

## FORM AND CONTENT

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### *SUMMARY*

*In this article the study of a laboratory case will allow us to establish the distinction between form and content in the analysis of human relations. This distinction will enable us to understand what all of these relations have in common and what lies behind their fascinating diversity. It will also make possible their scientific understanding which can be applied to any place or time.*

**KEY WORDS:** theory of social action. - laboratory case. - military drill.

1. In the parade ground of a barracks a squad of soldiers is doing drill under the orders of a Sergeant:

. . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . . X  
. . . . .  
. . . . .

This will be our *laboratory case*.

In a laboratory we construct *or find* the object of our study in such particular physical conditions that it will be very easy to understand how it works and what is the best way of studying it.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the original text in Spanish by Stanley E. Miller (MA, Spanish Literature) and Carlos Allones Pérez  
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On a balcony which overlooks the parade-ground we place a video camera and record the exercises of the drill. When we arrive home we run the video, first *without sound*. What we can see, the thing which can be seen on the television, is each and every one of the soldiers carrying out with his body the same movements at the same time.

Let us suppose that this is the series of body movements which the soldiers are practising:

(Body of soldiers)<sub>1</sub>

(Body of soldiers)<sub>2</sub>

.....

(Body of soldiers)<sub>n</sub>

To continue we run the tape which we have recorded *without a picture* -the screen is blank. What we hear via the television speaker are the words of the Sergeant as he calls out one after another the exercises which the soldiers carry out:

(Word of Sergeant)<sub>1</sub>

(Word of Sergeant)<sub>2</sub>

.....

(Word of Sergeant)<sub>n</sub>

We then run the recording with sound and picture various times, and in this repetition we can observe a *one-to-one correspondence* between each of the words which we hear the Sergeant says, and each of the exercises which we see the soldiers perform:

(Body of soldiers)<sub>n</sub> <----> (Word of Sergeant)<sub>n</sub>

It is not enough to only observe the correspondence in exercise 'n'. We also wish *to identify and define it* in the most accurate way. In order to do this we draw up the formula:

(Body of soldiers)<sub>n</sub> <=> (Word of Sergeant)<sub>n</sub>

This is because in Military Drill the word of the Sergeant is the only necessary condition required to provoke the simultaneous and identical movement of the soldiers. Thus, if the Sergeant does not call out any exercise the soldiers remain still.<sup>1</sup>

*Within* the relationship between the activities which constitute the exercise 'n', the analysis distinguishes two other relationships. The first is one of *linguistic identity or equivalence*:

$$(\text{Word})_n = (\text{Body})_n$$

The above reflects the fact that the soldiers do what the Sergeant says, and nothing else.

The second relationship is one of *political command and obedience*:

$$(\text{Sergeant/soldiers})_n$$

This reflects the fact that the soldiers carry out what their Sergeant orders them to do.

However, we are also interested in defining the relationship between activities which might be applied to *any one* of the exercises of Military Drill and not for some of them in particular (this is: none of those which have been recorded). For this we draw up the formula:

$$\text{Body of each and every one} \Leftrightarrow \text{Word of Other} \quad (1)$$

In the above we use 'each', 'every', 'Other', without a concrete meaning, or with the meaning 'any at all', in order to open the way to a subsequent generalisation. We wish to do this without compromising, in any way, the truth of what happens in our laboratory case -namely that each and every one does what the other previously tells them to do.

As I stated earlier, formula (1) does not define *the content* of the relationship between activities *in a particular exercise*, as might be 'Over the shoulder', or 'Present arms'. On the contrary, it defines *the form* of this relationship *which is common* to all the exercises of Military Drill.<sup>2</sup>

Also, here within relationship (1), the analysis can distinguish the relationships

of which it is formed. The first of these is *the common form* for the relationship of linguistic identity or equivalence:

Word = Body

The second is *the common form* for the relationship of political control and obedience:

(Other/each and every one)

2. We will concentrate now on the form of the relationship between activities which is common to any of the exercises which can be found in Military Drill - from now on: M.D.-

We have given this the formula:

Body of each and every one  $\Leftrightarrow$  Word of Other (1)

and we will try to determine some characteristics of *its nature*:

(1) *is not* a mechanical relationship. By this I mean that there are no equations of general Physics, or more specifically of Acoustics to explain why the sound of the voice or the word of the Sergeant is able to move such heavy and bulky bodies as those of the soldiers. In M.D. there are elements of behaviour which *seem* mechanical, and it is the job of Sociology to identify them. However, the relationship itself is not mechanical.

(1) *is not* an instinctive relationship. It is certain that in M.D. there are some elements of behaviour which are *really* instinctive, and it will be an obligatory part of our undertaking to take note of these very precisely. However, between the voice of the Sergeant and the activity of the soldiers there is not a stimulus/response relationship such as that which existed between Dr. Pavlov's bell and the saliva which was secreted *malgré lui* from the mouth of his dog.<sup>3</sup>

For this reason, we can sometimes see one of the soldiers disobeying his Sergeant's orders with clear premeditation. One example of such behaviour might be the soldier who decided to get down on all four beneath the flag on the Oath Day. He did this even though he knew he would be punished -as indeed he was.

(1) *is exclusive of the human animal*. Only the individuals of our species are able to form a group which can carry out, in a simultaneous and identical way, such complex and co-ordinated movements as those seen on the parade ground of a barracks.

Someone may tell me that it is possible to make a group of 65 monkeys carry out similar activities following the orders of one Other than them. It might be possible, perhaps, but I think not. In any case, the skills required by M.D. are only one particular example for us humans. There are many others, some even more sophisticated and collective, which our little soldier performs them in many different places throughout the day.

No, here we are dealing with another thing. We are speaking about *the animal who speaks*. Thanks to this amazing and perfected quality, the human animal possesses its marvellous capacity to do everything which he does, and which only he is able to do.

(1) *is the only thing the human animal does and the only thing the human animal can do*. By this I mean to say that what occurs in Military Drill occurs always and everywhere. The same occurs in the present, in the past, and in the future. Consequently (1) defines and identifies *the form* in which human activities are related *in every place and time*, and that

Body of each and every one  $\Leftrightarrow$  Word of Other (1)

is truly a *Universall formula*.

I am only putting forward an *anthropological hypothesis*: based on a contemplation of the human animal. It is for Sociology to demonstrate its veracity or falseness.

3. However, prior to embarking on the task of demonstrating that

Body of each and every one  $\Leftrightarrow$  Word of Other (1)

*is universal*, and as a necessary step towards this, we will try for now to show more modestly that *it could be*: that there is nothing in the formula in question which, at first sight, prohibits its application to any human activity.

Furthermore, at the same time as we gain an understanding of the possibilities for the applications of formula (1) we can determine the peculiar characteristics of Military Drill, and the reasons why in our analysis it has been identified as the

laboratory case.

1) When I state that in relationship (1) each and every one does what the Other tells them to do, I am not saying in any way *what* exactly they all do or *what* words the Other says. This relationship can be observed in any place or situation: in a factory they make cars, in a city a computer controls the traffic, from the pit a football manager organises the position of his players, and pious people take advantage of a Holy Day to form a procession behind their Patron Saint.

This is nothing more than another way of saying what has already been said. This is, that what is defined in (1) is *the universal form* of relationship between the linguistic and political activities of the human animal, and not *the particular content* of these activities. This content could be of any type -although obviously of any thinkable and possible type.

2) In Military Drill the order is the same for everyone and is given at the same time. However, in the majority of collective activities this is not the case, *the order is different for each individual and is given at a different time*. Nevertheless, (1) continues to define everybody's need to obey the other.

Situations in which the order is given simultaneously and identically to all are common in education. In this way it is easier to examine and check the degree of control which each individual has achieved in the target skill, as this has been taught to all in an identical way.

3) Suddenly the Sergeant barks out "Break Ranks" and the soldiers scatter out over the parade-ground and wander around at will.

What has happened here? Clearly relationship (1) at the same time as it is established in a particular place also *concedes* to each individual a degree of freedom or *relative autonomy*. Nevertheless, this freedom is subordinated to the common activity which it regulates very precisely... This is demonstrated by the fact that the soldiers cannot leave the parade-ground where they are doing the drill and that the Sergeant only needs to blow his whistle and shout "Attention" and all the men will draw up in ranks and columns, each one in exactly the same position he was in previously.<sup>4</sup>

We can now determine clearly what Military Drill achieves. It obliges each one's

body to work in co-ordination with every other person's body. *M.D. concedes no freedom or relative autonomy* and in this lies the peculiarity of the situation and for this reason we are using it in our analysis as a laboratory case. This is because the particular content of Military Drill is precisely the political part of the universal formula (1) *in practice*: this being *the discipline itself*, which becomes visible in Military Drill:

(Other/each and every one)

.<sup>5</sup>

Moving on from this we can see that M.D., in its most abstract content as a simple series of *gymnastics exercises*, is a disciplinary instrument of a type commonly used in other institutions, like schools, factories, prisons, ... (ONIONS 1985)<sup>6</sup>

4) When relationship (1) has existed for a long time in a particular place, and especially when its content is very constitutive of the social order in which it is practised, in this case, each and every one becomes used to obeying the other's order *in an unconscious way*. At times it is not even necessary for the order to be given.<sup>7</sup>

One example of this might be as follows. I go into a bar, order a Coke, drink it, pay for it and leave. However, let us suppose that just after drinking it I realise that I haven't brought any money. Only then do I become fully conscious of my strictly commercial relationship with the unfamiliar waiter. I had hardly paid any attention to this relationship previously, although I knew it was there.

There are many examples of this type of relationship in which the protagonists are unaware of its precise nature. The clearest and most important of these can be observed in tribal societies, i.e. those based on links of kinship. In all of these the child is brought up by its mother *under* the political control of the male group, who don't even need to remind her about this.

Now that we have talked about this *maternofilial* relationship in the rearing of children we can see that it seems to be a complete exception to the universal formula which was defined in (1). This is because as the infant is, in fact, unable to speak, he must also be incapable of doing anything, and in particular of what his mother tells him or her to do. However, when we examine not what (1) is like but rather *how it is established* -ALLONES PÉREZ (2019)- we can observe that it always has to go through a primary learning stage. The relationship between mother and infant is, naturally, the example par excellence.

*To sum up*, and bearing all the above in mind, (1) only establishes the *universal form* by which the activities of the human animal are related. It does not define their *particular content*. The content of the order may be different for each individual and given at a different time. Also, the very same relationship (1) concedes some relative autonomy. Nevertheless, even though it does this it does not cease to control the area where it has been established. Finally, the actual protagonists of the relationship are sometimes unaware of its existence... Only after taking all the above into account do I say that relationship (1) can be considered universal.

It is quite another thing to demonstrate that this *is* true, but that is not the concern of these pages.

4. However, I do wish to say something about this matter, namely, that proving that relationship (1)

Body of each and every one  $\Leftrightarrow$  Word of Other (1)

is universal cannot be done by listing examples of collective activities in which its control is obvious. Equally it will be of no use for us to challenge the reader to point out, if he can, some type of human behaviour which does not seem to obey this relationship.

The universal nature of (1) can only be proved *by tautology*. By this I mean that is necessary to find another truth about *the rational* -a deeper and more essential characteristic of its nature- and based on this Sociology may be able to deduce what we postulate above as being an automatic consequence, or simple corollary.

5. Finally, I repeat that by analysing Military Drill we have been able to establish the common form of relationship between the activities of the Sergeant and those of the soldiers in all the exercises. We have given this the formula:

Body of each and every one  $\Leftrightarrow$  Word of Other (1)

We have automatically postulated that this common formula is universal and that its specific content in the case of exercise 'n' will be:

(Body of soldiers)<sub>n</sub>  $\Leftrightarrow$  (Word of Sergeant)<sub>n</sub>

At the same time, in the analysis of formula (1) we were able to distinguish between the linguistic part:

(Word = Body)

and its political part:

(Other/each and every one)

Furthermore, we can do the same with the specific content of any other thinkable and possible contents. These could be in Military Drill or any other collective activity.

The distinction between the political and the linguistic relationships will be of great importance in *our study method*. This will have to be based precisely on a simultaneous examination of both of them.

On the other hand, and in a different way, the distinction between universal form and particular content will also be basic and fundamental for us. Such a distinction will separate the different *theoretical objects* we have to deal with <sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

1

$(p \Leftrightarrow q) \Leftrightarrow \{p \Rightarrow q \text{ and } q \Rightarrow p\}$

‘p iff q’: ‘q is the only necessary condition for p’

(GARCÍA RODEJA 1972: 7.6.) [Our translation]

<sup>2</sup> “The manner how Speech serveth to the remembrance of the consequence of causes and effects, consisteth in the imposing of *Names*, and the *Connexion* of them. Of Names, some are *Proper*, and singular to one onely thing; as *Peter, John, This man, this Tree*; and some are *Common* to many things; as *Man, Horse, Tree*; every of which though but one Name, is nevertheless the name of divers particular things; in respect of all which

together, it is called an *Universall*; there being nothing in the world Universall but Names; for the things named, are every one of them Individuall and Singular.” (HOBBS 1985: 102)

<sup>3</sup> "Il a fait *malgré lui* le geste héréditaire", verse of José Maria de Heredia, quoted in RAMIRO RICO (1980: 46)

<sup>4</sup> All human societies are very strict with those relationships which are a structural part of their social mechanism. On the other hand, they hardly pay any attention to other relationships which are not a fundamental part of the society in question.

In this way, in modern democratised societies the industrial relationships concerning the accumulation of capital are very tightly controlled, whereas those concerning sexual activities or the bringing-up of children are controlled much less. Vice-versa was what happened in our historical hamlets where heterosexual relationships and those for bringing-up children were obsessively regulated and those related to production were not considered to be so important (as long as they did not affect the former).

<sup>5</sup> As regards the linguistic part of the universal formula (1) it does not seem that Military Drill is a sufficiently subtle practice to be of use...

Perhaps my master, Agustín García Calvo, might be able to invent *a game* or series of exercises which were for the linguistic convention:

(Word = Body)

what Military Drill is for the political discipline... However, does this author consider this possible? (cf. GARCÍA CALVO 1979)

<sup>6</sup> "Latin. - Greek. *gumnásion*, formed on *gumnázien* train (literal: naked), formed on *gumnós* naked, nude." (cf. C. T. ONIONS)

The true *raison d'être* of Military Drill or organised series of gymnastic or aerobic exercises, is a fascination with discipline for discipline's sake. However, this does not take away the fact that such exercises also improve the fitness of those who practise them.

In the case of Military Drill, the army is also, as a secondary effect, looking to accustom the soldier to the weight and form of the rifle. The object of this is that afterwards in parades and marches the soldiers can show off the military purpose for which this discipline has been achieved.

<sup>7</sup> "However, air does not cease to have weight, although we no longer feel that weight".

(DURKHEIM, 1982: 53)

<sup>8</sup> If the reader should be interested, he can consult ALLONES PÉREZ (2019). In that book we explain this formal reasoning as it leads to an empirical principle of statistical general validity.

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