



The Dynamic Dance: Nonvocal Communication in African Great Apes

Barbara J. King

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Mother and infant negotiate over food; two high-status males jockey for power; female kin band together to get their way. It happens among humans and it happens among our closest living relatives in the animal kingdom, the great apes of Africa. In this eye-opening book, we see precisely how such events unfold in chimpanzees, bonobos, and gorillas: through a spontaneous, mutually choreographed dance of actions, gestures, and vocalizations in which social partners create meaning and come to understand each other.

Using dynamic systems theory, an approach employed to study human communication, Barbara King is able to demonstrate the genuine complexity of apes' social communication, and the extent to which their interactions generate meaning. As King describes, apes create meaning primarily through their body movements--and go well beyond conveying messages about food, mating, or predators. Readers come to know the captive apes she has observed, and others across Africa as well, and to understand "the process of creating social meaning."

This new perspective not only acquaints us with our closest living relatives, but informs us about a possible pathway for the evolution of language in our own species. King's theory challenges the popular idea that human language is instinctive, with rules and abilities hardwired into our brains. Rather, *The Dynamic Dance* suggests, language has its roots in the gestural "building up of meaning" that was present in the ancestor we shared with the great apes, and that we continue to practice to this day.

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