

## Editorial Comments

This issue continues the JASHM tradition of presenting theoretical, ethnographic and critical perspectives on the anthropology of human movement.

The issue begins with a stimulating paper by Charles Varela, a regular contributor to JASHM, entitled "Harré and Merleau-Ponty: Beyond the Absent Moving Body in Embodied Social Theory." As the title suggests, Varela argues that most attempts to include "the body" in contemporary social theorizing—what might be called a somatic turn—have failed to take the *moving* body into account. He proposes ways of going beyond this toward a conception of *dynamic* embodiment. In his rigorous critical examination he finds that neither Harré nor Merleau-Ponty provides us with such a conception, despite the fact that their respective standpoints call for, and internally permit the idea. For example, while Harré includes "physical being" in his concept of embodied personhood, he never sought to include *moving* being, i.e., human persons in movement. Yet "being human, in being physical, is necessarily moving-being (Farnell 1994)" (this issue, page 79)

Likewise, Merleau-Ponty sought to overcome the problems of Cartesian mind-body dualism by privileging the "lived body" and "flesh," but Varela assesses this conception of embodiment as sensitizing rather than definitive: "...the body is more than the experience and the feeling, or even the perception, of doing. There is *the doing itself—the movement*" (page 67). This omission means that Merleau-Ponty's philosophical perspective can only be considered transitional. Varela concludes, "It is the radical idea of human movement *as signifying acts* that can take us beyond the contemporary situation in which the moving body remains absent from embodied social theory" (page 68). This presumes Williams's concept of the "action sign" (Williams 1979: 178-207), and thus locates semasiology where it belongs at the forefront of anthropological theories of human embodiment.

The second paper, entitled "The Movement of American Infantry in Anthropological Perspective" applies a semasiological perspective to military movement. The author, Frank Tortorello Jr., first identifies a number of problems with the location of agency in historical accounts of military action and turns to anthropological and ethnographic resources for richer, more plausible explanations. In rejecting various forms of biological reductionism (i.e., claims that military action is instinctive, emotional, and/or irrational), he maintains that "military movement, specifically the parade ground drills and battlefield postures of Western infantry, are best understood as embodied cultural values enacted by persons. As such, they persist historically and differ cross-culturally in fascinating ways" (page 87). Tortorello says,

In contrast to the [reductionist explanations] above, I will argue that socio-cultural anthropology can provide more satisfying explanations of military action based on the proper alignment of biological and cultural aspects of human being. More specifically, I proceed from the perspective of

semasiological theory, which accepts biology as a necessary *ground for* human agency but not as a deterministic mechanism that can account for human social behavior. Certainly, without a biological body one cannot have a human person. However, semasiological theory denies that the “real” explanation of human behavior and its significance is to be found in, for example, genes, the adrenal system, or the brain. Active human beings are defined, not in terms of putative bio-psychological mechanisms, but as embodied, agentic, meaning-makers who are also language-users [see Williams 1982]. (This issue, page 89)

We look forward to further contributions from Tortorello as he develops this work ethnographically through field research with members of the contemporary American military and with combat veterans.

A review essay by Drid Williams follows which examines a book by sociological dance scholar Helen Thomas, entitled, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory* (2004). Williams identifies problems that stem from Thomas’s heavy reliance on the work of sociologist Bryan Turner (and hence also Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology), and Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*. A third problem arises from Thomas’s adherence to an ontological position that denies dance works any duration in time outside of a performance (“as it comes into being in performance so it is gone” (Thomas, page 122). Unfortunately the book fails to achieve its goal of making connections between the recent and burgeoning interest in the body by social and cultural analysts and studies of various dance forms.

The Editors