

# Proxemic Magic

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Order of the Trapezoid  
Temple of Set

“Magick,” Aleister Crowley once wrote, “may be defined as the name given to science by the vulgar.” By this he meant that the knowledge and application of obscure scientific principles may very well seem “magical” to an ignorant observer, whether the practitioner be a stage magician or a NASA astrophysicist.

A corollary to this observation is that so-called “magic” [or “Magick”] based upon nothing more than mere superstition or ooga-booga mysticism is objectively useless, meaning that it won’t accomplish a damned thing if the person or persons in question are unaware of it. The ooga-booga stuff will work only if the person at whom it is directed (a) **knows** about the Working and (b) is superstitious enough to **believe** in it. [Note: The magician should never make the mistake of assuming that another person is not sufficiently superstitious just because that individual protests to that effect. The less people know about the Black Arts, the more they are vulnerable to superstitious reactions to them.]

I cannot overemphasize how important it is that the Black Magician not fool himself or herself in this regard. You are differentiated from White Magicians, among other things, precisely because you **aren’t** scared silly by your own tools, and because you **don’t** deceive yourself as much as - or worse than - the other person. The Black Magician must always **know** what is happening and be **in control** of it. If he doesn’t know quite what is happening when a given technique is being used, then he approaches that Working in much the same manner as a scientist making a laboratory experiment: He constructs and tests various theories and takes note of such results as may manifest themselves.

To me the foregoing has never seemed like a very difficult principle to grasp. Yet for the better part of twenty years I have been amazed by the number of people - Magicians, and would-be Black Magicians - who have scared themselves [and made themselves look ridiculous in the bargain] by taking some rag-tag superstition from some old grimoire and turning it into a personal idol before which to abase oneself. I like to think that one of the key virtues of the Temple of Set - and the saving grace of the old Church of Satan before it - has been the rejection of self-deceit, which Anton LaVey so accurately labeled “the greatest of all ‘sins’”.

The focus of this article, like so many *Runes* articles before it, is upon another aspect of science which is sufficiently obscure to warrant its being venerated as “magic” by the vulgar. Hence it is suitable for practical use by the Black Magician. Because it is based upon objective principles, rather than ooga-booga tosh, moreover, it can be applied successfully **whether or not** the object of the Working knows about it or believes in it.

In 1966 an anthropologist by the name of Edward T. Hall wrote a very interesting book entitled *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co.), whose central theme, he said, was “social and personal space and man’s perception of it. ‘Proxemics’ is the term I have coined for the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture.” Hall elaborates on his thesis thus:

It has long been believed that experience is what all men share, that it is always possible somehow to bypass language and culture and refer back to experience in order to reach another human being. This implicit - and often explicit - belief concerning man's relation to experience was based on the assumptions that, when two human beings are subject to the same 'experience', virtually the same data are being fed to the two central nervous systems and that the two brains record similarly.

Proxemic research casts serious doubt on the validity of this assumption, particularly when the cultures are different. People from different cultures not only speak different languages but, what is possibly more important, inhabit different sensory worlds. Selective screening of sensory data admits some things while filtering out others, so that experience as it is perceived through one set of culturally patterned sensory screens is quite different from experience perceived through another. The architectural and urban environments that people create are expressions of this filtering-screening process. In fact, from these man-altered environments, it is possible to learn how different people use their senses. Experience cannot therefore be counted on as a stable point of reference, because it occurs in a setting that has been molded by man.

Hall begins his study with a discussion of the mechanics of distance regulation, first between animals, then between humans. "Flight distance" (FD) is the point at which an animal will flee when approached by a potential enemy: for example 500 yards for an antelope and 6 feet for a lizard. If you manage to approach too closely within FD, you will encounter "critical distance" (CD), wherein the animal feels so threatened that it will begin to stalk or fight. The famous Swiss animal psychologist H. Hediger offers one illustration:

A lion in a zoo will flee from an approaching man until it meets an insurmountable barrier. If the man continues the approach, he soon penetrates the lion's CD, at which point the cornered lion reverses direction and begins to stalk the man. In the classical animal act in the circus, the lion's stalking is so deliberate that he will surmount an intervening obstacle such as a stool in order to get at the man. To get the lion to remain on the stool, the lion-tamer quickly steps beyond the CD. At this point the lion stops pursuing. The trainer's elaborate "protective" devices - the chair, the whip, or the gun - are so much window-dressing.

Human beings are also subject to FD/CD stimuli, as well as to an intermediate condition which Hediger terms "personal and social distance" (PSD). We have a variety of physical sensors by which we make such subconscious decisions: sight, hearing, and smell at a distance; and touch up close. In some cultures, people are accustomed to being within the smell-radius of others, for example - and in fact judge moods, class, and relationships in part on olfactory impressions. In other cultures, such as that of the U.S., we are repelled by the scent of anyone except those with whom we are personally intimate. This simple fact may identify an invisible yet powerful barrier against American rapport with various mid-eastern cultures.

Japanese culture emphasizes the "stretching of visual space", as in gardens (wherein steps along paths or stepping-stones must be individually picked with care) or in rooms (where furniture tends to be arranged in the middle rather than near or against the walls). To the Westerner, a Japanese environment often appears "open" and "spacious" even if the physical dimensions involved are no greater than those in a Western home or office.

In public spaces and conveyances, on the other hand, orientals and Arabs have a much higher tolerance for crowding than do Westerners. Observe the behavior of mixed ethnic groups on a crowded subway or bus and see for yourself. [Hall theorizes that the increased attention to personal living-area spaciousness by the Japanese may be in the nature of a partial compensation for this.]

The human skin's ability both to transmit and to sense emotional states is greater than most people know. Anger or embarrassment triggers blushing, for example, but it also increases the blood supply to various parts of the body, causing [among other things] a subtle swelling of the forehead and temples, and a resultant rise in skin temperature in those areas. Observers can detect such changes by skin-based thermal detectors, by more intense olfactory sensation (smell), and by visual impact. Some women interviewed by Hall commented that changes in the bodily temperature and odor of dancing partners, for example, were reliable advance-signs of lust, anger, etc. - long before the male in question would speak or act accordingly. Crowley, in addition to his skill in recognition of visual signals ["Give me the sign of the Open Eye"], was similarly a student of space- and smell-based behavior. His subtle use of these techniques astonished many an onlooker, who might well credit the results to the supernatural. [Cf. William Seabrook's account of Crowley's "magical" trip-up of a pedestrian. The Beast merely intruded on his victim's auditory space.]

Heat and space-perception are related. People in a cool, crowded room will not feel as cramped as the same number of people in a similar-sized room which happens to be hot. Whether or not you see or hear other persons, your heat-sensors will react to them if you are close enough. [To sample your own heat-radiation sensitivity, place the back of your hand close to your lips. Both generate a high level of heat. Then move your hand up and down in front of your face. Also try near-skin experiments with another person, particularly "out of eyesight". You may be surprised at the results.]

Photographs and paintings of individuals create an immediate attitude-impression in a viewer depending upon whether they place him or her in FC/FD of the subject. [Try looking at people in "close" or "distant" pictures and see how you react. Also try viewing both types of pictures from near and distant positions.] Maurice Grosser, in *The Painter's Eye* (NY: Rinehart & Co.) states:

Four to eight feet is the portrait distance: Here the painter is near enough so that his eyes have no trouble in understanding the sitter's solid forms, yet he is far enough away so that the foreshortening of the forms presents him no real problems. Here, at the normal distance of social intimacy and easy conversation, the soul of the sitter begins to appear. Nearer than three feet, within touching distance, the soul is far too much in evidence for any sort of disinterested observation. Three feet is the sculptor's working distance, not the painter's. The sculptor must stand near enough to his model to be able to judge forms by sense of touch.

The next time you visit a museum which contains statuary from several historical cultures, try to sense (a) from what distance the sculptor wrought a particular statue, and (b) from what distance he intended that it be viewed - and why. Note that Egyptian statuary tends to focus on the *ka* or *psyche*, Greek statuary on the physical ideal of beauty, and Roman on the physical reality of individuals. Once you perceive these interrelated "filters", you will begin to understand why these images affect you in the way they do - and which you couldn't previously explain on a conscious level.

Perspective in painting was re-discovered at the time of the Renaissance, enabling the viewer to focus on various parts of a painting and see them proportionately represented. A peculiarity of Rembrandt's style is that he painted "stationary visual fields", such that by focusing on a portrait's central feature you will see the entire portrait in the same clarity/lack of clarity as you would standing before the individual in question and observing him/her with your foveal, macular, and peripheral vision.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that the “boundary” of each human being does **not** end with the skin. Each individual possesses an unseen “personal field” - or rather variety of situational fields - which constitutes his or her true “boundary”. **The magician who succeeds in controlling or altering another individual’s “personal field” thus controls or alters that person just as assuredly as though he were able to control his conscious personality.**

As Dr. Becker’s *bete noir* was the high level of electro-magnetic activity in contemporary Western civilization [see my “From Salamander Bones to the Seven Towers of Satan”, *Runes* 5/85], Hall’s is the contemporary city, which he views as an absolute disaster for human spatial psychology. The more you jam people together, the more psychotic and antagonistic their behavior will become, due to intrusions within and disruptions of their personal fields. When high-density is disguised by sensory screens and barriers (such as apartment living), people become lethargic and stupid. The civilization of man has significantly muffled his FD reaction, enabling him to tolerate others within his FD radius. But if he is made fearful of others, the FD instinct can suddenly reassert itself with explosive force, resulting in the sheer savagery of inner-city crime and rioting unknown in more open environments. Hall concludes:

Man and his extensions constitute one interrelated system. It is a mistake of the greatest magnitude to act as though man were one thing and his house or his cities, his technology or his language were something else. Because of the interrelationship between man and his extensions, it behooves us to pay much more attention to what kinds of extensions we create, not only for ourselves but for others for whom they may be ill-suited. The relationship of man to his extensions is simply a continuation and a specialized form of the relationship of organisms in general to their environment. However, when an organ or process becomes extended, evolution speeds up at such a rate that it is possible for the extension to take over. This is what we see in our cities and in automation. This is what Norbert Wiener was talking about when he foresaw dangers in the computer, a specialized extension of man’s brain.<sup>1</sup> Because extensions are numb - and often dumb as well - it is necessary to build feedback/research into them so that we can know what is happening, particularly in regard to extensions that mold or substitute for the natural environment.

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<sup>1</sup> [M.A.A. comments:] *God & Golem, Inc.: A Comment on Certain Points where Cybernetics Impinges on Religion* by Norbert Wiener. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964. Wiener, who coined the term “cybernetics” in 1948, later went on to consider the ultimate implications of artificial intelligence. A series of his lectures was consolidated into this 100-page volume, which won the National Book Award. The argument is one of ethics rather than of technology.