

Questions for Discussion and Review

1. As you read the articles in this section, think of examples of cultural rules that you take for granted and assume to be fixed in nature.
2. What does it mean to say that cultural rules are “arbitrary”?
3. Consider your relationship to time. Do you think people’s rhythms have been altered by the invention of digital clocks that carve time into units of seconds, versus clocks that signal only quarter hours? What about people who organize time in terms of the sun only?
4. Spend a day thinking of yourself as an anthropologist from Mars (remember Mork from Ork?). What do you see when you look at your world from the perspective of an outsider?

REALITY AS A COLLECTIVE HUNCH

1

Islands of Meaning

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In the beginning . . . the earth was unformed and void . . . and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness. He called Night.¹

The very first act of the Creation was one of dividing. It was through being separated from one another that entities began to emerge. The first day was thus spent on dividing the light from the darkness while the next two were dedicated to separating the waters under the heaven from those above it as well as from the dry land.² Indeed, according to Genesis, the first three days of

the Creation were devoted exclusively to making distinctions.

Like most cosmogonies, the biblical story of the Creation is an allegorical account of the process through which we normally create order out of chaos. These theories of the origin of the universe almost invariably describe the formation of essences (the heavens, the earth,

life) out of a boundless, undifferentiated void.³ Distinctions, they all tell us, are at the basis of any orderliness.

Separating entities from their surroundings is what allows us to perceive them in the first place. In order to discern any “thing,” we must distinguish that which we attend from that which we ignore. Such an inevitable link between differentiation and perception is most apparent in color-blindness tests or camouflage, whereby entities that are not clearly differentiated from their surroundings are practically invisible.⁴ It is the fact that it is differentiated from other entities that provides an entity with a distinctive meaning⁵ as well as with a distinctive identity that sets it apart from everything else.

The way we cut up the world clearly affects the way we organize our everyday life. The way we divide our surroundings, for example, determines what we notice and what we ignore, what we eat and what we avoid eating. By the same token, the way we classify people determines whom we trust and whom we fear, whom we marry and whom we consider sexually off limits. The way we partition time and space likewise determines when we work and when we rest, where we live and where we never set foot.

Indeed, our entire social order is a product of the ways in which we separate kin from nonkin, moral from immoral, serious from merely playful, and what is ours from what is not. Every class system presupposes a fundamental distinction between personal features that are relevant for placing one in a particular social stratum (for example, occupation, color of skin, amount of formal education) and those that are not (for example, sexual attractiveness, height, intelligence), and any society that wishes to implement a welfare or retirement policy must first distinguish the well-to-do from the needy and those who are fully competent to work from those who are “too old.” By the same token, membership in particular social categories qualifies us for, or disqualifies us from, various benefits, exemptions, and jobs.⁶ It is the need to distinguish “us” from “them” that likewise generates laws against

intermarriage, and the wish to separate mentally the “masculine” from the “feminine” that leads to the genderization of professions and sports.

It is boundaries that help us separate one entity from another: “To classify things is to arrange them in groups . . . separated by clearly determined lines of demarcation. . . . At the bottom of our conception of class there is the idea of a circumscription with fixed and definite outlines.”⁷ Indeed, the word *define* derives from the Latin word for *boundary*, which is *finis*. To define something is to mark its boundaries,⁸ to surround it with a mental fence that separates it from everything else. As evidenced by our failure to notice objects that are not clearly differentiated from their surroundings, it is their boundaries that allow us to perceive “things” at all. These lines play a critical role in the construction of social reality, since only with them do meaningful social entities (families, social classes, nations) emerge out of the flux of human existence. Examining how we draw them is therefore critical to any effort to understand our social order. It also offers us a rare glimpse into the not-so-orderly world that underlies our social world, the proverbial chaos that preceded the Creation.

Boundaries are normally taken for granted⁹ and, as such, usually manage to escape our attention. After all, “Nothing evades our attention so persistently as that which is taken for granted. . . . Obvious facts tend to remain invisible.”¹⁰ In order to make them more “visible,” we must suspend our usual concern with what they separate and focus instead on the process by which we cut up the world and create meaningful entities. In short, we must examine how we actually separate entities from one another, whether it be humans from animals, work from hobby, official from unofficial, or vulgar from refined.

The way we cut up the world in our mind manifests itself in how we construct age, gender, and ethnicity as well as in how we arrange food in supermarkets and books and movies in bookstores

and video stores. It is manifested as well in how we divide our homes into separate rooms, and in our sexual taboos. Conventional metaphors such as *closed*, *detached*, and *clear-cut* similarly reveal how we experience reality as made up of insular entities, while our need to keep such discrete islands of meaning neatly separate from one another is evident from our gut response to ambiguous creatures.

The way we draw lines varies considerably from one society to another as well as across historical periods within the same society. Moreover, their precise location, not to mention their very existence, is often disputed and contested within any given society. Nonetheless, like the child who believes the equator is a real line¹¹ or the racist who perceives an actual divide separating blacks from whites, we very often experience boundaries as if they were part of nature.

Things assume a distinctive identity only through being differentiated from other things, and their meaning is always a function of the particular mental compartment in which we place them. Examining how we draw lines will therefore reveal how we give meaning to our environment as well as to ourselves. By throwing light on the way in which we distinguish entities from one another and thereby give them an identity, we can explore the very foundations of our social world, which we normally take for granted.

At a time when political and moral distinctions are constantly blurred—when the international order we have regarded for nearly half a century as a given is virtually collapsing and our definitions of work, art, and gender are in flux—the very notion of a social order is being questioned. At such a point it is therefore critical for us to understand the actual process by which we establish boundaries and make distinctions. How we draw these fine lines will certainly determine the kind of social order we shall have.

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*The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying "This is mine," and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society.*¹²

We transform the natural world into a social one by carving out of it mental chunks we then treat as if they were discrete, totally detached from their surroundings. The way we mark off islands of property is but one example of the general process by which we create meaningful social entities.

CHUNKS OF SPACE

The perception of supposedly insular chunks of space is probably the most fundamental manifestation of how we divide reality into islands of meaning. Examining how we partition space, therefore, is an ideal way to start exploring how we partition our social world.

The way we carve out of ecological continuums such as continents and urban settlements supposedly insular countries and neighborhoods is a classic case in point.¹³ Despite the fact that Egypt and Libya or Chinatown and Little Italy are actually contiguous, we nevertheless treat them as if they were discrete. Such discontinuous perception of space is nicely captured by the map shown here, which almost literally lifts Montana out of its actual context. Not only does it represent that state as a discrete three-dimensional chunk jutting out of a flat backdrop, it also portrays both the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains as if they indeed broke off at its borders.

Spatial partitions clearly divide more than just space. The lines that mark off supposedly insular chunks of space often represent the invisible lines that separate purely mental entities such as nations or ethnic groups from one another, and crossing them serves to articulate passage through such mental partitions. That is why we attribute such great symbolic significance to acts such as

trespassing¹⁴ or crossing a picket line and regard the crossing of the Red Sea by the ancient Israelites coming out of Egypt as an act of liberation. That is also why the Berlin Wall could represent the mental separation of democracy from communism and why opening the border between Austria and Hungary in 1989 could serve as a symbolic display of the spirit of glasnost.

Often abstract and highly elusive, mental distinctions need to be concretized. Wearing different sets of clothes, for example, helps substantiate the mental distinction between business and casual or ordinary and festive, just as color coding helps us mentally separate different types of information we put in our notebooks, calendars, or files. Choosing among different variants of a language (such as the one used for speeches and the one used for intimate conversations) likewise helps express the mental contrast between the formal and the informal.¹⁵ In a similar manner, we often use differentiation in space to reinforce mental differentiation. Partitioning our home into separate rooms, for example, helps us compartmentalize our daily activity into separate clusters of functions (eating, resting, playing, cleaning) as well as mentally separate culture (study) from nature (bathroom)¹⁶ or the formal (living room) from the informal (family room). Along similar lines, separate aisles in music stores help reinforce the mental separation of classical and popular music, just as separate floors of department stores help us keep the worlds of men and women separate in our mind. In a similar manner, we express discontinuities among supposedly separate bodies of information by relegating them to separate drawers, newspaper sections, and library floors; and keep different categories of food separate in our mind by assigning them to separate pages of restaurant menus, chapters of cookbooks, aisles of supermarkets, and sections of the refrigerator. Similar forms of zoning help give substance to the mental contrasts between even more abstract entities such as the sacred and the profane,¹⁷ the

permitted and the forbidden,¹⁸ the dangerous and the safe, and the good and the evil.¹⁹

The mental role of spatial partitions is also evident from the way neighborhood boundaries graphically outline rather elusive social class differences.²⁰ Even more revealing is the way separate bathrooms in the army help articulate status differences between officers and soldiers. The conspicuous absence of doors from rooms we define as public likewise highlights the role of spatial partitions in keeping the private and public spheres separate.²¹ “A lock on the door,” notes Virginia Woolf in her aptly titled study of privacy and selfhood, *A Room of One's Own*, “means the power to think for oneself.”²² It is the realization that the definition of our selfhood is at stake that makes us so sensitive to the symbolism of having the license to close the door to our room or office.

BLOCKS OF TIME

The way we divide time is evocative of the manner in which we partition space. Just as we cut supposedly discrete chunks like countries and school districts off from ecological continuums, we also carve seemingly insular segments such as “the Renaissance” or “adolescence” out of historical continuums. Such discontinuous experience of time is quite evident from the way we isolate from the flow of occurrences supposedly freestanding events such as meetings, classes, and shows, some of which we further subdivide into smaller though still discrete particles—meals into courses, baseball games into innings.²³ It is also manifested in our ability to create stories with beginnings and ends as well as in the way we break down novels, sonatas, and plays into chapters, movements, and acts.

In a similar manner, we isolate in our mind supposedly discrete blocks of time such as centuries, decades, years, months, weeks, and days, thus perceiving actual breaks between “last week” and “this week”²⁴ or “the fifties” and “the sixties.”

That is why many of us may not carry over sick days from one year to the next and why officials try to use up their entire budget before the end of the fiscal year. A similar discontinuity between successive tax years also leads some couples to plan the births of their offspring for December, even to the point of inducing those that would naturally have occurred in January.

Central to such discontinuous perception of time is our experience of beginnings, endings, and “turning points.” Most revealing in this regard is the sense of conclusion we experience as a performance, picnic, or season is coming to an end,²⁵ the radical change we expect at the turn of a century or a millennium or even between two contiguous decades, and the experience of a “fresh” start (or “turning over a new leaf”) often associated with the beginning of a “new” year. Even in services that operate around the clock, night staff are often expected to allow the day (“first”) shift a fresh start with a “clean desk.”²⁶ A pregnant friend of mine who came back to the same clinic that had handled her previous pregnancy within the same year was asked to provide her entire medical history all over again, as she would now be considered a “new” case.

Temporal differentiation helps substantiate elusive mental distinctions. Like their spatial counterparts, temporal boundaries often represent mental partitions and thus serve to divide more than just time. For example, when we create special “holy days,” we clearly use time to concretize the mental contrast between the sacred and the profane.²⁷ In a similar manner, we use it to give substance to the equally elusive contrast between the private and the public domains, using, for example, the boundary of the workday to represent the mental partition between being “on” and “off” duty.²⁸ Groups likewise use the way they periodize their own history to highlight certain ideological distinctions, as evident, for example, in the Zionist use of “the Exile”²⁹ or the American use of “the Great Depression” or “Vietnam” as discrete

historical eras. The boundaries of the Sabbath, the workday, and “the Vietnam era” clearly represent major mental discontinuities. Like neighborhoods, drawers, and wings of museums, what they define are clearly more than mere chunks of time.

FRAMES

Temporal differentiation often entails an experience of discontinuity among different sorts of reality as well. Transitions from televised news to commercials or from live coverage to replay, for example, obviously involve more than just breaks in time. Along similar lines, warmup and “real” jumps in long-jump competitions are clearly anchored not only within two distinct blocks of time but also within two separate realms of experience, as are comments made before meetings begin and those included in the official minutes.³⁰

Spatial differentiation often entails similar experiential discontinuity. The knight on the chessboard and the glass of water on the table are obviously situated not only within two distinct chunks of space but also within two separate “realities.” That is also true of what occurs on and off the stage or inside and outside the picture frame.

Crossing the fine lines separating such experiential realms from one another involves a considerable mental switch from one “style” or mode of experiencing to another, as each realm has a distinctive “accent of reality.”³¹ At the sound of the bell that signals the end of a boxing match, as brutal punches are instantly transformed into friendly hugs, our entire sense of what is real is dramatically altered. That also happens, of course, when actors enter the stage and are immediately transformed into fictional characters. Picture frames similarly remind viewers that they cannot smell the flowers or eat the apples they see in pictures,³² as pictorial space is “a structure altogether different from the real space we experience. Within actual space an object can be touched, whereas in

a painting it can only be looked at; each portion of real space is experienced as part of an infinite expanse, but the space of a picture is experienced as a self-enclosed world. . . . [The work of art] builds a sovereign realm."³³

It is precisely that quality that makes frames the ideal prototype of all boundaries delineating the various realms of our experience,³⁴ those mental lines that separate ordinary reality from the "worlds" of art, dream, play, and symbolism as well as off-the-record from official statements, parenthetical from ordinary remarks,³⁵ the metaphoric from the literal, satire from sheer slander, commentary from pure coverage, parody from plagiarism, and maneuvers from actual war. Framing is the act of surrounding situations, acts, or objects with mental brackets³⁶ that basically transform their meaning by defining them as a game, a joke, a symbol, or a fantasy. Play, for example, is actually "a name for contexts in which the constituent acts have a different sort of relevance . . . from that which they would have had in non-play. . . . The essence of play lies in a partial denial of the meanings that the actions would have had in other situations."³⁷

A frame is characterized not by its contents but rather by the distinctive way in which it transforms the contents' meaning. The way framing helps de-eroticize what we normally consider sexual is quite suggestive of the remarkable transformational capacity of frames. The party frame, for example, allows even perfect strangers to hold one another while moving together in a pronounced rhythmic fashion (though only while the music is playing).³⁸ In a similar manner, in the context of art, respectability is granted to otherwise obscene literary passages and poetic metaphors as well as to nude modeling and photography,³⁹ just as the play frame helps de-eroticize games such as "house" and "doctor." Ordinary sexual meanings are likewise antisepticized by science, which allows genital display in anatomy books, and medicine, which de-eroticizes mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and gynecological examinations.⁴⁰

In cutting chunks of experience off from their surroundings, frames obviously define not only different but also separate realms of experience. In delineating a space which the viewer cannot enter, picture frames, for example, "[cut] the artist's statement off from the room in which it is hung,"⁴¹ thus visually articulating an experiential cleavage between ordinary reality and the artistic realm.⁴² Supposedly bounded, experiential realms do not spill over into one another,⁴³ and the "reality" of any objects is therefore always confined to the boundaries of the particular frame within which it is situated. That is why it is so difficult to prolong a dream after waking up or to sustain an erotic experience when someone knocks on the door, as well as why we normally do not hold others responsible for any harm they may have caused us in our fantasies. Along similar lines, terrified as we are by Captain Hook, Darth Vader, or the Wicked Witch of the West when we read about them or watch them on the screen, we nonetheless know that they can never step out of the fictional frames in they belong and therefore cannot really hurt us.

Picture frames also make us disregard the wall surrounding the picture.⁴⁴ Like them, all frames basically define parts of our perceptual environment as irrelevant, thus separating that which we attend in a focused manner from all the out-of-frame experience⁴⁵ that we leave "in the background" and ignore. Thus, for example, when we play checkers, the material of which the pieces are made is considered totally irrelevant to the game and, therefore, out of frame. In fact, when a piece is missing, we often replace it with a coin, totally disregarding the latter's ordinary monetary value. Likewise, within an erotic context, we normally perceive others as attractive or not, ignoring ordinary distinctions based on social class, status, or ethnic origin.⁴⁶

Moreover, frames make us ignore entire acts or objects despite their obvious physical presence in the situation. At concerts, for example, we usually disregard such acts as replacing a mouthpiece or

wiping spittle off one's horn, which are clearly not part of the framed performance in which they are visually embedded. We likewise ignore "background" activity such as nail biting or doodling at meetings and routinely skip page numbers and translators' notes when reading books.⁴⁷ And just as we exclude from the game frame such accidents as unintentionally knocking a piece off the chessboard (in sharp contrast to removing deliberately a captured piece), we also instruct jurors to ignore "unacceptable" evidence presented to them.

The experiential discontinuity between what is situated "inside" and "outside" frames also applies to human objects, as mere presence at a social situation may not always guarantee inclusion in the frame surrounding it.⁴⁸ In social gatherings, full-fledged participants are often surrounded by a mental partition⁴⁹ that keeps mere bystanders practically "out of focus." (Such discontinuity becomes apparent when we poke fun at those who laugh at jokes that were not addressed to them or when cardplayers scold kibitzers who offer unsolicited advice: "Who asked you, anyway?")⁵⁰ Cabdrivers, waiters, stenographers, and children are often assigned such out-of-frame status. So are technicians installing equipment at rock concerts, attendants who clean after the animals at circuses, food vendors at sports events, and photographers at weddings, all of whom are clearly situated outside the entertainment frame that surrounds everyone else. Despite their obvious physical presence at these situations, they are considered "non-persons"⁵¹ and thus relegated to the out-of-frame "background." That is also why we sometimes fail to notice the very presence of those we assume do not understand the language we speak or the topic we discuss.⁵²

CHUNKS OF IDENTITY

The manner in which we isolate supposedly discrete "figures" from their surrounding "ground" is

also manifested in the way we come to experience ourselves.⁵³ It involves a form of mental differentiation that entails a fundamental distinction between us and the rest of the world. It is known as our sense of identity.

The most obvious form of identity is the experience of an insular self that is clearly cut off from one's surrounding environment,⁵⁴ a self with "clear and sharp lines of demarcation" that we experience as autonomous and "marked off distinctly from everything else."⁵⁵ Such self presupposes the experience of some "ego boundary"⁵⁶ that marks the "edge" of our personhood,⁵⁷ the point where we end and the rest of the world begins. Such boundary is at the heart of the fundamental experiential separation of what is "inside" the self from what lies "outside" it.⁵⁸

The experience of a self presupposes some "psychological division from the rest of the world."⁵⁹ It is a product of a long process that begins when, as infants, we psychologically disengage ("hatch") from our initial "symbiotic" relationship with our most immediate other, usually our mother.⁶⁰ As a result of such process of individuation, we withdraw from a somewhat fluid reality into one where the self as well as other individuals with sharp and firm contours seem to emerge as discrete entities that are clearly separate from their environment.⁶¹

The self is but one particular focus of identity. There are many other answers to the existential question of where we end and the rest of the world begins, and they all involve supposedly bounded clusters of individuals (a family, a profession, a political party, a nation) who experience themselves collectively—and are usually perceived by others—as insular entities⁶² clearly separate from everyone else. In short, we experience ourselves not only as "I" but also collectively as "we," that is, as liberals, baseball fans, Muslims, women, humans. It is such perceptions of social clusters as discrete entities that lead us to regard a marriage between a Christian and a Jew or an Armenian and a Pole as "mixed."

The experience of such discrete entities presupposes a perception of some boundaries surrounding them.⁶³ Even a couple going steady experiences some clear partition separating them from others around them.⁶⁴ Such fine mental lines help us perceive a fundamental discontinuity between insiders and outsiders, those included in a social cluster and those who are left outside its confines. Only in relation to those lines do sentiments such as fidelity, loyalty, or patriotism, for example, evolve, and only in relation to them do we learn whom we can trust and of whom we should beware, who is available to us as a sexual partner and whom we must avoid. These are the boundaries that basically define the mental entities we come to experience as “us” and “them.” They constitute the basis of our sense of identity and determine much of the scope of our social relations.

MENTAL FIELDS

Early in life space is the only mode available for organizing a self.⁶⁵ Indeed, our individuation begins with the development of locomotor functions such as crawling, which allow us to literally withdraw from others.⁶⁶ Later we establish some nonspatial sense of selfhood,⁶⁷ actualizing our separateness by acts such as saying no⁶⁸ and experiences such as ownership of toys, yet the basic way in which we experience the self and its relations with others remains spatial nonetheless. We thus associate selfhood with a psychological “distance” from others⁶⁹ and experience privacy (including its non-spatial aspects, such as secrecy) as having some “space” for ourselves or as a “territory” of inaccessibility surrounding us.⁷⁰ We experience others as being “close” to or “distant” from us and portray our willingness or unwillingness to make contact with them using topological images such as “opening up” (or “reaching out”) and being “closed” (or “removed”).⁷¹ We also use the image of

“penetration” to depict the essence of the process of becoming intimate.⁷²

Similar spatial imagery captures our experience of groups as bounded, “closed”⁷³ entities that one almost literally “enters” and “exists.”⁷⁴ We thus “incorporate” members into, “expel” them from, and assign them “central” or “marginal” places in groups. We also use images such as “*extramarital*” (or “*out of wedlock*”), “mobility,”⁷⁵ and “knows his place”; perceive actual social “distance”⁷⁶ between blacks and whites or senior and junior executives; and mentally locate “distant” relatives in terms of the number of “steps” they are “removed” from us.⁷⁷ Such mental geography has no physical basis but we experience it as if it did.

We likewise use spatial images to depict supposedly discrete chunks of professional jurisdiction (boundary, turf, territory, arena)⁷⁸ as well as knowledge. We thus perceive academic disciplines as surrounded by mental “walls”⁷⁹ and works as lying on the “fringes” of sociology or outside our “area” of expertise, and regard those whose interest does not transcend the confines of their “field” as “limited” or “narrow minded.” Similar spatial imagery seems to underlie our perception of the *extracurricular*, *extrajudicial*, and *esoteric* as well as of insular “domains” such as work, religion, or art.

Somewhat similar is our experience of the fine mental lines that separate acceptable from unacceptable behavior—the assertive from the rude, the funny from the crude. We basically “confine [ourselves] to a particular radius of activity and . . . regard any conduct which drifts outside that radius as somehow inappropriate or immoral. . . . Human behavior can vary over an enormous range, but each community draws a symbolic set of parentheses around a certain segment of that range and limits its own activities within that narrower zone.”⁸⁰ Our quasi-spatial experience of such “normative outlines” of society⁸¹ is quite evident from our use of verbs such as “*transgress*” or “*exceed*” (which literally mean to step or go beyond), prefixes such as “*over-*” (as in “*overambitious*”), “*out-*” (as in

“outlaw”), or “extra-” (as in “extravagant”), and metaphors such as “line of decency”⁸² or “limits of authority.”

In a somewhat similar manner, we also “enter” conversations, go “out of” business, portray breakthroughs as the crossing of a Rubicon⁸³ or a forbidden frontier,⁸⁴ and can appreciate a cartoon depicting someone reaching a line demarcated by the sign “Boundary of Self Respect.”⁸⁵ Similar spatial imagery also underlies such concepts as “extraordinary,” “outstanding,” or “exotic.”

Spatial metaphors pervade much of our thinking.⁸⁶ In a wide variety of contexts, we use them to depict purely mental relations among entities. In fact, we basically experience reality as a “space”⁸⁷ made up of discrete mental fields delineated by mental “fences”⁸⁸ that define⁸⁹ and separate them from one another. Given the significance of proximity in perceptual grouping (the closer things are to one another, the more we tend to perceive them as a single entity⁹⁰), we use closeness as a metaphor for conceptual similarity,⁹¹ essentially seeing difference in terms of mental distance.⁹² We thus consider similar mental items as belonging “together”⁹³ and different ones as being “worlds apart,” and we may even try to locate an item “exactly halfway” between two others.⁹⁴

A foremost prerequisite for differentiating any entity from its surrounding environment are exceptionally strong intra-entity relations.⁹⁵ A mental field is basically a cluster of items that are more similar to one another than to any other item. Generating such fields, therefore, usually involves some lumping. As we group items in our mind (that is, categorize the world), we let their similarity outweigh any differences among them. As a result we perceive mental fields as relatively homogeneous lumps and regard their constituent items as functionally interchangeable variants (“allo-” variants) of a single unit of meaning.⁹⁶ Even when we notice differences among them, we dismiss them as totally irrelevant⁹⁷—“making no difference”—and consequently ignore them.

Thus, despite the obvious differences among them, we regard the prefixes of the adjectives “inaccurate,” “improper,” “dishonest,” and “unusual” as functionally equivalent variants of a single morpheme.⁹⁸ We regard them as basically “the same” because no confusion of meaning is likely to occur if one of them is substituted for another (that is, if we say “disaccurate” or “unproper”). Nor do we normally attribute much significance to the difference between right-eye and left-eye winks, which we perceive as functionally interchangeable variants of a single gesture,⁹⁹ or between a kiss and an affectionate look, which we often substitute for each other as tokens of intimacy.¹⁰⁰ Along similar lines, we usually ignore the obvious difference between 490- and 540-millimicron-long light waves, regarding both as variants of the color “green,”¹⁰¹ and casually substitute pretzels for potato chips as party snacks. And though clearly aware of the difference between thirty-one- and twenty-eight-day blocks of time, we nonetheless regard both as structurally equivalent variants of the unit “month”¹⁰² and expect identical monthly paychecks for January and February. Along similar lines, we usually perceive conventional historical periods as relatively homogeneous stretches, often lumping together events that occurred centuries apart from one another yet within the same “period” (as in “the Middle Ages”).¹⁰³

In a similar manner, we establish social clusters in our mind by regarding all cluster members as similar and ignoring all differences among them, as when we lump together all those whose income falls below a certain “poverty line” as an undifferentiated lot—“the poor.” We generally tend to downplay differences within our own group as well as among others,¹⁰⁴ as evident from the extremely broad categories (“Orientals”) in which we lump those who came to America¹⁰⁵ or from various catchall categories for outsiders, such as the ancient Greek “barbarian,” the Armenian *odar*,¹⁰⁶ the Gypsy *gadjo*, or the Jewish *goy*.

Ignoring intracluster differences and regarding all cluster members as basically “the same” often results in stereotypes, as when racists claim that all blacks are lazy or that all Orientals look alike. Nonetheless, without some lumping, it would be impossible ever to experience any collectivity, or mental entity for that matter. The ability to ignore the uniqueness of items and regard them as typical members of categories is a prerequisite for classifying any group of phenomena. Such ability to “typify”¹⁰⁷ our experience is therefore one of the cornerstones of social reality.

RITUAL TRANSITIONS

Most of the fine lines that separate mental entities from one another are drawn only in our own head and, therefore, totally invisible. And yet, by playing up the act of “crossing” them, we can make mental discontinuities more “tangible.” Many rituals, indeed, are designed specifically to substantiate the mental segmentation of reality into discrete chunks. In articulating our “passage” through the mental partitions separating these chunks from one another, such rituals, originally identified by Arnold Van Gennep as “rites of passage,”¹⁰⁸ certainly enhance our experience of discontinuity.

The various rites we perform when we cross the equator, tropic of Cancer, or arctic circle¹⁰⁹ are perfect cases in point. In dramatizing our passage through these imaginary lines that exist only on maps, they certainly make them more “tangible” (somewhat like the road sign Welcome to Massachusetts). In a similar manner, we also dramatize the mental discontinuity between the public and private domains by knocking on the door before entering a room as well as by altering our appearance, as in the following caricature of a stereo-typical return home, “from ‘a hard day at the office’: a banal scene in which the social passage is signified by the man successively removing his hat . . . taking off his jacket, stripping away

his tie (exaggerated gesture), opening his shirt collar. . . . A whole set of statements about the contrast between [home] and the ‘larger world’ is going on.”¹¹⁰ Along similar lines, soldiers coming home even for a few hours often change into civilian clothes just to actualize their “exit” from the military world. Lowering their voices on entering church similarly helps congregants substantiate the mental separation of the sacred from the profane, whereas the ritual apology (“I beg your pardon”) we offer on entering each other’s “personal space” likewise promotes our experience of an insular self.

In a similar manner, weddings substantiate the boundaries of the family, whose crossing transforms people into spouses and in-laws. They also signal, of course, the crossing of the mental partition that separates marriage from singlehood, just like puberty rites¹¹¹ (or modern equivalents such as obtaining a driver’s license or going for the first time to an R-rated film), which dramatize the transition from childhood to adulthood. (The fact that we rarely celebrate divorces and usually articulate second weddings considerably less than first ones suggests that entering marriage entails a much greater break in identity than exiting or reentering it.) In dramatizing the moments of entering and exiting it, birth and death rituals¹¹² likewise substantiate the experience of life as a discrete block of time (as well as the mental contrast between life and nonlife). The need to substantiate the way we segment time into discrete blocks also accounts for the holidays we create to commemorate critical transition points between historical epochs¹¹³ as well as for the rituals we design to articulate significant changes in our relative access to one another—greetings, first kisses, farewell parties, bedtime stories.¹¹⁴ Changes of lighting or background music likewise signal transitions among successive segments of theatrical performances, films,¹¹⁵ rock concerts, and circus shows, whereas ritual switches from sitting to standing help to “punctuate” religious services¹¹⁶ and demarcate featured solos in jazz.

The ritual of raising the curtain before the beginning of a show¹¹⁷ and the almost obligatory “once upon a time” or “and they lived happily ever after”¹¹⁸ that signal crossings of the line separating fairy tales from “real” life similarly serve to substantiate the boundaries of frames.¹¹⁹ So do the ritual glove touch or kickoff that prefaces sports events, the suspension of meter that signals the dissolution of the poetic frame,¹²⁰ and the caption “The End” that used to announce the conclusion of films. (Within films, conventional cues such as soft focus, overexposure, change from color to black and white, and suspension of background music often signal transitions from characters’ here and now into their memories, fantasies, or dreams.) Along similar lines, organ preludes are often used to announce a religious frame,¹²¹ “soft” music (and candlelight) a romantic frame, and dance music (and hors d’oeuvres) a party.

By switching from one language to another or even from standard to colloquial speech, we often articulate transitions from formality to informality or from just talking to quoting.¹²² In a similar manner, speakers often clear their throats to announce the conclusion of their informal introductory remarks (just as chairpersons use gavels to announce the formal parts of meetings), change their tone to signal diversions from the general thrust of their talk to “parenthetical” remarks, and sit down to announce the beginning of the more informal question-and-answer part.¹²³ Children likewise use a change of voice to “enter” the make-believe frame¹²⁴ and the ritual call “Time” to exit from a game in order to tie a loose shoelace or get a drink.

Along similar lines, by punishing deviants who transgress its moral boundaries, society not only forces us to see that such lines do indeed exist but also demarcates their precise “location.” Like weddings, funerals, and bedtime stories, punishment is a ritual that dramatizes the act of crossing some mental partition. In substantiating the mental segmentation of human behavior into acceptable and

unacceptable, it serves to “locate and publicize”¹²⁵ moral edges:

The deviant is a person whose activities have moved outside the margins of the group, and when the community calls him to account for that vagrancy it is making a statement about the nature and placement of its boundaries. . . . Members of a community inform one another about the placement of their boundaries by participating in the confrontations which occur when persons who venture out to the edges of the group are met by policing agents. . . . Whether these confrontations take the form of criminal trials, excommunication hearings, court-martial, or even psychiatric case conferences, they [demonstrate] where the line is drawn. . . . Morality and immorality meet at the public scaffold, and it is during this meeting that the line between them is drawn. . . . Each time the community moves to censure some act of deviation, then, and convenes a formal ceremony to deal with the responsible offender, it . . . restates where the boundaries of the group are located.¹²⁶

Moral boundaries remain a meaningful point of reference, of course, only as long as society indeed curbs all attempts to transgress them.¹²⁷ When society fails to punish deviants who venture beyond the limit of what it defines as acceptable, members will wonder whether such a line really exists.

Only the need to announce crossings of frame boundaries prompts us to indent quotations like the one above on a page of text¹²⁸ and only the need to substantiate an insular self compels us to say grace before we ingest parts of the environment into our body through the act of eating. Substantiating the insularity of conventional chunks of space, time, and identity is likewise the only reason for the rites we perform around door-sills,¹²⁹ the birthday cards¹³⁰ and New Year midnight kisses with which we “punctuate” life as well as history, and the various initiation rites (such as baptism, adoption, and naturalization) by which we dramatize the incorporation of new members

into religious communities, families, or nations. Such rituals of "passage" are all products of some basic need to substantiate in our acts the mental discontinuities we perceive in our mind. As such, they play a major role in our ability to think analytically.

NOTES

Introduction In the Beginning

1. Genesis 1:1–5.
2. *Ibid.*, 6–10.
3. See, for example, Paul Seligman, *The Apeiron of Anaximander* (London: Athlone Press, 1962).
4. Gyorgy Kepes, *Language of Vision* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1951 [1944]), p. 45; Wolfgang Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology* (New York: New American Library, 1947), pp. 84, 93.
5. See also Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959 [1915]), pp. 116–22; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1973 [1966]), p. 144.
6. Paul Starr, "Social Categories and Claims in the Liberal State," in Mary Douglas, ed., *How Classification Works* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).
7. Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963 [1903]), p. 4. See also Karl W. Deutsch, "Autonomy and Boundaries according to Communications Theory" in Roy R. Grinker, ed., *Toward a Unified Theory of Human Behavior* (New York: Basic Books, 1956), pp. 278–79; Anatol Rapoport, "Statistical Boundaries" in *Toward a Unified Theory of Human Behavior*, p. 308. In Hebrew, the words for *classifying* (*sivug*) and *boundary* (*syag*) indeed derive from the same root.
8. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969 [1945]), p. 24. See also Gottlob Frege, "Logic in Mathematics," in *Post-humous Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979 [1914]), pp. 155, 179, 195, 229, 241; Joan Weiner, "The Philosopher Behind the Last Logician," in Crispin Wright, ed., *Frege—Tradition and Influence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 72n.
9. Don Handelman, "The Ritual Clown: Attributes and Affinities." *Anthropos* 76 (1981):340.
10. Gustav Ichheiser, *Appearances and Realities* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1970), p. 8.
11. See also Henning Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1961), pp. 99–101.
12. Jean Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," in *The Social Contract and Discourses* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950 [1754]), p. 234.
13. See also Robert C. Tryon, *Identification of Social Areas by Cluster Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), p. 71.
14. Barry Schwartz, "The Social Psychology of Privacy," *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1968):747.
15. Charles A. Ferguson, "Diglossia," *Word* 15 (1959):325–40.
16. Stanley J. Tambiah, "Animals Are Good to Think and Good to Prohibit," *Ethnology* 8 (1969): 423–59; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Berber House," in Mary Douglas, ed., *Rules and Meanings* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1973 [1971]), pp. 98–110.
17. Robert Hertz, "The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity," in Rodney Needham, ed., *Right and Left* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973 [1909]); Barry Schwartz, *Vertical Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
18. Kurt Lewin, *Principles of Topological Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), p. 44.
19. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail*, pp. 22–31.
20. Gerald D. Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 13–38, 225; Albert Hunter, *Symbolic Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982 [1974]), pp. 84, 88.
21. See also Schwartz, "The Social Psychology of Privacy," pp. 747–49.
22. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957 [1929]), p. 110. See also pp. 4, 109; Christopher Alexander et al., *A Pattern Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 669–71.
23. On such segmentation of everyday life, see Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967 [1954]), pp. 73–82; Roger G. Barker and Herbert F. Wright, *Midwest and Its Children* (Hamden,

Conn.: Archon, 1971 [1955]), pp. 225–73; Roger G. Barker, ed., *The Stream of Behavior* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).

24. Zerubavel, *The Seven-Day Circle*, pp. 121–29. See also pp. 102–6 and Zerubavel, *Patterns of Time in Hospital Life*, pp. 98–101. That is why nurses can take four-day blocks off only if no more than two of these days are within “the same” week (*Patterns of Time in Hospital Life*, p. 21; *The Seven-Day Circle*, pp. 128–29).

25. See also Barbara H. Smith, *Poetic Closure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 2–4.

26. Zerubavel, *Patterns of Time in Hospital Life*, pp. 31–32.

27. Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*, pp. 101–37; Zerubavel, *The Seven-Day Circle*, pp. 118–20.

28. Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*, pp. 138–66.

29. Yael Zerubavel, “The Last Stand: On the Transformation of Symbols in Modern Israeli Culture,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1980), pp. 301–21; Yael Zerubavel, “Collective Memory and Historical Metaphors: Masada and the Holocaust as National Israeli Symbols” (paper presented at the meetings of the Association for Jewish Studies, Boston, December 1987).

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31. Alfred Schutz, “On Multiple Realities,” in *Collected Papers* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973 [1945]), vol. 1, pp. 230–31. See also William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983 [1890]), pp. 920–23.

32. See also Gregory Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy,” in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972 [1955]), pp. 187–88; Marion Milner, *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men* (London: Tavistock, 1987), pp. 80–81, 225–26.

33. Georg Simmel, “The Handle,” in Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *Georg Simmel, 1858–1918* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1959 [1911]), p. 267.

34. Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy,” pp. 184–92; Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1974).

35. See also Goffman, *ibid.*, pp. 496–559; Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of

Pennsylvania Press, 1981), pp. 144–57, 173–86, 226–327.

36. Schutz, “On Multiple Realities,” p. 233; Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, pp. 251–69.

37. Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), p. 125.

38. See also Georg Simmel, “Sociability: An Example of Pure, or Formal Sociology,” in Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950 [1917]), pp. 47–53.

39. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, pp. 77–78; Murray S. Davis, *Smut* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 216–19.

40. Joan P. Emerson, “Behavior in Private Places: Sustaining Definitions of Reality in Gynecological Examinations,” in Hans P. Dreitzel, ed., *Recent Sociology No. 2* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 74–97; Davis, *Smut*, pp. 219–24.

41. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, p. 412.

42. Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967 [1954]), p. 231; Edward T. Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), p. 15; Meyer Schapiro, “On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs,” *Semiotica* 1 (1969):224; Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 143; Rudolf Arnheim, *The Power of the Center* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 50–52, 63.

43. Schutz, “On Multiple Realities,” pp. 230–33.

44. Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy,” p. 187.

45. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, pp. 201–46.

46. Davis, *Smut*, pp. 29–30.

47. Michel Butor, “The Book as Object,” in *Inventory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), pp. 50–51; Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, pp. 227–30. See also Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places* (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 43, 50–53; Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, p. 220.

48. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, pp. 224–25; Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, pp. 131–40.

49. See, for example, Erving Goffman, *Encounters* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), pp. 65–66; Harland G. Bloland, “Opportunities, Traps, and Sanctuaries: A Frame Analysis of Learned Societies,” *Urban Life* 11 (1982):87ff.

50. See also Goffman, *Encounters*, pp. 63–64.
51. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1959), pp. 151–53; Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places*, p. 84; Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, p. 207.
52. Our assumption, however, may be false. Traveling in Europe and speaking together in Hebrew, my wife and I were once surprised on a bus by the woman sitting in front of us, who turned and asked us in Hebrew something about the weather. It was a subtle hint designed to remind us that “nonpersons” may interact with us in a far more “focused” way than we realize.
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54. Victor Tausk, “On the Origin of the ‘Influencing Machine’ in Schizophrenia,” in Robert Fliess, ed., *The Psychoanalytic Reader* (New York: International Universities Press, 1948 [1919]), vol. 1, p. 68; Witkin et al., *Psychological Differentiation*, p. 14; Witkin, “Psychological Differentiation and Forms of Pathology,” pp. 320–21.
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57. Paul Federn, “The Ego as Subject and Object in Narcissism,” in *Ego Psychology and the Psychoses* (London: Imago Publishing Co., 1953 [1928]), p. 285.
58. Paul Federn, “Ego Psychological Aspect of Schizophrenia,” in *Ego Psychology and the Psychoses*, p. 225. See also Tausk, “On the Origin of the ‘Influencing Machine,’” p. 69; Jean Piaget, *The Construction of Reality in the Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1954), p. 281; Ernst Prelinger, “Extension and Structure of the Self,” *Journal of Psychology* 47 (1959):13–23; Witkin et al., *Psychological Differentiation*, p. 134.
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61. Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 292.
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63. See, for example, Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (New York: Harbinger, 1935), p. 665; Hill, *Families Under Stress*, pp. 3–5; Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans* (New York: John Wiley, 1966), pp. 11, 13, 196; Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).
64. Mark Krain, “A Definition of Dyadic Boundaries and an Empirical Study of Boundary Establishment in Courtship,” *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 7 (1977): 120. See also Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1972), pp. 19–23.
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66. Mahler and La Perriere, “Mother-Child Interaction,” p. 36; Margaret S. Mahler, “On Human Symbiosis and the Vicissitudes of Individuation,” in *Separation-Individuation*, pp. 85–86; Mahler, “On the First Three Subphases,” pp. 124–25; Mahler et al., *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, p. 72; Louise J. Kaplan, *Oneness and Separateness* (New York: Touchstone, 1978), pp. 191–98.
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80. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, p. 10.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
82. "Next: R-Rated Record Albums?" *Newsweek*, August 26, 1985, p. 69.
83. "Botha Goes Slow," *Newsweek*, August 26, 1985, p. 27.
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85. *Newsday*, January 30, 1986, Part 2, p. 19.
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91. See also Werner, *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development*, pp. 222–25.

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95. Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology*, p. 93; Federn, "Ego Psychological Aspect of Schizophrenia," p. 222; Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: Free Press, 1964 [1951]), p. 482; Campbell, "Common Fate," pp. 18–20; Bonner, "On Some Clustering Techniques," p. 22; Smith, *Poetic Closure*, pp. 23–24; Robert R. Sokal, "Clustering and Classification: Background and Current Directions," in J. Van Ryzin, ed., *Classification and Clustering* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), p. 7; Smith and Medin, *Categories and Concepts*, pp. 110–11.

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97. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 140.

98. On "allomorphs," see Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory*, pp. 164, 176–77, 206; Dwight Bolinger, *Aspects of Language* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp. 58–63. On their functional phonological analogues, "allophones," see Roman Jakobson, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978 [1942]), pp. 28–33; Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory*, pp. 44–46, 325–28; Mario Pei, *Glossary of Linguistic Terminology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 10; Bolinger, *Aspects of Language*, pp. 43–44.

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