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The 1988 Stirling Award Essay

Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology

THOMAS J. CSORDAS

The purpose of this essay is not to argue that the human body is an important object of anthropological study, but that a paradigm of embodiment can be elaborated for the study of culture and the self. By paradigm I mean simply a consistent methodological perspective that encourages reanalyses of existing data and suggests new questions for empirical research. Although I shall argue that a paradigm of embodiment transcends different methodologies, I will not attempt to synthesize the broad multidisciplinary literature on the body.¹ The approach I will develop from the perspective of psychological anthropology leans strongly in the direction of phenomenology. This approach to embodiment begins from the methodological postulate that the body is not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture.²

The work of Hallowell is a useful point of departure, since his denomination of the “self as culturally constituted” marked a meth-

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odological shift away from concern with personality structure, and remains current in anthropological thought. In his most influential article, Hallowell (1955) articulated two principal concerns, which for present purposes I will term perception and practice. Perception is a key element in Hallowell's definition of the self as self-awareness, the recognition of oneself as an "object in a world of objects." He saw self-awareness as both necessary to the functioning of society and as a generic aspect of human personality structure. He referred to his outline of a method to study the self as phenomenological "for want of a better term," but I would argue that what he lacked was a more adequately worked out phenomenology. Nevertheless, in directly addressing the problem of perception, Hallowell prefigured an anthropological critique of the distinction between subject and object.

However, although he explicitly recognized the self as a self-objectification and the product of a reflexive mood, Hallowell cast his analysis at the level of the already objectified self. A fully phenomenological account would recognize that while we are capable of becoming objects to ourselves, in daily life this seldom occurs. Such an account would take the decisive step of beginning with the preobjective and prereflective experience of the body, showing that the process of self-objectification is already cultural prior to the analytic distinction between subject and object. Hallowell went only as far as the conventional anthropological concept that the self is constituted in the ontogenetic process of socialization, without taking full cognizance of the constant reconstitution of the self, including the possibilities not only for creative change in some societies, but for varying degrees of self-objectification cross-culturally.

Hallowell's second concern is summarized in the term "behavioral environment," borrowed from the gestalt psychology of Koffka. The proto-phenomenological approach to perception that we have identified accounts for an essential feature of the behavioral environment, namely that it includes not only natural objects but "culturally reified objects," especially supernatural beings and the practices associated with them. The concept thus did more than place the individual in culture, linking behavior to the objective world, but also linked perceptual processes with social constraints and cultural meanings. Thus, the focus of Hallowell's formulation was "orientation" with respect to self, objects, space and time, mo-

tivation, and norms. It is in this sense that the term “practice” is relevant to describe Hallowell’s concern. If, as Ortner (1984) has argued, the anthropological conceptualization of practice occurred at a certain theoretical moment, then the concept of behavioral environment is a terminological composite that stands for the context in which practice is carried out, and hence counts as a theoretical stepping-stone between behavior and practice. This is of particular relevance to the present argument because, as we shall see, a theory of practice can best be grounded in the socially informed body.

There are other ways to frame the need for a paradigm of embodiment, of which I shall mention only one. Mauss ([1938] 1950), in his fragmentary but influential discussion of the person, suggested that all humans have a sense of spiritual and corporal individuality. At the same time, he argued that particular social conditions were associated with qualitative differences among the totemistic personage, the classical persona, and the Christian person.³ It is of empirical concern to my argument that he saw the development of the individualistic person played out in the arena of sectarian movements of the 17th and 18th centuries, since the data I analyze below come from their 20th-century equivalent. It is of methodological concern that he saw the person as associated with the distinction between the world of thought and the material world as promulgated by Descartes and Spinoza, since the paradigm of embodiment has as a principal characteristic the collapse of dualities between mind and body, subject and object. In this light it is of relevance that Mauss himself had already reproduced this duality by elaborating his concept of *la notion du personne* quite independently from that of *les techniques du corps* ([1934] 1950). Here again we find the themes of perception and practice as domains of the culturally constituted self; but writing nearly two decades before Hallowell, Mauss could not yet treat them together, still less within a consistent paradigm of embodiment.

My plan for outlining such a paradigm begins with a critical examination of two theories of embodiment: Merleau-Ponty (1962), who elaborates embodiment in the problematic of *perception*, and Bourdieu (1977, 1984), who situates embodiment in an anthropological discourse of *practice*. My exposition will be hermeneutic in the specific sense of cycling through presentation of methodological concepts and demonstrations of how thinking in terms of embodi-

ment has influenced my own research on healing and ritual language in a contemporary Christian religious movement. I first examine two religious healing services, interpreting multisensory imagery as an embodied cultural process. Then I examine the practice of speaking in tongues or glossolalia as embodied experience within a ritual system and as a cultural operator in the social trajectory of the religious movement. Finally, I return to a general discussion of the implications of embodiment as a methodological paradigm.

METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION TO EMBODIMENT

The problematic of both theorists is formulated in terms of troublesome dualities. For Merleau-Ponty in the domain of perception the principal duality is that of subject-object, while for Bourdieu in the domain of practice it is structure-practice. Both attempt not to mediate but to collapse these dualities, and embodiment is the methodological principle invoked by both. The collapsing of dualities in embodiment requires that the body as a methodological figure must itself be nondualistic, that is, not distinct from or in interaction with an opposed principle of mind. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty the body is a “setting in relation to the world,” and consciousness is the body projecting itself into the world; for Bourdieu the socially informed body is the “principle generating and unifying all practices,” and consciousness is a form of strategic calculation fused with a system of objective potentialities. I shall briefly elaborate these views as summarized in Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the *preobjective* and Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus*.

THE PERCEPTUAL CONSTITUTION OF CULTURAL OBJECTS

Merleau-Ponty lays out his position as a critique of empiricism.⁴ He examines the constancy hypothesis, which asserts that since perception originates in external stimuli that are registered by our sensory apparatus, there is a “point by point correspondence and constant connection between the stimulus and elementary perception” (1962:7). This is not experientially true, he argues—far from being constant, perception is by nature indeterminate. There is always more than meets the eye, and perception can never outrun itself or exhaust the possibilities of what it perceives. When we make a special effort to see two apparently unequal lines in an optical illusion as really equal, or to see that the triangle is really three lines related

by certain geometric properties, we are making an abstraction, not discovering what we really perceive and later name as a triangle or illusion. What we “really” perceive is, in the first case, that one line is longer than the other, and in the second, the triangle. To start from the objective point of view (the triangle as geometric object and the lines of objectively parallel length) and analytically work backward to the perceiving subject does not accurately capture perception as a constituting process.⁵

Merleau-Ponty thus wants our starting point to be the experience of perceiving in all its richness and indeterminacy, because in fact we do not have any objects prior to perception. To the contrary, “Our perception ends in objects . . . ,” which is to say that objects are a secondary product of reflective thinking; on the level of perception we have no objects, we are simply in the world. Merleau-Ponty then wants to ask where perception begins (if it ends in objects), and the answer is, in the body. He wants to step backward from the objective and start with the body in the world. This should also be possible for the study of the self conceived in Hallowell’s terms, as an object among other objects.

Since the subject-object distinction is a product of analysis, and objects themselves are end results of perception rather than being given empirically to perception, a concept is necessary to allow us to study the embodied process of perception from beginning to end instead of in reverse. For this purpose Merleau-Ponty offers the concept of the *preobjective*. His project is to “coincide with the act of perception and break with the critical attitude” (1962:238–239) that mistakenly begins with objects. Phenomenology is a descriptive science of existential beginnings, not of already constituted cultural products. If our perception “ends in objects,” the goal of a phenomenological anthropology of perception is to capture that moment of transcendence in which perception begins, and, in the midst of arbitrariness and indeterminacy, constitutes and is constituted by culture.

It may be objected that a concept of the preobjective implies that embodied existence is outside or prior to culture. This objection would miss what Merleau-Ponty means by the body as “a certain setting in relation to the world” (1962:303) or a “general power of inhabiting all the environments which the world contains” (1962:311). In fact, the body is in the world from the beginning:

... consciousness projects itself into a physical world and has a body, as it projects itself into a cultural world and has its habits: because it cannot be consciousness without playing upon significances given either in the absolute past of nature or in its own personal past, and because any form of lived experience tends toward a certain generality whether that of our habits or that of our bodily functions. [1962:137]

It is as false to place ourselves in society as an object among other objects, as it is to place society within ourselves as an object of thought, and in both cases the mistake lies in treating the social as an object. We must return to the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification. [1962:362]

By beginning with the preobjective, then, we are not positing a pre-cultural, but a preabstract. The concept offers to cultural analysis the open-ended human process of taking up and inhabiting the cultural world, in which our existence transcends but remains grounded in *de facto* situations.

Merleau-Ponty gives us the example of a boulder, which is already there to be encountered, but is not perceived as an obstacle until it is there *to be surmounted*.⁶ Constitution of the cultural object is thus dependent on intentionality (what would make one want to surmount the boulder?), but also upon the givenness of our upright posture (Straus 1966), which makes clambering over the boulder a particular way of negotiating it (an option even if one could walk around it). The anthropological anecdote told by David Schneider, of the umpire who declares that pitches are neither balls nor strikes until he calls them such,⁷ tells us about an act of bestowing cultural meaning, but it presupposes something about the cultural fact that the pitches are already there *to be called*. It presupposes objectification of a particular space of the body between the knees and shoulders (the strike zone) in conjunction with a particular way of moving the arms from the shoulders (swinging the bat). It is the process of this objectification to which Merleau-Ponty calls our attention.

HABITUS AND THE SOCIALLY INFORMED BODY

Bourdieu's methodological goal for the theory of practice is to delineate a third order of knowledge beyond both phenomenology⁸ and a science of the objective conditions of possibility of social life. Parallel to Merleau-Ponty's goal of moving the study of perception from objects to the process of objectification, Bourdieu's goal is to move beyond analysis of the social fact as *opus operatum*, to analysis of the *modus operandi* of social life. His strategy is to collapse the dual-

ities of body-mind and sign-significance in the concept of *habitus*. This concept was introduced by Mauss in his seminal essay on body techniques, to refer to the sum total of culturally patterned uses of the body in a society. For Mauss it was a means to organize an otherwise miscellaneous domain of culturally patterned behavior, and received only a paragraph of elaboration. Even so, Mauss anticipated how a paradigm of embodiment might mediate fundamental dualities (mind-body, sign-significance, existence-being)⁹ in his statement that the body is simultaneously both the original object upon which the work of culture is carried out, and the original tool with which that work is achieved (Mauss [1934] 1950:372). It is at once an object of technique, a technical means, and the subjective origin of technique.

Bourdieu goes beyond this conception of habitus as a collection of practices, defining it as a system of perduring dispositions which is the unconscious, collectively inculcated principle for the generation and structuring of practices and representations (1977:72). This definition holds promise because it focuses on the psychologically internalized content of the behavioral environment. For our purposes, it is important that the habitus does not generate practices unsystematically or at random, because there is a

. . . principle generating and unifying all practices, the system of inseparably cognitive and evaluative structures which organizes the vision of the world in accordance with the objective structures of a determinate state of the social world: this principle is nothing other than the *socially informed body*, with its tastes and distastes, its compulsions and repulsions, with, in a word, all its *senses*, that is to say, not only the traditional five senses—which never escape the structuring action of social determinisms—but also the sense of necessity and the sense of duty, the sense of direction and the sense of reality, the sense of balance and the sense of beauty, common sense and the sense of the sacred, tactical sense and the sense of responsibility, business sense and the sense of propriety, the sense of humor and the sense of absurdity, moral sense and the sense of practicality, and so on. [1977:124, emphasis in original]

Bourdieu maintains this groundedness in the body even in discussion of the “sense of taste” as the cultural operator in his social analysis of aesthetics, insisting that it is “inseparable from taste in the sense of the capacity to discern the flavors of foods which implies a preference for some of them” (1984:99).

The locus of Bourdieu’s habitus is the conjunction between the objective conditions of life, and the totality of aspirations and practices completely compatible with those conditions. Objective con-

ditions do not cause practices, and neither do practices determine objective conditions:

The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less "sensible" and "reasonable." That part of practices which remains obscure in the eyes of their own producers is the aspect by which they are objectively adjusted to other practices and to the structures of which the principle of their production is itself a product. [1977:79]

In other words, as a universalizing mediation the habitus has a dual function. In its relation to objective structures it is the principle of generation of practices (Bourdieu 1977:77), while in its relation to a total repertoire of social practices, it is their unifying principle (1977:83).¹⁰ With this concept, Bourdieu offers a social analysis of practice as "necessity made into a virtue," and his image of human activity is Leibniz's magnetic needle that appears actually to enjoy turning northward (Bourdieu 1977:77; 1984:175).

In this section I have shown that the paradigm of embodiment is superordinate to the different empirical interests and divergent methodological propensities of two influential theorists. Thus we have the apparent paradox of positions compatible within the paradigm of embodiment, but articulated in the methodologically incompatible discourses of phenomenology and what I term dialectical structuralism.¹¹ It is natural, however, that contradictions emerge between incipient attempts to forge a paradigm. In the remainder of this essay I will elaborate a nondualistic paradigm of embodiment for the study of culture. The concepts of the preobjective and habitus will guide analysis in the empirical domain of religious experience and practice.

EMBODIED IMAGERY IN RITUAL HEALING

The healing practices I describe are those of Charismatic Christianity as practiced in contemporary North America. This religion is essentially a form of Pentecostalism, which since the late 1950s has introduced a complex of practices, including faith-healing and speaking in tongues, into established Christian denominations such as Methodist, Episcopalian, and Roman Catholic. Historically, the movement can be said to have originated in the post-World War II search for stability, to have accelerated and acquired a more youthful following during the social turmoil of the 1960s, to have reached

a peak of apocalyptic fervor and popular appeal in the 1970s, and to have settled into a socially conservative but theologically enthusiastic niche in the religious ecology of 1980s North America. Its most visible manifestations are in “televangelists” ranging from the Bakkers of the “PTL Club” to the Roman Catholic Mother Angelica. Less well known are healing services conducted by “spiritually gifted” laypeople or clerics, or networks of intentional communities, nondenominational congregations, and small denominational-based prayer groups. Participants range from lower-middle to professional classes, and except for the slightly younger membership of charismatic intentional communities, the modal age distribution is in the 50s. The data I present in this section include two examples of multisensory imagery¹² in group healing sessions conducted by well-known charismatic evangelists (cf. Csordas 1983, 1988).

DEMONS AND SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

The first healing session is one led by the Reverend Derek Prince, a leading figure in the practice of deliverance, or casting out of evil spirits. Reverend Prince typically prays by naming evil spirits of different types, which he then commands to depart their hosts. As the spirits are expelled from those present in the assembly, they produce a physical manifestation as a sign of their departure. Let us first turn our attention to the nature of evil spirits in contemporary Charismatic Christianity, both for ethnographic background, and because the way they are constituted as cultural objects illustrates the importance of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the preobjective.

If we ignore the methodological implications of the dictum that “Our perception ends in objects,” we begin with the already constituted object, the Christian evil spirit. It can be described as an intelligent, nonmaterial being that is irredeemably evil, is under the domination of Satan, and whose proper abode is Hell. Evil spirits interact with humans by harassing, oppressing, or possessing them. Given this cultural definition, one might hope to reconstruct a demonology similar to the abstract, speculative demonologies of the Middle Ages, and to discover a discourse of interiority/exteriority in which demons transgress body boundaries and are expelled. Indeed, references to spirits being “cast out,” and the cultural definition of physical manifestations as “signs” of the spirits “coming out” support the experiential salience of interiority/exteriority, although it may be descriptively as illuminating to say they are being

“acted out.” These are all late moments in the process of cultural objectification, however. Persons do not perceive a demon inside themselves, they sense a particular thought, behavior, or emotion as outside their control. It is the healer, specialist in cultural objectification, who typically “discerns” whether a supplicant’s problem is of demonic origin, and who when faced with a person self-diagnosed as “possessed” is likely instead to attribute that person’s presentation to “emotional problems.”

To illustrate this demonology in practice, I quote from an edited account by an informant who participated in a healing service conducted by Reverend Prince:

And as some of [the demons] would come out [from their human hosts], some would come out with a roar. Some would come out with a belch. Some would come out with terrific coughing or choking or twisting of the neck back and forth. There were all kinds of weird and horrible things. . . . Quite a number of them come out with vomiting. Since there are over 150 kinds of spirits that have been identified, . . . maybe 20 of those will come out with vomiting. Ten of them will come with hissing. Two of them will come out with writhing on the floor like a snake. Five of them will come out with rolling of the eyes up to the top of the head. Every spirit of witchcraft . . . comes out there with a noise sounding very much like a shriek of a hyena. And it didn’t matter whether it was men or women, young or old, whatever. . . . They all came out with the identical thing.

I’ll tell you the story of what happened to me. . . . He dealt with whole groups [of spirits]. And he got to the group of sexual aberrations. Somewhere along the line, he dealt with the spirit of masturbation. . . . [He said] “You’ve known this was a sin, but you did it. You did it deliberately. If you acquired a spirit, now it becomes compulsive and you FEEL that compulsion. If you’re Catholic or Lutheran or Episcopal you may have confessed this sin time again, time again. And you fight it and you don’t like it and you hate it and you renounce it and it’s still with you. Those are all signs, that whole package. You almost certainly have a spirit. Any of you who have that particular package and think you’d like to be released of the spirit, stand up.”

So in that case, I stood up. And there were about 15 or 20 other people. I bet there were a lot more should have, but [chuckles] anyway, there were probably 15 or 20 of us who stood up. . . . He said, “You foul spirit of masturbation, I’m taking control of you in the name of Jesus and by the power of His precious blood, I cast you out in His holy name.” And everyone, their hands went way back. We were standing up. He had asked the group to stand and we went through a prayer of Renunciation and Repentance. So I was standing and quite without thinking of anything, I had no idea what was going to happen. The hands went up like this, the arms this high, and the hands went further than I can do it myself, way back. It didn’t hurt. And there was sort of an electric feeling, like a mild electric shock.

Well, he didn’t tell us ahead of time what was expected, but that’s what happened. Everybody did the same thing. Now I don’t know what they felt. But I know

what I felt. Something was happening here. And then at a certain point, it all went away and my hands dropped.

The important distinction for our discussion is between demons as cultural objects, and their experiential manifestations as concrete self-objectifications in religious participants. As cultural objects, demons are “no more fictitious, in a psychological sense, than is the concept of the self. Consequently, [as] culturally reified objects in the behavioral environment [they] may have functions that can be shown to be directly related to the needs, motivations, and goals of the self” (Hallowell 1955:87). The role of demons in the behavioral environment of Charismatic Christians is twofold. As a system of representations, the demonology—which this informant estimates to have a hundred and fifty entries—is a mirror image of the culturally ideal self, representing the range of its negative attributes. In terms of behavioral pragmatics, they are intelligent beings that can be encountered in everyday life and can affect one’s thought and behavior.

It is against this cultural background that the manifestations described above can be understood as examples of an embodied process of self-objectification. The preobjective element of this process rests in the fact that participants, like the informant quoted, experience these manifestations as spontaneous and without preordained content. The manifestations are original acts of communication which nevertheless take a limited number of common forms because they emerge from a shared habitus. This character of the preobjective is summarized by Merleau-Ponty:

Anterior to conventional means of expression, which reveal my thoughts to others only because already, for both myself and them, meanings are provided for each sign, and which in this sense do not give rise to genuine communication at all, we must . . . recognize a primary process of signification in which the thing expressed does not exist apart from the expression, and in which the signs themselves induce their significance externally. . . . This incarnate significance is the central phenomenon of which body and mind, sign and significance are abstract moments. [1962:166]

I would suggest that the “thing expressed” that “does not exist apart from the expression” in this case is *not* the cultural object, the evil spirit, for the discourse of spirits is an example of what Merleau-Ponty means by a “conventional means of expression.” What is expressed is the transgression or surpassing of a tolerance threshold defined by intensity, generalization, duration, or frequency of dis-

tress. There is too much of a particular thought, behavior, or emotion. Self-awareness of this transgression may have already occurred, and self-objectification may have taken place by adopting the conventional demonic idiom. However, the expressive moment that constitutes this form of self-objectification as *healing* is the embodied image that accompanies the casting out of the spirit. This image has a multiple signification: “I have no control over this—it has control over me—I am being released.”

This interpretation challenges the common ethnographic description of evil spirits in the language of interiority/exteriority, as transgressors of body boundaries. In Charismatic Christian healing, the language of control/release appears to have as much or greater experiential immediacy. The healer stresses “release” from bondage to the evil spirit over “expulsion” of the spirit that invades and occupies the person. Why this should be is understandable when we are reminded again that the preobjective is not precultural. Control (of one’s feelings, actions, thoughts, life course, health, occupation, relationships) is a pervasive theme in the North American cultural context of this healing system. Crawford (1984), for example, offers an ideological analysis of “health” as a symbol that condenses metaphors of self-control and release from pressures. A substantial degree of cultural consistency is evident with the formulation in the charismatic healing system of problems as loss of control to demonic influence, healing as release from bondage to that influence, and health as surrender to the will of God, whose strength helps restore self-control.

A brief methodological aside is in order to emphasize that analysis in a paradigm of embodiment does not immediately grasp onto transgression of body boundaries as the description of demonic action. Such a description would count as objectivist in the sense that it assumes the demon as already objectified, already a conventional means of expression. Bringing to the fore the rather Foucauldian metaphor of bondage points to the concretely embodied preobjective state of the afflicted rather than to the conventionally expressed invasive action of the demonic object. The metaphor of bondage simultaneously invokes a material/corporal as well as a psychological/spiritual condition addressed by healing.

The analysis of control and release helps us as well to understand certain features of experiential indeterminacy in dealings with evil

spirits. There are two loci at which the preobjective perception of demons as emotion, thought, or behavior are indeterminate in practice. First is the threshold of control at which an emotion such as anger becomes the evil spirit of Anger, and the subsequent determination of the degree of purchase that spirit has on a person's life—in order of severity from harassment to oppression to possession. While the degrees of control are thus “objectively” categorized, there are no objective criteria for their determination in practice, since practice operates at the level of preobjective intersubjectivity (empathy and intuition); healers do not “diagnose” but “discern.”

Second is the threshold of generalization, where the sufferer's malaise is expressed in multiple characteristics portrayed as clusters of related spirits. Again, although it is established in healing practice that spirit clusters are hierarchically organized around a dominant “manager” or “root” spirit and that certain spirits tend to appear together, in healing with a single person any number of spirits may emerge. In principle, the identification of spirits can be an open-ended excursion through the entire domain of possible spirit names. Again, this domain is culturally predetermined, and both the spontaneous discovery of a series of typically related spirits, and their experiential salience to the supplicant, can be understood in terms of the way dispositions are “orchestrated” within the habitus.

This orchestration is also the basis for the apparently spontaneous coordination of kinesthetic images culturally defined as manifestations of discrete types of evil spirits in the session narrated above: vomiting, writhing on the floor, hissing, rolling the eyes to the top of the head. Given the ethnographic fact that “evil spirits departing a person typically produce a physical manifestation as a sign of their departure,” which we can account for in purely cultural or conventional terms, how do we account for the regularized association of particular spirits with particular signs?

Two instances are narrated with enough detail for comment. That the spirit of witchcraft departs with the “shriek of a hyena” must be understood with respect to the cultural definition of witchcraft as an “occult” practice connected to Satan, and hence profoundly evil. The bloodcurdling scream is a deeply ingrained somatic component of the experience and symbolism of evil in North America—hence the apparently “natural” connection between the scream and the spirit. In a group setting such as described by the informant, it

makes little difference whether the spirit is first identified and then emerges with a scream, or whether the scream emerges and is subsequently identified as the sign of the spirit; in either case it exemplifies the “arbitrary necessity” (Bourdieu 1977) of evil in the Charismatic Christian habitus.

The narrator’s experience with the spirit of masturbation also lends itself to such an interpretation. We begin with the cultural definition of masturbation as a strongly proscribed but compulsive (hence demonic) behavior. The spontaneous collective gesture of arms flung in the air can be understood as a powerful “hands off!” emphasized by strong backward flexion of the hands. That this flexion “does not hurt,” although it is farther than one could accomplish “naturally,” is consistent with the concept of release from bondage as opposed to punishment for sin. Likewise, the mild electric feeling is understood not as a punitive shock but as an embodiment of spiritual power. Not at issue here is whether most of the men were responding to the cue of one or two others, since the impression of collective spontaneity indicates the immediate, intuitive grasp of the gesture’s implicit meaning by them all.

IMAGE, EMOTION, AND BODILY SYNTHESIS

The second healing event, described from my own observation, was conducted in the context of a Roman Catholic Charismatic intentional community. The session was led by two visiting Catholic healing evangelists. These healers had recently adopted the currently popular style of the Reverend John Wimber, who, in contrast to the Reverend Prince’s emphasis on evil spirits, evokes a diversity of “signs and wonders” in what he refers to as “power evangelism.” The signs and wonders are understood as manifestations of divine power intended to prompt the conversion of unbelievers and increase the faith of believers. In addition to the faith healing of physical, emotional, and demonic illness, they include a variety of multisensory images, emotions, and somatic manifestations that indicate the flow of divine power within and among participants. Common elements of the repertoire are rapid fluttering or vibrating of hands and arms, and somatic sensations such as lightness or heaviness, power or love flowing through the body, heat, and tingling. Spontaneous laughter or tears may spread contagiously in waves through the congregation. Many participants “rest in the Spirit,” an experience of motor dissociation in which a person is overcome

by the power of the Holy Spirit and falls in a semi-swoon, typically experienced as a relaxing and rejuvenating moment in the presence of God. Also common is the “word of knowledge,” a form of revelation understood as a divine gift of knowledge about persons or situations not acquired through any channel of human communication, but experienced as a spontaneous thought or image.

The event I observed was a two-day healing conference, to which the leaders brought their own team of experienced healing ministers. The conference consisted of alternating periods of collective prayer, religious song, healing prayer, and lectures. It was stressed that healing and salvation are “almost synonymous,” and that the participants should expect healing to occur throughout the sessions, not only during the discrete moments when the healing ministers were praying over them with the laying on of hands. The leaders stated that there was a difference between a gathering for purposes of worship and one for the experience of divine power. “Lots of things will be happening,” they said, and the participants should “get their spiritual antennae up” to receive the power. During the proceedings one of them prayed aloud, “More power, Father; release more power.”¹³

In the first phase of prayer, the leaders received inspiration through the word of knowledge that God wanted to heal people with back, respiratory, arthritis, and cartilage or tendonitis problems. Such people were asked to come forward for laying on of hands and prayer by the experienced prayer team. In the next phase, all were invited to participate, alternating roles as healing ministers and persons prayed for. The leaders stated that certain among the audience were experiencing a heaviness in their chest and head, a feeling of heat in their faces or lips, or a tingling in their hands. Such people were asked to hold their hands out palms upward in a prayer posture to identify themselves, and those surrounding them were told to lay hands on them in prayer to strengthen the manifestation of divine power and spread the power among themselves. Participants were invited to experience the word of knowledge themselves, and were paired off to pray with whoever responded to the problem they identified.

In contrast to the previously narrated event with Reverend Prince, the multisensory imagery in this instance is a manifestation not of release from evil, but of its cultural inverse, incorporation of

divine power. The group leaders' enumeration of the physical accompaniments of divine power that some participants would experience (heaviness, heat, tingling) recapitulates a repertoire acquired from their own experience and from reports of participants in similar events. These somatic images are here being inculcated as *techniques du corps* that will embody dispositions characteristic of the religious milieu. Laughing, crying, and falling can also be objectified as sacred if their spontaneous occurrence is thematized as out of the ordinary, the "otherness" which according to Eliade (1958) is the formal criterion of the sacred.

On the other hand, the leaders' inspired enumeration of predominantly physical ailments is formally similar to Reverend Prince's identification of evil spirits in the psychological domain of negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. In a group of two hundred, inspirations that single out culturally common illnesses, or illnesses of particular organ systems, are statistically likely to obtain a response. This is reinforced when the culturally shared knowledge of the body and its ailments is exploited by inviting participants to experience similar inspirations, such that the technique operates communally, rather than unidirectionally from leaders to participants. That this knowledge is not purely conceptual is testified to by the presentation of these revelations in a variety of sensory modes: participants do not merely draw on a cognitive list of diseases, but are just as likely to visually image a part of the body, or experience pain in their own body. Neither is there a cognitive act of "scanning," either of a list of diseases or of body parts, for the one that "feels right." Inspirations emerge spontaneously, insofar as participants have immediate access to bodily knowledge inculcated as culturally shared dispositions.

That it is a structured form of knowledge, however, is affirmed by the possibility for a poorly formed inspiration to misfire. During the session each participant who had an inspiration was to be approached by the person or persons who recognized their own problem, and they would pray together for that problem. The problems enumerated were specific and localized, specific enough to seem special, but not so specific as to be improbable: the area from the left knee to the lower thigh, left earache, right ear drainage, right deafness, severe lower back pain, alignment problems with ankles, vision (especially right eye), lump near right part of throat, arthritis,

left tendon pull, bad hemorrhoids, pregnancy prevented by twisted ovaries, loss of hair due to scalp eczema, grief over lost child, hernia, smoking, chronic stomach acidity, need for counseling. All who articulated a problem appeared to receive responses from the audience except one, a somewhat obese woman with the appearance of not being well-adjusted to the collective proceedings. She said that someone was suffering from pain in the right lung, and her overspecific inspiration fell flat. Finally, a young woman approached her for prayer, admitting to me later that she had no "pain in the lung." Instead, she was motivated by a feeling that the woman with the unsuccessful inspiration was the one identified by yet another word of knowledge as being in need of counseling. Since the poorly adjusted woman apparently could not recognize that need, and since the younger woman was herself in training as a counselor, the latter took it upon herself to step forward, forestalling disappointment and offering a supportive interaction.

The interplay of sensory modalities, social interaction, and meaning attribution is illustrated by the experience of another person I was able to follow during the session. He was 30 years of age, married, and working as an assistant store manager. The episode occurred following a period of guided healing prayer during which one of the leader's themes was the need for healing from experiences of rejection. The man was being prayed over with laying on of hands by a friend who had accompanied him and a member of the healing team; the free hand of the latter fluttered continuously during the prayer. The young man broke out laughing, continuing for several minutes until one of the leaders responded by taking all three to the back of the hall, where the prayer could go on more privately. He asked the young man what was happening, crouching at his side while he and his friend both sat and the healing team member stood by their side. The man recounted having responded to the theme of rejection, and secondarily to that of passivity, with the image of a stream flowing over rocks through a broken wall. At the emergence of this image he felt joy, and began to laugh. To the leader he stated that this had been a double release for him, both from the sense of not being accepted by others, and in that usually he only laughs inwardly, and was suddenly able to laugh quite openly. His friend then reported an image of a clothes washing machine in action, which was understood as divine "confirmation" that the experience

was one of cleansing and freeing from the negative emotion. The attending group leader summarized, saying that God wanted to continue this process, but warning that the young man would be “tested.” This follow-up period lasted less than ten minutes.

In this vignette we find the invocation of a culturally common negative affect, taken up by the young man through imagery that is at once visual and kinesthetic. In contrast to the objective compulsion evoked by naming the demon in our earlier example, the leader names an indeterminate affective theme. The religious significance is not that all participants respond to this theme in the same way, but that “God speaks to each individual” in a way concordant with that person’s experience. The indeterminacy of a theme like rejection is not the same as ambiguity, in the sense of applicability to any number of diverse situations. In this instance, rejection is indeterminate insofar as one can feel rejected because of a particular event, one can be temperamentally disposed to feeling rejected, or one can be oppressed by an evil spirit of Rejection. Healing does not change the rejecting behavior of others except insofar as they respond differently to the healed person’s own behavior; hence the relevance of the leader’s statement that the man will be “tested” in the future. For the store manager it is not actual instances of rejection that are treated, but the feeling of being rejected that is replaced by the feeling of joy.

The concreteness of the experience lies in the bodily synthesis of visualization (stream), affect (joy), and kinesthesia (laughing). These expressions, spontaneously coordinated within the North American habitus, do not represent and express an inner experience, but objectify and constitute an embodied healing. The socially informed body deals with the negative emotion in images of breaking through a boundary (water flowing through a broken rock wall), release from repression (ability to laugh openly), cleansing from the sullyng effects of the negative emotion (water agitating in a washing machine). Further, it is a particularly male variant of habitus that we see, responding to the emotional combination of rejection and passivity. It thus excludes the kind of experience typical for North American women in devotional settings, such as “I no longer feel rejected because I feel loved by God.” Whereas the traditional female variant replaces rejection with acceptance (often passive in the

somatic image of being held and nurtured), this male example replaces it with joy (active in the ability to laugh out loud).

As in the case of witticism, which as Bourdieu points out often surprises its author as much as the audience, spontaneous religious images invoke "That part of practices which remains obscure in the eyes of their own producers," the realm of buried possibility in which practices are "objectively adjusted to other practices and to the structures of which the principle of their production is itself the product" (1977:79). Through these embodied images, dispositions of the habitus are manifest in ritual behavior. Because they are shared at a level beneath awareness, they are inevitably misrecognized, and the principle of their production is identified as God instead of as the socially informed body. This conclusion is to be distinguished from Durkheim's functionalist abstraction of the sacred as self-affirmation of social morality and solidarity, as much as it must be distinguished from an incarnational acceptance that "God" inhabits the socially informed body. Instead, it suggests that the lived body is an irreducible principle, the existential ground of culture and the sacred.

BODY AND SPEECH: WHAT KIND OF SPEAKING IS SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

If embodiment is to attain the status of a paradigm, it should make possible the reinterpretation of data and problems already analyzed from other perspectives; and if this is to be in a strong sense, it should be possible even to construct an embodied account of language, typically the domain of linguistic, semiotic, and textual analyses. With this agenda I turn to the problem of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, as a cultural and expressive phenomenon. Pentecostal glossolalia (see May 1956 on glossolalia in other traditions) is a form of ritual utterance characterized by its lack of a semantic component. Hence, all syllables are "nonsense syllables." Yet, contemporary charismatic speakers in tongues may develop distinct phonological-syntactic patterns, and individuals may have more than one glossolalic "prayer language," used in different situations and with different intentions. In addition, they believe that it is at times possible for their apparent gibberish actually to be a natural language (xenoglossia). Despite its semantic indeterminacy and phonological-syntactic variability, glossolalia bears a global mean-

ing as an inspired form of praise to God, and can also be called into play as an experientially profound prayer for divine intercession or guidance. At times it is even understood as the utterance of an inspired message or prophecy from God. It can be spoken or sung improvisationally, and can be used in private devotion or collective ritual. It is a basic tenet that the expressive powers of glossolalia transcend the inadequacies of natural languages (cf. Csordas 1987).

SEMIOSIS AND EMBODIMENT IN THE GESTURAL CONSTITUTION OF SELF

When I first began the study of ritual language, Pentecostal glossolalia was being examined in one of three ways: as a phenomenon of trance or altered state of consciousness (Goodman 1972), as a mechanism of commitment to a fringe religious movement (Gerlach and Hine 1970), or as a ritual speech act within a religious speech community (Samarin 1972). Each of these positions adds to our understanding of the phenomenon, but none exhausts the cultural meaning of glossolalia as a form of utterance that both is and is not language. The question for me became not what social function glossolalia served in religious commitment or as a ritual speech act, or by what mental states it is accompanied, but what can the ritual use of glossolalia tell us about language, culture, the self, and the sacred.

In my own view, the two key facts were that glossolalia took the form of nonsense or gibberish, and that its speakers regarded vernacular language as inadequate for communication with the divine. Glossolalic utterance thus seemed to challenge taken-for-granted canons of vernacular expressivity and intelligibility, and in so doing to call into question conventions of truth, logic, and authority. That glossolalia has this potential for challenge and critique is implicit in contemporary Pentecostal efforts to build the kingdom of God on earth. It is even more strongly borne out by Field's (1982) account of the outlawing of tongues as subversive by British colonial authorities during a post-World War I Watchtower movement in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia). In the absence of violence, indeed of any overtly political act, the authorities were totally unnerved—and speaking in tongues was the focus of their attempts to repress.¹⁴ By a semiotic account, then, glossolalia ruptures the world of human meaning, like a wedge forcing an opening in discourse and creating the possibility of creative cultural change, dissolving structures in order to facilitate the emergence of new ones.

The creative potential in glossolalia lies in the phenomenological fact that it is “gibberish,” and hence threatening, only to nonparticipants. Yet what is compelling about glossolalia is that it is more than a dramatization of the post-Babel loss of a unified tongue. On the contrary, speaking in tongues is experienced as a redemption of pre-Babel lucidity (Samarin 1979), for despite the existence of distinctly recognizable glossa, the global meaning of glossolalic utterance can be apprehended immediately.

The semiotic interpretation is not incorrect, but additional light is thrown on the creative potential of glossolalia's immediacy when it is viewed as a phenomenon of embodiment. Merleau-Ponty (1962) sees at the root of speech a verbal gesture with immanent meaning, as against a notion of speech as a representation of thought. In this view, speech is coterminous with thought, and we possess words in terms of their articulatory and acoustic style as one of the possible uses of our bodies. Speech does not express or represent thought, since thought is for the most part inchoate until it is spoken (or written). Instead, speech is an act or phonetic gesture in which one takes up an existential position in the world. To follow this line of reasoning does not mean that we are to treat glossolalia only as a gesture, for we must grant its phenomenological reality *as language* for its users. I would argue, with Merleau-Ponty, that *all* language has this gestural or existential meaning, and that glossolalia by its formal characteristic of eliminating the semantic level of linguistic structure highlights precisely the existential reality of intelligent bodies inhabiting a meaningful world. In playing on the gestural characteristic of linguisticity, speaking in tongues is a ritual statement that the speakers inhabit a sacred world, since the gift of ritual language is a gift from God. The stripping away of the semantic dimension in glossolalia is not an absence, but rather the drawing back of a discursive curtain to reveal the grounding of language in natural life, as a bodily act. Glossolalia reveals language as incarnate, and this existential fact is homologous with the religious significance of the Word made Flesh, the unity of human and divine.

The experience of contemporary glossolalists lends support to this position. A common charismatic practice is speaking in tongues to make oneself open to divine guidance. These inspirations frequently take the form of imagery, but also include fully formed verbalizations that seem to emerge spontaneously. Here I would suggest that,

just as vernacular speech facilitates and is the embodiment of verbal thought, so glossolalia facilitates and is the embodiment of nonverbal thought. Vernacular speech is “putting it into words”; glossolalic speech is “putting it into images.” In glossolalia the physical experience of utterance (*parole*) comes into balance with the intellectual experience of language (*langue*). I would argue not that body and mind merge in glossolalic utterance, but that the utterance takes place at a phenomenological moment prior to distinction between body and mind, a distinction that is in part contingent on the objectifying power of natural language. Preobjective processes of the self emerge, and what is perceived includes both inchoate attributes of self, others, and situations, and what psychoanalysis would call contents of the unconscious. The results do not remain inchoate, however, but are typically taken up into discursive language. The facts that Charismatics typically switch back and forth between glossolalia and the vernacular, and that some of the apparently spontaneous inspirations emerge in verbal form, suggest that speaking in tongues serves the cultural process of self-objectification and is not simply a dreamy state of meditatively emptied consciousness.¹⁵

Gesture, emotional expression, and language are of a piece in being superimpositions of a human world on a natural or biological world. Because of a “genius for ambiguity which might serve to define man . . . Behavior creates meanings which are transcendent in relation to the anatomical apparatus, and yet immanent to the behavior as such, since it communicates itself and is understood” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:189). Thus, a smile for the American and the Japanese is grounded in the same anatomical apparatus, but transcends it by being appropriated or thematized in the one case as friendship and in the other as anger (Ekman 1982). In language, too, this transcendence is both a spontaneous engagement with others and a locus of cultural creativity, since “Speech is the surplus of our existence over natural being” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:197), that is to say, of our existence as persons over mere being as objects or things.

In both these ways (spontaneous engagement and cultural creativity), absence of the semantic component in glossolalia again reveals the gestural meaning of language, such that the sacred becomes concrete in embodied experience. With reference to human

engagement, and in comparison with the brain-damaged patient who never feels the need to speak or to whom experience never suggests a question or invites improvisation, Merleau-Ponty quotes Goldstein:

As soon as man uses language to establish a living relation with himself or his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which unites us to the world and our fellow man. [1962:196]

But this element of *communitas* in linguistic utterance is overshadowed by the fact that once the primordial silence has been shattered by an act of expression, a linguistic and cultural world is constituted. Speech coalesces into constituted languages, the speaking word becomes the already spoken word, and transcendence occurs only in acts of authentic expression such as those of writers, artists, and philosophers. What better way to maximize the gestural element of *communitas*, and what better way to preclude the petrification of *parole* into *langue* than to speak in tongues, always a pure act of expression and never subject to codification. This carries us quite a distance beyond the semiotic analysis, which we based on glossolalia's lack of a semantic component and its consequently bold challenge to canons of intelligibility. It suggests that glossolalia offers not only a critique of language, but a positive statement about expressivity, such that its critical force is enhanced by the moral force of its claim to be pure communication, incapable of uttering any "wrong words."

The totalizing aspect of glossolalia does not preclude the possibility noted above for glossolalists to have more than one syntactical-phonetic configuration or *glossa*, used in different situations and bearing different expressive and emotional valences. We may see this as a contradiction, or as one of the fruits of indeterminacy and the "genius for ambiguity." Nevertheless, the multiplicity of tongues resonates with Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that verbal form may not be as arbitrary as linguistic theory would have it. He suggests that the phonetic structures of various languages constitute "several ways for the human body to sing the world's praises and in the last resort to live it" (1962:187). Considered from the perspective of embodiment, it is thus understandable that glossolalia adapts its phonetic contours to the affective contours of different situations; and in an unexpected validation of Merleau-Ponty's metaphor, I

note again that Pentecostal glossolalia is consistently thematized as prayer of praise, and that it is often sung or chanted with improvised harmony and melody lines.

The musical performance of tongues in charismatic ritual suggests that its temporal structure may be more akin to music than to language, and indeed it has been analogized to scat singing in jazz. The principal difference is that scat is a form of instrumental music in which the voice is the instrument, whereas glossolalia insists on being sung speech. Even when freely improvised, it lacks the temporal contours and resolution of musical form. Because glossolalia lacks the lineality of semantic utterance or music, but also because it highlights the gestural meaning of language as a pure act of expression, it allows language to exist outside time. To the speaker in tongues, temporality becomes eternity, because there is no logical progression, but also because every moment is an existential beginning.

EMBODIED LANGUAGE AND RITUAL PRACTICE

If embodiment really does advance our understanding of a particular practice, it should also advance our understanding of how practices are related among themselves—this is the contribution of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. "Resting in the Spirit" is one charismatic practice that on first glance appears quite different from speaking in tongues as a religious experience. In this *technique du corps*, a person is overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit and falls in a state of motor dissociation, while retaining some awareness of the surroundings and subsequent memory of the experience. It is typically characterized as peaceful, relaxing, rejuvenating, healing, and imbued with a sense of divine presence. Among Roman Catholic Charismatics,¹⁶ this practice has incited much more controversy than has speaking in tongues. The principal issue is the "authenticity" of the experience. The fact that this problem never arose with glossolalia can be understood in terms of different uses of the body in the two practices.

In brief, glossolalia cannot be inauthentic as long as it is accompanied by an intention to pray. One cannot have the intention to rest in the spirit, because by definition the experience occurs spontaneously. To be more precise, a person who first begins to speak in tongues is said to "yield to the gift," that is, passively to allow it to be manifest through more or less spontaneous utterance. At the

same time, it is said that the neophyte should “step out in faith,” actively uttering whatever nonsense syllables he or she can formulate. The combination of active and passive uses of the body in one practice seems to be the concrete operator that allows for experiential communion of human and divine in a speaking body. The ritual status of resting in the spirit is different, emphasizing the subjective passivity of “resting” and the objective passivity of being “overcome.” The Protestant term for this practice, “Slaying in the Spirit,” even more strongly emphasizes the external force overwhelming a passive or weaker recipient. There is no act of will involved in resting in the spirit, neither is there a willful act of speech—the practice is mute as well as passive. Hence there is the possibility of “inauthenticity” if a person chooses to fall, or falls in conformity to those around him.

This interpretation offers an embodied understanding of the relation between ritual and social life in the Roman Catholic Charismatic movement over its 20-year history. The introduction of resting in the spirit came considerably later than that of speaking in tongues, and corresponded with a social transformation of the movement from a self-perceived vanguard of active renewal in the late 1960s to a source of passive refuge, one conservative movement among others in the Roman Catholic church of the late 1980s. In conjunction with the changed sociopolitical climate across these decades in the United States, the demographic base of the movement has shifted to an older and more conservative group predominantly in their 50s, as well as to a group that includes more working and lower middle-class people. Thus, the relation between speaking in tongues and resting in the spirit represents the embodiment in ritual practice of differences in generational and class habitus.

The perspective of embodiment can also help us understand the relation between glossolalic prayer and a second form of Charismatic ritual language, prophecy. Prophecy includes a semantic component of the most sacred sort, for the prophetic utterance is understood as a direct message from God. The speaker is not entirely passive, for he or she must “discern” when, where, and whether to utter the inspired words, but the utterance is invariably in the first person, with God as the ostensible speaker. Charismatic prophecy rarely foretells the future, but instead ritually establishes a state of affairs in the world (e.g., You are my people, I am doing

a great work among you, Lay down your lives for me). The gestural nature of prophetic utterance is evident in its content, almost like a verbal pointing. This gestural meaning is made concrete in practice by a direct link with glossolalia, in that prophecy can at times be expressed first in tongues, and subsequently “interpreted” into a vernacular utterance identical to any other prophecy. The difference between prayer and prophecy in tongues is entirely based on tone of voice, volume, and stridency. Thus, through the medium of the body, the relation between glossolalia as prayer and as prophecy is established not as one between activity and passivity, but as one between intimacy (prayer) and authority (prophecy) in the relation between God and humans.

Given that this relationship between glossolalic prayer and vernacular prophecy is grounded in the embodied experience of intimacy and authority, we can understand a further parallel between the two forms in ritual practice. Earlier I described the gestural meaning of glossolalia as a ritual celebration of the open-ended or indeterminate way in which language, gesture, and emotion take up an existential stance in the world. In practice, glossolalic prayer as embodied intimacy is for some individuals free improvisation, but for others it is the redundant repetition of a limited phrase or series of syllables, much in the manner of a *mantra*. Thus, practice follows a continuum between indeterminacy and redundancy. Prophecy as embodied authority follows an inverse continuum between determinacy and redundancy, since in practice it ranges from the unique and creative elaboration of metaphor with explicit rhetorical consequences for mood and motivation, to the highly redundant reproduction of basic meanings through simple prophetic exhortations, the simplest form of verbal pointing.

In conjunction with the way in which ritual activity and passivity have been embodied in the social life of these Charismatic Christians, a movement from intimacy to authority can be seen in the development of charismatic “covenant communities.” These intentional communities have cultivated the vanguard mentality of the movement’s early days largely through emphasis on prophecy as the authoritative and directive word of God. The increasing reliance on prophecy and the increasingly radical message promulgated have led to a split between two prominent networks of covenant communities, to a self-conception of those communities as a movement

distinct from the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as a whole, and finally to proto-schismatic tension between the communities and the Catholic hierarchy. The latter achieved a measure of public visibility in a recent controversy over allegiance of one community to the prophetic authority of another, as opposed to the ecclesiastical authority of the local bishop. The case resulted in litigation by the covenant community in the Vatican, and the bishop's resignation.

From the perspective of embodiment, then, glossolalia asserts the unity of body and mind, establishes a shared human world, and expresses transcendence—as does all language. Thought is not independent of utterance, the human world is constituted in a blend of embodied voices, and every utterance is an initiating utterance, a transcendent beginning. Yet glossolalia does this in a radical way, since the gestural meaning of language predominates. From the perspective of embodiment, the indeterminacy of glossolalia is not only semantic. On a more fundamental level, glossolalia's indeterminacy subsists in its capacity to participate in modes of pure communication and absolute critique, intimacy and authority, activity and passivity, private and collective, a unitary language of pre-Babel and a multiplicity of situationally contoured tongues.¹⁷ Experienced glossolalists do not construe their utterances as childish babble, although the religious theme of childlike simplicity is sometimes invoked to describe a first embarrassed nonsense-utterance. Instead, they see themselves as mature users of a spiritual gift, the purpose of which is to enhance their relationship to the divine.

COLLAPSED DUALITIES: OBJECTIVIST EXPLANATIONS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

To the degree that the argument outlined above successfully bridges or integrates domains of perception, practice, and religious experience, I would assert that a paradigm of embodiment does indeed have paradigmatic implications. In the two concluding sections I will elaborate some of these implications. Having concentrated on the domain of religious experience, I will turn first to the critique of explanations grounded in the objectivist mind-body dichotomy, and offer a phenomenological alternative.

Ritual practices are often explained in terms of psychological suggestion or learned behavior on the mental side and physiological mechanisms of trance or catharsis on the physical side. Suggestion

and learning are inadequate to account for the phenomena discussed above. In the group setting, the “power of suggestion” takes us no further than the healer’s invocation to “release more power, Lord.” It accounts for the setting of mood and tone, but not for the structure and efficacy of embodied ritual practices, and not for their character of apparent spontaneity. Neither can learning account for why glossolalia has a particular place in the ritual system (why glossolalia and not some other practice?). Learning may begin to account for its transmission in response to cues, and for its culturally consistent theological meaning, but not for how it can be perceived as *power* in ritual practice.

Likewise, physiological explanations in terms of trance and altered states of consciousness, or catharsis and nervous-emotional discharge, do not take us very far unless we are willing to accept trance and catharsis as ends in themselves rather than as *modus operandi* for the work of culture. For example, the most advanced theory of catharsis, that of Scheff (1979), defines cathartic laughter as the expression of embarrassment. It cannot go beyond this objectivist formulation to account for how such laughter is thematized, or systematically misrecognized, as “joy” in the vignette of the store manager analyzed above, or as “mocking” in other instances in which a demon “refuses to take seriously” attempts of the pious to deliver one of the faithful from its influences.

Part of the inadequacy of these explanations is that they are often derived from research in experimental settings, and research focused on concrete events that does not attempt to transcend those events. These approaches share a weakness outlined by Bourdieu as

. . . the occasionalist illusion which consists in directly relating practices to properties inscribed in the situation . . . the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction. This is what social psychology and interactionism or ethnomethodology forget when, reducing the objective structure of the relationship between the assembled individuals to the conjunctural structure of their interaction in a particular situation and group, they seek to explain everything that occurs in an experimental or observed interaction in terms of the experimentally controlled characteristics of the situation, such as the relative spatial positions of the participants or the nature of the channels used. [1977:81–82]

This is true both of the psychological and of the physiological explanations outlined above. The former assume a kind of immediate interpersonal influence, and the latter that ritual interaction operates as a triggering mechanism, as well as that the phenomena of reli-

gious experience are results of a stimulus-response pattern operating entirely within the circumscribed ritual event.

In contrast to these positions, to collapse the duality of mind and body yields a phenomenology of perception and self-perception that can pose the question of what is religious about religious experience without falling prey to the fallacies of either empiricism or intellectualism.¹⁸ To explain this approach I must return to my earlier conclusion that certain preobjective phenomena are misrecognized as originating in God instead of in the socially informed body.¹⁹ I would take issue with Durkheim, who identified this misrecognition but adopted a functionalist definition of the sacred as society mystifying and worshiping itself and thereby establishing morality and social solidarity. This was one of the fundamental arguments by which he established the social as a category *sui generis*, but I believe that in doing so he mistakenly also abolished the sacred as a category *sui generis* for anthropological theory.

Durkheim's argument was that the *way* society creates the sacred is by appearing as something radically other and outside the individual, and in the massiveness and mystery of this otherness establishing an absolute moral authority ([1915] 1965). By restricting the human experience of otherness to the category of the social, however, Durkheim committed a major error of reductionism. Subsequent generations have followed him in this sociological reductionism, in large part precluding an authentically phenomenological and psychocultural theory of religion. Thus Geertz (1973) can posit a definition of religion, and symbolic anthropologists take up the notion that it is a system of symbols, articulated in a system of social relationships. For the psychological anthropologist it is the next part of Geertz's definition which is of principal concern, that religion acts to establish long-standing moods and motivations. I submit that the theoretical power to get at these moods and motivations may be found among phenomenologists and historians of religion such as Otto ([1917] 1958), van der Leeuw (1938), and Eliade (1958). These theorists conceived the sacred in terms of the same "otherness" identified by Durkheim. They differed, however, in regarding this otherness not as a function of society, but as a generic capacity of human nature.

This approach can be applied to the above analyses of embodiment in the Charismatic data, especially the perception of spon-

taneity as the phenomenological criterion of the divine, and the lack of control as a criterion of the demonic. When a thought or embodied image comes suddenly into consciousness, the Charismatic does not say "I had an insight," but "That wasn't from me, how could I have thought of that. It must be from the Lord." The experience of God does not come from the content of the idea but is constituted by the spontaneous fit of the inspiration with the circumstances. When a bad habit becomes a compulsion, when one can no longer control one's chronically bad temper, the Charismatic does not say "My personality is flawed," but "This is not me, I am under attack by an evil spirit." The demon does not cause the bad habit or the anger but is constituted by the lack of control over these things. The *sui generis* nature of the sacred is defined not by the capacity to have such experiences, but by the human propensity to thematize them as radically other.

With this conception, the question of what is religious about religious healing can be posed, since the sacred is operationalized by the criterion of the "other." However, since otherness is a characteristic of human consciousness rather than of an objective reality, anything can be perceived as "other" depending on the conditions and configuration of circumstances, so that defining the sacred becomes an ethnographic problem. The paradigmatic significance of embodiment is then to provide the methodological grounds for an empirical (not empiricist) identification of instances of this otherness, and thus for study of the sacred as a modality of human experience.

COLLAPSED DUALITIES: PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE BODY IN THE WORLD

In my opening argument I reiterated Hallowell's concern with the subject-object distinction and showed that within the incipient paradigm of embodiment both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu require the collapse of such analytic dualities.²⁰ In the subsequent analyses I attempted to work out some implications of embodiment in the domain of charismatic religious experience. I avoided the assumption that phenomena of perception are mentalistic (subjective) while phenomena of practice are behavioristic (objective) by approaching both within a paradigm that asks how cultural objectifications and objectifications of the self are arrived at in the first place.

With Merleau-Ponty I attempted to resist analyzing the objects of religious perception in order to capture the process of objectification, and with Bourdieu to resist constructing models of religious action in order to capture the immanent logic of its production.²¹

The hermeneutic circle of this argument is completed with a return to the subject-object distinction, which in my view frames the central methodological issue of embodiment. Recall that Merleau-Ponty criticized analyzing perception as an intellectual act of grasping external stimuli generated by pre-given objects. His objection was that the object of perception would then have to be either possible or necessary. In fact it is neither—instead, it is *real*. This means that “it is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which it is given exhaustively” (1964a:15). The critical “but” in this analysis requires the perceptual synthesis of the object to be accomplished by the subject, which is the body as a field of perception and practice (1964a:16). Merleau-Ponty felt that it was necessary to return to this level of real, primordial experience in which the object is present and living, as a starting point for the analysis of language, knowledge, society, and religion. His existential analysis collapses the subject-object duality in order to more precisely pose the question of how the reflective processes of the intellect elaborate these domains of culture from the raw material of perception.

The paradigmatic implications of embodiment extend to how we study perception as such. Beginning with the experiments of Rivers (1901) in the Torres Straits expedition, anthropologists have (1) considered perception strictly as a function of cognition, and seldom with respect to self, emotion, or cultural objects such as supernatural beings; (2) isolated the senses, especially focusing on visual perception, but seldom examining the synthesis and interplay of senses in perceptual life; and (3) focused on contextually abstract experimental tasks, instead of linking the study of perception to that of social practice (cf. Cole and Scribner 1974, Bourguignon 1979). Within a paradigm of embodiment, analysis would shift from perceptual categories and questions of classification and differentiation, to perceptual process and questions of objectification and attention/apperception. Looked at in another way, whereas in conventional studies of optical illusions or color perception our questions have been posed in terms of the cultural constitution of perceptual cate-

gories, the analyses I have presented raise issues of the perceptual constitution of cultural objects.

In taking up a paradigm of embodiment, it is critical to apply the analysis of subject and object to our distinctions between mind and body, between self and other, between cognition and emotion, and between subjectivity and objectivity in the social sciences, particularly psychological anthropology.

First, if we begin with the lived world of perceptual phenomena, our bodies are not objects to us. Quite the contrary, they are an integral part of the perceiving subject. Contrast this with the perspective of Piaget, who argues that “the progress of sensorimotor intelligence leads to the construction of an objective universe in which the subject’s own body is an element among others and with which the internal life, localized in the subject’s own body, is contrasted” (1967:13). Merleau-Ponty would not deny that we construct an objective universe, nor that development of the capacity to objectify is critical to our makeup, but that the fully developed adult moving about in the world treats his or her body as an object. The slippery moment of Piaget’s thought comes in the difference between observing that in reflection the internal life appears localized in the subject’s body, and accepting this artifact of consciousness as the end point of development. To do so is to accept the mind-body distinction as given. My argument has been that on the level of perception it is not legitimate to distinguish mind and body. Starting from perception, however, it then becomes relevant (and possible) to ask how our bodies may become objectified through processes of reflection. This contrast is so basic that it gives one pause to think how much psychological anthropology has been influenced by Piaget, and how little by that other professor of child psychology, Merleau-Ponty.²² The first defines the body as “an element among others in an objective universe,” the second as “a setting in relation to the world.”

When the body is recognized for what it is in experiential terms, not as an object but as a subject, the mind-body distinction becomes much more uncertain. Psychological anthropology has tended to operate within the mind-body duality, conceptualized as the relation between the subjective mental domain of psychocultural reality and the objective physical domain of biology. The approach I am proposing certainly does not negate the problematic of biology and

culture, but by a shift of perspective offers an additional problematic. When both poles of the duality are recast in experiential terms, the dictum of psychological anthropology that all reality is psychological (Bock 1988) no longer carries a mentalistic connotation, but defines culture as embodied from the outset.

If we do not perceive our own bodies as objects, neither do we perceive others as objects. Another person is perceived as another "myself," tearing itself away from being simply a phenomenon in my perceptual field, appropriating my phenomena and conferring on them the dimension of intersubjective being, and so offering "the task of a true communication" (Merleau-Ponty 1964:18). As is true of the body, other persons can become objects for us only secondarily, as the result of reflection. Whether or not, and under what conditions, selves do become objectified becomes a question for the anthropology of the self. In addition, the characteristic of being "another myself" is a major part of what distinguishes our experience of the social other from that of the sacred other discussed above, which is in a radical sense "not myself."

Embodiment also has paradigmatic implications for the distinction between cognition and emotion (Rosaldo 1984; Jenkins 1988a). Emotion has attracted growing attention from anthropologists, but has remained conceptually subordinate to cognition. Emotions have been defined as cognitive by making methodological choices to study them through essentially cognitive card-sorting tasks (Lutz 1982), by focusing on the culturally provided schemata for dealing with them (Levy 1973), or by defining them explicitly as interpretations constituted of concepts, beliefs, attitudes, and desires (Solomon 1984). A step toward the present position was taken by Rosaldo (1984), who suggested that emotions are a kind of cognition with a greater "sense of the engagement of the actor's self, . . . *embodied* thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that 'I am involved' " (1984:143, emphasis in original). Although thought and emotion are thus placed on a more even footing, to define emotion as embodied thought preserves the fundamental duality. It precludes the question of how thought in the strict sense is itself embodied, and does not take up the challenge of an authentically "affective" theory of emotion corresponding to the "cognitive" theory (Jenkins 1988b).

Rethinking the relation between subject and object also has implications for our conceptions of objectivity as the goal of science. In one of its strongest forms, objectivity is said to be achieved through a process of abstraction whose

... aim is to regard the world as centerless, with the viewer as just one of its contents. ... The object is to discount for the features of our pre-reflective outlook that make things appear to us as they do, and thereby to reach an understanding of things as they really are. [Nagel 1979:206, 208]

Risking glibness, I would argue that science is not to be run as a discount operation and that we must start from the pre-reflective if we hope sensibly to pose questions about appearance and reality. The collapse of the subject-object distinction requires us to recognize that if “hard science” deals with hard facts,²³ they are the result of a hardening process, a process of objectification.

Perhaps more immediately compelling to psychological anthropology than this general point about subjectivity and objectivity, Nagel acknowledges that “The problems of personal identity and mind-body arise because certain subjectively apparent facts about the self seem to vanish as one ascends to a more objective standpoint” (1979:210). Before the vanishing point is reached, it is necessary to begin to formulate what Shweder calls a “science of subjectivity,” because:

The real world, it seems, is populated with subject-dependent objects and object-like subjectivity, two types of phenomena for which there is no place in the mutually exclusive and exhaustive realms of the symbol-and-meaning-seeking hermeneuticist and the automated-law-seeking positivist. [1986:178]

It is equally in error to seek the objectivist “view from nowhere” and to inordinately privilege subjectivist “inner experience.” The most fruitful definition of the real is that quoted above of an indefinite series of perspectival views, none of which exhausts the given objects.²⁴ Objectivity is not a view from nowhere, but a view from everywhere that the body can take up its position, and in relation to the perspectives of “other myselfes.” This perspective does not deny that objects are given; as I have emphasized throughout this essay, the body is in the world from the start. Thus it is not true that contemporary phenomenology denies an “irreducible objective reality” (Nagel 1979:212). Quite differently, phenomenology insists on an *indeterminate* objective reality.

The theme of indeterminacy has arisen several times in this argument, with respect to the nature of our analytic categories as well

as to the domains of perception and practice.²⁵ It is not surprising that both theorists we have considered, as a result of the methodological collapse of dualities, recognize an essential principle of indeterminacy within human life. Merleau-Ponty sees in the indeterminacy of perception a transcendence which does not outrun its embodied situation, but which always “asserts more things than it grasps: when I say that I see the ash-tray over there, I suppose as completed an unfolding of experience which could go on ad infinitum, and I commit a whole perceptual future” (1962:361). Bourdieu sees in the indeterminacy of practice that, since no person has conscious mastery of the *modus operandi* which integrates symbolic schemes and practices, the unfolding of his works and actions “always outruns his conscious intentions” (1977:79). This indeterminacy must be squarely faced by embodied accounts of subject-dependent cultural objects that resist isolating the senses from one another, and from social practice, in experimentally restricted settings.

As we have seen in ritual healing and ritual language, embodied selves inhabit a behavioral environment much broader than any single event. If this is the case, then a final paradigmatic implication is that embodiment need not be restricted to a microanalytic application, but as Merleau-Ponty hoped, can be the foundation for analyses of culture and history. Freeing interpretation from the event was critical for Bourdieu, even for his study conducted within a stable traditional society. It is yet more critical with the kind of religious movement I have described, which does not exist in a taken-for-granted world, but is set instead in a contemporary world where the principle of indeterminacy holds sway in a sea of opinion. In this setting, religious practice exploits the preobjective to produce new, sacred objectifications, and exploits the habitus in order to transform the very dispositions of which it is constituted. What is out of the ordinary in such situations, and what therefore can be thematized as sacred, is the evocation in ritual of the preorchestrated dispositions that constitute its sense. The locus of the sacred is the body, for the body is the existential ground of culture.

REPRISE

The argument of this paper has been that the body is a productive starting point for analyzing culture and self. I have attempted to show that an analysis of perception (the preobjective) and practice

(the habitus) grounded in the body leads to collapse of the conventional distinction between subject and object. This collapse allows us to investigate how cultural objects (including selves) are constituted or objectified, not in the processes of ontogenesis and child socialization, but in the ongoing indeterminacy and flux of adult cultural life. To be sure, the empirical examples I have chosen (evil spirits, multisensory imagery, glossolalia, prophecy, and “resting in the spirit”) come from the specialized domain of ritual practice. Yet if, as I suspect, embodiment has paradigmatic scope, the many analyses of other domains that have begun to be published in the past decade share common features that can be elucidated in future work. This is suggested, as I have argued, by the way embodiment poses additional questions about religious experience and perception beyond those typically asked in psychological anthropology. It is even more strongly suggested by the application of the subject-object analysis to other dualities (mind-body, self-other, cognition-emotion, subjectivity-objectivity) that underlie much of anthropological thought.

NOTES

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¹In addition to works cited in the text, several major theorists have developed perspectives on the body (Douglas 1973; Foucault 1973, 1977; Straus 1963; Ong 1967). Anthropologists have periodically examined the social and symbolic significance of the body and the senses (e.g., Hertz [1909]1960; Leach 1958; Benthall and Polhemus 1975; Blacking 1977; Obeyesekere 1981; Howes 1987; Hanna 1988; Tyler 1988). Particular fields that have made recent contributions include medical and psychiatric anthropology (Devisch 1983; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Frank 1986; Good 1988; Martin 1987; Kleinman 1980, 1986; Kirmayer 1984; Favazza 1987), social anthropology (Jackson 1981), sociology (Armstrong 1983; Turner 1984), philosophy (Johnson 1987; Levin 1985; Tymieniecka 1988), history (Bell 1985; Bynum 1987; Feher 1989), and literary criticism (Scarry 1985; Berger 1987; Suleiman 1986). This is naturally only a sampling of relevant works, and the list continues to expand.

²The argument I am developing about the body as existential ground of culture is to be distinguished from that of Johnson (1987), who analyzes the body as cognitive ground of culture.

³These distinctions roughly presage the empirical delineation of a continuum of person-concepts between egocentric and sociocentric by Shweder and Bourne (1984).

⁴Whereas empiricism erroneously posits a world of impressions and stimuli in itself, the antithetical error of intellectualism posits a universe of determining, constituting thought. Intellectualism (epitomized by Descartes) confuses perceptual consciousness with the exact forms of scientific consciousness. Both positions start with the objective world rather than sticking closely to perception, and neither can express the “peculiar way in which perceptual consciousness constitutes its object.” Intellectualism is weakened by its lack of “contingency in the occasions of thought,” and its requirement of an abstract capacity of judgment that transforms sensation into perception (Merleau-Ponty 1962:26–51).

⁵Merleau-Ponty’s reference to the unequal lines of an optical illusion is to the well-known Muller-Lyer diagram. Cross-cultural studies suggest that both shaping of geometric perception within the behavioral environment (the carpentered-world hypothesis) and psychophysiological factors (variations in retinal pigmentation) may play a role in whether the diagram is perceived as illusory (Cole and Scribner 1974). It is these very differences that make it important to begin with the perceiving subject rather than the analytically constituted object in the study of perception as a psychocultural process, especially when we move from visual perception to self-perception.

⁶Hallowell (1955) makes a similar point that environmental resources are not objectified as “resources” until they are recognized as such by a people and until there is a technology developed to exploit them.

⁷The first umpire declares, “I calls ’em as they are.” The second replies, “I calls ’em as I sees ’em.” The third announces, “They ain’t nothing till I calls ’em.”

⁸Bourdieu rejects phenomenology in the guise of Schutz and the ethnomethodologists on the one hand, and Sartre on the other, while including favorable citations of Merleau-Ponty’s (1942) early work on behavior.

⁹The distinction between existence and being is essential to the thought of Merleau-Ponty and, in general, to phenomenology and existential psychology. In anthropological terms it can be roughly translated as the distinction between intentional action and constituted culture.

¹⁰I do not believe that Bourdieu’s reference to a generative principle implies a search for a “deep grammar of practices” reminiscent of Chomsky’s linguistics. Insofar as Bourdieu’s generative and unifying principle is the socially informed body, it must be considered as *given* in an existential sense rather than as *innate* in the sense of cognitive hard-wiring. Bourdieu explicitly includes Chomsky in his critique of the objectivist conception of rule in social and linguistic theory (1977:10–30). The critical distinction is that the habitus and its constituent dispositions are *nonrepresentational*, as opposed to the objectivist model and its constituent rules. In accounting for practices governed by rules unknown to agents and thus outside their experience, it thus avoids the “fallacy of the rule which implicitly places in the consciousness of the individual agents a knowledge built up against that experience” (1977:29).

¹¹On the relation between Merleau-Ponty and structuralism proper, see Edie (1971). Boon offers a brief but insightful analysis of parallelism between the mutual attempts by Lévi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty to overcome the subject-object duality promulgated by Sartre: “For Lévi-Strauss totemisms institutionalize reciprocal object-object relations from the viewpoint of the totalizing classification system (*langue*). For Merleau-Ponty pronouns, art, and so forth institutionalize reciprocal subject-subject relations (artists and pronouns ‘view’ objects as subjects) from the viewpoint of intersubjectivity” (Boon 1982:281).

¹²I avoid the term “mental imagery” because it begs the question of our problematic distinctions between body and mind, because it tends to imply a focus on visual imagery rather

than the integration of the senses in imagery processes (cf. Ong 1967 on the “sensorium”), and because it belies the need to examine the relation of image and emotion.

¹³This is not the place to discuss cultural concepts of power, but it can be said that the concept invoked here has much more in common with ethnologically familiar notions of spiritual power such as *mana*, *orenda*, or *manitou*, than with current North American ethnopsychological notions of “personal empowerment.”

¹⁴Field’s account can be compared with the outlawing of drums among African slaves in the antebellum United States. Here was a situation where the threat was not explicitly linguistic, but was semantically a more complete form of embodied communication insofar as actual messages can be sent via “talking drums.” From the slaveowners’ perspective the drumming was both unintelligible and a concrete threat to social order.

¹⁵The cultural language of self-objectification is here preferable to the psychoanalytic language of “regression in service of the ego” (Kris 1952), because the latter is less attuned to what kind of ego—in this case, one constituted in religious terms—is in question.

¹⁶Because the ritual systems of different branches of Charismatic Christianity vary somewhat, for the sake of consistency the discussion in this section is restricted to the Roman Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

¹⁷This level of indeterminacy made glossolalia a key symbol in the postmodernist fiction of Pynchon, who not only constantly invokes Pentecost and speaking in tongues, but impregnates his pages with a multitude of languages and pseudo-languages. For Pynchon “Pentecost is a version of the state of entropy which takes what is, and celebrates it. Pentecost is entropy with value added—the value of communication” (Lhamon 1976:70). I have not used Pentecost as an image of an entropic postmodernist world in which everything refers to everything else, but would argue that the principle of indeterminacy essential to embodiment makes such a world possible.

¹⁸See Note 4 on Merleau-Ponty’s parallel critique of empiricism and intellectualism. For a contemporary critique of empiricist language in medical science see Good and Good (1981).

¹⁹An additional example is provided by Fernandez (1989), who points out that the drug-induced bodily experience of Fang participants in the Bwiti religion is misrecognized precisely as its opposite, a state of disembodiment, and thematized as an approximation of the serene, purified disembodiment of the ancestors.

²⁰Bourdieu is perhaps less successful in going beyond dialectic to the collapse of dualities, remaining bound to apparently oxymoronic articulations about spontaneous dispositions, regulated improvisation, or intentionless invention. Accordingly, discussion in this section leans more heavily on the work of Merleau-Ponty.

²¹I have offered Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus to forestall the lapse of phenomenology into the microanalysis of individual subjectivity, and to emphasize the social and cultural background which Merleau-Ponty requires but does not sufficiently elaborate. I have confronted Bourdieu’s anti-phenomenological bias with preobjective intentionality and the transcendent constitution of cultural objects, in order to compensate for his inadequate provision for self-motivated change within the habitus.

²²The ramifications are too great to broach here. Consider only the reliance of cognitive developmental theory, which owes much to Piaget, on the objective notion of *representation* intervening between stimulus and response (Kohlberg 1969). A phenomenology of the body does not posit this kind of object and concentrates not on intervening reference and representation, but on immediate relation and rapport of the body with the world (Hottois 1988).

²³The very distinction between hard and soft is imbued with machismo, for there is no doubt about its cultural connotation that hard data is more tough-minded and hence better. To the extent that our attitudes are shaped by conventional metaphors, and as someone who

has worked in both modes, I would propose that we experiment with replacing “soft and hard” data by “flexible and brittle” data.

²⁴The most vivid example of the constitution of the real as an indefinite series of perspectival views is Merleau-Ponty’s (1964b) essay on “Cezanne’s Doubt,” which he begins with the observation that the painter required a hundred working sessions for a still life, and a hundred fifty sittings for a portrait.

²⁵Undoubtedly the most fruitful attempt to date to deal with indeterminacy is Fernandez’s elaboration of the notion of the inchoate as “the underlying (psychophysiological) and overlying (sociocultural) sense of entity (entirety of being or wholeness) which we reach for to express (by predication) and act out (by performance) but can never grasp” (1982:39). For Fernandez, the inchoate is the ground of emotional meaning, moral imagination, identity, and self-objectification. That the principle of indeterminacy elaborated in the paradigm of embodiment may contribute to understanding the inchoate is suggested by Fernandez’s (1989) recent attempt, in dialogue with Werbner, to rethink earlier analyses of religious experience from the perspective of bodily experience.

It may also be this principle of indeterminacy, inherent in social life, that has come to the fore in postmodernist anthropology’s shift from pattern to pastiche, from key symbols to blurred genres. Anthropologists such as Tyler (1988) have launched a critique of empiricist theories of the senses and called for an approach to language as incarnate, but the postmodernist critique remains committed to the idiom of semiotics and textuality. The perspective of embodiment may provide psychological anthropology with its own analytic purchase on postmodern processes of culture and self.

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