and
3. to acquire an understanding of theories and methods that clarifies the proxemic interrelationships of human behavior and the physical environment.

This paper analyzed both the personal spaces that people form around their bodies as well as the macro-level sensibilities that shape cultural expectations about how the interior of buildings are organized. The goal of this research was also to refute certain aspects of Hall's theory of "proxemics," the term he coined for "man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture" (1). He suggests that people will maintain differing degrees of personal distance depending on these multivariates:

- personality (Chapter 1)
- environment (Chapter 1)
- transaction or the type of conversation (128)
- relationship (128)
- feeling [attitude] (128)
- activity (128)
- contact/non-contact culture (110).

My inquiry was also to promulgate that there are farther reaching causes.

Definitions of some of the discipline-specific terminology is provided as follows:

Critical distance: the narrow zone separating distance from which flight takes place and attack occurs.

Exocrinology: the study of odoriferous glands scattered throughout the body of mammals.

Haptics: the study of the use of touch to communicate.

Infraculture: "behavior on lower organizational levels that underlies culture. It is part of the proxemic classification system and implies a specific set of levels of relationships with other parts of the system." (101)

Non-contact mammals: those which do not display much interpersonal closeness or immediacy (the antithesis is contact mammals, those which stand close, or touch, or touch freely or considerably)

Propinquity: closeness, nearness.

Sociofugal: Fugal refers to "out," as in centrifugal force, hence situations and materials which separate people.

Sociopetal: the opposite of sociofugal, signifying "in," hence situations and materials which draw people together.

Territoriality: behavior by which an organism characteristically lays claim to an area and defends it against members of its own species (7).

This paper deals with (a) human space, and (b) what the author has termed for the purpose of outlining, "beyond-human space," which encompasses features of the interior of a building that can be altered by the participant, for example, tables, chairs, and drapes. The scope excludes the immovable aspects of buildings such walls, the exterior architectural design of structures, the yard, gardens, fences, the street, or the city layout. It does, however include Japanese walls, *fusuma*, as they are slid back and forth to create smaller and larger spaces. The subjects were people from various countries around the world, both contact and non-contact middle class adults. It included the authors' experiences in many of the over one hundred countries to which she has traveled (but concentrated on recent funded research trips):

- to all 40 countries in Europe (hitchhiking) for a year in 1964 and 1965,
- across North Africa in 1965,
- throughout the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait) in 1965,
- to all countries in South America except for Chile in 1970,
- to countries around the Pacific Ocean in 1972 (Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji),
- to almost all the Caribbean islands (plus living and teaching in Trinidad/Tobago) in 1966, 1970, and 1980,
- to all countries in Central America in 1997 (Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Belize, Nicaragua);
- to India and Nepal in 1998;
- to Canada in 1999 (and other non-funded occasions);
- to America in 2000 (and other non-funded occasions); and
- to Germany in 2003.

As for breath of content, this paper includes Semifixed-feature Space; and "Person-to-Person" Space (my terminology) which includes three of Hall's categories, Intimate Space, Personal Space, and Social Space. The study excludes Fixed-feature Space and Public Space. In brief, this project encompassed human-to-human propinquity and interior design, but it did not cover architecture on the outside of structures, nor regional and community features.

## II Fixed Feature Space and Semifixed-feature Space

Hall in 1963 when he investigated man's use of personal space in contrast with "fixed" and "semi-fixed" feature space coined the term "proxemics." The basis for his lifelong research on cultural perceptions of space was laid during World War II when he served in the U.S. Army in Europe and the Philippines. During this time, as well as during his later service as director of the Foreign Service Institute training program for technicians on overseas duty, Hall observed the many difficulties as a result of failures of intercultural communication. Hall began to believe that basic differences in the way that different cultures perceived the world, space included, were responsible for miscommunications of the most fundamental kind. Hall's work has inspired developments in several disciplines. In the field of anthropology, he was one of the first to consider the "anthropology of space." Today, this is a robust area of research pursued by anthropologists. Hall's ideas have had a significant impact in communication theory, especially intercultural communication, where it inspired research on spatial perception that continues to this day (Niemeir, Campbell, and Dirven, 1998).

According to Archer, (1989) serious inquiries of proxemics had begun in the 1950's, but Hall is credited with being the "grandfather" of proxemics. From amongst his prolific research, Hall is most associated with proxemics. He presented his theory of proxemics in *The Silent Language* (1959) and then an entire book *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), purporting that human perceptions of space, "although derived from sensory apparatus that all humans share, is patterned and shaped by culture." When studies commenced in earnest, two methodologies emerged for the study of proxemics and haptics, employing groups in the natural approach (participant observation), and the unnatural invasion/experimental approach.

In a preamble to his organization of the anthropology of space, Hall, begins with the following background information (101):

Infraculture is the term I have applied to behavior on lower organizational levels that underlies culture. It is part of the proxemic classification system and implies a specific set of levels of relationships with other parts of the system. The senses [are] the physiological base shared by all human beings, to which culture gives structure and meaning. It is this precultural sensory base to which the scientist must inevitably refer in comparing the proxemic patterns of Culture A with those

of Culture B. We [consider] two proxemic manifestations. One, the infraculture, is behavioral and is rooted in man's biological past. The second, precultural, is physiological and very much in the present. The third, the microcultural level, is the one on which most proxemic observations are made.

The organization of this paper follows this outline of the three aspects as provided by Hall. The first was termed fixed-feature space, and the second, semi-fixed feature space. The originator calls the third grouping "Informal" but this researcher prefers the phrase, "Person-to-Person Space." As noted in the revelations of the scope and delimitations, the first category (fixed-feature space) and the last sub-category (public space) are not the topics of the interviews. Hence, only explanatory remarks are submitted for those portions.

#### 1. Fixed-feature Space

Hall considered territoriality as fixed-feature space (103). Territorial claims differ from personal space in that the personal zone accompanies the individual while territoriality is relatively stationary. A list of fixed-features would include these examples from smaller to larger: unmovable heavy pieces of furniture such as hutches, buffets, heavy tables, large heavy chairs, large-scale audio-visual equipment, shelving units, air conditioners, and large kitchen appliances; fixed divisions (walls) in buildings and homes; buildings; fences, yards and gardens; groups of buildings; streets; town and city layouts; and countryside organization. All are culturally based (103); every culture has internalized expectations about how these areas should be organized (105). By way of illustration, we can cite the French and Spanish radiating star pattern in cities; the Roman grid of cities in the United States and Canada—preference inherited from the British; and the naming of crossings, not streets in Japan. In addition, in Japan, houses are numbered according to when they were built.

The modern-day interior separation in homes is quite recent. Philippe Aries (1962) describes European homes as having rooms with no determinate functions. There was no privacy, as we know it. Visitors came and went at will, with a "Grand Central Station atmosphere," and beds and tables were brought out or put away according to the frame of mind and appetite of those present. Later the rooms were designated as bedroom, kitchen, etc. so that the members did not have to pass through one room into another.

Archer calls us to reflect on the relationship of space and hierarchy—that low ranking individuals are allocated smaller spaces while superiors are accorded larger areas. Superiors can come into the territory of their subordinates at anytime, with no permission, and no hesitation. An inferior pauses, waits and asks permission to enter in deference to the boss. The higher echelon person may just barge into the office of his lower level staff and ask/command him to review a brief (1989).

## 2. Semifixed-feature Space

Semifixed features may include furniture which is not too heavy to move such as chairs and tables; audio-visual equipment; small cabinets (dressers) and other storage units; shelves; certain kitchen appliances, heaters, lighting apparatus (especially lamps), and the *fusuma* (the paper doors/walls) in the Japanese inn or home which the host, hostess, occupant and guest may move to enlarge the room or to go to another room. Semi-fixed features are often the criteria used to claim a territory within any environment; it becomes a person's safety zone where he can relax, relatively speaking, from the rigors of defending personal space from intrusion, from the dramatic or sudden entry into his zone.

Territoriality is determined so quickly that by the second session in a class or public talks most of the audience are found to have returned to the same seats. If one has been sitting in a particular spot and someone else occupies it, there is a noticeable though fleeting annoyance. Territory that has been claimed long-term gets controlled by the occupant. An office or desk at work becomes defended territory, however subtle the defense might be. How would you react if you arrived at work one morning and someone else were sitting at your desk?

The most common semi-fixed feature space for direct contact, face-to-face, is usually the kitchen or dining room table. The proxemics of the furniture itself and how it establishes our use of distance becomes a key factor in what we consider to be a comfortable and cozy family atmosphere.

Condon (1975) delineates two styles of houses in America (149-154). The authority-centered home contains family areas and guest areas; the family eats together; and the bathroom is the "intrapersonal communication" room for self-reflection. The social-centered home is characterized by informality with no clear divisions between family and company. Everyone can enter the kitchen. Serious conversations take place outside



of this type of home. Whether at home or in public, "furniture arrangement has a distinct relationship to the degree of conversation. Some spaces such as railway waiting rooms in which the seating provisions are formally arranged in fixed rows, tend to discourage conversation (sociofugal spaces). Others such as the tables in a European sidewalk cafe, tend to bring people together (sociopetal spaces)" (Plate 13 and 14).

### III "Person-to-Person" Space

The author has coined this next category "person-to-person" space, whereas Hall calls it "informal space," defining it as "the distances maintained in encounters with others (111-112). His definition of this is his most famous innovation. His choice of term stems from the fact that it is mostly out of awareness, unstated. "Person-to-person" more closely captures the essence of the phenomenon.

Person-to-person space is characterized by a personal zone or "bubble" (26) that varies for individuals, cultures, and circumstances. While the use of each of the above spatial relationships (fixed and semi-fixed) can impede or promote speech acts, the area that humans control and use most often is this zone, guarding themselves from the intrusion of outsiders. The study of spatial territory for the purpose of communication uses Hall's four categories for person-to-person space in the American model roughly described as:

- intimate distance for embracing or whispering (0-18 inches; up to 0.5 m),
- personal distance for interlocutions among good friends (1.5-4 feet; 0.5 to 1.25 m),
- social distance for speaking among co-workers and acquaintances (4-12 feet; 1.25 to 3.5 m), and
- public distance used for public speaking (12 feet or more; 3.5 m or more).

Trager and Hall, both Americans, determined the four distances from sensory "shifts," particularly the auditory, voice changes as their distances increased (114). These spaces differ according to culture and circumstances; Hall and Trager's is the American model. They noted that birds and other mammals follow these groupings, too (although public space is generally not considered for animals). Additionally, according to Hediger (1955), they are governed by flight distance and critical distance, rarely exhibited in man. When the lion trainer at the circus moves into the lion's critical distance, it will jump onto the stool to get at the man. To get the lion to stay there, the trainer simply steps out of

its critical distance. The whip and chair are just window dressing (13).

### 1. Intimate Space

Exocrinology, the study of odoriferous glands scattered throughout the body of mammals, helps explain the spacing preferred by humans at close range and was one determiner for Hall and Trager's categories (33). Intimate space is the closest bubble of space surrounding a person. Entry into this space is acceptable only for the closest friends and intimates. An intimate distance can be used to advantage in certain circumstances. The vocal message can be qualified and conditioned by the alteration of distance. If one does not actually state that one's message is top secret, one can effectively convey that message by leaning forward and whispering.

In the realm of haptics, Americans are generally considered to be non-contact people with a pattern of behavior that discourages physical contact, except in moments of intimacy. When we are in a crowded elevator or subway we have several strategies: we avoid gazing at people; we attempt to be rigid and not fall onto others; and/or we hold ourselves in. We have been taught from early childhood to avoid bodily contact with strangers.

The soccer player pushing his body right into the linesman who issues him a red card demonstrates an intimate distance in public—with the attendant aggressive and hostile feelings at the moment (Plate 5).

### 2. Personal Space

"Personal distance" was formulated as a phrase by the animal psychologist Hediger (1950), not Hall, for "the normal spacing that non-contact animals maintain between themselves and their fellows." It forms an invisible bubble surrounding the organism. A line of people who are standing waiting for the bus would reflect this natural tendency. So would acquaintances who are standing talking casually.

Since it is such an important variable in a person's customary distance, the issue of contact/low-contact will be mentioned here. "Contact cultures," Hall's term, are those who stand close and touch often. Low- or non-contact persons tend to stand apart and touch less or not at all. Contact cultures are generally located in warm climates and low-contact (or non-contact) in cool countries.

In Samovar and Porter's book, *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, Peterson discusses individualism and collectivism as important factors in the use of space. People from individualistic cultures are comparatively remote proxemically. Collectivistic cultures are interdependent and, as a result, they work, play, live, and sleep in close proximity to one another (1991, 290).

### 3. Social Space

Social and consultative spaces are the spaces in which people feel comfortable conducting routine social interactions with acquaintances as well as strangers. Depending on the degree of involvement, business of an impersonal type may be conducted at the close or far range in this category.

Cultural expectations about social spaces vary widely. In the United States, for instance, people engaged in conversation will assume a social distance of roughly four to seven feet (roughly one and a half meters to a little over two meters), but in many parts of Europe the expected social distance is roughly half that with the result that Americans traveling overseas often experience the urgent need to back away from a conversation partner who seems to be getting too close.

Social distance can vary by context, exemplified by the Congo lines of complete strangers who grabbed hold of each other at the waist or shoulder or hand and formed human chains in mass demonstrations in the 1960's throughout America—this by a basically low-contact culture.

## IV Methodology

The majority of the research was conducted in the form of in-depth ethnographical interviews in the style mentioned in Books' (1997) *In-depth Interviewing as Qualitative Investigation* and in Books' (2002) "Ethnographical Qualitative Research via Interviewing: Part I, Countering Objections and Probing." Many interviews lasted three or four hours and had to be broken up into two meetings. Additionally, I sent out questionnaires worldwide by mail or email; they included many open-ended, semantic differential, and Likert scale questions, and I followed most of them up with telephone calls for verification. As I am a qualified member of the Travel Century Club (anyone who has traveled

to over 100 countries), I often drew from my experiences with people from countries other than those that I was funded to visit.

## V Findings

This section will reveal the raw data from the participant observations, the questionnaires, and the interviews sans interpretation—which are left to the sixth section.

### 1. Fixed-feature Space

In spite of the fact that the participants were not queried about fixed features, there were some offerings in this regard.

A Japanese diamond merchant who traveled to Europe frequently complained about German use of space; his ideal hotel room was not at the Ritz. "When I stayed at a German hotel I felt "fixed" and independent, but completely locked out so I could have privacy but it was not a warm feeling. Japanese *tatami* feels warm. The German rooms were too impersonal, too large. We were dealing in jewelry and we stayed in upper class hotels so that we would be regarded as an upper-class company, but I wish they could have chosen something more homey."

### 2. Semifixed-feature Space

#### a. Ideal Kitchen or Living Room

Question: How would you change your office or living room or kitchen to make it more suitable for you, more comfortable, more efficient, etc?

Question: Please draw an ideal kitchen or living room or office. (If you do not have a "paint" program, just describe it, please.)

When I asked participants to draw or describe an ideal room, many chose the living room. It proved to be a difficult challenge for many. For some, the seating arrangement in the room presented proxemics challenges when it revolved around a television set. When the subjects attempted to work with a linear or curved seating alignment, they

discovered that they are not conducive to small, intimate gatherings.

I heard complaints from women around the world about their kitchens—in my recent funded research targets of Central America, India and Nepal, Canada, the US, Germany, and Japan, plus previously unfunded trips to many nations. They all want to alter them in some way. My own grouse in every kitchen I've had in various countries in which I have lived or stayed sounds like this, "It must have been designed by a man who is never in the kitchen." Both the fixed and semifixed aspects were inadequate or poorly placed or poorly designed.

A Nepalese interviewee claimed, in response to the "ideal room" enquiry, "I can't visualize anything until I see it done. The layout of my apartment, a tailor-made suit, a window box of flowers, none of that can be imagined by me ahead of time. I'm not very good with spaces."

The wife of my guide who invited me to his home in Guatemala groaned, "What does this kitchen have against me? It's so small, and see, the two of us can't be in it together."

In 1997 in Honduras, my interpreter related an anecdote about their living room.

My father had the biggest, most comfortable Johnny Boy [reclining easy chair]. It never even crossed my mind to sit in that chair. I kind of got the idea that my mother wore the pants in the family, but my father had that chair, so he watched TV from there, and was the only one who had access to the switcher ([remote control]). The only side table was right at his elbow, too.

German homes which I have visited in 1964, 1965, 1981, 1982, 1983, and 2003 adhere to *ordnung muß sein* (there must be order). Fences, walls, and gates are a necessary part of each German home and yard. Inside, everything is in its proper place, stored neatly. They appear to have a lot of rules. In *Germany: Unraveling the Enigma* by Greg Nees (2000, 40), there is a story (which I heard forty years previously) of a German person who received a ticket for not locking her car when she parked it.

In 1964 in Turkey, I was invited into a guest room (not a bedroom, as is our definition, but an "entertaining" living room, perhaps like our never used living room which is designed for show). I felt that we sat very far apart in the living room, lining the walls, sitting on mats and carpets, leaning against the walls.

Some of my American co-researchers lamented the low kitchen sinks and counters, plus the miniscule area devoted to the typical or traditional Japanese kitchen. I

personally appreciate the low counters and sinks because I am short; in fact, high counters is one of the reverse culture shocks I endure when I visit Canada, as I feel even shorter in Canada. Japanese women are getting taller and have a legitimate gripe. The shoebox kitchens are, indeed, inadequate, and almost every respondent drew or described a larger kitchen.

North and South Americans thought bigger was better, with numerous huge pieces of furniture in the living room.

In contrast to most of the literature, many of my Japanese subjects did not show preference for a living room in which all the furniture is in the middle of the room: the *kotatsu* (heater-table) and the *zabuton* (floor cushions). They described a Western style front room in which the furnishings line the walls and the center is comparatively bare. One young exchange student related that when she stepped into the living room of her host family in California, it looked empty.

A Chinese home which I visited in Shanghai in 1986 observed the rules of *feng shui* (wind and water), an ancient Chinese philosophy related to the *I Ching* and the principles of yin and yang. It was necessary to place a *ba-gua*, an eight-sided mirror, in the living room to improve the harmony of the space.

On one of my trips to Hong Kong, the hostess explained an essential ingredient in a Chinese kitchen, the kitchen god. They smear his lips with honey, or else they offer him sweet sticky-rice cakes; then when he returns to heaven, only sweet comments will emanate from his mouth regarding her kitchen.

b. Orientation (At the Dinner Table)

Question: You are A. You are having dinner with five other people of the same gender.

C     D  
B     E  
A     F

(If this did not transmit by email (if the format is lost), please draw a table for six, like this:

You (A) are at the 7:00 position (bottom left).

B is at the 9:00 position (at the end of the table on your left).

C is at the 11:00 position (opposite you).

D is at the 1:00 position (across the table on your right).

E is at the 3:00 position (at the end of the table on your right).

F is at the 5:00 position (right beside you on your right).

Who do you talk to

a. the most? ...

b. The next most frequently? ...

c. The next most frequently? ...

d. The least? ...

A Nepalese iterated this scenario: "Maybe I am in the habit of looking across the table because that is where my brother sat, and he's the only one who was younger than I was, so I could look at him. I didn't look at my mother or father or older brother or sister."

One co-researcher who elaborated about dining events spoke of the effect that the compact and centrally positioned Japanese table could have on the psyche and behavior:

My home is Japan; I've been here so many years. I'm no less a Canadian, but I'm more Japanese now. The way that the Japanese rooms are, in a house, or an inn, I find myself speaking more quietly. I'm more humble and reserved. I think it has to do with the proximity of everyone nestled in under the *kotatsu* (central heated table) and the *fusuma* (sliding paper walls/doors).

I distinctly remember a fun-filled noisy dinner table in Tunisia in 1964 at a large family gathering where the guests were shouting to people at the far end of the table. It added to the festiveness of the event. I can recall entering the room in a conundrum about what was really going on, because of the mixed uproars of both high volume iterations and laughter.

A man from France asked if he could change the question a little, deleting "the same gender" in order to include the opposite sex. "Then the question would be easy; I'd spend the whole evening talking to the ladies."

Most of the North and Central Americans said that they tend to talk to the person across from them. Most Japanese prefer to talk to the person beside them sushi bar style. The rest of the contributions were mixed. No one chose E, the person farthest.

c. Seating

Question:

- a. Where do you like to sit for a public (or other) lecture/class? Choose between Row 1 to 10. ...
- b. At the second meeting, do you usually return to the same place? .....
- c. How do you feel if someone sits in the place you sat in the first time?

This portion is presented in drama format, with the speaker's nationality followed by a colon, then his or her quote.

German: "I like to sit at the front. I'm not scared, and then I don't get distracted."

American: "Whatever seat I choose, I always go back to that seat. Yes, if it's occupied once, it feels funny, and I have to get another one."

Canadian: "I like to sprawl all my belongings out. I'm an "everything out" person, so I pretty well have to sit at the back of the room. If I didn't have that quirk, I guess I'd sit front and center."

Japanese: "Our professor wanted us to sit together so that we could talk in pairs or in a group of four, so she took a vote about whether we all wanted to sit starting at the front, or whether we all wanted to sit together at the back. It looked like almost everybody wanted to sit at the back. I was sitting at the back. She told us after the vote that she preferred us to sit in the front, but she wanted to be democratic, so we're sitting at the back."

Indian VIP: "Well, they seem to usher me to the front, but India is a very heavily populated country, and so I don't have to luxury of returning to the same seat the next time."

Most Japanese said they prefer to sit at the back, or near the back. The majority of North Americans chose the front. The other nationalities showed mixed results.

### 3. "Person-to-Person Space"

#### a. Intimate Space

The first question about territoriality, helping out in someone else's kitchen could be placed under "intimate" because a space less than 18 inches (half a meter) might be used.

Question: You are invited for dinner at the home of your mother or sister or aunt or friend.



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Choose one of them. I chose my \_\_\_\_\_.

Now please tell me how they react when you go into the kitchen to help out.

Write a number from 1 to 4 between the given words according to your impression.

For example, if you think your hostess would feel very bad, you write 4, close to bad, like this:

Good                      4 bad

If you think your hostess would feel OK, you might write 1 or 2 close to good, like this:

Good 2                      bad

Comfortable              uncomfortable

Glad                        disturbed

Welcoming                unwelcoming

Cheerful                  angry

Relaxed                    nervous

Rescued                    invaded

Please comment on any circumstances concerning your reply.

Do you have a sister, aunt, or friend whose kitchen is sacred to her (precious to her, her private space, so it cannot be entered)? How do you know she would feel trespassed on, or her kitchen is "off limits"?

Direct questions were not asked about physical contact in the in-depth interviews, nor in the attendant questionnaire, but some contributors offered statements about "zero space," contact, touching.

An Indian pointed out what I had witnessed previously: in my participation observation of haptics in New Delhi and other cities in India in 1997, I noticed that there was no touching of or between women, but I noticed several pairs of men holding hands as they walked down the street.

In every visit to Thailand, I read in different guidebooks that one must not touch the top of the head of a youngster: the head is regarded as the seat of the spirit or the soul. There is the belief that the spirit or soul is insufficiently strong in a young child to be patted, and there is a likelihood of becoming ill if violated.

Most North American, Central American, and European participants qualified their response to the question if positive, "It depends on whether I know my friend very well

or not." "It depends on whether he is a confident cook." Contextual factors were critical in the replies: "If I'm the only guest, yes."

Japanese generally fell into the category of typical Asians, in which body contact, for example when greeting, is not the norm, and were hesitant to go into the kitchen to help uninvited. There were more Japanese than other nationalities who were hesitant to help out in the kitchen.

The interviewees (and I) have experienced many people from Spain, Italy, France, Portugal, and other Mediterranean countries being kissed on both cheeks. But when I worked on a kibbutz (communal farm) in the north of Israel, I followed the lead of those around me and avoided any contact with males. The exception was when I had to hang on tight to the waist of the Israeli on whose motorcycle I hitchhiked across the length of the country in one day, to the beaches of Eilat.

b. Personal Space

The question was the following.

Question: This question refers to standing and speaking to a stranger of the same gender.

Write yes or no if you have spoken to a person of that nationality.

Write "closer" or "farther" if you had any impression that they stood closer or farther from you than you expected (or were comfortable with). (You can compare this to the space maintained when you converse with people from your own country, in similar circumstances.)

For example,

- |                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Canadians         | yes, farther |
| Kenyans           | no           |
| - Germans         | .....        |
| - Latins*         | .....        |
| - American Whites | .....        |
| - American Blacks | .....        |
| - Japanese        | .....        |
| - Italians        | .....        |

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- Arabs .....
- Indians\*\* .....

\*Latins/Latinos is short for Latin Americans from Central and South America.

\*\* Indians refers to South East Asians.

Kindly relate any details.

One of my Spanish participants, when quizzed about standing conversation distance, contributed this, "But it depends on whether they are family or not. In Spain it's closer if they are family."

This past summer when I was sitting on a bench waiting for a bus at Munich University, all the Germans kept a distance of maybe 40 cm (20 inches).

In 1998 in Calcutta, one of my subcontinent Indian subjects commented on the caste system as the determiner of whether their countrymen would stand closer or farther. There are elaborate rules about the appropriate distance maintained between members of one caste with members of another.

In both Haiti and Guatemala, I felt like a different person when speaking to someone from there. I became more animated and leaned forward more. I felt caught up in their body language, and automatically followed suit.

These are the notes I took about a Panamanian who was my taxi driver-cum-guide, "I thought he was trying hard to have one over on me, to dominate, to take control forcefully. It was awful."

Japanese generally said/wrote that people of other cultures stand closer than they are comfortable with. An American shared this story:

I regarded my neighbor, Mari Tanaka, as a very close friend. She invited me to her son's wedding, and I was delighted. There was a kind of reception line, and I couldn't wait to congratulate everybody, especially Mari. I stepped forward to hug her, but she stepped back. I was crushed.

North Americans, classified as non-contact people, maintain personal space. One interviewee volunteered this, "But in an elevator it may not be possible." The same is not true for many Arabs, who would come and sit right beside you even if there were other seats available.

When I reviewed my photographs of Arab people I met hitchhiking in the Middle East in 1964 and 1965 (Iraq, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait) and

North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco) I often viewed two women or two men standing very close to each other, but not a male-female dyad. This was substantiated by my recent Arab research participants.

c. Social Space

Question:

How far do you stand apart from a co-worker of the same gender? (a volunteer worker would be the same) (One hand span is about 20 cm or about 9 or 10 inches.)

One well-traveled Japanese replied, "A Bulgarian seemed too close, and I was wondering if he had any unwanted intentions, so I backed up. But the stranger moved toward me and kept talking. This happened another couple of times, until I hit the wall."

A young Canadian who went abroad for the first time reported, "He moved in on me. Well, I didn't want to be impolite, so I kind of leaned back. But he kind of leaned forward, and I leaned back some more."

My Honduras guide-cum-taxi driver told me about his daughter's recent wedding. He and his wife have three children, and they invited six out-of-town guests to stay overnight in his tiny two-bedroom apartment, as it was expected of him. It was "a little full," but definitely tolerable for eleven people.

A co-researcher often feels stifled in her normal characteristics due to the greater distances maintained by the Japanese. She often does not feel free to laugh a hearty laugh, or speak at a normal (louder) voice, or to speak as quickly as she would like to.

In the story above about the American at a Japanese wedding-being rebuffed by her dear friend when she attempted to put her arms around her in an embrace and was rejected—she later was coached, and observed that even more distance than usual was exhibited at a Japanese wedding, a formal occasion. In America, weddings, she felt, are occasions to let your hair down and get closer.

In 1964 when I was hitchhiking across North Africa, I was invited by the driver in Lybia to his home. There was a gathering there, and all the men were seated on the floor on large cushions in the living room, while all the women were either in the kitchen, or its anteroom, perhaps a dining room—a complete separation of the genders. Correspondents and interviewees confirm that there are strict rules about interactions between the genders, for both children and adults. No body contact is allowed between

members of the opposite sex.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The organization of the discussion will follow the format laid out above, progressing from larger space (semifixed feature space) in terms of "non-human" distances, then reversing course in the human realm: from smallest (intimate space) to largest (social). But first will be some general level comments. It must be noted that this research did not attempt to draw from a representative sample, hence my conclusions deduced from observations around the world, participant observations, questionnaires, and interviews, are not universally applicable: they are analyzed from a small sample. From among the possible ways to approach the selection of subjects, the "purposive" sampling format was chosen. It is also variously called judgmental, deliberate, or selective because the researcher uses judgment in selecting individuals who will be instrumental in gathering data (Lonner and Berry, 1986, 87 in Books, 1996a). Patton also terms it "purposeful" (1990, 169) and clarifies it:

Perhaps nothing better captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ( $n = 1$ ), selected purposefully. Quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples selected randomly.

He goes on to explain that by selecting cases for study in depth, "the logic and power" of purposeful sampling is revealed: one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. The purposive method was chosen instead of random sampling also in order to increase the depth of data exposed, to illuminate the questions under study, and because "random or representative sampling is likely to suppress more deviant cases ... as well as the likelihood that the full array of multiple realities [may be] uncovered (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, 40)."

In response to the fact that some of the interviewees found certain questions intriguing and difficult, and that they often remarked, "Oh, I never thought of that! Give me a moment to think about it," I would say that this is perhaps because proxemics is as much taken for granted as the air we breathe.

The author disagrees with Hall in the realm of territoriality wherein he only

categorizes fixed features as territoriality (101); the respondents and I group semifixed items under the heading also, by reason of the attitude of "belonging" in their boundaries. The categorization of features into fixed and semi-fixed necessitates a discussion of the culture. What North and Latin Americans and Europeans generally consider semi-fixed (particularly chairs) are treated as fixed, rarely or never moved, by Japanese; but Japanese move *fusuma* walls, which are determined fixed by other cultures. The facade of one's space, be it office decor, the interior decorating of the living room, or the bedroom accoutrements, conjures up *tatema* (facade), literally the front of the building. My extrapolation here is that we each have a public presentation (and a private presentation).

The placement of semi-fixed interior items is governed by culturally specific spatial principles and aesthetic standards, as witnessed by the artistic endeavors of the participants in drawing their dream room. Too many architects are totally out of touch with the needs of the inhabitants of the building, especially with the cook in the kitchen and her requirements in terms of the placement of the refrigerator and other semi-fixed (and fixed) items. Further, too many architects concentrate on what looks good. They are unaware that good design of interiors is governed by culturally specific spatial principles in addition to aesthetic standards—in other words, that there are social and behavioral factors that should influence environmental design. What is sociofugal in one culture may be sociopetal in another. My experience of sociopetal seating in Turkey made me feel isolated "lining the walls." Perhaps the Turkish would find some American, Canadian, or German front rooms sociopetal (although the Japanese that I interviewed did not).

As was confirmed in the study, North Americans prefer to face each other when they talk. The artists who drew ideal living rooms felt that if they and their guests would be forced to sit side by side, their body language would attempt to compensate for the lack of eye-to-eye contact by having to turn the body and having to lean in shoulder-to-shoulder. Which came first, the culture or the table? Of course, the culture. In considering the Chinese penchant for large round tables in restaurants, the sociopetal effect was evident in the design. My Chinese participants preferred to talk to the person beside them, as opposed to the person opposite them. In Japan is the ubiquitous sushi bar where side-by-side is the norm.

Whereas "zero space" is generally taboo in most of Asia, elsewhere, it is generally expected. In fact, avoiding some sort of touch can emit negative signals. In regards to personal space, Petersen has aptly phrased a word of warning and a word of hope. Our

attributions about the nonverbal communication of people from other cultures are often wrong. No dictionary or code of intercultural behavior is available. We cannot read people like books, not even people from our own culture. Understanding that someone is from a masculine, collectivist, or high-context culture will, however, make their behavior less confusing and more interpretable.

For the co-researcher who complained about feeling stifled by greater distance maintained by the Japanese, I would hazard that there are other factors at play, but proxemics is a key; it seems to act as a hint at expected behavior.

The concepts of propinquity put forth in this work and that of others is not automatically registered by the layman because of its multivariates, for one thing; for another, it is not in their conscious mind, particularly the notion that space "belongs" to you beyond your actual body. Hall presents these variables: personality, environment, transaction or the type of conversation, relationship, feeling [attitude], activity, and contact/non-contact culture. This research would extend the list to include gender. Eakins and Eakins in Samovar and Porter (1991, 309) point to numerous differences. The "invio-  
lable" space surrounding women is "generally less" than for men. Women stand closer than men do to close friends, but farther from friends. Less space is used when they are sitting. In general women used less space. Hall did not enter into the aspect of hierarchy that is societally based. His "relationship" dealt with personal relating on a one-to-one basis, hence missing out such determiners as the caste system in India. The Indian quoted under the Seating Findings was not an "untouchable," and he was dealt with in an honorable manner. So many variables are possible—many of the participants started off by saying, "Well, it depends." There are innumerable correlations between proxemics and the intended communication process.

My observations and interviews caused me to formulate the idea that "space is a gesture." As evidenced numerous times above, we employ distancing as a tactic with interlocutors to convey, for example, our interest or disinterest, or our fear or comfort.

I also believe that we could say that we have "space personalities," as we feel differently with different spaces. This is influenced by many factors, particularly varying cultures and environments.

In conclusion, this study validated that "person-to-person space" and semifixed features can have an immense effect on attitude and behavior. Where man places himself in relation to others, and how he establishes his semi-fixed feature space—whether in a sociofugal or sociopetal arrangement—can and does profoundly influence interactions.

Presumably, if Auden had a gun, in a situation of inappropriate spatial use, he would not just spit. Perhaps worse still in the eyes of the intercultural communicator, ignorance or misuse of cultural biases of space can not only thwart but kill communication.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

(Note that not all responses were analyzed and included in this report. Some questions were reserved for a future project.)

### PROXEMICS INTERVIEWS/QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you very much for assisting me with my research. I am researching proxemics (space/distance) used by people of various cultures/nations. My tentative title is: Space Can Kill: Perceptions of Proxemics Centrifugally and Centripetally in Personal and Semi-Fixed Dimensions.

All the information will be kept confidential, so please be as candid as you can.

You will probably delete the lines when you type in your response.

I appreciate your input very much.

Personal Space: (Territoriality, Privacy)

P1. You are invited for dinner at the home of your mother or sister or aunt or friend.

Choose one of them. I chose my .....

Now please tell me how they react when you go into the kitchen to help out.

Write a number from 1 to 4 between the given words according to your impression.

For example, if you think your hostess would feel very bad, you write 4 close to bad, like this:

Good                      4 bad

If you think your hostess would feel OK, you might write 1 or 2 close to good, like this:

Good 2                      bad

Comfortable                      uncomfortable

Glad                      disturbed

Welcoming                      unwelcoming

Cheerful                      angry

Relaxed                      nervous

Rescued                      invaded

P2. Please comment on any circumstances concerning your reply.

.....  
.....

P3. Do you have a sister, aunt, or friend whose kitchen is sacred to her? How do you know she would feel trespassed on, or her kitchen is "off limits"?

.....  
.....

P4. Have you witnessed a visitor who moved a piece of furniture in another person's home or office? ..... Have you moved anything? ..... Was there any reaction?

.....

P5. Where do you go to have private space/time?

a. in our home I go to ..... b. outside of your home I go to .....

.....

P6. a. If you work in an office or similar place, do you or would you prefer to have the door open or closed? ..... b. Why?

.....  
.....  
.....

P7. What do you think of other people who keep their door closed?

.....  
.....

Social Space:

S1. This question refers to standing and speaking to a person that you don't know very well, of the same gender.

Write yes or no if you have spoken to a person of that nationality.

Write "closer" or "farther" if you had any impression that they stood closer or farther from you than you expected (or were comfortable with). (You can compare this to the space maintained when you converse with people from your own country, in similar circumstances.)

For example,

Canadians    yes    farther

Kenyans      no

- Germans      ..... ..

- Latins\*      ..... ..

- American

Whites      ..... ..

- American

Blacks      ..... ..

- Japanese      ..... ..

- Italians      ..... ..

- Arabs      ..... ..

- Indians\*\*      ..... ..

\*Latins is short for Latin Americans from Central and South America

\*\* Indians refers to South East Asians

Kindly relate any details.

.....  
.....

S2. How far do you stand apart from a co-worker of the same gender? (a volunteer worker would be the same) (One hand span is about 20 cm or about 9 or 10 inches.)

.....

S3. Which dyad/pair of strangers stands further apart when conversing in your culture?

- a. two males
- b. two females
- c. a male and a female

What do you think accounts for that in terms of circumstances, usual behavior, context, activity, etc.?

.....  
.....

S4. Where do you like to sit for a public (or other) lecture/class? Choose between Row 1 to 10. ...

- S5. a. At the second meeting, do you usually return to the same place? .....
- b. How do you feel if someone sits in the place you sat in the first time?

.....  
.....  
.....

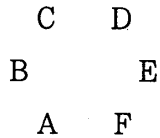
S6. You're standing in line. How close do you stand to the person (a stranger) in front of you? (One handspan is about 20 cm or about 9 or 10 inches.) .....

It depends on

.....  
.....

Semi-fixed Space

SF1. You are A. You are having dinner with five other people of the same gender.



(If this did not transmit by email (if the format is lost), please draw a table for six, like this:

- You (A) are at the 7:00 position (bottom left).
- B is at the 9:00 position (at the end of the table on your left).
- C is at the 11:00 position (opposite you).
- D is at the 1:00 position (across the table on your right).
- E is at the 3:00 position (at the end of the table on your right).
- F is at the 5:00 position (right beside you on your right).

Who do you talk to

- a. the most? ...
- b. The next most frequently? ...
- c. The next most frequently? ...
- d. The least? ...

SF2. How would you change your office or living room or kitchen to make it more suitable for you, more comfortable, more efficient, etc?

.....  
.....

SF3. Please draw an ideal kitchen or living room or office. (If you do not have a "paint" program, just describe it, please.)

Comments: (I would really appreciate any comments that you would be kind enough to take the time to make.)

.....  
.....

Background information:

Nationality: .....

Gender: .....

Age: a. 20-29 b.30-39 c. 40-49 d. 50-59

Thank you again for participating in this research. I am grateful for the time that you took to aid in this study.