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CHAPTER XVIII

INTRODUCTION: EUPHORIC AND DYSPHORIC INTERPLAY

When persons are in each other's presence, it is possible that no one will be made to feel ill at ease, out of countenance, nonplussed, self-conscious, embarrassed, or out of place because of the sheer presence of the others or because of the actions of the others. No one will have the feeling that there is a false note in the situation. When these conditions are present, we may say that the interaction is euphoric. To the degree that those present have been made to feel ill at ease, we may say that the interaction is dysphoric.[1] In this study we are concerned with euphoric and dysphoric interaction only in cases where those present to each other are also involved in accredited directed communication with one another, i.e., in interplay. (It is to be clearly understood that many interesting false notes arise among persons who are engaged only in undirected communication with each other.)

In Dixon, the specific requirements for euphoric interplay seem to be very subtle and complex. So delicate a balance seems to be required of factors potentially opposed to each other that it is a wonder any interplay at all is completely

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[1] The terms euphoria and dysphoria have been employed by students of preliterate societies to refer to social systems that are functioning well or functioning badly.

euphoric.[1]

When persons engage in interplay (as in any other ac-
tivity) there is a tendency for them to become unselfconsciously,
spontaneously, and unthinkingly immersed or involved in the pro-
ceedings. During any particular interplay, norms seem to prevail
which indicate the degree to which participants ought to immerse
themselves or forget themselves in the interaction.[2] It would

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[1]In contrast, observation suggests that euphoric inter-
action is quite common in situations where persons present to
one another are not engaged in interplay nor feel obliged to be.
In Dixon it seemed easy for persons to fulfill unselfconsciously
expectations regarding proper clothing, proper modulation of
voice and gestures, and other requirements of public seemliness
and decorum.

[2]It has become common to consider interpersonal commu-
nication as that which occurs when two persons each take the
probable response of the other into consideration. This view
seems to be implied in G. H. Mead and to have been carefully
elaborated into a model of feints and strategies and infinite
tactical maneuvers by von Neumann. It overlooks the crucial
fact that a sender is committed to the expressive component of
his communication, this tending to be, in a sense, more of an
impulsive response to the situation than a calculated and tacti-
cal adjustment to it. By expressing himself spontaneously, the
sender becomes intimately a part of the situation, instead of
merely a rational manipulator of it. In a manner of speaking,
the character of the sender becomes lodged in and infused into
his communicative acts, giving these acts a weight and a reality
in their own right. To the extent that actors can control their
behavior in accordance with tactical utility, communication can
conveniently be seen as a type of abstract rational game--a game
that can be played at a distance, in any convenient context, at
any convenient time, and by means of any convenient set of sym-
bols for denoting individual moves. To the extent that actors
cannot prevent themselves from conveying their feelings on a
matter (or do not attempt to do so), interpersonal communication
can conveniently be seen as part of a unique concrete situation,
each message inseparably part of the context in which it occurs.
It would seem that the unthinking impulsive aspect of interaction
is not a residual category that can be appended as a qualifica-
tion to a rational model of communication; the spontaneous un-
thinking aspect of interaction is a crucial element of inter-
action.

seem that in Dixon the most general requirement of euphoric interaction is that no participant act in such a way as to disturb or disrupt a proper degree of involvement on the part of the other participants. This generalization does not answer the question of what makes for euphoric and dysphoric interaction, but only moves the question one step back, for we must go on to ask what sorts of behavior on the part of one participant throw the other participants off balance and make it difficult for them to involve themselves spontaneously in the interplay in the way required of them.

Until now in this study, interplay has been considered from a rather mechanical point of view. It has been suggested that orderly interplay seems, in Dixon, to have certain functional characteristics: warning must be given as to when the interplay is to start, when it is to end, and who is to be officially included in it; during the interplay, a supply of messages must be assured, interruption must be controlled and regulated, and a transition from one sender to another must be effected; a center of focus must be maintained. When these arrangements did not prevail, dysphoria tended to occur. However, these requirements seemed to be necessary but not sufficient grounds for euphoric interaction. Interplay was often conducted in a perfectly orderly way and was nevertheless dysphoric.

It is sometimes felt that euphoric interplay is interaction in which participants are made to feel happy or pleased, and that dysphoric interplay is interaction in which participants are made to feel deprived. This is by no means always the case.

Apparently deprivations can be conveyed to participants in a way which leaves them saddened but does not disrupt the euphoria of the interaction; indulgences can be conveyed in a way which leaves participants happy but embarrassed. Gaiety and light-heartedness can prevail in an awkward situation, and anger and hostility can prevail in euphoric conversation.

In the chapters that follow, no assumption is made that a complete, or satisfactory, or systematic analysis of euphoria and dysphoria in interplay has been given. The problem will be approached from different points of view, some of which overlap and some of which have very little relation to each other. As many different approaches will be attempted as the data seem to call for.