Carnal Hermeneutics: From “Concepts” and “Circles” to “Dispositions” and “Suspense”

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From the Students’ Point of View

To give my students a sense of the incomplete and elusive character of interpretive anthropology, I use two images drawn from Clifford Geertz’s The Interpretation of Cultures. One is the “Indian story,” which is “about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked . . . what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that turtle? ‘Ah, Sahib, after that is turtles all the way down.’” The other comes from Geertz’s assertion that “the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong.”

Every year, the students’ reactions are, for better or worse, the same. With respect to the Indian story, first, they seem to enjoy the possibility of this mythical reversal, and laugh. Then, having realized that this is an analogy to reality, they seem puzzled, annoyed, even threatened, by the real possibility that the analysis—no matter how “deep” it goes—may not “get anywhere near to the bottom of anything ever written about.” Except for one or at most two out of twenty students, no one seems ready to buy this story! There must be a bottom where the very, very, very last turtle must rest! There is an argument accompanying this collective assertion: it is contradictory to say that there is no end in cultural analysis and yet to care so much about “the meaning” of “readily observable” or “actually occurring” symbolic forms, that is, words, images, institutions, and behaviors tied as closely as possible to “concrete, social events and occasions, [and] the public world of common life.”
The students’ responses to the second image are similar. First, they seem puzzled and impressed by the ethnographer’s presentation as a clandestine reader of cultures-as-texts. Then, recalling that this is an analogy to reality, they feel insecure at finding that “participant observation” in fieldwork may be such a distant and fleeting experience. Finally, insecurity and awe give their place to relief-generating assertions: if cultural phenomena are like texts, then they are somehow grounded things the fieldworker can not only observe—it doesn’t matter how fleetingly—but read, converse with, translate, write about, make “meaningful.” Students’ familiarity with these “mental activities” makes them feel secure about their future job and helps them understand the presentation of cross-cultural translation or interpretation as a “hermeneutic circle”: a continuous dialectical tacking between natives’ “experience-near” and ethnographers’ “experience-distant concepts.” Nevertheless, the notion of experience confuses them. To their minds—as to ours?—“experiences” are immediately and really lived, yet internally sensed and unselfconsciously practiced. On the contrary, “concepts” are abstract and symbolic (somehow nonreal) and yet self-consciously and meaningfully used. The former are closer to one’s body, so to speak, whereas the latter are closer to one’s mind. If interpretive anthropology involves “poking into another people’s turn of mind,” as opposed to “putting oneself into someone else’s skin,” then, the students ask, what’s the use of our including “experience” instead of sticking to “concepts”? The point underlying this question is familiar to most interpretive anthropologists: verstehen is more feasible, reliable, and useful than einfühlen.

The next step in my lecture about interpretive anthropology is to convince students that this separation is impossible. To do this I use the image of “carnal hermeneutics.” This is not a shift in stress from spiritual mind to material carne and thus to a renewed search of a more tangible “bottom.” On the contrary, it is another complementary way to explain why the interpretation of cultures is incomplete and elusive. It is suggested that the “symbolic means”—words, images, actions—through which both natives and ethnographers represent themselves to themselves and to each other are as experiential as the experiences supposedly represented. Yet the so-called immediate nature of experience is denied here: it is the always already nonimmediate character of experience (e.g., of comprehending or writing about Other cultural experience) that is responsible for its incompleteness and indeterminacy. Time, rather than space (near-, far-experience), is the name of the game.
I use the metaphor *carnal* hermeneutics to suggest that the act of both ethnographic and native *interpretation* is not simply a “mental” or “cognitive” function but a sensory and emotional engagement in the world. This means that cultural interpretation (seen as either “text reading” or “conversing” or “translating” or “writing about”) is not a conceptual re-presentation of experiences, understood as immediate and thus more real and prior to their representation. It is itself an experience, understood as a historically and temporally, and thus culturally, informed somatic intersubjectivity: instead of “points of view” or “visions of the world,” participant co-interpreters, physically or imaginatively copresent, juxtapose, contest, negotiate, realize, socially informed embodied, and bodying forth, knowledge that includes “from silence and gesture to language.” In Geertz’s terms, this knowledge would be natives’ “near-experience concepts,” namely, the unselfconscious and spontaneous local definitions of feeling, thinking, imagining. In carnal-hermeneutics terms, a more apt category, covering both near- and far-experiences, could be Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus or dispositions*, understood as historically informed, lasting “manners of feeling and thinking,” “embodied” through sensory mnemotechnics, extremely general in their application, yet responsible for agents’ “intentionless invention of regulated improvisation.”

Shifting from “concepts” to “dispositions” implies that natives and ethnographers produce knowledge as sentient agents—through our always already socially informed senses and emotions rather than through our “minds.” It also implies that knowledge becomes constantly embodied and bodying forth through past, present, and future practices, sensorily and emotionally shared with persons, objects, and institutions—actual or imagined, seen or unseen or never to be seen. Finally, and for all these reasons, it implies that the meaning or truth claimed by any interpreter is never entirely contained nor constructed in the ethnographic present of the interpretive process. Seen as a juxtaposition of dispositions, rather than concepts, interpretive ethnographic process becomes a temporally and spatially decentered and decentering “coexperience,” that is, one much less localizable, visible, cyclical, and intentional than cognitive synchronic approaches, such as “text reading,” “dialectics,” and “dialogue,” imply. This happens because in this approach, the “sources” of data collection and interpretation include more than interlocutors’ “minds” and go beyond their face-to-face ethnographic present. In other words, meanings are not simply “conceived” but “sensed”—touched, smelled, tasted,
heard, seen. During research this multisensory production of meanings proves to be always taking place in time-bound intersubjective milieus: in surroundings including conversing interpreters and “offstage conversation partners”—living or dead, actual or imagined—with whom each interpreter has consciously and unconsciously shared, shares, might share, negative or positive sensory-emotional relations.

The people I have been studying for many years are so-called prospective organ or body donors living in Athens, Greece. Contrary to the teachings of the Orthodox Christian Church and transplant-policy rhetoric about altruism and Christian love, these people decided to sign donor cards because they feel disgusted by the “idea” of being buried, eaten by worms and thus decomposed, and finally exhumed. Only some have actually observed burials and exhumations, whereas others have only heard about them. However, they all feel that those rituals are “burdensome,” because, as they say, instead of familiarizing Orthodox Christians with death, the rituals cause fear and repulsion—“It’s like watching a Dracula film.” Almost all my interlocutors say that they feel repulsed by the smells smelled on such occasions (the smell of cologne spread on the dead body by undertakers, of the incense used by priests, of flowers, and of the damp soil in the open grave); the tastes tasted (of coffee and brandy as well as boiled wheat distributed); the things and persons seen and touched (the wooden coffin, the icon placed upon it to be kissed, people kissing each other); the sounds heard (relatives’ crying, priests’ hymns). Prospective donors do not want to “see themselves” suffering these “barbarous, aesthetically abusive and meaningless tortures,” despite the fact that “by then, they won’t be able to feel what is done to them.” Having excluded a world with whom they have apparently shared unpleasant feelings (from the Church or priests to undertakers to relatives), donors have turned toward another world: that of doctors specialized in extracting and transplanting body parts, of medical students practicing anatomy lessons, of terminally ill people living all over the world waiting for transplants. Although they don’t know and will never get to know these people, donors seem to trust them more and to already experience their relations to them in a pleasant way.

A woman organ donor, now in her early forties, told me that she has been afraid of being buried and decomposed since she was around six years old. Almost every night, she would wake up and touch one hand with the other to see if she was alive. During the day, she would make her mother tell her the Snow White story: that young girl, though laid dead in the coffin, never decomposed, because the prince came in time and kissed her
and resurrected her. What a relief! The prospect of donating all her organs and tissues after her death causes her the same relief: she knows that some day she will die but will not decompose within the grave—at least not totally. There is a long list of princes (doctors and organ recipients) waiting to kiss her and save her! In that case, why didn’t she donate her whole body? For two reasons: out of respect for her relatives’ right to get her body as a whole, even organless, to bury it in a concrete place, and to be able to “see” it and “speak” to it and “communicate” with it; and out of fear of being endlessly mutilated by doctors and thereby decomposed in a different way. How about whole-body donors? Are they so disrespectful to relatives and so liberated from the fear of being mutilated? Body donors wish to get rid of what is felt as burdensome altogether: “While my body will be traveling to the dissection room, priests and my relatives will be performing a parody of my funeral in front of a picture of mine,” said a man, laughing. Instead of being partially decomposed within the damp soil, body donors prefer to expose their naked bodies on the anatomical table to be consumed by formalin, as well as by medical students’ gazes and hands, and what is left, to be thrown into the garbage or burned—or so they imagine.

Given the temporally and spatially dispersed and indeterminate nature of “offstage partners,” as well as their determining role in the production of dispositions, intuitive empathy and imagination (understood as “somatic modes of attention,” rather than “psychological” or “mental” functions)19 become the inevitable means for the ethnographer to get not inside her interlocutors’ heads but inside the seen and unseen or never to be seen worlds embodied by them. Ethnography, in this case, becomes imaginatively “multi-sited.”20 To capture the knowledge produced beyond the confines of a dialogical communication in a specific location, anthropologists may travel, with or through their informants’ narrated experiences, to “different locales, even different continents,” the political, economic, and cultural systems of which “are registered in dispersed groups or individuals”—in this case donors—“whose actions have mutual, often unintended, consequences for each other, as they are connected by markets and other major institutions that make the world a system.”21 This sort of “sympathetic” or “empathetic” involvement between ethnographers and their subjects may seem to be what George Marcus calls “traditional ethnography”: “I know because ‘I was there’—I saw, I sympathized, etc.”22 or, I know because I am studying “cultural formations . . . encompassed in the everyday lifeworlds of a limited set of subjects concentrated in an easily defined place.”23 This is not the case, because attending to dispositions
not only avoids the “ocularcentrism” implicated in the cognitive “pursuit of clear and distinct ideas” but undermines fast and easy attribution of “certainty,” “domesticity,” and “significance” to the so-called “ordinariness of everyday life.” Put another way, for carnal hermeneutics, there is no place easily “seen” thus defined, nor sets of subjects limited to themselves, nor cultural formations encompassed in the supposedly visible and thus seemingly accessible daily life.

Long before signing a donor card, most of my informants had already prepared the way to protect their fleshly bodies from decomposition and exhumation. Some had officially declared themselves atheists in the hope that the Orthodox Christian Church would not allow the burial of their dead bodies. Others had denied their Christian identity—more or less definitely—to join Hindu-oriented groups in the hope that their souls (identified with their “selves”) would be reincarnated into new bodies. At the same time, through their travels to India, they had been convinced that the “body” perceived by Christians as material flesh may not really exist: “This is why meditating yogis can feed themselves on a biscuit per year!” Some others, while studying or working in foreign countries, had observed the practice of cremation—which is not allowed in Greece—and had decided to make, or had already made, a will asking relatives to carry their dead bodies abroad and have them cremated; one of them, an ex-mariner, had already bought the urn for his ashes. Finally, others had joined recently established pro-cremation groups in Athens, in the hope that this practice, legitimate in other countries of the European Union, could be also established in Greece. In fact, almost all donors wish to have their bodies cremated after having donated parts or the whole of their bodies. Apart from having a “fast and dignified death,” they believe that combining the two practices is the perfect way to undermine black markets for organs that, “from what they know,” flourish in Brazil, China, India, Albania, Turkey, and even Greece! Does this mean that they would be willing to donate and cremate their relatives’ bodies and body parts? Yes and no! They would probably donate certain organs (eyes or heart) but not whole bodies; they would be skeptical about cremating them. In general, they would have preferred to bury them in a concrete place so that they could go and “see” and “speak” to them!

Listening to all these stories, I found myself in a very difficult position. I was prepared, from my prior readings, to locate donors’ meanings attributed to their body, to death and donation, to Christian love and altruism, in the Greek context. I never thought that I would meet Hindus, atheists, or pro-cremationists among Greek donors, or that signing a donor card in
Greece involved so many people—other than donors themselves—spread in so many places other than Greece. The “social context,” supposed to guarantee the “content” or “meaning” of donors’ concepts about donation, proved too indeterminate and elusive. I knew, more or less, what these people were talking about because I was born an Orthodox Christian, had observed most of the above-mentioned rituals, and had read or heard about cremation, body-parts commercialization, and so on. However, I did not understand them, because, in the beginning, I felt that I shared neither their fears nor their images of escape from rituals. More specifically, I am an atheist myself but have never related it to the consequences of my death. Although I find Hindu philosophy interesting, I don’t care about it concerning myself. I have become an organ donor myself only because during fieldwork I felt compelled to do it. Nevertheless, I intend to remain so because, as my Hindu and atheist informants say, I don’t care what happens to this “piece of meat” after my death. On the other hand, although it has occurred to me to become a body donor, I will not do it; I share my interlocutors’ position that relatives should not be deprived of the right to bury my body and communicate with it. Finally, I refuse to be cremated; I saw my father getting burned in an accident and do not want to “see” this happening to my—dead—body!

Paradoxically, through this empathetic, rather than simply conceptual or dialectical, juxtaposition of similar and different somatic knowledge, I felt familiar with the donors’ world and comfortable with, rather than frightened by, its indeterminacy. More specifically, by discovering and attending to, rather than neglecting, my own unconscious fear of being burned even after my death, I came closer to the donors’ kinds of fears—initially incomprehensible to me. Einfühlen, or sensing a similar feeling, which however came from a completely different experience, made me realize that we both shared a common concern about our carnal bodies’ destiny and a common fear of losing the way we sense our embodied selves with respect to embodied others. This common feeling gave further impetus to my culturally informed intuition and imagination and somehow introduced me to a legacy or habitus that, until then, I was unconscious of but that my informants had already reworked into practices meaningful to themselves and their relations to many others. In other words, whereas I was just discovering “how corporeal [rather than spiritual] a dogma Greek Orthodoxy is,” my informants had already attended to this local somatic knowledge and had integrated it with more global practices imaginatively experienced as more pleasant and useful than the ones promised by Greek Orthodoxy: almost none of them will wait for the Second Coming of
Christ to have their bodies resurrected because all abhor the idea of decomposition and exhumation intervening between (their) Orthodox Christian death and (their) resurrection. Instead, through the institutions of donation, imported from the United States, and cremation, to be imported from the European Union, they will skip these two horrifying experiences and retain the “image” of their embodied selves the way they will be immediately after death, that is, as “semi-alive”—neither fully dead nor fully alive. The more “intact” their bodies are to be kept (i.e., the more protected from decomposing within the grave), the more (semi-) alive they are imagined to stay and the more tangible, visible, audible, their relations to the living are imagined to remain after death. Is this one reason I wish to remain a donor myself even after fieldwork?

None of these empathetic realizations or co-experiences provided me, the ethnographer, with “an almost preternatural capacity to think, feel, and perceive like a native,” namely, like a person who became a prospective donor only after having gone through so many and such long, conscious and unconscious, painful and pleasant experiences. Instead, they made me fully aware of the co-experiential character of all practices (including ethnography) and familiarized me with the always already non-immediate, and thereby elusive and indeterminate, nature of all “experiences”-as-dispositions (including the disposition to practice ethnography). This means that I have been liberated from the fear of “losing,” or the illusory hope of “finding” ways to “rescue” the “raw” material of fieldwork—a concern usually ending by locating cultural formations that seem to be “nearer” to native experiences and therefore more “central” to the local society. Does this mean that substituting dispositions for concepts eschews the problem of “representing” the cultural Other, especially when the time comes to write about it, that is, to transform the “active” and uncontrollable—because “immediate”—dialogical or sensory co-experience into “static” yet neat and controllable texts? The ethnographer who juxtaposes his or her own disposition to others’ dispositions is particularly sensitive to the embodied and bodying forth tempo(rality) of such co-experiences. This means that the ethnographer is aware of their irreversibility, and hence non-re-presentability and partiality; he or she considers “losses” in comprehension and interpretation and representation of cultural otherness inevitable, not only because of cultural differences or their final transformation into “written” text, but because of their temporal nature: of the time constantly intervening and defining—not definitively—the meanings of all past, present, and future practices, including writing about the Other. Thus, instead of trying to center analysis by
privileging (and hence detemporalizing and disembodying) certain cultural forms or concepts versus others, this ethnographer accepts the somatic and intersubjective (and thus dispersed, indeterminate, nondefinitive) nature of her own and her informants’ interpretations. She knows that, not only during but also after fieldwork, “the domain of interpretive possibilities is continuous between those of observer and those of observed.” In other words, writing at “home alone” (no less than conversing in fieldwork or text reading or translating or dancing or dreaming or keeping silent) is a somatic mode of attention: a culturally elaborated way of attending to and with one’s body to surroundings that include the embodied (actual or imagined) presence of others. In this new intersubjective milieu (“home”) to which colleagues’ comments should also be added, nothing will be “lost” or “found” or “rescued” in order to be “re-presented,” as “near” as possible to natives’ experience and the co-experience of fieldwork. New meaningful yet indeterminate realities will present themselves in written form, and no one will know exactly whose property they are. The ethnographer who is conscious of this will undertake the responsibility of telling readers that the faults of the book are of course the ethnographer’s alone, so that readers feel free to add their own interpretations to it. This is another way to conceptualize Geertz’s assertion that,

in the study of culture, analysis penetrates into the very body of the object—that is, we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those. . . . In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition only a “native” makes first order ones: it’s his culture.) They are, thus, fictions; fictions in the sense that they are “something made,” “something fashioned” . . . not that they are false, unfactual, or merely “as if” thought experiments.

Words as Dispositions

Every time I expose these thoughts to an audience—be it students or colleagues or others—the majority ask me whether “in the long run” I perceive and represent informants’ dispositions “by means of words.” This question echoes Geertz’s asking, in all honesty, “Are we, in describing symbol uses, describing perceptions, sentiments, outlooks, experiences? And in what sense? What do we claim when we claim that we understand the semiotic means by which, in this case, persons are defined to one another? That we know words or that we know minds?”
Despite my assertion that socially informed embodied knowledge or dispositions include “from silence to gesture to language,” my audience not only identifies dispositions with nonverbal gestures but considers the latter not “expressive” enough to be read and interpreted. Apparently, dispositions are identified with “experiences,” understood as inner, spontaneous, unmediated, and therefore unobservable and anterior to outer, observable, culturally mediated typifications such as “words.” This stance reproduces the perennial distinction between experience and language; the latter is seen as not “experiential,” because related to mind, thought, consciousness. Consequently, verbal language is approached as linear, logical, predetermined by social conventions, and therefore more “constructed,” more social or “public,” than experiences, perceptions, sentiments, outlooks. For all these reasons, however, discourse is considered the most useful tool to represent nonverbal experience “scientifically,” and simultaneously, the expressive means that most distorts and belies the vital significance of lived experience, including body language. Anthropologists who adopt this position constantly face the dilemma of how to “close the gap between descriptive language and the actions described.” One proposal has been to read action as (if it were) a text; another is to read language as (if it were) polyphonic or dialogical action; neither one bridges the gap between body-action and mind-language. Another approach, coming from carnal hermeneutics, could be to read words as dispositions or habitus, that is, as socially informed “verbal gestures” or “one of the possible uses of our [socially informed] body,” as one of the many “experiences” we live with others within nonlinear time. Here, then, unlike Bourdieu, who distinguishes habitus from discourse, words, and consciousness, we see language as one’s embodied, multisensory, and emotional knowledge or skill made up and shared with others both unconsciously (when we think we are literally speaking by means of “dead metaphors” and we do not feel the need to explain) and consciously (when we objectify it, we invent and perform new metaphors, neologisms, and seemingly new realities—not simply objectifications) if, of course, we are similarly predisposed to it, that is, we (have learned to) share similar embodied knowledge or experiences; if not, we feel we speak different languages. Because language is habitus, the words used in our conversations with informants “contain an ‘objective intention’ . . . which always outruns [interlocutors’] conscious intentions”; this is why “the truth [or meaning] of the [verbal] interaction is never entirely [constructed] in the interaction.” Each interlocutor participates with his or her own culturally informed verbal images, indexes, and symbols that do not represent inner ideas seen with the
mind’s eye but constitute sensory and emotional estimations of sociopolitical relations, experienced in the past and present or to be experienced in the future, with real and imagined, embodied or seemingly disembodied, others—dead persons, objects, institutions. The many metonyms upon metonyms, metaphors upon metaphors, and similes used neither obscure nor distort nor immobilize nor de-historicize experiences—especially when they project experiences impossible to be lived in the future, such as decomposing within one’s grave! Being themselves experiences or dispositions, these tropes disclose how verbal gestures are as historical, temporal, and fluid as nonverbal ones.

Many potential donors, “framed” by my ethnographic interviews, were made to delve, so to speak, into their habitus and describe or “word” how they feel or “see” their bodies with respect to their future plans to donate them. According to a woman organ donor,

it is the material cover of my soul which is me, something like a temple, or a box. . . . It is the image of my soul on earth . . . something like my house, so if I gave it away to medical students I would feel like selling off my furniture . . . . Although I know that when I die my body will be a piece of meat . . . nothing . . . nothing worth of making all these expenses, etc. . . . but this [donating organs versus body] is a way to leave my parents something of me to see and speak to.

No definitive definition of “the body” is given. The indeterminate character of native interpretation obliges me to become equally indeterminate and leave my “key words” aside. Nevertheless, this “tropic movement . . . from pre-objective [yet not precultural] indeterminacy to inexhaustible semiosis” makes me feel anxious about how to control it, to communicate it. I feel confused with a body image (which I thought I knew), that is (now) or would be (after death) a “house,” and that will be (after death) “meat” or “nothing” but also “something of me.” I feel both familiar and unfamiliar with these “views”: I live the same as my informants’ society but do not perceive my body—now and after my death—as they do. A stranger in my own land, I feel tempted to follow the traditional path: to isolate donors’ strange concepts, order them into antithetical pairs, and connect them with “deeper,” more “central” concepts of society at large. Our conversation does not allow me to do so. While speaking, my interlocutors enter various past, present, and future relations and emotional states—only generally known to me—and depending on how they feel them, they “word” the body “house” or “nothing” or “something.” When they speak positively about the religious choices they have made,
they feel like calling the body “house,” “temple.” When they criticize the Orthodox Church priests for imposing barbarous rituals, the undertakers for exploiting people’s pain, and the Greek state for refusing to pass the cremation law, the body is felt as “meat” or “nothing.” When they get enthusiastic about the advantages of donation, the body organ becomes the “Olympic flame” to be transferred all over the world. When they get angry with organ dealers, the body becomes “flesh,” and the organ, “flesh of my flesh.” When they feel sorry imagining their relatives burying and crying over the “empty” body, then the latter is felt as “something of me.” Finally, when they speak of their plans to be cremated or of their plans to modernize Greek society by claiming their civil right to cremation, they speak of the body as “energy.”

I find my informants’ vocabulary unfamiliar. The only word that I share is “meat”: like them, I perceive my dead body as a mere “piece of meat,” and yet, unlike them, I don’t want it to be cremated! I would prefer it to be buried and eaten by worms. Juxtaposing “words” cross- and intra-culturally proves to be a complicated experience, as it goes beyond matters of different grammar and syntax and into the “mysteries of incarnation.”

What, then, are all these “words” the moment they are uttered? Are they the “conceptual means” by which “experiences” or “minds” are “represented,” depending on the “social context” in which speakers find themselves? Are there multiple meanings attributed to “the [one] body” by “multi-positioned” actors’ selves? These spatially oriented views not only detemporalize verbal gestures but neglect the positive or negative feelings felt by “observers” when they do or do not share their informants’ “vocabulary of motives.” An alternative view, suggested here, would be to approach words with an emphasis on time: as dispositions or as “emotional engagement[s] with social and political realities.” Through this path, the ethnographer discovers and attends to the nonlinear nature of language, compatible not only with the “deeply rooted emotional component[s] of identity” but also with the processes of their “integration” with actual (seemingly “present”) and dreamed of (seemingly “past” or “future”) experiences. Experienced in this way, the process of “making sense of the foreign and of communicating the very foreignness” is felt as a hermeneutic “suspense” rather than as a “circle,” and this feeling should be fearlessly disclosed in our “writing” about cultural otherness, including our own. For example, writing about certain people’s decisions to become so-called prospective donors should communicate to readers this emotional state of potentiality or prospect, the more so when it concerns donors who have the right to countermand this decision—and they often do!
In case my informants did, would they have lied to me, since words are easy to use because of their “externality” to “real” dispositions? Or, for that matter, would their own conscious words have belied their own unconscious feelings? By the same token, my own words toward informants may prove otherwise—some day I may decide to be cremated. Also, my ethnography may prove “false” when read by readers who happen to be donors. Well, this is the destiny of ethnographies exposed to time-bound *dispositions* rather than space-bound *concepts*. Carnal hermeneutics is another rather complementary way to convince my audience—be it students or colleagues or even myself—that “in finished anthropological writings . . . what we call our data are really our own constructions [i.e., dispositions] of other people’s constructions [i.e., dispositions] of what they and their compatriots [in this case myself] are up to.”48