Culture, Embodiment, and the Senses
Thursday, 27 October 2005

Reading
- Erica James, *"Haunting Ghosts: Madness, Gender and Ensekirite in Haiti in the Democratic Era."* Ms.
- Paul Farmer, "Sending Sickness: Sorcery, Politics, and Changing Concepts of AIDS in Rural Haiti," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (March 1990): 6-27.

Questions to be considering

How do we come to sense an object of sorcery and by what method?
Keep in mind the experience itself and the methodology/construction of knowledge.

How do the body and mind become objects of knowledge?
How do individuals relate to the past? perceive objects?

Merleau-Ponty examined going about analyzing using the **phenomenological method**:
What happens during our perceptions? How do we look at relations between people? What are sensory engagements and a social level? How are relations ruptured? And how is it culturally specific?

How is the self conceived in different cultures? How do we relate to one another in a social network? What is at stake when the conditions of the relationship are broken and what are the repercussions?

How is the individual conceived?

Discussion of readings from last time

- **"Unbewitching as Therapy"** by Jeanne Favret-Saada and Catherine Cullen – seminal in work on the senses (like the Herzfeld piece)

ambiguous anthropological position – how is it politicized? does it allow us to learn more?

Favret-Saada and Cullen offer a political economic analysis:
isolated French community in countryside with intra-family competition for economic resources
kinship is linked to local economic practices
How are the social relations grounded in a political economic context?

The idea of **intersubjectivity –** that the individual is connected at some deep level his social space, that surrounding individuals and objects are extensions of himself – is manifest in this article...

Misfortunes befalling the farm are indicative of sorcery. The head of family *(patron)* is always

the specific target of the sorcery and the sorcery is meant to target his **bioeconomic potential**. The *patron* is the representative body of the whole: his **force**/potency is linked to his kin (who are, in effect, subsumed into his identity) and to the geographical space of the farm. The family and his objects are considered part of the *patron*, even by law.

How is healing sought? The wife (otherwise subordinated) is the impetus!

How is sorcery diagnosed? The unbewitcher takes the life history of the target, examines the farm space, inquires about what happens with the neighbors (who are often the ones blamed).

Social relations are fragile and there is an interdependence in the community. The erection of barriers (whether physical or communicative) is an act of **indirect violence**, of aggression. This is similar to the notion of *vodou* death from being ostracized from the community. In both cases, there are systematic, material measures to communicate suspicion and censure.

The relation between unbewitcher and the bewitched testifies to Csordas' discussion of intersubjectivity. The witch is taking the *patron's* force, and so the unbewitcher must address this, treating/healing the family as a unit.

What tensions exist in the family? The wife is the unofficial unbewitcher. Her motivation is what is the impetus for the husband to undergo/maintain the rituals.

What changes and what inspires such change? The wife becomes "empowered" throughout the unbewitching process, and what also changes is her perception of what is going on in her social space. Reference to medical anthropology: what constitutes **medical efficacy**? Are results due to the charisma of the healer or to the agency of the afflicted?

What is the idea of the individual and his relation to the body? How is it related to social space?

Csordas talks about **somatic modes of attention** (knowing through the body) and Scheper-Hughes and Lock talk about the **social body** – both concepts applicable to this article. There is an intervention at the level of the social body in order to bring about change.

- **"Waorani Grief and the Witch-Killer's Rage:** Worldview, Emotion, and Anthropological Explanation" by Clayton & Carole Robarchek – psychological anthropology that analyzes through **worldview** and which focuses on the individual (as opposed to medical anthropology that has more a phenomenological approach and examines the **lived experience**)

How does method (e.g. psychological vs. medical anthropology) affect analysis?

The article explores to what extent do anthropologists need to empathize in order to understand. Here is the issue of **commensurability** – how is it possible to truly understand the Other when we are not part of the same *habitus*? The Robarcheks argue that it *is* possible to understand cross-culturally.

Accusations of sorcery often are about economic resources, **inequalities of access**.

Their methodological/theoretical orientation posits that we have choice, that with new information, we would choose a new course of action.

For the Waorani, a change in circumstances was correlated to the violent manifestation of the rage associated with that change. To what extent can culture be consciously changed? What is at stake and for whom?

Student presentation of today's readings

- "Haunting Ghosts: Madness, Gender and *Ensekirite* in Haiti in the Democratic Era." by [Professor] Erica James

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. International aid hasn't been successful. Democratization of Haiti – tried to disarm militias, economic distress

The insecurity is the interaction of political, economic, and personal/individual issues.

In the slums, the people had a sense of hopelessness – insecurity was normalized, routinized. They had no power to change their circumstances and were subject to constant stressors, which eventually led to traumatic syndromes.

Vodou religious concepts affirm that emotion, illness, suffering was the result of an interaction among body, living persons, and spirits. The **person** was comprised of both **material and immaterial aspects.**

Informant was "resigned to her tragic fate," having been lost her husband and sons, been haunted by her husband. ***Domination*** [*dominasyon*] was important to the Haitian experience of trauma.

Professor James' commentary

During slavery, the Haitians practiced their traditions but also those of a monolithic god. Outwardly, there was Christianity, but they mapped it onto their own traditions to try and keep alive their traditions in secret.

Giddens' concept of **"ontological security"** - we count on our existence as remaining constant, that there is a sense of trust in the world. A sense of **security comes from routines in daily life**, but this continuity can be ruptured. In Haiti, insecurity is the order of the day. There is a **resignation** that not only something *could* go wrong, but that it something *will* go wrong. Both the individual and the international community are held responsible.

- "Sending Sickness: Sorcery, Politics, and Changing Concepts of AIDS in Rural Haiti" by Paul Farmer

Farmers discusses how representation of a new diseases develops and the role of culture in structuring narratives of experience.

It started with rumors of *sida*, Americans were blaming Haitians for the disease. There were ideas that it dirtied the blood (analogous to TB) and that it was primarily about homosexuals. There was also the nation that *sida* was just part of the American plan for the enslavement of Haiti. Eventually there some preventative campaigns for public awareness.

1987 - 1st Haitian to die of *sida* in a small town

Sida was attributed to various sources. Sorcery could be the cause, and if it were then intervention (or a cure) was possible since the cause was known. Poverty was also blamed. There was some social awareness of *sida* as it was developing. But there was also a growing fear in the population. It is now linked to suffering, punishment, and corruption. Thus, **the idea of *sida* is linked to social concerns.**

Professor James' commentary

Sorcery can be an explanatory model and can be used to explain mysterious happenings among interaction with others.

Farmer uses **processual ethnography** which documents development over time. This takes a certain level of trust and commitment to the community with which the anthropologist is working. With this method, we have to ask how valid is the data vs. a short-term study?

How is this an example of Csordas' attention to the lived experience?

Consider the **ethical position** of the anthropologist – what knowledge does that yield?