

A FIELD GUIDE TO SPATIAL INTIMACY

The Book of Everyday Instruction, Chapter Four:
It's amazing we don't have more fights

(Appendix B1: Pedagogical)

PROLOGUE

I was talking to my mother about a recent experience on the subway. I had arrived at her apartment flustered, sweaty, late -- already exhausted and overwhelmed even without having faced the frustration of family. I don't remember what the offense was. Pushy people? Someone not using headphones? Whatever the cause, there was definitely a disagreement between two riders. This small tiff escalated until everyone in our car was involved, whether we wanted to be or not. I was furious, but hearing the story, my mother took the opposite approach. She believed that in fact, New Yorkers are mostly worthy of praise. "Really," she said, "when you consider that the subway is the space where our bodies are closest to people who are different from us, it's amazing we don't have more fights."

The Book of Everyday Instruction is an eight chapter project about one-on-one social interaction. Each chapter focuses on a different central inquiry question. Chapter Four, *It's amazing we don't have more fights*, investigates how we tell stories through pair-based physical interactions in space. Where are the guidebooks to teach us how to move in contemporary society? What are the lessons we might need? I am considering partnership from this perspective.

This booklet contains:

1. Exercises For Your Completion
2. Images For Your Enjoyment
3. Background Information For Your Understanding
4. Creative Writing for Your Stimulation

Each booklet comes with one (1) set of measuring ribbons, to be used in tandem with exercise #2.

EXERCISE #1: MOVING

Find someone in the room to:

- a) follow;
- b) avoid.

Then do it.

Find someone in the room who:

- a) attracts you;
- b) repels you.

Then do it.

Note how your feelings change as you follow and avoid. Note how your body changes as you follow and avoid. Note who is following and avoiding you. Does this change your feelings about that person?

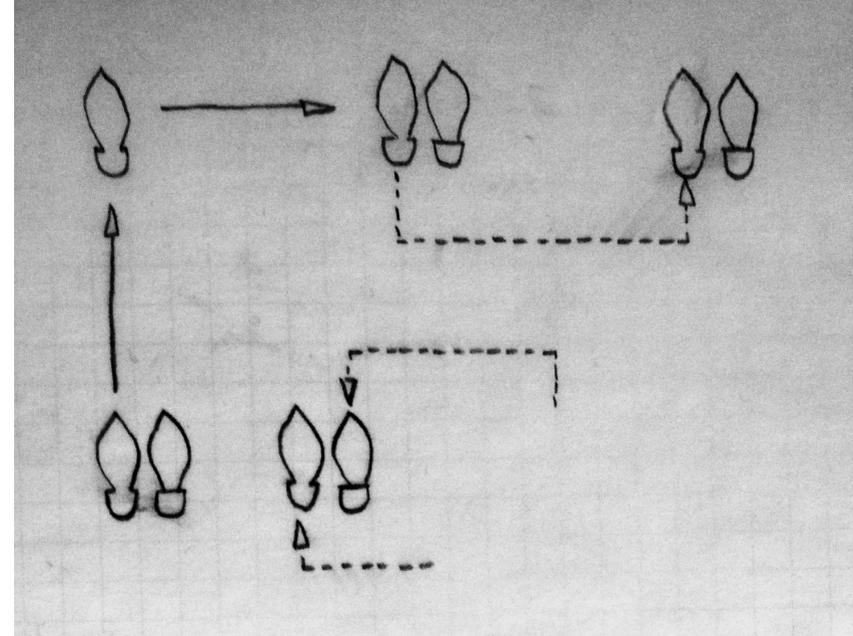
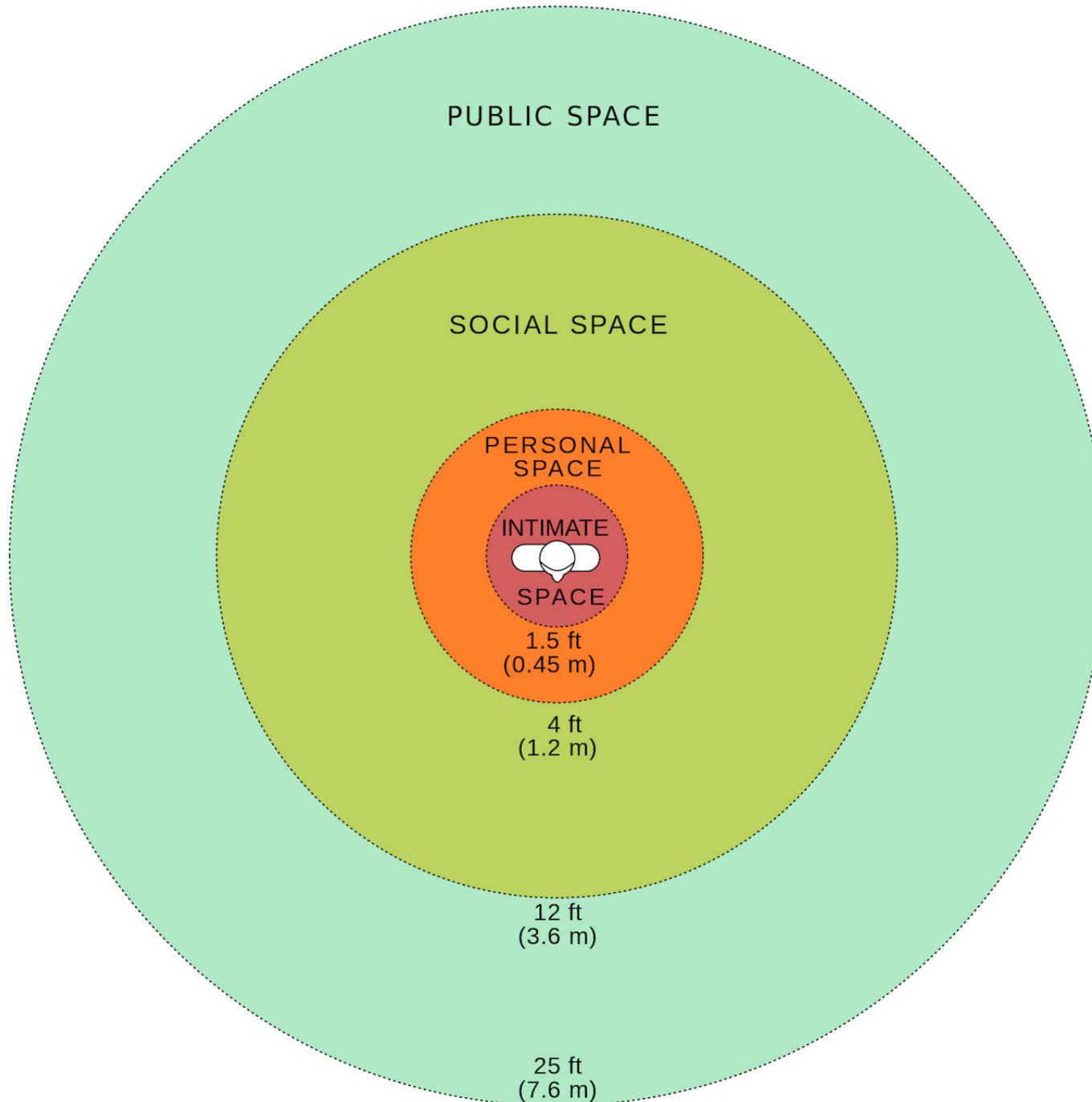


Figure 1. An incomplete diagram of feet in motion.

Proxemics is the study of human spatial requirements and the effects that population density has on behavior, communication, and social interaction. Proxemics is among several subcategories in the study of nonverbal communication. (Wikipedia, 4/17/2016)

I think our strong, almost instinctive feelings about public spaces are formed by how close we are to other people when we to experience them. There's a built-in excitement to walking in a public square. It's not the weather. It's the nearness of other bodies.



This chart, developed by researcher Edward T. Hall in 1966, depicts his scientifically determined ideal distances between people sharing intimate space, personal space, social space, and public space.

Of course, these distances vary by culture (both ethnic, and locational). *The distance between us in line is far less than I'd like it to be if, for example, you were visiting my home or studio. Likewise, I imagine we'd feel differently about what was spatially appropriate if one of us were, say, Japanese. Or Kenyan. Imagine the possibilities.*

EXERCISE #2: MEASURING

You have been given four ribbons. Each is cut to a different length. First choose a point of reference in the room. Using these measuring guides, position yourself each of the four distances away from that point. Note any changes to your relationship with the room.

Second, choose a partner from the workshop. Position yourself each of the four distances away from your partner. Note any changes to your relationship with your partner, or with the room.

You can start your measurements from smallest distance to greatest, or from greatest to smallest. For best results, try going once from smallest to greatest, and then in reverse.

EXERCISE #3: STORYTELLING

There are so many verbs that we use to discuss relationships between bodies in space. (I call these “proximity verbs.”)

Pick a verb, either from the list below or otherwise. Keeping in mind the physical interactions that you’ve just shared in the gallery, imagine yourself in space with that verb.

What memories come up?

What relationships do you want to explore?

How does the story change as distance changes?

Write a short story.

Maybe 1 - 4 sentences long.

Use the verb you selected as the title for that story.

An incomplete list of proximity verbs: chase, follow, lead, settle, approach, sidle, retreat, embrace, accompany, block, join, shake, tango, touch, unite, deny, shadow, engage, cleave, devour, divorce, merge, spoon, track, crave, protect, dismiss.

(example)

PLAY

What if there was a way to play Memory that instead of matching like-images, you could first look at your partner’s eyes, and then track their gaze to what was being observed? And if you guessed right, that would be a pair? The winner would be, I suppose, the person who best understands the link between the outward-facing expression of the body, and desire.

EPILOGUE

WHAT IS THE LARGEST DISTANCE?

Is it the distance before we come together, or the distance after we separate? When do we require more space? When we know there's a step back to be taken, or when we don't know that there's a term binding us at all?

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