

DECEPTION

Deception is a transaction in which one person or group pretends to be addressing another in good faith but is in fact deceiving the other, and lying to them.

Most of us are regularly reliable. Consider the daily back and flow of language in the open African market place. This functional chaos of verbiages, called phatic communion by linguists, serves basic purposes—denotes for the marketers the price of eggs, the availability of cabbage, the time for the next shipment of cardboard boxes. By and large such communication may be assumed to be free of deception.

Take, at a next level up, the language exchanged among appropriately sophisticated guests at a party in London, where upper level employees of a banking firm have gathered for cocktails on the management. (An Aldous Huxley novel, no?) Drinks and smart talk flow, but what is said means more than what appears on the surface. What is said is not precisely deceptive, yet to determine true intentions under its language surface requires constant vigilance. Is Peter Barnes really looking like top level quality, or is it that suppressed giggle at the end of her query the true key to Agnes' attitude?

At the ultimate level of gamesmanship, subtlety and verbal skill comes diplomacy, in which both deception and mutual understanding are put to play. (Throw in humor, too, for the games great diplomats play cannot be brought to completion without a sense of humour.) On this level, depending on the theme, peninsulas are traded for islands, narrow maritime channels for mountain ranges. The stakes are high. Deception comes to the fore, as the name of the game, but it is deception that will never reveal its identity as deceptive.