

JASHM PAPER WINS DANCE HISTORY PRIZE

*The Gertrude Lippincott Prize
for
Best Essay on Dance History and Theory Published in
2002
has been awarded to*

*Dr. Theresa Jill Buckland
for*

*"Th'Owd Pagan Dance: Ritual, Enchantment and an
Enduring Intellectual Paradigm"
JASHM Vol. 11:4/12:1*

Theresa wrote to JASHM editors, "I couldn't possibly have achieved this without your painstaking attention to detail, clarification, helpful references and pushing me to develop the ideas." The full reference to the essay will be listed on the SDHS webpage after the official announcement at the annual conference in June in Limerick, Ireland. Our Hearty Congratulations Theresa!

Editorial Commentary

The availability of inexpensive and portable film, and more recently video, has stimulated renewed interest in visual aspects of language-in-use, especially those movements of the arms and hands—somewhat loosely referred to as "gestures"—that accompany speech in discursive practices. The papers in this issue of JASHM were written for the *First Congress of the International Society for Gesture Studies* held at the University of Texas, Austin, June 5-8th, 2002. Participants in the congress came from several disciplines including linguistics, linguistic anthropology, communications, cognitive studies, semiotics, sign language studies and anthropology, although panels devoted to psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology were clearly in the majority. Communications scholar Jürgen Streeck organized the conference, and keynote speakers included Genevieve Calbris (semiotics), Charles Goodwin (ethnomethodology), John Haviland (linguistic anthropology), Adam Kendon (gesture studies), Scott Liddell (ASL Linguistics), and David McNeill (psycholinguistics). The conference inaugurated a new *International Society for Gesture Studies* with the goal of supporting the recognition and establishment of the field of gesture studies as a scientific field. A new journal, *Gesture*, edited by Adam Kendon and Cornelia Müller has also been launched.

New technologies such as video do not, in themselves, however, generate new theories. When film, and later television, were first developed, for example, it was some time before the new media transcended conventions

inherited from the theater. Likewise, it will probably be some time before a fully embodied conception of 'language' transcends many habits of thinking and analysis inherited from a linguistics that has customarily attended only to speech and written texts. The papers presented at this conference indicate that this process is currently underway. One must wonder however, whether the category of 'gesture' will itself turn out to be limiting when there are many other human practices in which body movement and speech are integrated. A more broadly conceived approach to the modality of human movement *per se* might be crucial in order to avoid the problem, but this requires a more sophisticated theory of embodied human action than is envisaged by most scholars specializing in gesture studies to date.

Adam Kendon notes that historically, with one or two notable exceptions, linguists from Saussure onwards have almost always defined 'language' in structural terms. The reorientation of linguistics under the influence of Chomsky, however, "...turned it into a kind of mental science" (2000: 49), and so gesture disappeared altogether as a topic of inquiry. He also notes that the subsequent development of cognitive studies has generated renewed interest in gestures. "If language is a cognitive activity and, if as is clear, gestural expression is intimately involved in acts of spoken linguistic expression, then it seems reasonable to look closely at gesture for the light it may throw on this cognitive activity" (*ibid.* p. 49). Unfortunately, focus on such cognitive activity dominates this emergent field at present, bringing with it a problematic adherence to Cartesian mentalism (see Farnell's paper, this issue). The research presented by psycholinguist David McNeill and his students is typical of this paradigm. There are, however, interesting anthropological contributions being made by Haviland, Kendon and Goodwin which offer an alternative perspective. In contrast to psychological/cognitive approaches, their data come from naturally occurring discourse in ethnographically rich environments, rather than elicited or experimental contexts, and their work is informed by contemporary linguistic anthropology.

As anthropologists of human movement who consider the Western category of gesture to be just one genre of action sign system among many, we found that our approach contrasted markedly with the kinds of questions being asked by many participants at the Congress. Our panel, entitled "Theorizing 'Gesture': Dynamic Embodiment in Anthropological Perspective" sought to draw scholarly attention to more holistic approaches to dynamically embodied practices and to the importance of cultural/performance context in the analysis of meaning. The papers explored a range of relationships between spoken signs, action signs and performance spaces in a variety of ethnographic contexts, including Plains Indian Sign Language (Brenda Farnell), Egyptian dances (Marjorie Franken), African-American Voguing (Jonathan David Jackson), the Greek Orthodox Church (Angela Shand), and Okinawan dances (Valerie Barske). The papers by Farnell, Franken and Jackson are published in this issue, together with an extended commentary by Drid Williams, who served as a discussant for the panel.

The theoretical and methodological focus in all the papers is on dynamically embodied action in semantically rich spaces, an arena that has received com-

paratively little attention despite the explosion of inter-disciplinary interest in "the body" as a cultural object and/or phenomenological realm of subjective experience. The papers illustrate how theoretical resources from semasiology, as well as new technologies of recording and transcription, have replaced earlier anthropological approaches such as Birdwhistell's "kinesics" and Hall's "proxemics."

The Editors

References cited:

Kendon, Adam

2000. Language and Gesture: Unity or Duality. In *Language and Gesture* (Ed. David McNeill). Language, Culture and Cognition Series (Gen. Ed. Stephen C. Levinson). Max Plank Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.