

Culture, Embodiment, and the Senses

Tuesday, 20 September 2005

Reading

Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*, chapters 2 and 4, pp. 61-108, and pp.153-192.

We have certain ways of holding our bodies and experiencing our bodies. Mentastics and the Trager Approach address these patterns of embodiment. <http://www.trager.com/approach.html>

[class exercise in Mentastics]

Discussion of reading

(Note: Italicized questions set aside by arrow-bullets are broad questions to keep in mind and think about throughout the reading and analysis)

- *What is Kuriyama's purpose?*

The Western approach to medicine *describes* while the East emphasizes *experience*.

West: primacy of sight

East: perception is linked to practice and diagnosis

Chapter 2 discusses the distinction between **perception vs. fact**

West: objective, quantifiable conception of the pulse so that it could be easily recognized by anyone – it exists *beyond* human perception.

- *Is the object of study the same as the methods used to perceive it?*

East: the *mo* (life flow) is not consistent always, was defined through a haptic manner. Reading the *mo* showed how the Chinese regarded how the knowledge of a thing depended on the act of perceiving it

*We can't think about notions of body that differ across **cultural contexts** without considering **styles of communication** that vary in those contexts.

West: visual imagery was important in the understanding of pulse (e.g. visualization of arteries)

East: emphasis was on the act of touching

- *How do **conceptions of the body** influence the **methodologies** chosen to explore it and vice versa, how do the methodologies of exploration influence the conception of the body?*

<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Greek</i>
interconnected system	governing source (e.g. heart, brain)
body viewed as depth	body systems
long-term, indirect relations between systems	immediate systemic effects (e.g. nerves)
vision – object <i>is</i> color focus on both the surface and what is behind it	vision used to assess anatomy skin blocked vision/knowledge of insides
no need for dissection	dissection as a major influence on knowledge and method
<i>se</i> is related to character, countenance, color, beauty, sexual attractiveness	
skin is the mirror of the internal body	
emphasis on form and place	emphasis on function and shape
language – descriptive, metaphoric	language – emphasis on clarity and precision
organization and depth	

How did clinicians experience the body? They described, thinking through their own personal experiences. Chinese was *experiential* whereas Greek was *regimented*.

○ *What constitutes legitimate ways of acquiring **knowledge**?*

The Greeks did not think touch was legitimate because it could be subjective – and this led to the birth of the **scientific method** (an attempt to *overcome* the subject, to be *objective*). The Greek emphasis on clarity aimed to create a definition outside of an individual diagnosis, i.e. not case-specific. On the other hand, for the Chinese, the *action* of the clinician (e.g. reading the *mo*) defined the diagnosis.

The idea of **rhythm** originated from the Platonic forms. Objects had ideal templates. Form was a deep philosophical concept.

○ *What is **real** and how may our **perception** be included?*

Blood and *qi* (life force) constituted the *mo*. It flowed, rather than having a mechanical nature like the Western conception of the pulse. The *mo* was the spiritual/psychological component. It was continuous and not confineable.

Here is the **botanical metaphor** because the *se* is nourished by energy (*qi*) and blossoms at the surface. The *se* should be cultivated because that is how one appears to others and how one can read people – there is an interrelatedness between people, less discrete individuality than in the Western conception.

Confucius was concerned with social relations. People were obligated to cultivate their selves as **moral persons** and this related to the order of society and **governance**. The cosmology of society was thus related to the visions of the body (see the Scheper-Hughes and Lock article).