

Editorial Introduction

This issue of JASHM is devoted to the topic of spatial orientation. In this issue, we present four articles of historical value. A subsequent issue will focus on more recent contributions. This editorial introduces readers to ways in which this subject is handled by anthropologists of human movement and some linguistic anthropologists. It situates the selected articles theoretically and historically.

Spatial Orientation

The spaces in which human acts occur are not simply physical spaces. They are simultaneously physical, conceptual, moral and ethical spaces.

Drid Williams (1995: 52).

For anthropologists of human movement, concepts of space and spatial orientation have consistently provided a central focus for research. As Williams puts it

Spatial orientation is so fundamental a feature of what we consider to be reality ... that semasiologists believe it forms the core of intersubjective understanding. ... [It] is the conceptual groundwork on which intelligent intersubjective relations with other people(s) are based (1995: 51-2).

Recognizing the implicit, unexamined, nature of most people's spatial awareness, Williams also notes

In ordinary life, each individual's orientation to his or her personal, subjective space and to the physical spaces that are shared with others is usually taken for granted. Our received education with regard to spatial orientation tends simply to happen or to grow somehow, along with learning whatever language one was born into and its associated codes of everyday behavior. ... Whatever we grow up with is just "there" — as a kind of lived just-so story perhaps. Whatever it is that we learn (and then later amend through travel or study of various kinds ...) is what we settle for, partly because nothing else is available and partly because spatial orientation has never achieved a very prominent place in Western education (1995: 51).

American anthropologist Edward T. Hall would most certainly agree, since it was his contribution that first made cultural differences in spatial distancing more explicit, and so brought 'space' to the attention of cultural anthropologists and others in the 1960s. Hence, the first essay we have chosen for this special issue of JASHM is Hall's "Space Speaks," first published in his popular book, *The Silent Language* (1959).

Hall

Hall worked for the United States State Department in the 1950s teaching intercultural communications skills to foreign service personnel. In 1963, he introduced the term 'proxemics' to describe the distances people maintain between each other as they interact.¹ He noted that different cultures maintain different norms for using personal space. In Latin cultures, for instance, relative distances are smaller, and people tend to be more comfortable standing close to each other; in Nordic cultures the opposite is true. Hall maintained that realizing

and recognizing these cultural differences could improve cross-cultural understanding, and help eliminate the discomfort people may feel if the interpersonal distance is too large ('stand-offish') or too small (intrusive).

Hall postulated that there are socially established zones of space surrounding individuals, generally out of awareness, that influence and may even determine, daily interactions. His thesis was that *social distance* between people can be correlated with physical distance, and he suggested four categories:

- intimate distance:** for embracing, touching or whispering
- personal distance:** for interactions among good friends
- social distance:** for interactions among acquaintances
- public distance:** used for public speaking

From our current perspective, we can also recognize that Hall added the crucial component of 'space' to studies of embodied interaction and 'non-verbal communication' at that time, a feature that was entirely absent from Birdwhistell's 'kinesic' approach to body movement, for example. When comparing the two approaches we can see that

Kinesics and Proxemics provided important sensitizing constructs in the 1960s and 1970s. They raised new questions and suggested a framework that could be developed by later investigators. Problems arose in the two approaches, however, from the separation of body motion and space. Kinesic motions of the body exist in a spatial vacuum, whereas proxemic zones of space are empty of the dynamically embodied action that structures their meaning. It is dynamically embodied action within structured spaces that we wish to account for. In retrospect we see that this separation was possible because both approaches take an observationist rather than an agentic perspective on action (Farnell 1999: 351-352).

Hallowell

The second essay in this issue is "Cultural Factors in Spatial Orientation" by A. Irving Hallowell, first published in *Culture and Experience* (1955) and reprinted in *Symbolic Anthropology* (Dolgen, et. al. 1977). This wide ranging paper addresses a number of theoretical issues of central importance at that time and since, such as universalism versus cultural relativism, and innate versus learned factors in perception and spatial orientation. This is well illustrated in the following paragraph:

Spatially, like temporally, coordinated patterns of behavior are basic to the personal adjustment of all human beings. They involve fundamental dimensions of experience and are a necessary condition of psychological maturity and social living. Without the capacity for space perception, spatial orientation and the manipulation of spatial concepts, the human being would be incapable of effective locomotion, to say nothing of being unable to coordinate other aspects of his [sic] behavior with that of his fellows in a common social life. In addition to the psycho-physical and psycho-physiological conditions of human space perception, we know that variations occur, between one culture and another with respect to the selective emphasis given to the spatial relations and attributes of things, and degree of refinement that occurs in the concepts employed, and the reference points that are selected for spatial orientation. The human individual is always provided with some culturally constituted means that are among the conditions which enable him to participate with his fellows in a world whose spatial attributes are, in part, conceptualized and expressed in common terms. Ontogenetically, self-

orientation, object-orientation, and spatio-temporal orientation are concomitantly developed during the process of socialization (this issue, page 15).

Hallowell draws upon both philosophy and psychology to discuss the issues at hand, but his work is also solidly grounded in his ethnographic field research among the indigenous American Indian nation, the Anishinabe (Ojibwe).²

Hallowell was ahead of his time in stressing the *symbolic* dimensions of spatialization in human worlds:

The human being not only advances from a rudimentary to a more complex level of spatial orientation and mobility; the possibility is opened to him [or her] through various kinds of symbolic means to become oriented in a spatial world that transcends his personal experience. Place naming, star naming, maps, myth and tale, the orientation of buildings, the spatial implications in dances and ceremonies, all facilitate the construction and maintenance of the spatial patterns of the world in which the individual must live and act (this issue, page 17).

Haugan

Eingar Haugan's paper, "The Semantics of Icelandic Spatial Orientation" (1969) is included here, in part, because it provided an important contribution to the recovery of *cognitive* factors in socio-cultural anthropology as well as drawing attention to the symbolic nature of meaning-making. This was an important move away from the behaviorism that was so prevalent in American social sciences during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Haugan begins the article with a critique of Bloomfieldian linguistics, which, according to the empiricist principles of behaviourism, had eliminated semantics (meaning) from linguistic research altogether on the grounds that since 'meaning' could not be observed it was not a valid subject for scientific inquiry!

At the beginning of the article, Haugan makes reference to several misguided attempts to classify and categorize meaningful units — both linguistic and non-linguistic — as 'semes.' He then embarks on a subtle challenge to this approach to semantics by looking into a domain which, at first glance, appears relatively straight forward:

... it should be profitable to explore the problems of semantics on a body of selected materials. As Bloomfield indicated, it may be helpful here to start with terms which are susceptible of scientific definition, or in other words, have measurable coordinates (this issue, page 37).

Having read two articles by Stefán Einarsson on terms of direction in Icelandic (1942, 1944), Haugan notes,

Here is a carefully collected body of information from a clearly defined speech area concerning the meanings of the terms for the four cardinal directions (N E S W) and some others associated with them. These directions are easily determined in clear weather by any observant person and knowledge about them has been a part of Western tradition as far back as we have any records. Yet Einarsson's study begins with the observation "There is perhaps no category of words that shows more dialectical difference of usage in Modern Icelandic than the words of orientation" (1942: 37). Einarsson's studies bring out the fact that in addition to the meanings which jibe with the compass directions, these words have meanings that vary from community to community (this issue, page 37).

Farnell and Durr

Haugan thus leads us to a consideration of broader cultural as well as local possibilities for organizing spatial orientations. These can fruitfully be organized under the concept 'frames of reference.' This is the subject of the final paper "Spatial Orientation and the Notion of Constant Opposition" by Dixie Durr and Brenda Farnell, originally published in the first volume of *JASHM* (Fall 1981). Recognizing that skilled practitioners of action sign systems have very clear conceptions of the spaces in which they move, the paper combines important insights from both Semasiology and Labanotation to set out a number of theoretical possibilities for the ethnographic exploration of 'frames of reference.'

The paper was one of three that first presented solid examples of semasiological research by graduate students progressing towards Master's degrees in the Anthropology of Human Movement at New York University. Twenty-five years later, the introductory remarks about the paper made by Dr. Williams remain pertinent, and it serves our historical purpose to include them here. Dr. Williams began with a reference to Wittgenstein:

Wittgenstein observed that "We are inclined to be puzzled by the three dimensional appearance of the drawing in a way expressed by the question "What does seeing it three dimensionally consist in?" And this question really asks "What is it that is added to simply seeing the drawing when we see it three dimensionally?" And yet what answer can we expect to this question? It is the form of this question which produces the puzzlement. As Hertz says: "aber offenbar irrt di Frage in Bezug auf di antwort, welche sie erwartet"³ (page 9 *Einleitung, Die Prins Zipien der Mechanik*). The question itself keeps the mind pressing against a blank wall thereby preventing it from ever finding the outlet. To show a man how to get out you have first of all to free him from the misleading influence of the question (Wittgenstein 1965: 169).

The question that is central to the Farnell and Durr paper, 'where is up?' may seem to press readers' minds to a blank wall if it does not appear to be hopelessly silly in the first place, yet such a question, seen in the context of movement literacy and in the context of ethnography (used in the loose sense, where written texts *are* ethnography) the question is anything but trivial. Both highly accomplished writers of movement, the authors of this piece are acutely aware of the problems of transcription of action signs and the care that must be taken by an ethnographer to discover just how and in what ways the subject(s) of the investigation conceptualize the spaces in which they move. They know that before an investigator sets pen to paper to write a score, that the 'cross of axes' problem has to be addressed. They must find out from the informants — literally — 'where is up?' And they cannot ask the question directly; it might require six months or more of fieldwork to arrive at a partial insight into the matter.

They have attempted clearly to show that if constant features of the dimension up/down to the informant(s) and its place in their value system is not understood, then the resulting text of the action utterance, be it one sign, a longer stretch or an entire score, is likely to be conceptually flawed such that any further analysis based on the text will produce coincident distortions. They have confined themselves to simple movements and simple written examples of movements, not because they are incapable of speaking about more complex moves, or indeed lengthy texts of actions, but because we believe that readers who cannot 'read' Labanotation, through comparison of the writings provided, can see the differences in the graphic expressions of the movements and the reasons for the differences.

At another level, the Farnell-Durr paper illustrates the futility of theoretical approaches to human movement that attempt to separate the empirical from the

conceptual with reference to human actions; thus their paper can be understood either on a pragmatic or on an explanatory level, or both. That is to say that the paper can be read with a view towards understanding how a semasiologist sets about preparations for writing a movement score as a 'practical' act. Or the paper can be read with a view towards understanding the intricacies of relations between the 'natural' world and the kinds of lexically labeled categories of spatial reference that are likely to be encountered in any given action sign system. (Williams 1981: 210-211)

Since this article first appeared, others have followed, supported by a wide array of ethnographic evidence. Interested readers are invited to consult any or all of the following: Durr (1985); Farnell (1995a, 1995b, 1996); Franken (1991); Martin (1995); Hart-Johnson (1997); Williams (1994, 1995, 2000).

Spatial Inquiry in Linguistics and Linguistic Anthropology

Two related domains of academic inquiry that have paid attention to space and spatial orientation are linguistics and linguistic anthropology. Edited collections by Pick and Acredelo (1983); Jarvella and Klein (1982); Weissenborn and Klein (1982), and Hanks's study of Mayan deictics (1990), all attest to research interest in 'spatial deixis' during the 1980s.⁴ More recent collections include Bloom *et al.* (1996); Senft (1997; essays on Austronesian and Papuan languages) Bennardo (2002; essays on Oceania), and an *Annual Review* article by Levinson (1996).

With one or two notable exceptions, however,⁵ these linguistic contributions focus only upon conceptual organization and spatial cognition, as manifested in elicited spoken/signed spatial reference and syntax. Interesting and informative as these contributions are, there remain multiple Cartesian residues that lead to a neglect of interest in the *structured, dynamically embodied spaces* in which linguistic utterances occur. Little or no attention has been paid to co-expressive gestural/vocal discursive spaces, or ways in which speech and action work together in the enactment spaces of rituals, dances and the myriad of mundane activities within cultural spaces and landscapes.

The term 'deixis,' mentioned above, is derived from a Greek word meaning 'pointing' or 'indicating'. It is a category of 'indexical reference' used by conventional linguists to identify those words in a language, the specific meanings of which shift according to context, hence they are also sometimes referred to as 'shifters' (see Jakobson 1971). Linguists recognize categories such as spatial deixis (e.g., English words such as 'here,' 'there,' 'this way'), temporal deixis ('now,' 'then,' 'tomorrow') and personal deixis ('I,' 'you,' 'they' etc.). Semasiology adds to this a *dynamically embodied* notion of 'deixis' that moves beyond the Platonic-Cartesian separation of vocal signs and action signs to consider *both* modalities as mutually constitutive of spatial orientation. Linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli succinctly captures this dynamically embodied concept of deixis when she says

The structure of action fans out from the center, from the locus of *I* and *you*, to delineate where and when everything happens relative to the central actors: *he* and *she* versus *I* and *you*, *there* versus *here*, *then* versus *now*, present versus non-present (past or future) (1995: 190).

And further, to bring us full circle:

There is no such thing as time or space in a simple sense. Time and space are conceptual, moral and ethical before they are physical. If the selection of time and space indexes is reduced to the utilitarian (as it usually is) the [human] actor is essentially disembodied, at best one-dimensional, with no real motive, in Weber's sense of motive. The social dimensions that could come into being remain invisible, like the ten or eleven dimensions curled up inside molecule-sized universes in some cosmological theories. Williams makes it clear that cosmological space or metaphysical space or dramatic space all emerge performatively from the enactment of self, just as a promise or threat unfolds from the words, nuances, and intonations of the self in the moment of [spoken] utterance, enclosing a world of action. The meaning of all subsequent action — the Mass, the Tai-Chi, the ballet — flows from that moment (Urciuoli 1995: 194-195).

The Editors

Endnotes

¹ See Rogers, Hart and Miike (2002) for an informative essay about Hall's work in "Intercultural Communication."

² Hallowell's ethnography refers to the "Saiteaux," an older French designation for members of the current Anishinabe (Ojibwa) nation, who resided principally at Sault Ste. Marie at the outlet of Lake Superior during the early period of contact with Europeans. Later, this term was used for a division of the Ojibwa occupying western Ontario and eastern Manitoba, and also names the western-most dialect of the modern Ojibwa language.

³ Translation: "But obviously the question is mistaken with regard to the answer that it expects."

⁴ See Farnell 1995 for review of Hanks (1990).

⁵ Exceptions include Haviland (1993); Kendon (2000), and Le Baron and Streeck (2000).

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Errata:

1. We regret that during the printing of JASHM 13(4), we omitted to include the following permission statement in the paper version. It is included with the online version.

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