

Editorial Commentary

Acknowledgments

1. 'Free Expression, or the Teaching of Techniques' (*infra* pp. 1-10), first appeared in JASHM Vol. 2, No. 2: 89-98. It was originally published in the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, October 1979. Reprinted with permission of editor.
2. 'Physical Education is for Human Beings' (*infra* pp. 11-15) first appeared in JASHM 6(4): 141-145. Reprinted with permission of author.
3. 'Body, Mind and Sport' (*infra* pp. 16-29) first appeared in JASHM Vol. 7, No 4 : 201-218. It is a slightly revised and extended version of a keynote address delivered at the Olympic Congress in Oregon, which preceded the Olympic Games in California in 1984. Reprinted with permission of author.
4. 'Educating Artistic Response: Understanding is Feeling' (*infra* pp. 30-41) first appeared in *Curriculum* Vol.15, No.1, 1994. Reprinted with permission of editors.
5. 'Symbolism and the Meaning of Movement' (*infra* pp.42-54) first appeared in the *CORD* [Congress on Research in Dance] *Dance Research Annual X*, pp. 81-92, 1979. Reprinted with permission of editor.

Chronologically, item number five in the above list should appear as number one in this collection of David Best's contributions to JASHM. The decision was taken to place it last, however, because it discusses in depth two subjects that are raised in essays 1 - 4, i.e. dualism and symbolism, and because it has not appeared previously in JASHM.

The lists of references for all five essays have been assembled into one bibliography (see p. 55), and we have appended a list of suggested further readings most useful to anthropologists of human movement. We use footnotes throughout, and (since modern technology now permits such niceties), the essays are reprinted using British spelling.

It is always a pleasure to discuss David Best's work, and in this issue we celebrate the time span of twenty years that marks David's meeting with the original group of students who studied the anthropology of human movement with Drid Williams at New York University. David has had a seventeen-year-long association with JASHM. The Journal started in 1980. Best's first contribution appeared in 1982. It is the desire to share our pleasure and the conviction that his contributions will be more easily understood if they are available in a single issue of the Journal that inspired the creation of a special issue devoted to his work.

Not the least of the pleasures is Best's pithy sense of humour that readers will often discover in short sentences ending serious arguments, i.e. "But to suppose the difficulty to be of that kind is as misconceived as it would be to suppose that great effort and ingenuity would be required to construct a four-sided triangle" (p. 47-8). Or, "[I]t inevitably has to rely *implicitly* on precisely the objectivity of meaning which it is *explicitly* trying to deny. It tries to saw off the branch on which it is sitting" (p. 48). Or, "Thus, on a cold night one could say: 'Don't bother to go to the concert. Stay at home and read this poem which expressed the same experience even better than the symphony' " (p. 6).

It is gratifying to read serious arguments laced with witty remarks that contribute to further comprehension. In Best's case, his wit is a measure of his profound understanding of human movement.

Apart from a sense of humor, there is the pleasure of clear, simple and elegant writing. He says on page 19, for example, "the crux of my case is that what we see, normally, is a human being, not a physical machine which may contain a ghostly thing called a mind. *To take the human being as basic, rather than a physical body, may seem difficult to grasp* (italics added)..." but that is precisely what he wants his readers to do.

Moreover, Best's arguments are based on sound reasoning, not rhetoric, charisma or special pleading. And, he often takes readers unaware: for example, in Item 4: *Educating Artistic Response: Understanding is Feeling*, the essay begins with deceptively simple observations regarding the educational value of the arts. No one will be surprised to read about old assumptions, i.e. "artistic experience lacks genuine intellectual content," or "the arts are concerned with feeling, rather than with cognition or understanding." Or "[T]he arts are often regarded as of low academic content, and hopelessly subjective" (p. 30). However, they are likely to be surprised to learn that the lowly status of the arts in education is part and parcel of "doctrinaire articles of faith by the *supporters* of the arts" (italics added).

It is unusual for an author to attribute the problems of art to its practitioners and supporters -- not to detractors, those who would belittle, diminish or minimize artists and their work. However, Best doesn't ask us to deal with detractors, he asks us to examine the mind-sets and presumptions of art's *supporters* -- who consistently defeat their own case.

The arts will never be taken seriously while their proponents assert that, unlike the sciences, the arts are concerned with mysterious, unintelligible realms and/or are answerable solely to occult 'inner' feelings which give access to a transcendental Aesthetic universal. It is this kind of woolly, supernatural mystery-mongering which understandably gives the arts the dismissive reputation as airy fairy and educationally irrelevant (p. 32).

These damaging ideas are "educationally fatal subjectivist assumptions." This is what *Artistic Response* is all about.

Subjective - Objective

Best identifies one of the fundamental sources for such assumptions: "the continuing general influence of logical positivism or its heirs" (see last paragraph, p. 30 and first paragraph, p. 31).

Instead of exposing the deep and seductive fallacies of this conception most arts theorists implicitly accept it, and 'support' the arts in terms which either repudiate cognition and rationality as characteristic of artistic experience, or, what is equally disastrous, posit supposed kinds of reason and cognition which refer to the occult or supernatural metaphysics. In both cases such proponents of the arts often do not recognize their implicit acceptance of the positivist foundation-assumption which

holds that, for instance, whereas scientific propositions are supportable by normally intelligible reasons, the arts are outside the province of normal rationality. Hence the common cliché, which is a banner of educationally self-defeating subjectivism, that the arts are a matter of feeling, not of reason (p. 31).

He is also careful to point out that his

[A]rgument is certainly not against science. It is rather against *scientism*, by which I mean the confused and grossly distorting assumption that the sciences can tell us everything that can be known, or at least is of any value, about human movement. ... To put the point another way, scientism consists in regarding the sciences as the only conveyors of the truth (page 11).

He is always careful to point out exactly what it is that is under discussion:

There are two technical terms I cannot avoid: dualism and behaviourism. ... The dualist conception is that there are two basic and distinct entities in which human beings consist, a mind and a body, or mental stuff and physical stuff ... for the behaviourist, mental experience just is, or can be reduced to, physical behaviour ... (page 16).

More important, perhaps, he spells out the problem that any form of deeply embedded dualistic thinking represents to someone who does not hold such ideas:

[I]f I criticise dualism I am assumed to be a behaviourist, and if I criticise behaviourism I am assumed to be a dualist. In fact I am equally opposed to each. It is worth emphasizing too that *my position is not midway between them, but is a different position altogether*" (pages 16 - italics added).

"The aim of criticism is understanding" (p. 37)

But we wonder how many people in today's world really believe that? A so-called "politically correct" viewpoint seems to hold that *any* criticism whatsoever is some kind of "bashing" which attacks the nature and/or character of the person. Philosophically, of course, such attacks are simply regarded as *ad hominem arguments*¹ serving to destroy whatever credibility the speaker or writer may have had prior to using them. Best is never guilty of this, even in his extended criticisms of Peter Abbs's thesis about aesthetic experience (pages 32-39).

To those who wonder why Best's work is so important to anthropologists of human movement, two answers to their questions may be found on page 4 where the author discusses two major subjectivist misconceptions about the nature of individuality.

1. "It is easy enough to understand that a society is necessarily composed of individual people, but much more difficult to understand the converse relation which is of far greater significance ... namely the way in which individual personality is logically

¹ Literally, 'argument against the man'. We would now say, 'argument against the person'.

dependent on the language and practices of a society. ... [N]o sense could be made of the notion of the individual apart from that language and those practices" (p. 4).

2. "Central to the common misconception on this issue is an oversimplified notion of individual personality as an entity logically distinct from its social context. That is, there is an implicit tendency to think of the real person ... his essential individuality, as that which underlies and is independent of 'extraneous' factors such as the social practices in which he engages. ... The individual personality is not something other than what he does and says (p. 4).

The relation to language and social practices is a foundational social anthropological insight, making Best's work a powerful supplement to those who enter the anthropology of human movement studies, not from the disciplines of philosophy or linguistics, but from sociocultural anthropology. This by no means suggests that philosophy should become an "underlabourer" (Winch 1958: 3) to the social sciences.

What we do suggest is that there are strong lines of continuity and agreement in Best's work that are invaluable to graduate students and scholars trying to grapple with the complexities of human movement study. Winch states the main reason why, in our view, Best's work is invaluable: "For any worthwhile study of society must be philosophical in character and any worthwhile philosophy must be concerned with the nature of human society" (1958: 3).

The Editors