

This does not imply that animals evince no curiosity. It is well known that chimpanzees as individuals are very intrigued by anything new. When one of them stares into the distance, other chimpanzees will look in the same direction. However, they do not make a point of sharing their surprise with others (Call, Hare, and Tomasello 1998). Animals can communicate their emotional and physiological states, their intentions, their presence, their identity, events both concrete (food) and negative (predators), but they have never been described as drawing attention to events whose sole property is that they are unusual or unexpected.<sup>9</sup> Our own way of communicating, which consists of noticing occurrences that run counter to our expectations and telling about them, draws on subtle mechanisms. For instance, in order to appreciate the importance of the event recounted, one must have some idea of the frequency of occurrence of analogous events. On being told that a neighbour owns an XBS45, for example, if you have no idea how many people own such cars, you have no way of gauging whether there is anything noteworthy in what you have just learned, and if you catch sight of one of these cars in your neighbourhood, you will probably not see it as something worth telling to other people. A notion of rarity can be deduced from frequency; but it can also come from one's knowledge of the world. We know, for instance, that it must be unusual for a sports car to be equipped with a tow bar, as we have reason to suspect that the two do not go together.

The fact that storytelling focuses on rare or unexpected occurrences can be verified by observing good narrators. There is an art to the recounting of happenings in a way that captures the interest of one's audience, which entails both laying stress on some details and overemphasizing some others so as to enhance the unlikely character of what is being retailed.

Our narrative method in communication can be defined as Shannon's method. Claude Elwood Shannon revolutionized communication theory with his definition of the idea of information (Shannon 1948). According to this concept, the more unlikely an occurrence seems, the more information it affords. This conception of information has led to a redesign of the functioning of telecommunication systems in ways which increased

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that theories based on conditioning see any such behaviour as impossible, since only situations that recur with some regularity can lead to learning and hence to behaviours.