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**Book Review: The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding, by Mark Johnson, 2007. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, pp. xvii + 308. ISBN-13 978 0 226 40192 8 (hbk)**

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*Language and Literature* 2009; 18; 83

DOI: 10.1177/09639470090180010604

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of computers will continue to be presentational rather than discursive since, like the logographic system of Japanese, the presentational feature is more visually iconic and is 'regarded as more "human-friendly"' (p. 217).

One merit of Hiraga's book is to bring iconicity to a new level of discussion, in which the visual icon is compared with symbols like words. Based on her discussion of the evolution of computer 'language', Hiraga concludes that 'being an immediate sign, and connecting the things of similarity, icons are easier to understand than symbols; and therefore, they have more potential for communication across geographical, linguistic, social and cultural boundaries' (p. 226). This is a bold claim concerning not only what pictorial and symbolic signs do to the human mind, but also how the 'immediacy of icons' is privileged over the symbols in different fields. Yet it seems to me that Hiraga has touched upon but failed to recognize the complex relationship between words and images discussed within the realm of representation, signification and also communication. W.J.T. Mitchell (1986), for example, historicizes the struggle between the word and image, showing how each system claimed superiority of representation over the other. In order to understand how this struggle between the pictorial and linguistic signs continues in the electronic communication media (p. 225), I believe it necessary and beneficial to consider this matter in the word and image framework so that the idea of continuity or deviance can be made clear.

Structurally, some parts of the book look repetitive. On a larger scale, Part II tests out the methodology developed in the previous section, while locally the Japanese writing and speaking systems in Part III seem to repeat what has already been thoroughly explained in the previous chapters. However, it is exactly this scrupulous effort to remind readers of what is new and difficult that provides a good reason to recommend this highly complex yet carefully written book.

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*The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*,  
 by Mark Johnson, 2007. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, pp. xvii + 308.  
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In *The Meaning of the Body*, Mark Johnson stresses that humanity consists above all of meaning-making creatures, and if philosophical analysis strays from the investigation of how we make sense of this human condition it loses all relevance for mankind's endeavours in this world. Johnson builds up his argument from a strong critique of Anglo-American analytic philosophy as disembodied, anti-aesthetic and propositional-conceptual. Instead, Johnson proposes an understanding of human meaning-making as embodied, aesthetic and metaphorically-conceptual. What is at stake here is of huge philosophical importance

and, as many readers of this journal will recognize, the argument goes back to Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Johnson's *The Body in the Mind* (1987) and, more strongly, to Lakoff and Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999). In *The Meaning of the Body* – written in Johnson's most lucid prose – we are presented with a detailed analysis of why mainstream analytic philosophy should be abandoned as it gives no life to the human condition of making sense to survive; on the contrary, to live with fellow human beings and try to make sense together is survival by meaning-making – a cognitive fact considering the basic shared intentionality that defines every aspect of human existence.

Anglo-American analytic philosophy is grounded in an objectivist theory of meaning where meaningless conventional signs (language) paradoxically (try to) account for meaning, where the relation between words and world is never properly explained, only referred to (vaguely) in terms of 'reference'. By contrast, an embodied, naturalistic theory of meaning 'takes as its working hypothesis the idea that all of our so-called higher cognitive faculties . . . recruit cognitive resources that operate in our sensorimotor experience and our monitoring of emotions' (p. 10). **Meaning is more than words and deeper than concepts – the bodily basis of meaning involves patterns of images, qualities, emotions.** Thus meaning comes before truth, and truth-conditional propositions cannot be the basis for human meaning.

Johnson provides a distinct introductory chapter where he stresses this difference between an embodied and a disembodied theory of meaning. He identifies analytic philosophy as an ideology that proclaims the higher, rational self as superior to the lower, bodily self – i.e. the history of Western philosophy beginning with Plato, later reinforced in (especially) **Descartes' strict dualism of body/mind. Johnson instead presents embodiment as a holistic theory for how meaning emerges bottom-up: higher cognitive processes are recruited from sensorimotor processes. Being human is to exist with the rhythm of a body-mind that is always organism-environment interactive.**

In the first section of the book, 'Bodily Meaning and Felt Sense', Johnson focuses on the bodily origins of meaning, how meaning arises before we know it; preconscious emotions come before intellectual feelings and conceptualizations. We are born moving and discover ourselves in movement – beginning in the womb. As infants we are not little proposition-processing machines but learn through objects' affordances. We are, as Johnson puts it, Big Babies later in life; emotions are primary for monitoring our interactions with environments in a continuous effort to survive. Thus, felt qualities are the starting point for all perceptions and conceptualizations; before reflective thinking, our world comes forward aesthetically, from our senses – the basis of human intersubjectivity, intentionality and shared meaning is a wonderful feat based in preconceptual, non-conscious, bodily, emotional experience. Johnson's prime references here are to cognitive neuroscience: non-conscious emotions are primary to feelings (Damasio, 1994, 1999, 2003; LeDoux, 2002), and American pragmatist philosophy: percepts and concepts involve a continuous flow of body-mind or feeling-thinking continuity (Dewey, 1981 [1925], 1981 [1930], 1987 [1934], 1991 [1938]; James, 1950 [1890], 1979 [1911]).

The second section, 'Embodied Meaning and the Sciences of Mind', probes the bodily roots of meaning referring to cognitive science and neuroscience in an evolutionary framework with comparisons to animals' sensorimotor capacities for experiencing and making sense of the world. Again, Johnson underlines the shortcomings of analytic philosophy, especially in a critique of the representational theory of mind as incompatible with recent findings in the sciences of mind. For example, Jerry Fodor's 'mentalese' – a strong version of the representational theory of mind – is an example of disembodied

and misleading quasi-AI. Sensible thinkers will agree with Johnson's critique here, since Fodor's position is disembodied, never related to what actually happens in human, embodied, intercorporeal meaning-making procedures that are grounded in structures of sensorimotor experience. As regards neuroscientific evidence, Johnson here refers to Edelman's theory of 'neural Darwinism' (Edelman, 1987); as regards how meaning emerges in bodily experience as the basis for abstract thought, Johnson refers to his 1987 publication, claiming that 'image schemas are precisely the basic structures of sensorimotor experience' (p. 131).

In the third section, 'Embodied Meaning, Aesthetics and Art', Johnson stresses the importance of art connected to everyday meaning-making, art as heightened, intensified and highly integrated sources of meaning with particular reference to Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1987 [1934]). Writing about music – the epitome of art going directly into the body – Johnson criticizes the music as language metaphor as based in quasi-linguistic meaning: music cannot be explained principally as referential. Instead, Johnson stresses that 'virtually all of our conceptualizations and descriptions of music use metaphors whose source domains are drawn from sensorimotor experience' (p. 243). For example, music as moving, music as landscape, and music as moving force (pp. 248–52). In this section Johnson also provides analyses of writers and painters like Neruda, Camus, de Chirico and Matisse that are elegant but somewhat brief, mainly focusing on the sensuality of exemplars of art, as if chosen to exemplify a theory of embodiment grounded in aesthetics, i.e. human senses/sensuality. At this juncture one begins to brood over a basic theory/method distinction. For example, Johnson's discussion of passages of Camus' *The Stranger* here is brilliant – how the existentialist considers the nothingness of everything, how he repeats that nothing at all matters in life – while the text itself excels in highly aesthetic/sensual prose. Generally one lacks a methodological approach here, especially with reference to conceptual metaphor and image schemas. Although a theory of embodied meaning must – and should – be preferred to that of disembodied analytic philosophy metaphysics, the question of how to proceed from the theory of embodiment to the question of methodology is left somewhat in thin air.

*The Meaning of the Body* is extremely well-written and makes an impressive statement about human meaning-making grounded in cognitive embodiment. It is an important contribution to the very question as to how and why we try to and have to make sense in order to survive. But the question remains: although we now have an excellent theory of aesthetic meaning production, involving both producer and recipient, where do we go from here? How do we produce cognitively-embodied analyses that are not (formally) banal?

I would suggest a first careful reading of the object of study as a whole *gestalt*, grounded in a sensual bodily enactment with this object of study, and then proceed to analysing details while specifying methods grounded in how the mind processes both wholes and details – in any given object of study. I think we will be inspired by Johnson's book to further develop thoughts about meaning, aesthetics and the body-mind meaning-making aspects that are crucial for our endeavours to explore the deeper understanding of language and literature – and humanity at large.

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### *The Routledge Creative Writing Coursebook*

by Paul Mills, 2006. London and New York: Routledge, pp. xii + 242.  
ISBN 0 415 3178 5 (pbk).

One hundred years of Yale undergraduates have been able to sharpen their writing skills in a course called ‘Daily Themes’, which demanded its pound of text daily – often at an early morning class. You could identify the Daily Themes victims by sight: woolly-eyed and edgy on caffeine, they darted in and out of the breakfast hall, trailing ink and desperation: ‘Writing my theme, man,’ they slurred into the cornflakes, or more urgently, ‘Can’t get my head around this theme’.

*The Routledge Creative Writing Coursebook* addresses writers in search of not just a theme but a style as well. In six chapters, Paul Mills, known for *Writing in Action* (1996), prompts creativity in fiction, non-fiction prose, poetry and drama, with special attention to the writing of children’s fiction. Mills presents writing as an art at the intersection of four qualities: voice, world, image and story. The basic writing advice has not changed drastically since the Daily Themes professors called for detail, dialogue and showing not telling. The *Coursebook* embodies its own message, being rich on examples and short on programmatic advice. In an excellent section on writing beginnings, Mills gathers five passages under the simplest of rubrics (close-up and wide-angle information), and then parades us past a fiction potpourri including Kureishi, Banks, Bierce, Gilman and Franzen. Here the emphasis falls on the student reader’s powers of observation, on the capacity of the beginner writer to teach her or himself with the help of one template for guidance.

In terms of writing advice, Mills has a light touch; Chapter 3 introduces, for instance, the late-modernist style rules of Basil Bunting (pp. 100–1), only to have Mills contest

Our body-based, experiential understanding of how objects move in space relative to our bodies is mapped, via metaphor, onto the concept of time.Â The aesthetics of embodied meaning developed in the previous two sections is here illustrated and applied.Â While the book contains fascinating ideas and discoveries from several fields that are not usually found together â€ and is well worth reading for this reason alone â€ the result is more an agglomeration or enumeration than a powerful philosophical synthesis.<sup>8</sup> A challenging and promising new direction in contemporary philosophy, embodiment theory needs to be fleshed out.