

Editorial Comments

The papers in this issue of JASHM by Valerie Barske, Brenda Farnell and Charles Varela were first presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans, November 20th, 2002. The panel was entitled, "Exploring the Senses and Semiosis," organized by Brenda Farnell and Martin Manalansan (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign).

The panel also included papers by Jonathan Jackson and Marjorie Franklin (both published in JASHM Volume 12, no.2) as well as Martin Manalansan ("Olfactory signs and Asian-American identity) and Angela Shand ("The Sign of the Cross: Theology, Personhood and Liturgical Performance in the Greek Orthodox Church"). Although unable to be present in person, Rom Harré was kind enough to provide some thought provoking written comments on the papers.

In Farnell's introductory comments for the AAA session, she notes that the idea for the panel emerged from her observation that recent attention to the topic of embodiment in anthropological theorizing appears to have resulted in an incompatibility or, at the very least, a tension between two distinct approaches. On the one hand there are approaches that privilege a phenomenology of lived being (experience). On the other, are those that emphasize meaning-making through processes of semiosis. The discourses don't seem to be commensurable; that is, phenomenologically inspired authors tend to dismiss semiotic approaches to the body as "intellectualist" and disembodied, while those inspired by semiosis criticize phenomenological inquiry as privileging an experiential body and a bodily intentionality separate from 'mind', rather than the agency of the whole embodied *person*.

For example, in 1983, the anthropologist Michael Jackson outlined a phenomenological approach to bodily praxis for anthropology that utilized Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "body subject" and the experiential lived body. His main contention was that the anthropology of the body had been "vitiating by a tendency to interpret embodied experience in terms of cognitive and linguistic models of meaning." (Jackson 1983: 122). He positioned semiotic or semantic approaches to bodily meaning-making as *necessarily* representational, reductionist, intellectualist and Cartesian in that they "detached the knowing and speaking subject from an unknowing inert body." He was against speaking of bodily movement as symbolizing ideas conceived independently of it, and found it misleading to see the body as simply a representation of a prior idea or implicit cultural pattern such that "meaning" was located outside of what people say and do.

In 1994 and 1995, Charles Varela criticized Jackson's interpretation and use of Merleau-Ponty as philosophically self-serving. Varela argued that in dismissing language from any connection with the body subject, Jackson was, in fact, unable to realize a solution to Merleau-Ponty's eventual problem of trying to connect gesture with language. Varela found Williams's semasiological theory, inspired by Saussurian semiology, with its post-

Cartesian articulation of dynamically embodied human being, more fruitful—even when it came to realizing Merleau-Ponty's goals!

Varela's paper in this issue presupposes and builds upon his earlier papers on embodiment, focusing on contrasts between the paradigms of embodiment at work in the phenomenological approach of Csordas and Jackson with the semasiological approach of Williams and Farnell. He uses Merleau-Ponty's own work to suggest that Williams, Farnell, and Merleau-Ponty are all emphasizing the embodiment of the *doing* and not simply the *feeling* of that embodied doing: "It is in this precise sense that it can be said that the paradigm of dynamic embodiment [Williams and Farnell] stands today as one way to realize the full significance of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodied consciousness." He notes that "talk *about* the [objective] body, talk *of* the [experience of] the body and talk *from* the body" are not ontologically incompatible, but rather genuine agentive alternatives, different kinds of discursive, semiotic practices (see also Farnell 1994).

Jackson was certainly correct to criticize dualistic representational theories of meaning in which a sign "stands for" something outside of itself, as well as those that reduce the body to a medium of expression or an object of purely mental operations—a 'thing' onto which social patterns are projected. However, in retrospect, we can see that his "experiential phenomenology" failed to provide a satisfactory ontological solution to the Cartesian mind/body problem.

Rather than renounce the semantic and symbolic as necessarily intellectualist, Farnell's paper suggests that we reconfigure meaning-making processes of all kinds along non-Cartesian lines. She posits variable modes of "sensory semiosis"—processes of meaning-making in multiple sensory modalities (sound, vision, touch, taste, smell and kinesthesia)—as providing cultural resources by means of which dynamically embodied persons act and interact. Such a sensory semiosis does not separate language or privilege linguistic models, but rather expands the term "discourse" to include non-propositional forms of meaning making. Embodied discourses are produced by causally empowered embodied agents in cultural practices and the meanings of such discourses are not taken to reside in some predetermining social or psychological essence, but in the contexts and consequences of their use.

Barske's paper, also grounded in semasiology, provides a rich ethnographic account of how a traditional Okinawan dance called *nuchibana* was utilized for contemporary political purposes by a group called "Okinawan Hands for Peace." She documents how they sought not only to transform their immediate local environment, but also hoped to reach an international audience at a United Nations conference in The Hague. The performers relied on the power of visual-kinesthetic actions and rhythmic audio sounds to share their message with other organizations in the peace movement. Their efficient use of costuming and props suggests that OHP activists were mindful of the power and importance of such multi-sensory appeals, outside of any understanding of specific action signs. The traditional signifier/signified relationships of action signs in *nuchibana* were dispensable in this context and

could be reconfigured to suit the political goals, as well as the international audience.

Additional aspects of the theoretical incompatibility referred to above play themselves out in recent anthropological attention to the senses. For example, Ingold suggests that the anthropology of the senses in the work of scholars such as Howes (1991) and Classen (1993) seems determined to leave lived sensory experience behind in the search for *what it stands for*, namely the incorporeal 'ideas' and 'beliefs' of a culture. He criticizes approaches that perpetuate a representationalist theory of knowledge, according to which people draw upon the raw material of bodily sensations to build up an internal picture of the world 'out there' on the basis of models or schema (cf. Farnell 1996). Ingold argues that such approaches provide an anthropology of the senses fully committed to Cartesian body/mind dualism. Ingold calls instead for investigators to be concerned with "varieties of sensory experience" generated in the course of people's "practical, bodily engagement with the world around them." He contrasts this with approaches that focus on "how this experience might be ordered and made meaningful with cultural concepts and categories" Ingold (2000: 283). Whilst we agree with Ingold's overall anti-Cartesian position, we would want to argue that attention to cultural—or at least systematic—features of embodied action, such as spatial orientations and taxonomies of the body, provide actors with important resources that inform their bodily engagement with the world. The post-Cartesian theoretical move in this regard is to avoid mentalist discourses that reify or disembodify such shared resources and thereby bifurcate the dynamically embodied person.

We thus find a number of problematic dualisms emerging in the current literature between the body and its senses; between the cognitive rather than the existential ground of culture; between the expressive rather than the practical significance of sensory experience; and between the senses as metaphorical/symbolic resources for the expression of extra-somatic cultural values and the senses as somatic knowledge. Ethnographic evidence illustrates that this division of labor has more to do with traditional Western taxonomies of personhood and concepts of 'knowledge' *versus* 'experience' than analytic categories fruitful to anthropological enquiry. The papers in the panel sought to explore various aspects of these tensions through theoretical discussion and ethnographic example. They explored how meaning-making processes of all kinds constitute dynamically embodied social action, such that the lived experience of being—the feeling of doing—is not separated from the action of practice.

The Editors

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