

Deep Culture Podcast – Transcript

The Deep Culture Podcast explores the psychological impact of intercultural experiences, informed by the sciences of brain, culture and mind. Join hosts **Joseph Shaules** and **Yvonne van der Pol** as we look at the personal growth that can come from travel, living and working abroad, learning a foreign language, growing up in a multicultural context—and the challenges of bridging different cultural worlds.

(Episode 36 – Edward Hall Ahead of His Time)

This episode is a tribute to intercultural pioneer Edward T. Hall. We talk about his cultural learning journey, and why his work is so inspirational. We argue that his insights about culture and mind were 50 years ahead of his time, anticipating current research in brain-mind sciences. Featuring Daniel Glinz as the voice of Edward T. Hall.

Time	Speaker	
00:00:00	Daniel	(Hook) “Man must now embark on the difficult journey beyond culture because the greatest separation feat of all is when one gradually manages to free oneself from the grip of unconscious culture.”
00:00:21	Joseph	Hello, this is Joseph Shaules and welcome to the Deep Culture podcast, where we explore the science and psychology of intercultural understanding. And I'm here with Yvonne Van der Pol. Hello Yvonne.
00:00:34	Yvonne	Hi Joseph. Wonderful to be here again.
00:00:37	Joseph	So Yvonne, this is episode 36. We are kicking off season four.
00:00:43	Yvonne	Amazing, isn't it? We're still going strong.
00:00:47	Joseph	Yes, we are. And the Deep Culture podcast community keeps growing. That is great. So for season four, we want to focus on stories of discovery and transformation.
00:00:59	Yvonne	We will share our personal stories, but we'd like to expand on that, to share the stories for example, of intercultural research pioneers such as Richard Nisbett or Shinobu Kitayama, or explorers from the past, such as Ibn-Battuta, humanists such as Rabindranath Tagore, educators such as Jack Mezirow.
00:01:25	Joseph	These are people who inspire us. And so to kick this all off, we're going to take a deeper look at the life and learning of Edward T. Hall.
00:01:35	Yvonne	And he is the inspirational starting point for this podcast. And we've talked about him before.
00:01:42	Joseph	He's sometimes called the father of intercultural communication.
00:01:46	Yvonne	And Joseph, even people who aren't familiar with his name often know some of the ideas he pioneered. For example, monochronic or polychronic time, high context versus low context culture. And a lot more...
00:02:01	Joseph	He was interested in culture and the mind, what he called <i>unconscious culture</i> .
00:02:06	Yvonne	And now of course we have technology to help us understand unconscious cognitive function, but we're going to argue that Hall's insights were way ahead of his time.

00:02:18	Joseph	So we'll share some of his ideas, tell his story, and compare what he was saying 50 years ago with research from today.
00:02:27	Yvonne	And we are going to rely on the talents of our colleague Daniel Glinz, who has agreed to be the voice of Edward Hall today. Hi Daniel.
00:02:36	Daniel	Hello Yvonne. Hello Joseph. I'm very honored to be the voice of Edward T. Hall.
00:02:43	Yvonne	And that brings us to Part 1 - Hidden Complexity.
Part One – Hidden Complexity		
	Yvonne	Joseph, you've been a fan of Edward Hall for years.
00:03:11	Joseph	Yes, and it was through Hall that I discovered the field of intercultural communication. And even now I think of this podcast as an extension of the work that he started.
00:03:23	Yvonne	And just to remind people, let's listen back to a clip from the very first episode of the Deep Culture Podcast.
00:03:34	Joseph	Back in the 1950s and sixties when people were looking forward to their flying cars and spaceships, Edward Hall recognized that the transformational technology of the future wasn't rockets or robots, it was globalized communication and Information Technology. Hall was interested in how the unconscious mind is shaped by culture. And at the core of his work is a foundational insight which resonates 60 years after his first book. For Hall, superficial appreciation of other cultures is easy, it's interesting, but deeper intercultural understanding requires more than that. Cultural difference is not just a set of customs, it represents a different way of making sense of the world, of valuing, of being ourselves. Confronting deeper forms of cultural difference can be a shock. We're forced to question things we'd previously taken for granted. But as we expand our view of the world, we expand our mind. We transform our perceptions. Hall understood that humans are cultural beings and that to understand diversity, we have to first start by looking more deeply into ourselves.
	Joseph	Let's talk for a minute about just how unique his insights were. And I think of this in terms of hidden complexity. The functioning of our mind may feel simple, but scientists now understand clearly it's enormously complex, but that complexity is hidden by the very fact that our mind functions so smoothly.
00:05:48	Yvonne	It seems like a paradox. We may feel like our eyes are simply recording what's in the world like cameras, or that our ears just naturally hear what people say and understand their intentions. But seeing, making sense of language or understanding other people, is unimaginably complex.
00:06:11	Joseph	And Hall understood that this was true about culture as well. The complexity of culture, its influence over us, the ways that it shapes our mind. These things are powerful precisely because they are hidden.
00:06:26	Yvonne	And in his autobiography, he tells the story of how he came to these insights.

00:06:32	Joseph	And that is the story of discovery that we'd like to share today.
00:06:38	Yvonne	But first, let's give some background. Edward Twitchell Hall, Jr., his friends called him Ned, was born on May 16th, 1914 in the southern United States near St. Louis, Missouri.
00:06:54	Joseph	And Hall was trained as an anthropologist. And at first his research used traditional methodology.
00:07:01	Yvonne	But actually his story of cultural learning doesn't start there.
00:07:05	Joseph	No. And when he talks about the experiences that had the biggest impact on him, it wasn't what he learned in his anthropological training.
00:07:14	Yvonne	No, that's interesting. He talks about a time well before all that, when he was quite young, a four-year period from age 19 to 23, that was when he got a job working as construction foreman in New Mexico. The government was funding the construction of dams on Native American lands. And Edward Hall was hired to oversee some of the work being done.
00:07:40	Joseph	He was working with Native American work crews on Navajo and Hopi reservations. He had to travel to different work sites to get to know them, mend to check their progress, keep things on schedule.
00:07:53	Yvonne	But he had terrible trouble at the beginning. Work wasn't getting done, schedules weren't getting met. He felt that he wasn't getting straight information. He couldn't figure out why these things were happening.
00:08:08	Joseph	The problem was deeper than schedules or contracts. It was as though the world they were living in was different than what he was used to.
00:08:17	Yvonne	What most people do in these situations is to blame the other – “Those people are lazy” or “They just want to take advantage of me”.
00:08:27	Joseph	But even at that young age, it seems that Ned was very perceptive, non-judgmental, and he wasn't afraid to admit that he was at a loss. So he looked for help.
00:08:39	Yvonne	He befriended the owner of a trading post, someone who had been living and working in these communities for years, and he hired a Navajo assistant, Sam.
00:08:51	Joseph	And at this point he had another key insight - asking Sam to explain Navajo life wasn't enough.
00:08:59	Yvonne	The cultural patterns of everyday life are hidden from us because we take them so for granted. And not only that, the smallest of details from our everyday life can be a hint at much deeper patterns.
00:09:16	Joseph	For example, shaking hands. So let's hear what Hall says about the hidden patterns behind different ways of shaking hands. And this is from his autobiography, <i>An Anthropology of Everyday Life...</i>
00:09:31	Daniel	“In the white narcissistic culture, people have a need to attract attention to themselves. They don't do this deliberately, it's just the way we are. Out on the reservation, white males would drive up to the job sites in a world of dust, slam on the brakes and leap out of the truck, yelling instructions. Yet for the Navajo, there was another way of making an entrance. Once I had turned off the motor of my pickup, Sam and I

		would sit motionless in the cab, not saying a word, letting the dust settle and allowing the feel of the place to penetrate the very pores of our skin.”
00:10:17	Daniel	“Once the crew had mentally adjusted to the fact that we had arrived, we could then quietly descend from the cab of the pickup as though we were guests. The foreman would approach, greeting us with a smile, a yatahey and handshake - all to make us feel welcome in the proper Navajo way. The form of the handshake was also important. For white American males, the emphasis is on a firm strong handshake with direct and unblinking eye contact, one must demonstrate mutual respect, equality of status, strength, sincerity, and dependability. With the Navajo, the handshake is different. The emphasis is on proper feelings rather than image. One does not look the other in the eye. All that is necessary is to hold the human being in one's peripheral visual field while grasping his hand gently so as not to disturb the natural flow of feeling between his state of being and yours. Mental patterns of this sort are embedded in the structure of the central nervous system, which is why they are almost impossible to explain to people who have not had extensive cross-cultural experience.”
00:11:53	Yvonne	I love how Hall sees so much in the smallest of everyday actions, a handshake is not just a handshake, and these patterns are part of larger wholes. A strong American handshake has its place in a society that values individualism, it is part of a larger worldview.
00:12:16	Joseph	And these cultural patterns are complex. They exist both at the smallest scale, the slightest gesture, but also at the grand scale of societies and even civilization. So after these formative experiences, Ned went on to get a PhD in anthropology from Columbia University. He was stationed in Europe during World War II. He worked for the US State Department and he taught foreign service personnel intercultural communication skills.
00:12:48	Yvonne	And one important turning point in his story is that he left behind the traditional ways that anthropologists study culture, for example, with ethnographic interviews.
00:13:01	Joseph	Instead, he focused on what happens when people from two communities come together. In particular how different unconscious expectations create misunderstanding.
00:13:12	Yvonne	In 1959, he published the book, <i>The Silent Language</i> , considered the starting point of the study of Intercultural Communication.
00:13:22	Joseph	Another landmark book was <i>Beyond Culture</i> published in 1976.
00:13:27	Yvonne	And of course with his work, he has sold millions of copies of his books and inspired countless people.
00:13:35	Joseph	And that brings us to part two: The Visionary
Part 2: The Visionary		
00:13:55	Yvonne	So Joseph, in episode two, you told the story of how you were inspired by Hall's work. Can you tell us about it again?

00:14:04	Joseph	Well, I remember clearly being on a flight from Los Angeles to Boston about to start my master's degree program at the School for International Training in Vermont. And I had started reading <i>The Silent Language</i> on the plane.
00:14:18	Yvonne	How much international experience did you have at that time?
00:14:22	Joseph	Well, I had lived in Mexico for three years and Japan for, I don't know, five or six years.
00:14:29	Yvonne	So how were you feeling? How did you think about intercultural things?
00:14:33	Joseph	Well, living in Zacatecas, it was total exploration. I loved it. I walked cobblestone streets, I shopped in the open-air market, speaking Spanish became part of me.
00:14:44	Yvonne	Sounds like a lot of fun.
00:14:46	Joseph	Well, yes and no. On the one hand I loved all that exploration, but on the other hand, it could be stressful. It was a small city. I didn't know that many people. Uh, I was an outsider and it could feel suffocating.
00:15:02	Yvonne	And then, Japan...
00:15:05	Joseph	Which was a whole different world entirely. Japanese was so much more difficult to learn than Spanish. It turned my brain inside out. And it took so long to figure out what things mean, what people were thinking. Life in Tokyo was very different from life in Zacatecas.
00:15:22	Yvonne	Oh yes. So let's go back to your plane, right, <i>The Silent Language</i> . Do you remember your first impressions?
00:15:31	Joseph	Absolutely. I remember looking up from the page and looking out of the window of the plane. I remember thinking that his writing style was a bit tedious, but he was putting into words things that I had felt but had never been able to think about clearly and especially this idea of <i>unconscious culture</i> . So Yvonne, what has Hall's work meant to you?
00:15:57	Yvonne	It's, as you said, Hall puts into words things which I felt but couldn't explain. For example, I just took up the <i>Silent Language</i> from my bookshelf and noticed all these post-its for instance, this quote...
00:16:13	Daniel	"North Europeans and those of us who share in this culture make a distinction between whether or not a person is engaged in an activity. In fact, we distinguish between the active and dormant faces of everything - just plain sitting, trying to capture a sense of self is not considered to be doing anything. In a number of other cultures, just plain sitting is doing something."
00:16:46	Joseph	So what's your experience with that?
00:16:49	Yvonne	Well, I can definitely say that I've been raised to value activity. My parents had their own company and were always busy. Dormant faces didn't exist in their vocabulary, nor in Dutch culture at large.
00:17:04	Joseph	Well that's the image of Dutch society for sure.
00:17:08	Yvonne	On the other hand, when I did my anthropological research in small local communities in the tropical rainforest in Costa Rica, in the middle of the rainy season, I got in touch with these dormant faces, with the slower pace of life, with investing time in relationships.

00:17:28	Joseph	Well that must have been a big adjustment.
00:17:32	Yvonne	It was. But I started to understand that if you don't get to know people, any activity is doomed to fail. There was just no trust. I had to adjust to hanging out, to chat a bit, to just be amongst the others or to wait for someone to come. And then over time, I could ask questions and slowly deeper conversation started.
00:18:00	Joseph	Actually, it sounds like there are parallels with Hall's experience.
00:18:03	Yvonne	Oh yes indeed. And I often find Hall's ideas amazingly modern and applicable to current times. For example, we have talked about bias on this podcast and how we make ethnocentric judgements. This is what Hall says...
00:18:22	Daniel	"Informal patterns are seldom, if ever, made explicit. They exist like the air around us. They're either familiar, uncomfortable, or unfamiliar and wrong. Deviations from the pattern are usually greeted with highly charged emotion because people are not doing things our way."
00:18:46	Joseph	"Deviations from the pattern are usually greeted with highly charged emotion" - You know, this is so similar to the way that we have talked about cognitive biases on this podcast. So Yvonne, let me confess a bias that I have.
00:19:02	Yvonne	Great, go ahead.
00:19:04	Joseph	Well intercultural training and education often talks about foreign experiences in practical terms - etiquette, more efficient collaboration, better communication...
00:19:15	Yvonne	You often hear the term intercultural competence and intercultural insight is treated more or less like a practical skill.
00:19:23	Joseph	Right. And this frustrates me because understanding the cultural nature of human beings is so much more than having effective meetings. And Hall was not afraid to ask big questions, to explore hidden parts of the self, of the challenges faced by humankind.
00:19:43	Yvonne	On the one hand, he had a deep interest in psychology and the unconscious mind. Cultural learning was related to self-understanding. But on the other hand, he had this very global vision. This, for example, is from his book <i>Beyond Culture</i> ...
00:20:01	Daniel	"A man must now embark on the difficult journey beyond culture because the greatest separation feat of all is when one gradually manages to free oneself from the grip of unconscious culture."
00:20:17	Yvonne	And also this one...
00:20:20	Daniel	"Understanding ourselves and the world we have created and which in turn creates us is perhaps the single most important task facing mankind today."
00:20:34	Yvonne	And to think that he published this book in 1976!
00:20:40	Joseph	Which brings us to part three: Hall Ahead of His Time.
Part 3: Hall Ahead of His Time		
00:21:01	Yvonne	We have said that Hall was ahead of his time. So let's talk about what we

		mean by that.
00:21:07	Joseph	Well first, some background: Hall was interested in the unconscious mind. But when he was writing from for example, the 1950s to the 1970s, there was little understanding of how the brain worked.
00:21:21	Yvonne	Most commonly in those days, people thought of the unconscious mind as described by Sigmund Freud, as this realm of animal urges or shameful desires.
00:21:33	Joseph	But in the last 30 years or so, technology has allowed us to get a better understanding of cognitive processes. And we now know that the unconscious mind is much more complex than we imagined.
00:21:46	Yvonne	So Hall being ahead of this time means that his ideas about culture and mind are often quite close to our current understanding, and were very unusual for someone of his era.
00:22:00	Joseph	So let's give some examples. Hall recognized, uh, what cultural neuroscience has confirmed that culture shapes our mental processes in important ways. The brain is not simply an information system full of cultural knowledge. Cognitive processes themselves are shaped by culture. In other words, humans are cultural by nature.
00:22:26	Yvonne	Or as Hall says...
00:22:28	Daniel	"There are deep cultural differences that must be recognized before one can arrive at the underlying human nature we all share."
00:22:38	Yvonne	Or when he says...
00:22:40	Daniel	"What has been thought of as mind is actually internalized culture."
00:22:47	Joseph	And remember when telling the story about handshakes with his Navajo workers, he said...
00:22:53	Daniel	"Mental patterns of this sort are embedded in the structure of the central nervous system, which is why they're almost impossible to explain to people who have not had extensive cross-cultural experience."
00:23:08	Yvonne	And this is remarkable. Hall was talking about the cultural patterns of minds in an embodied way as integral to our physical being - not just a behavior or custom. But this is exactly what specialists are saying today.
00:23:27	Joseph	For example, Shinobu Kitayama, a top researcher in this area says, "Brain patterns are shaped by a variety of cultural and environmental inputs. And genes somehow interact with this relationship. The resulting product is thus sociocultural as much as it is biological."
00:23:49	Yvonne	So Kitayama is saying that culture, body and genes all interact with each other to shape the functioning of the brain. An idea that would not have surprised Hall at all. Let's give another example. Hall understood that the unconscious mind is not primitive at all. It handles very complex tasks intuitively and it is shaped by culture. In other words, our behavior is guided unconsciously by cultural patterns.
00:24:20	Joseph	And here is what Hall says...
00:24:23	Daniel	"Once learned these behavior patterns gradually sink below the surface of the mind, and like the admiral of a submerged submarine fleet

		controlled from the depths.”
00:24:37	Yvonne	Hall is referring to being controlled by hidden forces, the admiral in a submarine controlling things from below. On this podcast, we refer to this as the intuitive mind, or by using the metaphor of our mental autopilot.
00:24:55	Joseph	The mental autopilot is really similar to Hall's image, uh, which refers to being controlled by forces that we are unaware of.
00:25:06	Yvonne	But this is what the science is telling us.
00:25:09	Joseph	Now, I first heard the idea of the mental autopilot from the cognitive psychologist Timothy Wilson, and he researches unconscious mental processes. And he says, “The mind operates most efficiently by relegating a good deal of high level sophisticated thinking to the unconscious. Just as a modern jumbo jet liner is able to fly on automatic pilot with little or no input from the human conscious pilot.”
00:25:41	Yvonne	And we have talked about this before, we rely on our autopilot from the moment we wake up. We brush our teeth on autopilot, we make small talk on autopilot. It manages 1,001 daily activities, and is shaped by culture.
00:25:59	Joseph	And this helps us understand culture shock as well because the patterns of our autopilot don't match the patterns in a new cultural environment.
00:26:09	Yvonne	It's autopilot overload actually. One more thing. Let's touch upon Hall's insight into cultural differences in cognition. In other words, our mental processes are influenced by culture.
00:26:24	Joseph	And there's a lot of research now to show us that I'm thinking for example, of the work of Richard Nisbett or Shinobu Kitayama.
00:26:32	Yvonne	As Kitayama says, “Over the last several years, researchers have produced a sizable body of empirical literature showing different brain activity patterns across cultures when individuals perform certain psychological tasks.”
00:26:51	Joseph	And this research is related to things like information processing, emotion regulation, the experience of self.
00:26:59	Yvonne	And there is Edward Hall, years before this kind of research was being done, saying the same thing...
00:27:08	Daniel	“We have been taught to think linearly rather than comprehensively. And we do this not through conscious design or because we are not intelligent or capable, but because of the way in which deep cultural undercurrents structure life in subtle but highly consistent ways.”
00:27:29	Joseph	Hall is saying that our cognitive processes are shaped by the cultural patterns of our environment, which is precisely what research is showing.
00:27:39	Yvonne	Another of Hall's insights relates to what is now called <i>predictive processing</i> .
00:27:44	Joseph	And we have talked about this before. It refers to our mind's reliance on previous experience to shape our response to the world. Our mind is a predictive machine, so to speak.

00:27:57	Yvonne	And this is what Hall had to say about this...
00:28:01	Daniel	“People's nervous systems are organized according to the principle of negative feedback. That is, the whole thing works so smoothly and automatically that the only time the control system is consciously brought into play is when the input signals deviate from the norm. Therefore, people are for the most part, unaware of the patterns and reference signals governing behavior.”
00:28:32	Joseph	So Hall had identified the way in which our mind is always anticipating what comes next and notices anomalies. This is something we talk about in terms of the <i>Oz moment</i> or some people call culture bumps. These little surprises that we have when in a foreign environment.
00:28:51	Yvonne	Wow, we have covered a lot here and we need to close, but I don't think we should end on a technical note, Joseph, because for me, Hall's contribution was not simply insight into cognitive function, it was his larger vision.
00:29:07	Joseph	Yes he really was a humanitarian. Uh, and he believed that foreign experiences bring us face-to-face with parts of ourselves that we're unaware of.
00:29:18	Yvonne	And because of that, deep cultural experiences are really about understanding ourselves and growing as a human being and that this is a challenge faced by humankind.
00:29:32	Joseph	And in this podcast we talk about that as learning to be a cultural bridge person so we can reach across these cultural gaps.
00:29:41	Yvonne	And so today we have been telling the story of Edward Hall's cultural learning journey. And in the months to come, we'll explore the journeys of other people as well.
00:29:53	Joseph	So today we refer to the work of Edward T. Hall, his book, <i>The Silent Language</i> , his book <i>Beyond Culture</i> and his autobiography, <i>An Anthropology of Everyday Life</i> . We also mentioned Shinobu Kitayama - his article was <i>Mapping Mindsets: The World of Cultural Neuroscience</i> , and also Timothy Wilson, his book, <i>Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering The Adaptive Unconscious</i> . The Deep Culture Podcast is sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute. Check out JII'S Brain Mind and Culture Masterclass. It's a blended learning course and online community of cultural bridge people. And it is facilitated by Yvonne and I. The next session starts in October. To find out more, just do a web search for the Japan Intercultural Institute and follow us on social media and you can also contact us through JII's website. Special thanks to Daniel Glinz for being the voice of Edward Hall. Thanks also to our sound engineer Robinson Fritz and the rest of the podcast team – Ishita Ray, Zeina Matar, Emre Seven, Ikumi Fritz and everyone at JII. And of course, as always, thanks to you Yvonne, for sharing this time with me.
00:31:15	Yvonne	Thanks to you too, Joseph. It was a joy being here and kicking off season four together.