

RESPONSE

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It's gratifying to have one's work reconsidered, and I am grateful to my colleagues, translators, and commentators for giving me the opportunity to once again take up the theme of embodiment and alterity in relation to religion. I will begin with Rodolfo Puglisi, whose comments are the most extensive and who raises three important background issues about embodiment that must be grappled with even prior to understanding embodied alterity and how it contributes to the constitution of religion as a human phenomenon. First, how do we reconcile the fact that our bodies are in one sense the same as human bodies yet in another are endlessly variable across individuals, settings, and societies? Secondly how do we understand our bodies as separate yet interconnected, individual and collective, characterized by both corporeality and intercorporeality? Thirdly, how is human embodiment to be understood in relation to the bodily being of other creatures? Puglisi is generous in placing the argument of *Asymptote* in dialogue with other works of mine that allow for an understanding of an oscillation of perspectives between more individualist and collective, or corporal and intercorporeal, aspects of an argument about embodiment developed in installments over the past two decades. This includes works even before *Somatic Modes of Attention* (1993) and after *Intersubjectivity and Intercorporeality* (2008), both of which he cites (cf. Csordas, 1990, 2011). Somewhat contrary to Puglisi's assertion that the "collective dimension of otherness fades away in *Asymptote*," and most certainly contrary to the critics he cites who claim that the argument is characterized by individualist reductionism and prejudiced toward inwardness, I would offer the corrective that across the trajectory of my larger project I have where appropriate

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moved back and forth between the analytic moment of recognizing that each of us is a body and the analytic moment of recognizing the collective and intercorporeal nature of embodiment.

It is problematic to talk about “the other” or “a sacred other” just as it is to talk about “the body” in abstract and objectified terms, and in *Asymptote* I attempt to avoid endorsing the “other” in favor of examining “alterity” as an element of embodiment for ourselves and others. The notion of alterity does not, I think, objectify “the other” or eliminate the presence of “others,” but is rather the condition of possibility for self and other, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and as I argue when it is culturally elaborated for its own sake the phenomenological kernel of religion. This is also critical with respect to our relation with non-human human beings and the environment, which Puglisi also mentions in connection with reference to Carvalho and Steil’s intriguing synthesis of Ingold’s ecological anthropology and my paradigm of embodiment. In this respect I concur with Merleau-Ponty (2003) that the relation between human life and animality is to be defined not by a boundary but as an *Ineinander*, a term he draws from Husserl and defines as “the inherence of the self in the world and of the world in the self, of the self in the other and the other in the self” (2003, p. 306). It is this *Ineinander* that is in question when he describes the “flesh of the world” as continuous with our flesh, our sensibility or *Empfindbarkeit*, our embodied being. Indeed, this notion is critical to the next step of my own theorizing about embodiment in a direct engagement of animality and materiality as methodological fields. It is always possible to collapse dualities and always possible to generate them. Neither should a holistic cosmology be reduced to a kind of “hive mind” on the level of concrete experience. With William Blake we should recall that contraries are positives and that a negation is not the same as a contrary – an insight also contained in the work of Levi-Strauss on the mythologies of societies with holistic cosmologies. This, I think, is precisely in accord with Puglisi’s own attempt to find a middle ground between dualism and monism in thinking about embodiment.

In the second part of his comment Puglisi picks up the psychoanalytic thread of *Asymptote* introduced with Freud's notion of the uncanny and Lacan's mirror stage. It is gratifying to see this theme developed since my own limitations in psychoanalytic thinking prevented me from elaborating this intuition further – though I have attempted to examine the complementarity of psychoanalysis and phenomenology in other work (Csordas, 2012). Puglisi's observation that alterity is for psychoanalysis also fundamental to the constitution of the subject and of religion is critical in this respect, although insofar as for religion this has to do mostly with the Oedipal relation to the father, psychoanalysis is more beholden to the Abrahamic religion than might be comfortable to anthropology's concern with religions well beyond the Abrahamic traditions. Most interesting is his discussion of the unconscious, which suggests that my reticence to appeal to that category in *Asymptote* (again based on limited expertise in psychoanalysis) might be reversed with further investigation of concepts such as the barred subject, the Lacanian Autre/autre, and extimacy in relation to how alterity inhabits the innermost core of the subject.

Roberta Bivar C. Campos draws attention to the elements of *Asymptote's* argument that suggest incompleteness, blurred boundaries, and indeterminacy are elements that constitute religion. Most particularly she highlights the element of wonder, elaborating the nuance of that notion in opposition both to its rejection by Durkheim and its construal as cosmological awe by Otto and van der Leeuw. Though she does not draw the parallel, the kind of wonder in question is more that to which Irigaray draws attention as the most basic human emotion, such that she sees implications in my argument that "the ability to produce religion is what makes us human" and that there is "a tragic nature in the making of the human being." She observes the critical importance of both theory and ethnography to my argument, noting that the objectification of alterity includes individual participants but has no pre-set direction or pre-defined arrival point, instead being defined by indeterminacy and multiplicity as it becomes culturally elaborated. Regarding her query about Durkheim, while I think he was

guilty of sociological reductionism in his treatment of religion, I would not agree that my argument reduces religion to a bodily function, and that rather than being a mystification of the body religion is imaginatively emergent from bodily experience, even though its imaginal and poetic features are often sacrificed to reification and objectification. Regarding the question of religion and human nature, I refer again to the *Ineinander* that modifies any absolute distinction between humans and other animals, while still recognizing that even though both birds and humans produce song, birds do not have music in the way we humans do, regardless of whether some of us may be tone deaf and unmusical. It is also critical not to reduce the religious imagination to religious practice such that it can be described only insofar as it is elaborated as a skill. Finally, given these concerns it is striking that Campos sees a liberating potential in the possibility that this contribution to the theory of religion “frees us from the shackles of perversity and the radicalism of difference.”

The notion of perversity emerges again in the comment by José Carlos dos Anjos when he invokes Deleuze’s notions of *autruicide* and *altrucide*, notions central to Deleuze’s discussion of Sadian perversity. These are descriptions of how alterity and intimacy, to say nothing of intimate alterity, can be foreclosed. They are of interest insofar as rituals of perversity can be compared to religious rituals. If I understand correctly, his lamentation that “Jesus is lost” in my analysis of Charismatic imaginal performance is a kind of theological nostalgia, whereas my intent is more akin to the discussion above about the relation between phenomenology and psychoanalysis and in particular an understanding of Jesus and Mary in terms of internal object relations. With respect to the I and the other, it’s not correct either to say that they are historically constituted partitions or elementary structures of existence, but the way I would put it is that they are mutual conditions of possibility. I appreciate dos Anjos query about whether interrogating the primordially of religion poses a series of problems and not a single problem with many solutions, but I would then ask in return about the relation among the problems in that series and why he would recognize it

as a series in the first place. I apologize for not grasping the point about *Robinson Crusoe* via Deleuze and Tournier, and would only say that I would prefer considering *Robinson Crusoe* alongside *Lord of the Flies* with respect to dead goats and pigs' heads on desert islands. Finally, I welcome dos Anjos' invocation of African-Brazilian religion insofar as the *candomblé* has also inflected my own thinking about embodiment (Csordas, 1987). Certainly, to quote dos Anjos, the fact that "The orisha emanates from the body, it takes your body" counts as a concrete instance of intimate alterity. Also certainly, the presence of the egum as a dead person and the orisha as a deity do not bespeak precisely the same structure of alterity. Finally, again if I understand correctly, I do not think that the notion of embodied alterity and the *écart* it entails can be superimposed on the Cartesian logic that distinguishes a material substance from a thinking substance.

Carlos Alberto Steil reflects on the nature of anthropology as a profession – one might invoke Weber and think of it as a vocation – and its ability to "address some of the founding questions concerning the human condition and the meaning of the world," in the present instance the nature of religion. In doing so he raises the question of whether anthropology can engage in interdisciplinary discourse about such problems, including an engagement with philosophy, literature, and psychoanalysis, and still remain anthropology. Steil aptly characterizes the approach of *Asymptote* as a shift from a starting point in social practices to a starting point in the human condition, but in the same paragraph rephrases this as a distinction between interpersonal relations and the intimacy of the subject without recognizing the inherently interpersonal nature of the subject as an intercorporeal being. He suggests that my work downplays the role of empirical data, even though he cites my maxim that anthropology is a kind of "philosophy with data," where the data are precisely those of ethnography. In this respect, just as Puglisi places my argument in the context of previous works of mine on which *Asymptote* builds and Campos observes the ethnographic elements in *Asymptote*, I can only refer to a trajectory in which my ethnography of Charismatic healing led to a formulation of embodiment (Csordas, 1990)

which in turn in *Asymptote* I use to make a contribution to the theory of religion. In this respect my argument is not a return to a pre-Durkheim vision that seeks “grounds for the social outside social or cultural relations,” but an antidote to Durkheim’s sociologically reductionist account of religion, an effort to understand religion as an emergent function of the human imagination grounded in bodily experience rather than as a Durkheimian epiphenomenon of the social. To Steil’s question of whether intimate alterity is “an experience outside of culture” my clarification is that it is not an experience but an existential structure which cannot become an “experience” except insofar as it is taken up within culture. I am unwilling to grant Steil’s implied claim that an emphasis on either continuity or rupture on a cosmological level maps directly onto a presumed distinction between continuity or rupture on the level of concrete social relations, or that cosmological continuity implies a kind of “hive mind” in the social world. If the *écart* of alterity implies rupture, if rupture is the only way to understand this *écart*, and if rupture is a unique feature of what Steil calls western culture, then he may be correct – but then how would he describe the state which must then be prior to rupture? Finally, I must disagree with his conclusion: I don’t think anything can render the practice of anthropology impossible or take anthropological theory outside anthropology, nor do I think that interrogating the grounds of intersubjectivity silences intersubjectivity. I must also disagree with the implication, given Steil’s emphasis on empirical data, that my anthropological reflection on the attacks of September 11, 2001 could only be legitimate if I had interviewed Osama bin Laden and conducted ethnography in Al-Qaeda.

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