

Beyond Disembodiment Socio-Cultural Entities and Signifying Acts

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Becoming human then is a process in which personal choice and intentionality is at the forefront. . . . Given the reality of necessity and human limitation, people are essentially confronted with two choices. (The same applies to those who study them.) As May and Kierkegaard make crystal-clear, either individuals can lament what they are by appealing to a universal determinism which 'made' them what they are, or they can take up their own beings, their past and present selves, as their own responsibility. One can begin to become autonomous (or human, in my sense) only when one can accept responsibility for what one is. Making this crucial human choice does not negate -- on the contrary it emphasizes -- that such choice occurs in the context of limitation and necessity. It also points to the fact that knowing and accepting the self, let alone rejoicing in it, very often requires the help of significant others.

Ross Fitzgerald (1978)
What It Means to Be Human

Preliminaries

The title of this essay suggests a commitment to discuss 1. disembodiment and its related term, 'embodiment', 2. "significant" acts and actions, and 3. the concept of human beings as *persons* -- as sociocultural entities. I begin with a relevant quotation from an author with whom I disagree philosophically because he is a phenomenologist,¹ but he is an author who as far as I am aware, has written the only book we possess about the *absent* body (Leder 1990).

Human experience is incarnated. I receive the surrounding world through my eyes, my ears, my hands [we will add 'my tongue', 'my nose' and 'my kinesthetic sense']. . . . [I]t is via bodily means that I am capable of responding. My legs carry me toward a desired goal seen across the distance. My hands reach out to take up tools, reconstructing the natural surroundings into an abode uniquely suited to my body. My actions are motivated by emotions, needs, desires, that well up from a corporeal self. Relations with others are based upon our mutuality of gaze and touch, our speech, our resonances of feeling and perspective. . . . Yet this bodily presence is of a highly paradoxical nature. *While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence.* That is, one's own body is rarely the thematic object of experience. When reading a book or lost in thought, my own bodily state may be the farthest thing from my awareness. I experientially dwell in a world of ideas, paying little heed to my physical sensations or posture. Nor is this forgetfulness restricted to moments of higher-level cognition. I may be engaged in a fierce sport, muscles flexed and responsive to the slightest movements of my opponent. Yet it is precisely upon this opponent, this game, that my attention dwells, not on my own embodiment (1990: 1 - italics added).

Not only are bodily perceptions generally absent from awareness as people get on with the daily business of living,² their perceptions of others are char-

¹ The disagreement turns around phenomenologists' preoccupations with "experience," which has unfortunately led to various forms of subjectivism (see Best 1992).

² I do not suggest that we attempt to change this state, but only to reflect upon it.

acterized by modes of bodily absence. This is especially true when people watch television: viewers are passive spectators of shadowy images of disembodied creatures doing things, but, like the actors' bodies, they, too, are bodily absent from the action. Plato's myth of the cave in the seventh book of *The Republic* is no longer a myth. It is an all-too-pervasive reality.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when we *write* about other people -- their rituals, dances, sign languages and such -- we often write about them in terms of our own habitual modes of disembodiment. It is the rare movement analyst who questions whether the people about whom he or she writes are subject to the kinds of disembodied life styles to which European and American adults are accustomed.

Natural Limitations

Our bodies have natural physical limits. Human arms can only reach out, up, back or to either side so far. We can extend an arm's reach by incorporating other body parts (e.g. by 'leaning' or bending the torso) or by using the legs to reduce the distance between ourselves and another object or person, but the constant structures of natural limitations remain.

Human voices only carry limited distances without the aid of bull-horns, microphones and the technologies of recording. Luciano Pavarotti's voice carries farther than most, but it, too, has limitations. Technology extends Pavarotti's voice so far that it reaches audiences all over the world, however, unaided, even famous tenors can't shout or sing loudly enough to be heard much beyond the radius of half a city block.

Telephones daily extend our voices to listeners throughout the world, but we take these extensions of hearing and voice for granted. We rarely reflect upon the natural limits of our bodies and bodily senses. We don't conceive of ourselves as 'disembodied voices' to our listeners who may be thousands of miles away. Likewise, who thinks about disembodiment when they purchase scented toilet paper and deodorants, or during the times they see and hear people on television? Whether we think about such things or not, it is disembodied voices we hear and disembodied bodies we see. We frequently experience disembodiment, but, how many of us ponder the perceptual, intellectual and experiential consequences of technological innovation?

Leder remarks that human bodies are absent, "... only because [people are] perpetually outside [themselves], caught up in a multitude of involvements with other people, with nature, with a sacred domain" (1990: 4). I will add that human bodies are absent because we cannot see our own bodies as we see those of others. No one sees their physical selves as they see other people as parts of a landscape -- parts of *direct* visual, olfactory, auditory and tactile experience.

Perhaps that's obvious. What is not obvious is that when we see other peoples' bodies, we do not see *them*. Their physical bodies are visible, but the histories of the person to which the body belongs -- his or her feelings, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, attitudes and concepts are invisible. The living, sociocultural *presence* of a person is invisible.

But if you say: "How am I to know what he means, when I see nothing but the signs he gives?" then I say: "How is he to know what he means, when he has nothing but the signs either?" (Wittgenstein 1958: 139e).

Wittgenstein draws attention to the ways in which profound aspects of the common human estate elude us. *The only access we have to each other as living presences* -- as sociocultural entities -- is through spoken language (linguistic signs) and body language (action signs) -- through the mediums of sound and movement.

Visibility and Invisibility

When I speak before an audience, they can see my body, but they cannot see my thoughts or feelings. When we see someone, we do not see the *person*. That is, we only see his or her body as it is in the 'now' of immediate perception. Someone looking at me at this moment, for example, wouldn't see my body as it was forty years ago when I was a dancer. I can summon a clear mind-picture of my body back then, but my observer can not.³ The 'Drid' of forty years ago is *visible* to me, but *invisible* to you, just as your bodies at, say, ages eight, ten or fourteen are invisible to me but visible to you. It's no exaggeration to say that our received modes of disembodiment (minus technology) are part of the human estate because the structures of human visual perception are similar, even though the semantics and expressions of that perception vary. We see through eyes that are *biologically* constructed the same way, but the 'seeing' itself is an inter-subjective, sociolinguistic, construction.

In Euro-American sociocultural realities, it is possible to identify a matrix of ideas that for centuries supported and affirmed the general cultural condition of disembodiment: Cartesianism, Behaviorism, Dualism and Logical Positivism not only were instrumental in creating disembodiment, they helped perpetuate disembodiment through mind/body dualisms, and they still do. For example, these ideas produced the fundamental notions we have of 'subjective' and 'objective' knowledge.

Perhaps more important for human movement specialists, the medical sciences and general physics still perceive human bodies merely as objects to be anatomically and/or functionally described, as if they were no different from any other physical object in the world. We accept the medics' and physicists' forms of objectivity as 'true' *because they are scientific*. We don't assign the same status to other concepts of the body. This unique faith in science is so lop-sided it has become a form of scientism: one of the "most popular shibboleths of our age" (Best 1992: 13), but I will say more about this later.

In sum, disembodiment means first, that most people are unaware of their own body's natural limitations. Because we aren't aware of our own, we tend not to be aware of the limitations of other bodies. Second, Euro-American (and probably other) forms of disembodiment are heavily influenced by the

³ Seeing my body now might make it difficult to imagine I ever was a dancer, yet I know what my body was like then, and I know what dancing was like. I also know what it's like not to be able to perform everything I once could.

fact that we don't see ourselves as others see us. Most of the time, we are unaware of our incarnated state in important ways. In general, the concept of an absent body entails the failure to understand our own visibility and invisibility. Because we don't understand our own visibility and invisibility, we disregard this characteristic of others. To make matters worse, we presuppose structures of technological use and support that are not enjoyed by (or even available to), many peoples in the world.

Embodiment

Fully to comprehend *embodiment* would mean giving serious thought to our own (and others') natural bodily limitations, and we should cultivate increased awarenesses of the fragility of the technologies that create powerful illusions of embodiment. Let me be more explicit.

An individual understanding of embodiment would mean sensitizing yourself to your Self and to others in ways that encourage seeing yourself as others see you. A healthy sense of embodiment would entail awareness of your own incarnation which in turn invites awareness of life and death in profound (though not always welcome) ways.

I believe that comprehending embodiment and disembodiment means having uncommon views of life as it is lived from day to day. I am also convinced that the study of movement and the study of movement-writing provides a potential edge on deeper understanding of these kinds of apperception: notice I said "potential edge." Many people study movement in various forms, but relatively few arrive at deeper insights because of it. Likewise, many study 'Labanotation' so that they can write dances, but few go into the further implications of the script or the consequences of using it.

Having reached the end of the preliminaries, what about bodily movements as the "signifying acts" in the essay title?

The Absent *Moving* Body

To many people, the primary, most obvious feature about human beings is rooted in the visible evidence that human beings *have* bodies. Apart from having bodies, everyone knows the traditional, orthodox ways of explaining their movements, learned in primary and secondary school. I am often asked, "What's all the fuss about, Drid? What's your problem? Can't we just recognize the indisputable fact that humans have moving bodies, and then accept what biologists and kinesiologists tell us about how bodies move and get on with the job?"

To movement specialists, "the job" is to describe, interpret, illustrate and explain a dance, an exercise technique, a sign language, a system of greetings, a martial art technique or a ritual. If complex, accurate description and explanation is their aim, they cannot rely upon simple facts of recognition, nor can they depend upon orthodox, scientific, explanations of human movement. They may know, as everyone does, that bodies move before they are born and that the only time human bodies stop moving is when death occurs. The

heart stops beating -- everything stops: there is no movement, but that kind of knowledge isn't enough.

Edwin Ardener's (1989) seminal paper on the analysis of events has proved particularly helpful for thinking about Western perceptions and conceptions of body movement. He reminds us that the particular events that are registered depend on our modes of registration and specification, that is, the means by which they are apperceived. He advises that we should know as much as possible about these modes because "our definition of... the "events" depends upon the modes of registration available to us' (1989: 87 - cited in Farnell 1994: 935).

Elsewhere, Farnell also says that "[I]f we are to proceed from a scientifically valid basis in the cross-cultural comparison of human movement, it is necessary to posit some universally valid features of movement and the human body other than those offered by kinesiology and anatomy. This means identifying some structural characteristics of the expressive human body and the space(s) in which it moves" (Farnell 1996: 321)

Instead of presenting the spatial dimensions of up/down, right/left, front/back and inside/outside as "pre-conceptual image schemata," Williams's semasiological theory presents them as a set of potentialities that each culture will utilize differently. In other words, semasiology expects that all human beings will have concepts of [the spatial dimensions, but] ... What those spatial dimensions mean, how concepts are organized and the spoken or acted orientations metaphors based on them, will vary from culture to culture. In conjunction with deictic features of spoken languages, they provide cultural resources that govern empirically observable actions (Williams 1995: 72 - cited in Farnell 1996: 322).

The Status of Human Movement

Over fifty years ago I discovered that human movement didn't have the same status that physical bodies had in the generally accepted scheme of things, even though human bodies *generate* significant actions all the time.⁴ The anthropologist of human movement's difficulty is that human movement (inside or outside of 'academe') doesn't *conceptually* exist the same way human bodies exist. I found early on that the status of the body itself was poor in Euro-American traditions, but *the status of human movement was lower*. "As Harré puts it, in the Western philosophical tradition the body has been 'left on the butcher's slab more or less since Descartes credited it only with extension' (1986: 52 - cited in Farnell 1994: 935).

Movement (I was told) is *intangible* -- now you see it, now you don't. In contrast, bodies are *tangible* (therefore real). I was given to understand many times and in many ways by experts and non-experts alike that dead or alive, *bodies exist* in some way that movement does not. The reality of the body had something to do with measurement and with scientific fact. Because they could be measured, bodies were granted existential reality. In contrast, human movement occupied a conceptual limbo-land. In contrast to human move-

⁴ The lack of awareness of bodies in general is accompanied by an even deeper lack of consciousness regarding the moves they make.

ment, 'motion' wasn't in limbo-land. Physicists and mathematicians were interested in motion, not of human bodies, but of space ships, bullets, motor-cars, trains and 'planes. The important feature with regard to motion was (and still is) *velocity*. To a large extent, it still is.

Eventually, I realized that unless I used more sophisticated mathematical representations than ordinary arithmetic and common ideas about quantification, movement *could not successfully be described or measured*. By the time I reached age thirty, I'd developed several healthy skepticisms about the scope of quantification, ordinary arithmetic, and so-called "common knowledge" regarding human movement. These skepticisms merely deepen as I grow older because I slowly began to understand that "knowing something exists" was dependent upon one's sociolinguistic origins and the kind and depth of education one acquired. I understood that other people's answers to questions about the *existence* of movement (its possible measurement, therefore its reality), depended upon their knowledge *about* movement -- specifically, how much they knew about how movement is measured.⁵ In turn, this knowledge depended upon their concepts of what the world was like. During all that time, I realized that my search for measurement and quantification was a search for *certainty* -- a certainty, as advertised, that could transcend fallible human judgments and establish the reality (especially of dancing) as a legitimate form of human expression.

Notice that my concept of *legitimacy* at the time was limited to mathematics and the sciences. I didn't know that I was a victim of *scientism*, which

[C]onsists in the unquestioned assumption that *all* proof must be of an empirical or scientific kind, involving, for instance, experiments, testing, measurements, statistics, sociological surveys etc. Scientism is as much of an unquestionable foundation of thinking about knowledge, for many people, as is subjectivism about the arts for most arts educators. It amounts to the elevation of the methods and procedures of the empirical sciences to the status of a religious belief. (Best 1992: 13).

Does the quest for certainty seem familiar? It should, because I wasn't alone in seeking certainty, nor was my disappointment unique when I finally discovered that in the natural world, there are no absolutes and that an objectivist's science does not (because it cannot) provide answers for everything.

Fortunately, I am able to report that I didn't fall into an opposite (equally disastrous), subjectivist's trap, although if David Best is to be believed, many in the dance and movement professions have done. For example, he talks of

[T]he principal of a well-known dance academy [who] once wrote: 'Dance is such subjective matter that there is nothing that can or should be said about it.' One wonders how he can reconcile this with accepting his salary, since it amounts to denying that he and his staff can teach anything to their students. Some years ago an American dance professor, recognizing that an implication of her professed subjectivism is that anyone's opinion is as good as anyone else's, and that any feeling in response to a work of art is

⁵ This also varies greatly from one academic discipline/orientation to another and from one educational level to another.

equally 'appropriate', was unable to object when some of her students, as their dance performance, simply sat on the studio floor eating [potato chips]. Despite her commendable honesty, she lost her job (1992: 29-30).

Do these attitudes toward dancing sound familiar? They should, because they are constantly enunciated, not only by dancers, but people from all walks of life. I wonder how many of my readers believe the world is composed of subjective and objective realities? How many think of everything outside themselves as 'objective' and everything inside as 'subjective' -- and never the twain shall meet? The reason I ask is two-fold:

1. the subjective/objective opposition is part of a way of acting and responding that has been absorbed as a 'norm' -- as a way of life and thinking held by the communities to which one belongs, whether at university or at home; and,
2. The subjectivist/objectivist myth (equally distorted sides of the same coin) between feeling and reason, individual and group, freedom and restriction, non-verbal and verbal, can prevent anyone from understanding the issues of embodiment or disembodiment in the anthropology of human movement.

The most worrying feature of the situation is that everyone was conditioned, (as I was), to believe the traditional and ubiquitous subjective/objective doctrine -- a conception so deeply ingrained and prevalent throughout society, we are oblivious of it, thus unable to recognize it.

Respect. [L. *respect-*, *respicere* to look (back) at; to regard as having value]

As I tried to work out what movement was all about thirty-five years ago, I began to understand that because of their conditioning, other people's responses to my questions about movement were simply *reactions* of the type Best (1992: 19-22) calls *prelinguistic responses*. That is, responses solely based on *attitudes* they'd formed about human beings, about the world and how it works.

When I asked *why* they responded as they did, they couldn't answer, because their attitudes weren't based on conscious theorizing, reason or justification. In fact, I was often told, "that's the way things are -- like it or lump it." At some fundamental level, the *sources* of most people's concepts about movement were (and are) simply ways of acting and responding which have been absorbed as norms. Most people don't think about such things, nor do they want to think about them.

Commonplace attitudes held all over the world about posture, gesture and movement are those which people have assimilated during the process of growing up -- whatever "growing up" happens to amount to. I include myself in my early life, because no one in any culture has any other option during the growth process but to take in what their community teaches, especially on informal levels.

Later, I began to question what I'd taken in, primarily because I was a dancer and I didn't like what I'd been taught about dancing. Call it persistence, bull-headedness, or what-you-will, because I didn't like what I was told about the way things were regarding movement, I lumped my dislikes into a life-long pursuit of discovering levels of understanding *beyond* common knowledge, prelinguistic responses and reactive attitudes, especially to dancers, dances and dancing.

Given the wisdom of hindsight, I now see that as a dancer, I wanted *respect* for what I did. Most of the dancers I know also want this. Notice that I didn't say I wanted "respectability" -- I doubt if performing artists will ever achieve that in western societies. No. I wanted simple respect. I still do.

My pursuit of knowledge regarding human movement resulted in a theory of human action which led me into understanding topology and set theory, both of which contributed to my understanding that movement *can* be measured, in metrical (but, more important, in) *non-metrical* terms. It led me to the study of social anthropology, linguistics and philosophies of science. I came deeply to appreciate the works of philosophers, because I found the questions they asked fascinating. For example, "Did we invent human speech? No more than we invented walking on two legs" (Wittgenstein 1980: 11; 4.3.5). It was through thinking about what was (and wasn't) invented by people regarding movement that eventually led to the theory of human action I teach, but space prevents saying any more about it here.

Suffice to say that because I was interested in *the connections between* speech and "walking on two legs" I looked long and hard at the received notions I had about movement and dancing. I worked longer and harder at articulating my ideas, including the concepts I abandoned and those I adopted as a result of learning new things, all of which permits me to say, now, that I'm not interested anymore in *reactions* to what I have to say, nor am I particularly interested in peoples' *attitudes towards* movement. I'm even less interested in anything classified as "common knowledge" with regard to movement, because so much of it is mistaken. That kind of knowledge so often is.

Beginning Again

Having said that, let me now start over with this question: What does it mean to talk or write about human movement *beyond* disembodiment?

1. It means talking from ideas about movement that aren't polluted with Cartesianism,⁶ Behaviorism,⁷ Dualism, Objectivism,⁸ Subjectivism and Scientism.⁹

⁶ See Farnell (1995a) and Varela (1983).

⁷ See Best (1993) for Behaviorism and Dualism.

⁸ See Pocock (1994a), Varela (1994) and Williams (1985) for Objectivism and Subjectivism.

⁹ See Best (1992).

2. It means talking about embodied, *moving* human beings, because in one way of looking at the topic, talking *beyond* disembodiment is to talk *from* embodiment -- beyond static portrayals and two-dimensional pictures of movement events.
3. It means talking, not about human movement shorn of its socio-cultural realities (under the misguided idea that by so doing, one is being objective), but about human *actions* and *action signs* produced by persons who are incarnated sociocultural entities.
4. It means talking from a standpoint that assumes human actions are *significant*; that they are produced by *signifying* bodies, not physiologically describable entities that "emit behavior."
5. It means talking from a standpoint that doesn't divide verbal worlds from alleged "non-verbal" worlds. That means talking, not solely about bodies, but about the *deictic* features¹⁰ of the language spoken by the actors. These features connect the moving human body with its semantically-laden spaces.

And what are the *deictic* features of body languages? They are the features of location, direction, orientation and reference without which 'no-body' would know where it was, where it was going, where it belonged or to whom and what it was related.

Moving human bodies don't exist in convenient natural or scientific vacuums, but in semantically loaded spatio-linguistic fields. There is no better way to understand the deictic features of movement than to become literate in movement -- to study movement-writing -- for in that context, one has to grapple with location, direction, orientation and reference in fundamental ways. The world would be a very different place if we had all learned to write movement at the same time we learned to write the sounds of our voices. Movement literacy would not, of course, solve all the problems pertaining to human movement study, but there are two damaging misconceptions regarding the relationships between bodies, movement and actions which might disappear.

To understand these misconceptions, imagine talking about your vocal cords as if the cords themselves were the linguistic signs you hear. Try imagining speech as if the *messages* that are sent and received through speaking were the actual physical structures that produced the sounds. No one thinks or talks this way about vocal cords, sounds and messages, but people talk all the time as if the messages they get from human actions were the physical structures that produce the actions. In his poem, 'Among Schoolchildren' Yeats asked a question that has been drawn to my attention countless times: "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance/How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (see Finneran 1983). Unlike musicians and

¹⁰ 'Deictic' is from the Greek word, *deixis*, a concept used by linguists to identify the extra-linguistic, situational features of spoken utterances.

the music they perform, Yeats's question implies that we cannot separate *dancers* from the *dances* they perform.

Now imagine trying to live your life, even for a day, without any clear awareness or understanding of your situation or your relations to those around you. What would life be like without such awareness?

To answer this question it is necessary to show the central role which the concept of understanding plays in the activities which are characteristic of human societies. . . . the discussion of what an understanding of reality consists . . . merges into the discussion of the difference the possession of such an understanding may be expected to make to the life of [human beings]; and this again involves a consideration of the general nature of a human society, an analysis, that is, of the concept of a human society. A [person's] social relations with his [or her] fellows are permeated with ideas about reality. Indeed, 'permeated' is hardly a strong enough word: social relations are expressions of ideas about reality (Winch 1958: 22-23).

What Winch says is that theory and practice are not separable. Whatever one's ideas about the world and reality may be, they enter into everything that one does, thinks or feels. This notion conflicts with the received ideas we have about 'objectivity', but my point is this: over a long and varied career, I find myself constantly returning to basics. When I review everything I've written about human movement, I always talk about fundamentals, just as I'm doing now.

My critics seem to imagine that I talk about basics because I'm incapable of talking about anything else. Perhaps they think that the apperception of bodies as sociocultural entities is something everyone already possesses. The reason I constantly emphasize basics (understanding, orientation, intention, actions, personal judgments, spatial referents, etc.) is that, ultimately, I am talking about "the inter-subjective construction of significant actions in a complex of social relations" (Urciuoli 1996: 365), *not* 'physical movement' *per se*.

This is where indexicality and, more specifically, deixis enter the picture. Meaning emerges in significant action in ways that are systematically linked to the performer's or signer's or speaker's relation to an audience or addressee; in short, it requires consideration of an axis linking *I* or *we* to *you* in opposition to *her*, *him*, *it* or *them*. Such meaning cannot be purely indexical (that is, cannot simply indicate some existential connection), it has to be classified in some larger cultural scheme of meaning. . . . [T]he equation of the same physical movement with contextually different interpretations is not the same as a systematic explication of socially embedded actions in a specific . . . cultural theory of person and emotion (Urciuoli 1996: 365-66).

I talk about fundamentals because I know that such knowledge makes all the difference to human lives. A perfectly natural response to the notion of, say, spatial orientation, however, is "I know about that. I can define it, so tell me *something else* -- something I don't know about."

My critics fail to understand that their own perceptions about the nature of human movement are deficient, for it is *each individual's own judgment about reality* that guides what he or she thinks (and says or writes) about systems of human actions.

I attribute the lack of communication with regard to movement study to several pervasive influences: 1. a medical view of the body, 2. ubiquitous Dualist and Behaviorist thinking (see Best 1993), 3. the works of popularizers (e.g. Fast, Morris and others), and 4. to a widespread view of life and human nature celebrated in Romantic poetry and literature. Just one aspect of a movement specialist's training is to learn how to avoid these confusions. Here, I must ask that what I'm saying isn't misconstrued.

The principles of semasiology do not preclude chemical examinations of a dancer's body or kinesiological examinations of a dancer's moves. Nor do they preclude biological comparisons of, say, chimps or macaque monkeys with human beings, but semasiologists would only undertake such examinations in specified circumstances for clearly defined purposes. In other words, semasiology doesn't invoke chemistry, kinesiology, anatomy or biology -- even evolutionary biology -- as the ultimate explanatory paradigm for human actions (Williams 1986).

Just as linguists and semioticians might study the vocal apparatus, semasiologists sometimes study the nature and properties of the movement apparatus; the muscles, bones, etc., but even here, anatomical study is informed by the concept of living, moving, *persons* who generate actions using the body as an instrument. Marcel Mauss pointed out long ago in his essay *Les Techniques du Corps*, (1966 [1936]), that humanity's primary instrument is the body -- stone axes, grinding stones, spears and arrowheads, are secondary. They are some of the artifacts that resulted from human usages of the body. They are, so to speak, *extensions* of the body's primary instrumentality, just as technological innovations are today.

Conceptions of Living and Meaning

To talk about people, not as mere bodies, but as *persons* is to acknowledge that human beings, unlike animals, have *conceptions* of living and their actions are directly connected to their conceptions of living, experiencing and feeling life. It is to talk about persons as socio-cultural entities, not as biological objects.¹¹ This is why the study of ritual, dances, sign languages, the martial arts are crucial to understanding sociocultural anthropology, and, in my opinion, one's own life and being. The reason lies in the fact that it is in structured systems of human actions (dances, sign languages, rituals, etc.) that the *meanings* of human experience are so vividly enacted.

This is not to argue, of course, that everyday actions have no meanings -- or less meaning -- than *Seraphic Dialogue*,¹² Plains Indian Sign Talk,¹³ an Australian Uniting Church worship service,¹⁴ a Swahili dance,¹⁵ or the martial art technique, T'ai Chi Ch'uan.¹⁶

¹¹ What we are as biological objects is, so to speak, "given." What we are as sociocultural entities we both learn and create.

¹² A contemporary dance work by Martha Graham.

¹³ See Farnell (1995b).

¹⁴ See Farrell (1993).

It is to argue, in David Pocock's words, that "All human action is significant and the more highly that significance is valued, the more likely is it that the action will be precisely laid down and predictable, the less valued the more random" (1994b: 7). It is also to argue that the language the movement specialist uses to describe, interpret, and explain movement is crucial.

Human Data is Never Value-Free

The closest semasiologists ever get to anything neutral and uninterpreted is in the domain of intransitive structures (e.g. the structure of interacting dualisms, the law of hierarchical motility, the structure of degrees of freedom for the semasiological body). These are the "open structures" common to all human beings anywhere in the world. How and in what ways any single investigator's culture-specific data fits these structures, how specific systems of human movement manifest the structures and/or "fleshes them out," so to speak, is a matter of the extent and depth of each investigator's knowledge of the subject of his or her investigation and his or her own personal judgment.

Scientists approach the data of science from a network of views that led to their collection, and they appraise them from the standpoints of background, training and interests. *Their appraisals and judgments are a part of the theories they hold and use as tools for viewing the material they gather.* Hence, the problems chosen for study and the evaluation of their results function within the theoretical framework in which they work. . . . the role of personal judgment is paramount. (Gelwick 1978: 149 - italics added).

Graduate students on three continents have badgered me (sometimes mercilessly), trying to get me to tell them *how to do* semasiology and *how to* analyze the data they've collected, as if there were one grid-like blueprint that will fit everything, reminiscent of the "one size fits all" in the garment industry. Students often seem to want a magic formula that will identify what they have done and ensure its success. I've resisted their blandishments, mainly because I know of nothing like this and I don't teach methods similar, for example, to those in statistics that can be applied *carte blanche* to any and all data.

I *can* help students clarify their own thinking. I can further their understanding. I can lead them to begin a process which, if followed out, will ensure mastery, *if* they aspire to become part of the "network of views" that an anthropology of human movement rooted in semasiology represents. At every step of the way, each of them must know and understand what he or she is doing -- and, perhaps more important, *why* they are doing it.

Knowledge vs. Information

My insistence that students think for themselves hasn't changed, but I think attitudes towards teaching have changed, making me painfully aware

¹⁵ See Franken (1993).

¹⁶ See Kostynick (1989).

of the comparatively weak position I now uphold as an educator. To insist that students learn to think for themselves used to be the strong position. During my lifetime however, I've seen concepts of independent thinking (along with now old-fashioned ideas about knowledge and wisdom) eroded to the point where I wonder if they exist anymore. The erosion is easily comprehended in view of the "World-Wide Web" of information: to my generation 'knowledge' is much more than the possession of information.

Having listened with great interest to promoters of the information super-highway, I find that they promise travelers what anthropologists call a 'millennium'. As advertised, the highway leads to utopian conditions of knowledge, equality and problem-free environments, because anytime anything becomes problematic, all one has to do is look it up.¹⁷ The journey's promoters omit telling customers *how* they are meant to assimilate, process, use -- or even understand -- the information. Nor is the degradation of the pursuit of knowledge to information-gathering the worst feature of "the Web's" mixed blessings: the worst feature is *decisionlessness*.

Human beings have to be able to make decisions, even if they aren't always beneficial, because making decisions entails the possibility of making mistakes. The remarkable fact about the Information Super-Highway, however, is that *all the important decisions have already been made*. As far as I can make out, users of the highway are assumed to have no information of their own and/or they are thought to be incapable of decisions beyond deciding where to push a computer mouse to indicate a place on a pre-determined program of choices. To me, *this is a penultimate form of disembodiment*, because all the user has to do is passively to assimilate the information provided.

Let's face it: that's all he or she *can* do. Interaction with the human beings who created and molded the information into the form in which it appears isn't available, because the creators aren't available for discussion (far less criticism), are they? The language of human interaction is used in a poor attempt to humanize the machinery -- another illusion. The fact remains that in this interactional context, people become little more than passive-receptive information processing machines.

Travelers on the Information Highway don't make decisions about the information provided, nor are they likely to criticize it. They certainly aren't encouraged to criticize those who generated the information. Given these conditions, how can they be human? How can they begin to become autonomous (or *human*, in Fitzgerald's sense) when they can't accept responsibility for the knowledge they have, because the generators of the information aren't there to take responsibility for what they create?

There is a sense in which "the Web" is an ultimate expression of objectivism -- and objectification. It is predicated on the notion that information (thus knowledge) is "out there" somewhere, available in 'objective' forms. Not

¹⁷ Provided, of course, that one possesses the economic means and technology to gain access to the highway, which would be more accurately defined as a toll-road.

surprisingly, whatever an individual may think about the information is 'subjective'.

I don't know if Web-users will start looking behind computer and television screens for the people who generated the information; for those who decide what 'information' is and what they will include and exclude. After all is said and done, the Internet and all its information was (and is) generated by human beings who might be complete innocents -- not only regarding many areas of enquiry, but they may be innocents, too, regarding old-fashioned ideas about knowledge and creative responsibility.

The really lethal side-effect connected with the information age is however, still connected with decision-making. To many of my generation, the inability to make decisions is an identifiable evil. Someone once said that evil is "an aimless whirl of human potentiality."¹⁸ Aimless potentiality is convoluted. Having no purposeful outlet, it feeds on itself and festers. Potentialities having no direction remain trapped in themselves. They go haywire. Without decision-making abilities and purposeful directions of their potentialities, people can't take responsibility for their lives and destinies. They remain at the mercy of fate or whatever happens 'out there'. Essentially, they become powerless, and, we mustn't forget that our ability to make decisions -- our greatest source of power -- like all human capacities, is language-based.

Using Language

The current fashionable insistence on "politically correct" speech and writing is merely one of many examples of the gradual decline of language-use over the past 60 years (Simon 1980). These days, our spoken language does precisely the opposite of what I was taught it was meant to do. Words no longer *join*, they cut off; they isolate and divide. Words cause more misunderstanding than understanding, mainly because too many people have allowed the sins of the oversimplifiers, the overcomplicators, the trivializers and the information pundits to influence them. They buy into these distorted realities.

Not surprisingly, the decline in conventional language-use has been accompanied by an equal decline in the notion of body language, because the two are irrevocably connected. We are daily inundated with visual images of violence, fanaticism and aimlessness. We are told that inarticulate movements made by near motor-morons is 'art'. Many people are fanatical about exercising their physical bodies and monitoring what they eat, but they seem relatively uninterested in the kinds of ideas they ingest or express.

We are all both victims and victimizers of the spoken and body languages we have inherited. As an educator, I want students to be able to read Julius Fast's best-seller about body language realizing as they do that his conception is little better than an ad-man's doggerel -- a debasement of what body language is and means. I want students to understand that words and human actions can be repaired. They can put words and actions back into shape; re-

¹⁸ I don't remember where I read this; only *that* I read it somewhere, hence no documentation.

store them to their rightful place in the scheme of things as expressions of embodiment, capable of moving human hearts, minds and spirits.

No matter how casually or perversely we abuse language in any of its manifestations, *we cannot live without it*, because we *are* human beings. We are creatures who can't successfully survive on snorts, howls, expletives, clicks and squeaks -- or on reflexes, instincts, twitches, pushes, grabs and jiggles, no matter how much the mindless sounds or movements may resemble language. The most profound meaning of my title-phrase "beyond disembodiment," therefore, has to be a re-affirmation of the kind of creature we are: language-users, meaning-makers, rule-followers and role-players.

Finally, I'd want to say that I belong to a generation who was taught to define our lives more by their debts and legacies than by our presumed 'rights' and opportunities. Talk about 'rights' is good, but not without equal emphasis on the obligations, responsibilities and duties that accompany these rights, whatever they are.

I have no idea what will have to happen to restore some of the basic notions with which I grew up. Maybe they won't *be* restored, but there is something I miss in the world of information highways: the kind of reverence for people and things that stems from the idea that one *owes* -- that one makes decisions about acknowledging past debts and obligations, thereby taking responsibility for oneself and others.

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