

PREFIGUREMENTS OF ART: A REPLY TO SEBEOK

During the early 'seventies, many new contributions to social anthropology expressed dissatisfaction with one of the two predominant 'pure' social science outlooks, summarized below:

- (i) the approach which emanates from Durkheim, i.e. a construal of 'the social' as an autonomous domain, or
- (ii) the approach which emanates from various biological or behaviouristic scientific models, i.e. a construal of 'the social' as epiphenomena, determined by physiological mechanisms and/or 'habits' of some kind, where rituals, dance or spoken language, for example, are thought of primarily as 'adaptive behaviours' (See Leach, 1966, for one way in which the anthropological view differs from this).

In 1974, Sebeok added another outlook, relevant to those of us who are especially interested in human movement studies, i.e. 'zoo-semiotics', which has developed into a "semasiotic/ethological" approach to the dance and other forms of "avermal behaviour" which differs sufficiently from the older adaptive approaches that it demands special attention.

We were told in 1974 that semiotics "... at least in the vital Locke-Pierce-Morris tradition, continues to widen its horizons to comprehend the entire animal kingdom, indeed the whole of organic existence, as well as the sign functions of machines". "Ethology", he said, "is likewise moving to enlarge its scope to embrace man" (Sebeok, 1974:48). At that time, I had nearly completed work on an approach to human movement studies that is now known as 'semasiology', a term that came to be used largely because of Sebeok's re-definition of semiology.

I believed then, as I believe now, that there are many of us who are not likely to submit so willingly to ethology's "embrace" as Dr. Sebeok so romantically puts it, not only because of ethology's failure, like that of Behaviourism, to explain the semantic and linguistically-based features of human actions, but because these kinds of approaches have demonstrably failed in the past to account for most of the basic features of human action sign systems -- in particular, the dance. I refer to higher-order structuring capacities of the human neurological system, the faculty for language-use, graphic systems of notation for human actions, inter-subjective understanding, intentions, the concepts of intelligibility and accountability, rule-learning capacities and linguistic reflexivity -- to name a few.

The purpose of this essay is, therefore, two-fold: (i) it will address the perennial problems generated by ethological explanations of human movement-based systems of communication that are encountered by modern professionals and students of dancing, anthropology, linguistics,

folklore, ethnomusicology and ethnology whose chief interests centre around the study of dances, rituals, greeting systems, the martial arts, ceremonies and such, and (ii) it will address specific points brought up in Sebeok (1979) with reference to "verbal" sign systems, including those that were just named. Sebeok's approach seems to rest heavily on the orthodoxies of Darwinian theory and ethological methodology, stressing the continuities (and minimizing the significant discontinuities) between animals and ourselves.

Let me say, first of all, that the distinction between 'semiology', i.e. the science of signs,<sup>1</sup> and 'semasiology', i.e. the science of human action signs,<sup>2</sup> may seem puzzling, because semasiology could accurately be described as a 'semiotic' approach, if the term 'semiology' were presently defined as Saussure originally intended (1966:16 and 67), or if one follows Locke's designation (See note 1, p. 26). There would be no need for the distinction if that were the case, but this was changed by the doyen of American semioticians himself in 1974, hence the neologism and its derivatives, which has not been interpreted and broadened from its original usages, except for its application to action, rather than to linguistic signs. The term 'semasiology' has always pointed towards the semantic aspects of linguistic signification, and is applied to human action sign signification in our theoretical and meta-theoretical framework.<sup>3</sup> It is a term that is also meant to mark a preoccupation with human actions and the recognition, not only of the continuities, but also of the discontinuities that exist between animals and ourselves (See Williams, 1984, for fuller discussion).

Crick (1976) has drawn attention to the fact that current and increasing emphasis on the semantic aspects of the social cannot adequately be accommodated in the traditional paradigms of social science, observing that a modern anthropologist can hardly proceed successfully from such basically awkward and unjustifiable dichotomies<sup>4</sup> as that between 'systems of belief' and 'systems of actions'. Best has observed that "... an intentional action is not the same as a physical movement since the latter can be described in various ways according to one's point of view and one's beliefs about the person performing it. One cannot specify an action, as opposed to a purely physical movement without taking into account what the agent intended" (1974:193). I have argued that assuming a semasiological point of view entails a rejection of dichotomizing, not only 'belief' and 'action', but 'mind' and 'body', 'actions' and 'context' or 'verbal' and 'non-verbal' (or 'verbal') features of human actions. Individual usages of these terms is, of course, open-ended, but within the context of human movement studies, they often tend to mask widely opposing and incompatible points of view, as e.g. the ethological and the semasiological (since the ethological standpoint is well-known, for discussions of semasiology, see Williams, 1976, 1977, 1979 and 1982).

The current vogue for ethological connections with the human sciences seems in close alignment with Sebeok's point of view; the trend necessarily supports a move towards a construal of the social as

biologically determined, thus semasiology cannot presently claim some of the kinds of institutional support that the semiotic/ethological standpoint presently enjoys, but it is possible that history -- especially the history of the sciences -- will judge differently regarding their ultimate value. We cannot, I think, predict. What is interesting is that on the face of it, Sebeok's recognition of the "absolutely distinct" nature of human languages might seem to indicate that his point of view coincides with that of semasiology. It is the case that in some of his writings, he propounds an approach to sign languages that is not entirely incompatible with ours (See Sebeok, T. and J., Eds., 1978), but with regard to 'prefigurements of art', he seems to ask that we see the distinction of human languages as "trivial", because of "... the equally unchallengable fact that the communication system of every other species stamps it with a unique hallmark, much as language conspicuously segregates out our humanity" (1979:4).

Sebeok fails to point out, however, that the "unique hallmarks" of animal communication systems are all to be found within tightly circumscribed biological and genetic constraints,<sup>5</sup> both with reference to what may be communicated and to what individual specie-members. Unlike human body languages, these systems of animal 'behaviour'<sup>6</sup> do not incorporate displaced references, the ability to communicate about things and persons outside of immediate temporal and spatial contiguity, nor do they include metaphor, metonymy and all of the paraphernalia of the language-using capacities of the human mind which are tied to the uniqueness of specifically human concepts of person and to our usages of person-categories. In other words, we cannot say of our furred and feathered friends, as we can say of human beings, that spatial points of reference are points of application for linguistic predicates (See Hampshire, 1965).

I have argued in the past, and will continue to argue in future against embracing ethological trends, even though I share with the pre-ethology group in social anthropology, linguistics and semiotics, a search for universals and invariants in human action sign systems. Indeed, some invariants regarding human actions have been stated in previous papers, but these have been sought for -- and found -- in the 'unconscious' (See Lévi-Strauss, 1963 and 1970), not through presupposing that there is an a priori likeness, or an already proven linkage, say, between human dancing and the manifestations of other sensate life that are called 'dancing' by some, but not all, ethologists.

Doubtless we can all agree that adherence to the Durkheimian interpretation of the social as a completely autonomous domain is unacceptable, mainly because it connotes a closed type of thinking which is widely, if not wholly, rejected by modern social scientists. We can probably also agree that to leave possible or imagined similarities between animal 'behaviour' and human actions uninvestigated, either because of a wish to preserve the purity of the Durkheimian stance or out of fear for the professional consequences of stepping beyond orthodox methodological and paradigmatic boundaries, whether in biology, ethology, linguistics or social anthropology, amounts to absurdity. These kinds of issues do not arise in this essay.

Bluntly stated, the issues, and all of the arguments with which I am acquainted, arise over one fundamental point: the vast conceptual gulf which exists between human beings and animals, consisting in the human use of languages and all that the human capacity for language-use implies (See Harré and Secord, 1972; Harré, 1971 and 1973; Hampshire, 1965; Jakobsen, 1967; Winch, 1958; Ardener, 1971, 1973, 1977 and 1980; Chapman, 1982; Polanyi, 1964; Wittgenstein, 1958 and Toulmin, 1953). One need not be a religious fundamentalist, a 'creationist' -- or any other type of religious or non-religious fanatic -- to recognize this gulf, but to point to it, as Sebeok himself does, is not trivial either. One does not need any special training to recognize that language-users generate action sign systems of different types of logical and semantic complexity. But it is an hierarchy of types of different orders of self-monitoring capacities that Sebeok seems to want to minimize, among other things. I will revert to this subject later on, so will say no more about it here.

The most perplexing feature of Sebeok's arguments, like those of another modern writer -- a phenomenologist -- who propounds a 'bodily logos' for humanity that, according to her, is shared with higher primates, has strong implications, especially for studies of the dance, dancers and dancing (See Sheets-Johnstone, 1983). The trouble is, we are not told specifically what it is, in either case, that all the evidence that is alluded to from animal studies is supposed to mean. When asked, 'Do you mean for us to understand that primates (including the famous 'Washoe', 'Alpha' and others) are equal to ourselves?', or, 'Do you mean for us to understand that primates' 'behaviours' are caused by intentions, beliefs, contexts and all the rest?', or, 'Do you mean to say that primates' 'dancing' is the same as human dancing; that there is only a difference of degree, not kind?', or, 'What are the consequences for assuming an ethological standpoint for dancers, dancing, and 'the dance'?', these questions raise storms of protest or elicit polite, but contemptuous sneers, as I have discovered to my cost -- but, significantly, I think, they are never answered.<sup>7</sup>

It would seem that enthusiastic supporters of the now-fashionable ethological trends in human movement studies assume that semasiologists (i) reject ethology as a successful science of animal 'behaviour' on its own, or that we detract in a rather silly way from the recent advances made, for example, in Tinbergian ethology, or (ii) reject a human evolutionary past, or (iii) detract from the enormous amount of effort, time, money and thought spent on Washoe and her counterparts by their respective trainers, or finally -- that we simply reject animals. But, one does not have to reject ethology as a science of animal 'behaviour' to question in what ways and in how far the descriptive language used for human systems can be transferred carte blanche to animals. One can comfortably concede the advances made in ethology by Tinbergan's removal of animal studies from laboratories to natural circumstances and still remain skeptical -- a non-believer -- in primate programming in human beings; cf. Fox and Tiger, 1972. Furthermore, one need not totally reject a human evolutionary past to agree with Jakobsen that "... all the communication systems of language-users ... differ substantially from any communication system employed by speechless creatures" (1967:673). One can simply agree with Jakobsen that for human beings, each system of signs, whether it is a danced idiom, a system of greetings, a martial art, a ceremony or a sign language is,

for a start, irrevocably linked to human language-using faculties and capacities.

Those who subscribe to the view that between human language and animal communication there is a difference of degree and not a qualitative gulf are prisoners of an "outdated behaviourist creed" (Jakobsen, 1967:673). Yet, Sebeok would have us believe that even though "... the intricacies of human kinesic communication ... far exceeds anything any other animal is known to produce" (citation from Bateson, 1968:614), he nevertheless seems to want us to accept a homology between "aesthetic principles" shared by humans and animals alike. Or, perhaps, he would argue that he does not want us to accept an homology, but only to concede that the "exquisite harmonization of averbal manifestations" of human behaviour are, if we go back far enough, ultimately to be explained as highly complex expressions of our animal ancestry?

Unlike the semasiologist, who prefers to constitute the problems of human actions, their analysis and re-description from social anthropological subject matter (that is, human beings) and who avoids importing or imposing theories developed from other disciplines onto them, Sebeok concerns himself with several specifically ethological puzzles, many of which stem from the constraints placed upon them by the nature of their enterprise. That is to say that they are forced to confine themselves to making inferences about the 'culture' of animals, including 'aesthetics' and 'art' because, given the subject matter of their discipline, they cannot do otherwise. In human ethnicities (at least in those cases where western aesthetic values and a concept of 'art' are applicable<sup>8</sup>) art or aesthetic preferences and principles are not inferences made from observations of speech-less creatures.

The ethologists' problem, with specific reference to the dance, is that demeanour is rule-governed (Ardener, 1973). Their further problem consists in the fact that the nature of investigative contacts between the entities 'human ↔ human' (which we shall call 'A') and the entities 'animal ↔ human' (which we shall call 'B') is different. It is possible to examine and to discuss the reflexivities involved in relationship 'A' because we are aware, first, of the reflexive nature of the interaction and of the subtleties that both human agents in observing each other must inevitably deal with, given the fact that their observations of each other are, because of their use of language, already built in. Case 'B', in strong contrast, is a comparatively one-sided affair, or if it is not, then no ethologist has yet been able to persuade even the higher primates, to tell us what linguistically based concepts are built into the creatures' observation of us, which brings us to the question of just what is involved in the alleged 'direct observation' of significant 'behaviour' in case 'B' -- or in case 'A', for that matter.

Ardener, in an extended argument concerning primate vocalic utterances and phonology (1977) has provided us with irrefutable evidence that "primate phonetics" are not human phonetics. Semasiologists can assert, with equal assurance, that primate kinetics are not human

kinetics (See Williams, 1981).<sup>9</sup> In other words, we do not see human behaviour and human actions as if they consisted of something that exists prior to or independent of human intentions, beliefs, passions and ideologies. When the Sebeoks say that "Language, in other words, as the central force animating human culture, is both our salvation and our damnation", and that considerable ambivalence is generated with "human(s)...who, for one reason or another, must rely upon gestural forms of communication" (1978:xv), we can only agree. We prefer, however, to seek "salvation" rather than "damnation", and hope that the content and conclusions of this paper might provide some indications of how we might all proceed. It is appropriate to add, too, that we do not wish to deny anyone the right to define humanity in relation to an 'other' which is non-human or sub-human, but we now stray from the point.

Confronted with arguments which seem to ignore or to minimize the fact that such self-definition (either as individuals or as groups) occurs simultaneously with any definition of 'others', we are obliged to object. Evans-Pritchard was convinced that we define ourselves in relation to others (1940), but then "...the 'other' is not an open category of infinite possibilities, but is in turn defined by its opposition to ourselves" (Ardener, 1977). Were Sebeok to try to answer his own questions about aesthetics and the dance with attempts to notate primate 'dances' for a start, he might then understand that the socio-linguistic and therefore the aesthetic features of western human dances are perhaps more clearly evident when attempts to represent the absences of cultural characteristics is required.<sup>10</sup> Even if we view a writing system like Labanotation merely as an international kinetic system of symbols for representing movement and nothing else,<sup>11</sup> we would be obliged to recognize that it is based on human kinetics, and as such, provides a graphic system that exists at several removes from any real or imagined inventory of primate kinetics.

One need not detract from any member or species of the animal kingdom to argue for the human case. Many creatures possess speed, adaptabilities and characteristics that often surpass those of humans: I know of no dancer who can move as fast as a hummingbird, jump as high as a horse, run as fast as a cheetah, swing from his or her tail like a monkey, or construct a nest like a weaver-bird's, but I remain unsure of the significance of these facts. One does not detract, either, from the problems and talents of those who train chimps like Washoe and live with them. Nor does one want to minimize the fact that the creatures can be taught to perform tricks or complicated chains of tricks (See Winch, 1958:59-62, for the difference between an animal learning a trick and a human being learning a rule), but, one does feel obliged to point out -- because one's opponents never seem to do so -- that teaching human beings to dance is a totally different kind of effort. The skills required to teach people are not the same as those required to train animals.

It is the arguments of our ethologically-minded friends, who, like Sebeok, ask if the optimal design of an animal communication system allows for a superimposed "aesthetic function" onto those systems to which we must respond, first, with a confession of mystification. Are we expected to produce an hypothetical mechanism of some kind that will then explain the "aesthetic functions" of animal communication systems and human systems, or what? One can, of course, superimpose anything onto anything: dancers (considered momentarily as an homogeneous group) are especially aware of this. We have so often been classified with animals in this culture -- and with 'primitives', 'neurotics' and children that we are, perhaps, over-sensitive to the underlying assumptions and the implications behind Sebeok's question. I have likened our plight (at the hands of, say, an Armstrong (1963), a Peng (1978), and Argyle (1975) and many others) to third-world nationals who find themselves explained, and their activities subsumed, under the paradigms of non-native speakers -- or under the paradigms of a reductivist view of science (See Williams, 1986).

Those of us who have either been dancers and who have entered the worlds of science and educated discourse, or those of us who have studied human dancing in depth and who are equipped to assume rather more intellectual and scholarly responsibility for our benighted former professions tend to object to Positivist, Behavioural, Ethological, Darwinian and other kinds of meta-theoretical approaches that allow such classifications because they seem to offer us nothing but monolithic metaphysics that are similar to those that stem from Darwin's principles of natural selection as an explanation not only for what we do, but for what we experience. The animals cannot talk back, but human dancers can -- especially those of us who are trying to liberate ourselves and others from the cramping restraints of certain reductivist scientific ideals (See Grene, 1971, for further discussion).

For now, suffice it to say that we would tend to agree with Hillary Callan when she defines 'ethologism' as a term composed "... of something like romanticism plus the current gloom and despondency about the human condition, plus the perfectly genuine success of ethology as a science" (1970:160). Crick is also justified in saying that one is tempted to compare the vogue of ethologism with that of 'primitive' tribes resorting to animal imagery in systems of totemism. This employment of the animal realm to the purpose of yielding terms of human self-understanding -- a kind of filtering of human social and moral concerns and values through animal worlds -- should make us somewhat wary as to our motives in embracing the ethological trend. The popularity of the subject has resulted in a great amount of shoddy work in a field which also boasts a number of serious, conscientious scholars. But the former is not irrelevant to the latter, for it results from the same type of perception of the human estate, even though they exist at two distinct levels of scholarship (See Crick, 1976:102-108, for fuller discussions of 'animal behaviour' and 'ethology').

When Desmond Morris naively declares that he is a sociologist and that man is an animal (1969:9), this is in essence the premise from which many more learned approaches start. As far as I am aware, there is no doubt in anyone's mind that Dr. Sebeok is a conscientious scholar; therefore it comes as a surprise to note that popularizers like Morris are quoted with approval, and that Sachs (1937), whose book on dancing has merited cogent, although savage, criticisms from several leading anthropologists of human movement (i.e. Keali'inohomoku, 1977; Youngerman, 1972; and Williams, 1976) because of its naive evolutionary point of view, its chauvinism and its reductivist stance, is offered as a foundation for -- or somehow in support of -- his remarks about dancing. It also comes as a surprise that a remark by Royce about dancing, taken out of context, is used to shore up arguments for ethology (Sebeok, 1979:15). While Royce and Hanna are two of the five original anthropologists of human movement, and they are cited regarding matters about dancing, there are significant omissions, consisting of those of us who have addressed the ethological problems directly, who would defend Royce's, but would not defend Hanna's conclusions about the nature of human dancing (See Powers, 1984, for a recent criticism of her work and Kaepler, 1979, for an earlier criticism).

Finally, one need not be an 'animal-hater' to realize that the stimulus-response model for human physical behaviour was an extrapolation from animal 'behaviour' and the basis for perfectly respectable sciences like kinesiology, that do not pretend to deal with any of humanity's movements except the mechanical. Nor need we reject the as yet unfound links between animal 'behaviour' and the semantic systems through which human interaction (including dancing) takes place to remain totally unconvinced regarding, for example, Freeman's view of ritual and symbolism, which holds that human conventions are simply "... shared modes of adaptation, the displacement of a pre-existing behavioural repertoire" (1966:339-340ff). We can only observe that Lévi-Strauss's famous statement, "Animals are good to think with", surely applies to Armstrong, who apparently not only thinks with animals, but justifies his careless appropriation of human dancing into the animal domain by postulating unidentified emotional 'drives' as the basis for both.

No one objects to Armstrong's or to anyone else's attempts to synthesize the universe into an intelligible narrative of human 'beginnings'; we possess many interesting and complex explanations of that genre. We do object to his use of human dancing as one of the pivotal axes around which his arguments turn, because we do not think that he really knows or understands what the human act of dancing is really like. As anthropologists, we would require that he study some aspect of the activity as a participant-observer, and that he ask teachers, choreographers and dancers (as Susanne Langer did)<sup>12</sup> what their 'art' is all about. We find the folk model of the activity significantly missing. Thus, with all due respect, we cannot take his arguments about dancing seriously, nor can we honour his patronizing remarks about the 'bogies' and 'spectres' of anthropomorphism and Cartesianism: these are not fantasies of the nursery, nor are we children. The epithet of 'anthropomorphism' means, in Armstrong's case, that he should look to the real conceptual constraints that surround



ethology, and it is clear that the 'spectre' about which he speaks is a Cartesian 'ghost' in the moving machine (See Varela, 1983, for thorough discussion).

We would want to ask, if we use the terms 'dance', 'perform', 'symbolize', 'signification' and others with reference to animals, can it be with the same sense and with the same implications that these terms are employed in the human context? If the answer is 'no', then why do we not reject the use of such terms with reference to speechless creatures? Or, at the very least, why do we not exercise more care, in the interests of students new to the study of anthropology, linguistics and the human(e) sciences that such terms as these, used in ethological studies, are purely metaphorical and that the ethologist, studying forms of sensate life which have no speech of their own, must impose his or her own human terms onto the organized 'behaviours' of the creatures observed? Any other understanding of the ethologists' usage of language is simply going to perpetuate the conceptual confusion that vitiates so much of the literature concerning the dance and human movement.

If the subject matter of the social sciences consists of human agents who are people having conceptual systems of their own actions, and if the subject matter of ethology consists of non-human creatures who are animals having no conceptual systems for their own actions -- by which I mean that they seem unable to form linguistic propositions or to construct sign languages and idioms of dancing -- then a distinction must be made between the ethologist who is limited to external observations alone, and anthropologists and linguists, who are not limited to external observations alone. In fact, modern anthropology, as I and several of my colleagues conceive of it, is a language-based science. Ethology is not. And may I hasten to say, in defense of colleagues who are physical anthropologists and ethologists that they are often troubled and downright annoyed by the cavalier treatment of the alleged 'results' of their research. In fact, Tinbergen (1968) has asked that those outside the discipline concentrate less upon the alleged or imagined 'results' of ethological research as they are indiscriminately applied to human societies or used politically and socially for comparative reasons and to look at the methodology of ethology instead.

No one has any serious doubts that sub-human primates like Washoe, given the exceptional circumstances in which she was 'raised' -- or is it 'reared'? -- learned to combine some sign counters into simple sequences, but until Washoe's counterparts can accomplish linguistic reflexivity, either in speech or actions, there will be many who do not think that such isolated cases as Washoe are as significant as they are sometimes made out to be. Human action sign systems are not just 'more complex' than animal 'behaviour', nor are animal 'behaviours' simply 'less complex' than human action sign systems or our capabilities for literacy and such. To say that the issue is just a matter of degree is to commit all manner of conceptual errors. For, if there is a systemic, typical, qualitative difference between people and animals, then we cannot simply treat the meta-levels which are not only possible, but demonstrably exist, in human communication and a higher-order neural capacity as 'increased complexity' or as a 'development' of some kind.

I suggest that if the issue turned around such 'development', then it is highly likely that somebody would have taught chimps how to speak English a long time ago, or else the beasts themselves would have discovered a way of speaking and writing and they would have developed their own mythologies, creation legends, sciences, stories and all the rest. There would be no need for us to do it for them.<sup>13</sup>

When we use human, 'person' terms to describe animal 'behaviour', we merely invite -- and are then forced to live with -- confusion. It has become a commonplace, for example, to speak of the 'authority structure' of primate groups, but in the human social context, authority is not an inference from observations of speech-less creatures. On the contrary, authority is a concept linked with ideas of legitimacy and human systems of values and beliefs which form whole human ideologies. If such facts are not reproducible in the primate situation, then can we not agree that we invite confusion to employ the term 'authority structure' to primates? On what, we would like to know, is the 'authority structure' in primate 'society' and 'language' based?

In many ways, the problem alluded to above is clearer in relation to the fields of ritual and dancing than it is in law. In the literature of functional anthropology, ritual and dancing were conceived of as some special form of human actions. Furthermore, they have been defined as systems of actions related to mystical ideas and beliefs. Whether or not the dance and ritual actions should be classified as 'special' or not is one problem. That they are irrevocably bound up with conceptual systems and ideologies, one would have thought, is patently obvious. It would not be difficult to defend the proposition that the terms 'dance', 'ritual', 'idea' and 'belief' are synonymous in important ways, if (and only if) 'dance' and 'ritual' are thought of in human 'person' terms. In the cases of the alleged 'dances' of bees, birds, etc., the terms are employed to mean biologically rooted, organized animal movements of an instinctive, impulsive kind, when, for instance, the creatures are defending a territory, attracting a mate and such. If these organized 'behaviours' are 'performances' in a human sense, then why do they never take place out of season, and on what concepts and ideas are they based? Where are the creatures' accounts of them?

The very word 'performance' is the reverse of 'instinctive'. Even when we speak of human 'instinctive' or 'impulsive' actions, we refer to symbolic acts which partake of the conceptual strata in human spoken and body languages. It is therefore legitimate to ask, 'how can ethology create a conceptual field for animals, which, in the end, is based on human language and language-using capacities'? It would seem rather muddled of the ethologists to try to persuade us that the conceptual fields for animals are the same as those for humans, but if they apply human categorical and classificatory terms to animal 'behaviour', they are really arguing on the side of those of us who emphasize the discrete, non-continuous types of logical and semantic complexities involved, for the ethologists' very dependence on human conceptual terms underlines the distinction between language-users and speech-less creatures. The poverty of a natural science notion of 'behaviour' that would have us performing intellectual grande jetés from unstructured (i.e. non-linguified) movements of speech-less creatures to, say, a

concept of motivation constitutes just one of the objections to a bio-social model and its applications, because here, 'behaviour' is treated as if it were prior to and independent of, human intentions, beliefs and socio-linguistic contexts.

Because movements can be treated in this way in the animal realm, where movements are independent of intentions, beliefs, ideologies, language and such, this model is then applied to human action signs -- in particular, the dance. The animal model, through an interesting sleight-of-mind, is re-applied to humans and we are confronted with the awkward and unjustifiable dichotomies of 'verbal' and 'non-verbal' human behaviour -- or in Sebeok's case with 'verbal' and 'averbal' dichotomization. Needless to say, perhaps, there are considerable problems. If I understand him, the case he makes can be summarized as follows:

- (i) if conventionally understood spoken or written language only is 'verbal', that is, only the auditory medium of human communication is to be assigned the term 'language', and if
- (ii) the 'averbal' domain of human movement (or 'action' or 'behaviour') is, by definition, not language, then
- (iii) human dances, signing, greeting systems, the martial arts, the body languages of Roman and Orthodox Catholicism and many other systems in the world are not -- and cannot be -- 'language' in any sense, therefore,
- (iv) the 'dances' of stilt birds, chimps, bees and so on, being 'non-linguistic' and corresponding to the 'averbal' danced behaviour of human beings, can be 'prefigurements' of human art, because neither can constitute language.

On p. 37, we find an argument adduced in support of these contentions that speaks of the different processing in different parts of the brain -- the 'verbal' and 'averbal' hemispheres. It is unclear whether the separate functions of hemispheres is an implicit or an explicit theoretical point. It is also unclear, in either case, just what we are meant to conclude from it. I have no doubt that Sebeok is aware that the brain also functions as a whole and that to deal with dancing in any cultural situation is to deal with an activity as it happens 'on the ground' that is a result of whole brain function. Moreover, I would want to say that it is with reference to the functioning of the whole that humanity's language-using capacities are "absolutely distinct", whether the human is speaking, writing or singing in the auditory medium, or dancing, signing, fighting or praying in the medium of movement. A human being, lobotomized such that one or the other half of the brain did not function surely could not be said to be 'acting' in any of these ways, if, indeed, he or she would be able to function at all.

It has been suggested by Jones (1967) that Darwin's principle of natural selection has strong functionalist implications, and equal parts, thereby, of reductionism, which may account for the popularity of his ideas as an explanation of human movement, because the simplicity of his explanations, especially if one tries to apply them to dancing, releases one from the rather stringent requirements of dealing with the complexities of danced spaces. Although I agree with Callan that Darwin's thought is unquestionably an obvious landmark for anyone studying the development of evolutionary thought in the nineteenth century as it affected both the biological and social science of the future (Callan, 1970:13), I have strong reservations about an application of his principles of natural selection regarding the human activity of dancing. What, simply stated, might the Darwinian position look like?

Through mutation, animals acquire characteristics which enable them to deal more or less effectively with their environment. Their characteristics are then described in terms of distinctive features that contribute to the organism's perpetuation. The organism's biological system is primary. 'Functions', of course, maintain the system and 'structures', i.e. fins, paws, claws, arms and legs, perform 'functions'. The biological, system-maintaining characteristics of the movements pertaining to erotic procreation and mating, if seen as 'dancing' (or 'a dance' of some kind), are thus seen as extensions of the structures that maintain the system and perpetuate the organism. The phrase 'if seen as dancing' is crucial, of course, but we would want to say that those who see 'mating dances' of other sensate creatures and human dancing as similar are simply making the mistake of assuming that because something resembles another thing in some particular feature they must be alike in other respects is simply committing the old pars pro toto fallacy.

Many claims have been made with regard to the relevance of phylogenetic histories of biological organisms to the understanding of the social history of humanity. Equally many claims have been made with reference to the relevance of a purely biological study of the behaviour of animals or other kinds of organisms, emphasizing their species-preserving functions and the behaviours of human beings. The point at issue is a question of procedure. How valid are general conclusions about human social history or human activities like dancing when they are lifted, sometimes en toto from the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the non-human sciences?

"We are persons, and the resistance to reductivism springs often, perhaps chiefly from our resistance to the mockery we must make of ourselves in its terms" (Grene, 1971:65). None of the scholars Sebeok cites, nor does Sebeok himself, offer us any over-arching concept that is equivalent to a concept of 'person' or 'person-category'; part of the theoretical capital of a semantic anthropology. Semasiology, in postulating 'intransitive structures' -- an open set of meta-theoretical invariants that describes, for us, the panchronic zone of explanation of human action sign systems -- offers a set of theoretical propositions that designate those conditions by which and in terms of which human beings construct, in amazingly diverse ways, those systems of knowledge and actions in the medium of movement that are the activities

of representation of their knowledges. These are all parts of the lived, ethnographically describable narratives of their lives (as individuals or as groups) as ethnicities of 'societies'. Even when we are, for analytical purposes, speaking of the moves of parts of the person or of human bodies that move, we do so knowing that such analysis simply constitutes part of the verification procedures that we demand, but such investigatory strategies are always subordinate to the concept of 'personhood', because to proceed otherwise would be to violate an implied philosophy of mind.

Dancers, wherever they may be found, are persons and they resist the mockery that they must make of themselves and their activities as dancers if they consent to a variety of reductionism, all too many of which rigidly define science for many people, but again, I digress.

It is to the matter of Sebeok's usage of Sachs as an authority that I would now turn, and to Boas, because the remarks that are made about both tend, unfortunately, to be somewhat misleading:

The first publication about dance that had any real relevance to anthropology was Curt Sachs' Eine Weltgeschichte des Tanzes, published in 1933 and translated into English in 1937 as World History of the Dance. Although this book certainly has a place today in the study of the history of anthropological theory, it has no place in the study of dance in an anthropological perspective. Its theoretical stance is derived from the German Kulturkreis school of Schmidt and Graebner in which worldwide diffusion resulted in a form of unilineal evolution. But just as modern non-Western peoples do not represent earlier stages of Western cultural evolution, there is no reason to believe that non-Western dance represents earlier stages of Western dance. Yet some anthropologists find it possible to accept the latter without accepting the former.

Much more important for the study of dance in anthropological perspective, although he did not really address himself to the subject, was Franz Boas, whose orientation offers scope for analysing dance as culture rather than using dance data to fit theories and generalizations. Boas felt that man had a basic need for order and rhythm -- a need which Boas used to help explain the universal existence of art. By refusing to accept sweeping generalizations that did not account for cultural variability, he laid a foundation for the possibility of examining dance and responses to it in terms of one's own culture rather than as a universal language. In spite of Boas and others, however, the idea that dance (or art) can be understood cross-culturally without understanding an individual dance tradition in terms of the cultureal background of which it is a part, is not yet dead, especially among artists and dancers (Kaepler, 1978:33).

Boas seemed convinced that on account of the intense emotional value of music and dance, they enter into all those human social situations that imply heightened effects, and, in their turn they call forth an intense emotional reaction. Thus, war and religion offer numerous situations which are accompanied by music and dancing, that are in part an expression of the excitement inherent in the situation, and in part a means of further exciting the passions that have been aroused. He advised us, however, that it would be an error to assume that the sources of music and dance must be looked for in these situations. It seemed more likely to him that music and dancing share with other ethnic phenomena, particularly religion, the tendency to associate themselves with all those activities that give rise to emotional states similar to those of which they themselves are expressions (Boas, 1938:607).

The point that Kaepler makes, that non-western dancing does not represent earlier stages of western dancing, is an assertion that one would want to emphasize, adding that the alleged 'dancing' of non-human species does not represent earlier stages of western or any other form of human dancing either. The advice that Boas gave, i.e. that the sources of dancing are not to be sought after in emotional situations, is equally well-taken. The issue that has to be addressed in the end is whether or not human dancing can be effectively studied in any of its rich, diverse manifestations, if it is seen as an over-abstracted ideal of an activity that is one unified system. It is not. And it does not do to put up an appeal, as Sebeok and Sheets-Johnstone both seem to do, of a simple, one-levelled physicalism.

Human beings possess, in unparalleled abundance, the characteristic of flexibility in their so-called 'behavioural responses'. All of the data consisting of the world's dances, sign languages and other movement-based systems can be brought forward as evidence to support the claim that just here, we can see with blinding clarity the fact that human beings are precisely free from the rigid dictates of genetic programmings that, like those of animals, specify single responses. Human beings are not only not rigidly programmed, we are an unspecialized group of creatures. I do not think that there is an ethologist, biologist or physical anthropologist who would disagree. They might, however, think that I suggest resorting to a-theoretical particularisms as an alternative to their persistent suggestions, stated in many ways, that those of us who insist on the uniqueness of humanity simply 'give in' and regard our subject matter as highly complex animals -- but animals, nonetheless.

But it is just here that I must remain mystified by Sebeok's arguments, because it would seem that he has aligned himself with evolutionary biology to such an extent that he would yield the explanatory control, not only of linguistics, but of semiotics and social anthropology to the kinds of reductivist, genetic explanations that are characteristic of sociobiology. Surely he would not suggest that we concede such controls to that distinguished group of scholars, thereby minimizing the uniqueness of human culture and our not inconsiderable potential for self-understanding at a cultural level. I therefore hope that what I seem to read in Sebeok's 'Prefigurations'

article is completely wrong. In other words, I would have thought that Sebeok would support an anti-reductivist's perspective of the human sciences and semiotics -- but it could be that I have got that all wrong too.

The assumption of an anti-reductivist's stance in no way commits one to dualisms of the old familiar Cartesian kind. It does, however, commit one to the notion of hierarchy, and to hierarchical levels, not only of orders of self-monitoring capacities, but other features of human faculties and capacities as well. It seems necessary to become a 'constructivist' as an alternative to reductionism, which means that one seeks new levels of understanding and additional sets of principles whereby one can explain human actions -- and this, really, is what semasiology is all about. We neither deny, nor contradict, ethological explanations for sub-human 'behaviours' or biological explanations for lower levels of life forms, although we do tend to quarrel with what we view as a certain laxity in the use of descriptive language and technical terms such as 'behaviour'. The principles of semasiology do not preclude a chemical examination of a dancer's body, a kinesiological examination of a 'grande battement' or any other move in any other dancer's body language game, or a biological comparison, say, of circular formations that sometimes appear in human dances and rituals, but we think it both misguided and foolish to invoke chemistry, kinesiology or biology -- even evolutionary biology -- as explanatory paradigms for, say, a performance of Seraphic Dialogue, Bharatanatyam, a Haitian vudu ritual, a Harvest Moon Ball or any other manifestation of human dancing, ritual, ceremony, martial art or sign language in the world.

It may be the case that, as anthropologists, and as anti-reductivists, we must be "... wary of the deepest cultural prejudice of all: our almost desperate desire to make human beings special and superior among the animals of our earth" (Gould, 1981), but what about the cultural prejudice that operates at the other extreme? Is there not an almost equally desperate desire to make human beings non-special and not at all superior? And what are those of us interested in the study of the dance, dancers and dancing to do with the assertions and claims of those scientists or semioticians who would use the activity to 'prove' just how undistinguished, ignoble, irresponsible and unaccountable for our actions that we 'really' are? Is this a plea for modesty, or is it a denial: a rather neurotic refusal to accept our human responsibilities and obligations?

Finally, I would hope that this paper will be accepted in the spirit in which it is offered: that of an attempt to provoke serious debate and to elicit serious scholarly attention, not just towards dancing per se, but towards the questions that a systematic examination of human dancing can generate. Many of my colleagues whatever their disciplinary persuasion have told me that they do not know anything about dancing, either in theory or in practice. I take this as an open invitation for argument and productive conversation, and would

want to say that Sebeok's paper has been of invaluable assistance to me in that it has prompted further and deeper consideration of issues and intellectual challenges that I assume to be of common interest to us all.

23 March, 1984  
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#### NOTES

1. A semiotic treatment of actions simply means a scientific study of action signs, leaving open, of course, whether or not any given study of such signs is undertaken from a reductivist's or an anti-reductivist's standpoint. In Margaret Mead's definition (cf. Sebeok, *et al.*, 1964) 'semiotic' derives ultimately from John Locke's 'semiotike': the business whereof is to consider the nature of signs the [human] mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying of its knowledge to others.
2. The term 'semasiology' and its derivatives comes from a Greek source and can be defined as 'signification' in the sense of 'meaning + logy'. In the late 19th century, the word was used to refer to that branch of philology which dealt with the meanings of words. The term was used by R. Martineau in 1877 with reference to 'the semasiology of Arabic words'. In 1884, a reference appeared in the *Athenaeum*, 27 Sept. 395/1 as follows:

Philology is now advancing towards a new branch of having intimate relations with psychology, the so-called semasiology of Abel and others.

The next recorded use of the term occurs in 1889, where F. Haverfield (*Academy*, 7 Dec. 394/1) uses it to raise doubt about the phonetic connections of words. That is, where two words may seem to be phonetically linked, semasiologically their connection might be improbable. In 1880, a linguistic entity, the 'semasiological solecism' was apparently known and understood, as the phrase occurs in the *Athenaeum*. In that publication (5 Aug. 185) this phrase occurs:

The semasiologist ... has to trace the vicissitudes which the history of forms, words and phrases presents with respect to signification.

Usage of this term has always pointed towards the semantic aspects of linguistic signification and the term was chosen as a neologism in social anthropology to designate the same kind of concerns, only with reference to action signs rather than to linguistic signs.



3. There are many who still believe that an 'eme' of movement, say, the hand position used for thumbing a ride, if seen to occur in two or more systems of body language (i.e. as the mudra sikara in Bharatanatyam; as a substitute for the verbal expression 'right on' in the body language of the streets of New York; as 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down', possibly surviving from the Roman Circus, and other usages) must point to a similarity of meaning, or semantic content. Modern semasiologists argue that this is not the case; that two gestures or two utterances of body language may seem kinetically linked, but semasiologically, their connection is improbable, or demonstrably false, given the results of specific research where actual comparisons have been made (See Farnell, 1984; Puri, 1983; Hart-Johnson, 1984). It seems necessary to add, too, that detailed work can be produced to justify our claims that human kinetics are neither usefully applicable to, nor are they the same as, primate 'kinetics'.
4. All too often, any opposition whatsoever in any context is treated as a 'dichotomy'. All oppositions are not dichotomies, nor do they display the characteristics of a dichotomy (See Ogden, 1982/1957). It is to divisions of 'systems of belief' and 'systems of actions' (or divisions of the 'verbal' and 'non-verbal' in the human realm) seen as basic parts that are regarded as fundamentally or irreducibly different, implying mutual exclusion, to which I object.
5. Bonner (1981) tells the story of the female mason wasp, Monobia quadridens, for example, one species among many which has evolved rigidly programmed patterns of single response such that it is unable to accommodate natural or experimental changes in its environment and will dig itself to its own death, steadfastly obeying its genetic program. There are hundreds of such examples that can be adduced.
6. My usage of inverted commas around the term 'behaviour' when it is applied to animals is deliberate and is meant to mark the difference between its natural science and its social usage (See Ardener, 1973). I apologize for any visual irritation this may generate, but I feel it necessary to remind readers that the term used for animals and for humans, as we conceive of it, is different.
7. The only answers that I have ever received to these questions are non-answers. They are counter-questions, i.e., 'Do you mean to say that Alpha and Washoe are different and that you deny biology?' and such. My reply: 'yes' to the first, and 'no' to the second half of the question; however, I realize that such invitations by my antagonists to interminable and unsolvable discussion avoids addressing the questions I ask.

8. We know that western aesthetic principles are not universal, that is, they do not apply 'across the board' to all cultures and that it would be difficult to know what is meant by "aesthetic functions" of human systems of dancing, seen as a monolithic whole, or sign languages, etc. considered as 'communication systems'. I simply do not know what Dr. Sebeok means by the "aesthetic functions" of animal communication systems. Of the choices I seem to have, (i) superimposing a human conception of aesthetics onto animal communication, (ii) ignoring the fact that whatever 'I' or anyone else thinks the creatures mean, apart from mating, fighting, etc., we cannot know, in any sense comparable to the possibilities that exist for examination and research into human self-understanding.
9. See this paper with particular reference to comments on the structure of the human semasiological body.
10. It is necessary to construct a thought exercise here, fully to comprehend what is meant: suppose one attempts to notate a simple move of a monkey -- the creature reaches for and grasps a pole, for instance. Apart from writing the raw movement, filming it or drawing a picture, comparable to recording the sounds the creature might make as semantically null manifestations in either case, several questions would have to be answered in order to write action signs, as in the case of any human dance. For instance, one would have to know is the forelimb of the animal moving in an intended direction in space or is the 'hand' moving away from the torso, or towards the pole? Is the intention of the creature to support the rest of the body in order to squat down, to transport the body to somewhere else in space, or to free the rest of the body to attack, or does the creature want to 'play' with the pole? None of this so far addresses notions of the timings and dynamics involved: is the creature grasping 'tentatively', 'eagerly', 'forcefully', 'fearfully', 'longingly', or what? It is only possible to write the movements of animals. One cannot write 'actions', or action signs, because in order to do that, one has to have answers from agents. Basically, then, before one gets to aesthetics, even in the human realm, one has to have prior knowledges regarding intentions, purposes and beliefs. The point is, how do we know what the monkey's relation to the pole consists of?
11. We do not, of course, regard Labanotation in this way, but would want to say that even if we acquiesce in the game and say that we do that, there is a problem: the notation is already a linguistically-based script, based on human kinetics. Therefore, attempts to notate primate moves with Labanotation is analogous to attempts to represent animal sounds with the Roman alphabet, or with the phones, morphemes and utterances of a human language. This may be possible, but just how meaningful is it -- to us, or to the monkeys? (See Farnell, 1984, for more thorough discussion).

12. Langer became known, informally, as 'the dancer's philosopher' in the late 'forties after Philosophy in a New Key was published, not only because she had taken the trouble to find out what dancers thought they were doing when they danced, but because of her recognition that 'gestures' and 'actions' can possess symbolic value in a hard, logical sense. Subsequent essays of hers, such as that on Dancing in Problems of Art state with superb clarity what any western dancer knows, plus the fact that work like this opened up the possibility for a general Casserian/Langerian point of view about the activity, representing an invaluable contribution to studies on the nature of dancing in the midst of an historical period in the United States that was dominated, in academia, by positivist thinking.

One may disagree with elements of Langer's total philosophy of mind, and I do, but in so doing, one need not reject the many penetrating insights that she had into a little known and less understood activity -- dancing. Being a prolific writer, she has produced at least one piece about dancing that is a bit of an embarrassment, i.e. Langer (1953:Chap.VI), but that does not seem to justify a cavalier treatment of her views, as in Sebeok (1979:65, note 3) where a secondary reference is cited, stigmatising her views (apparently totally) as "absurd", especially when the reference concerns the question of consciousness and the arts. I have not read Thorpe, but would want to say that if I understand the import of the quoted statement, I wonder who is "absurd" -- Thorpe or Langer -- if he objects to the notion of differences between birdsong and human music. Are we meant to understand that Callas's Tosca is the same as a nightingale's song, or only that metaphorically, she sings like one?

13. It seems necessary to note that no amount of popular anecdotal writing by authors like Hediger (1976) will suffice as hard ethological 'evidence' of the alleged usage of pronouns, proper names and such by animals.

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