

# 10

## EMBODIED ETHNOCENTRISM AND THE FEELING OF CULTURE

### *A Key to Training for Intercultural Competence*<sup>1</sup>

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We want to speak of the *feeling* of one's own culture and the *feeling* for other cultures. This subject is important to interculturalists because much of their work concerns ethnocentrism, and the most fundamental fact of ethnocentrism is that things simply "feel right" in one's own culture. To counter ethnocentrism with cultural self-awareness, it is insufficient merely to know the values and common patterns of behavior of one's own culture. It is also necessary to become sensitive to the *feeling of appropriateness* that accompanies those patterns.

Another major concern of interculturalists is that of facilitating adaptation to other cultures. Once again, awareness or knowledge of a culture is insufficient—one also needs to have a *feeling* for it. For instance, an American might be aware that Italy has a culture that is different in many respects from that of the United States. He or she might be able to recognize behavior as more American or more Italian. This American might also be quite knowledgeable about Italian

culture, typically its objective culture (e.g., art, architecture, history). She or he might even be knowledgeable about Italian subjective culture and be able to analyze cultural differences in communication style or values. Yet this same person could lack a *feeling* for Italian culture. Without this feeling for the culture, our American would be limited in the depth of his or her understanding of Italians and in his or her ability to adapt to the culture.

We use the term "feeling" in both its physical and metaphorical aspects (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1998). The physical aspect of feeling refers to sensory experience. The sensory stimuli might be external, as in "She felt the sun warm her back," or it might be internal, as in "He felt his temperature rise." In the context of culture, these stimuli constitute the familiar sensory experiences of a particular reality—the warmth of a tropical sun or the bite of an arctic wind, the aroma of newly baked bread or of recently boiled breadfruit, the clicking of pigeon wings or the roar of traffic.

## 250 • THEORY INTO PRACTICE

In its metaphoric aspect, “feeling” refers to the intuitive grasp of a situation, such as “She has a feeling for physics” or “He has a feeling for how the group wants to proceed.” In terms of culture, this kind of feeling is associated with sensing the appropriateness of certain behavior—exactly how long and low the bow should be to greet this person, exactly when the appropriate moment is to take leave after a hosted dinner, or whether to apologize for a minor slight. This intuitive feeling of culture is built on sensory feeling, but it resides more at the interface between physical sensation and conscious awareness—what we will refer to as *embodied feeling*.

With a deeper understanding of the embodied feeling for culture, interculturalists can design training that incorporates physical self-awareness into their efforts to deal with ethnocentrism. They also will be in a better position to focus intercultural skills development on the ultimate goal of cultural adaptation—getting a feeling for the other culture.

In this chapter, we will address these questions:

- Why are interculturalists impeded in recognizing the importance of the feeling of culture?
- How is the feeling of culture embodied in everyday lived experience?
- What approaches to training for intercultural competence are implied by an understanding of embodied ethnocentrism and the feeling of culture?

To address the first question, we will first briefly refer to the social science context of the field of intercultural relations and then to the historical treatment of “body” in Western science. We will then develop a theoretical rationale for the concept of “embodied feeling of culture” and provide examples. Finally, we will suggest how the theory can be put into practice in intercultural training and education.

#### THE REIFICATION OF CULTURE

Intercultural communication studies<sup>2</sup> have emerged for the most part from American social science. As a result, theory and research in the

field tend to be limited by the parameters of acceptable social science (Martin & Nakayama, 1997).<sup>3</sup> In addition, the practice of intercultural training and education is biased toward Western culture in general and American culture in particular. This is not a criticism of the field of intercultural relations; rather, it is a reminder that the context of any focused study is necessarily restrictive.

The social science bias of intercultural communication is evident in its emphasis on methods that inevitably reify the experience of culture. In experimental studies, the methods of investigation must first identify dependent and independent variables before proceeding to establish significant difference or correlation, and in descriptive studies, a classificatory taxonomy must either precede or emerge from the observations. In the field of intercultural relations, this methodological imperative has fostered the belief in the essential nature of culture, where descriptions such as the ubiquitous iceberg metaphor imply that culture is an entity floating above and below the waterline of consciousness and observation. Such metaphors are necessary to allow “culture” to be divided, classified, and finally correlated with other reified phenomena such as values or specified behaviors.

“Culture” is usually treated as a cognitive construct in the West. In its objective sense, human culture refers to the institutions and artifacts generated by some defined group of people. According to the sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), these institutions are “objectivations” (and often reifications) of the coordinated behavior of a group of people.

The excision of the body from Western thought has led to the reification of the products of the mind. This is particularly evident in the concept of “objective culture,” as noted by Berger and Luckmann (1966):

The institutional world is objectivated human activity, and so is every single institution. In other words, despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it. (pp. 60-61)

Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world,

and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. . . . That is, man is capable paradoxically of producing a reality that denies him. (p. 89)

In its subjective sense, human culture refers to the underlying worldview shared by members of a defined group (Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Triandis, 1994). A typical definition found in both anthropology and intercultural communication is *the pattern of beliefs, behaviors, and values maintained by groups of interacting people*. Although this is not an “objectivation” in Berger and Luckmann’s sense, this definition of subjective culture is also reification. That is, it refers to observational constructs of cultural experience rather than to the experience itself. Some reification is necessary to describe anything, of course. The question for interculturalists will be whether the reification is recognized when considering how intercultural adaptation works.

In addition to its social science context, the Western and particularly American bias of intercultural communication is apparent in its separation of mind and body and in its emphasis on action. The body is seen as the vehicle for action initiated by the mind. In the intercultural context, this bias manifests as an emphasis on *intercultural competence*—how understanding one’s own and other cultures can lead to more effective action across cultures.

The assumed relationship between mind and body—cognition and behavior—employs the traditional division among cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of experience. Interculturalists generally believe that understanding cognitive constructs such as the values of a target culture can be translated into actions, such as modified social behavior in that culture. Interculturalists also tend to believe that particular affective states either impede or facilitate intercultural relations. For instance, the positive affect associated with “tolerance of ambiguity” is generally held to be facilitative, and the negative affect associated with “judgmentalism” is held to be an impediment. In a social science context, affect tends to be associated with attitude—a more or less positive or negative feeling about an object of perception and, possibly, a predisposition to action (Kuper & Kuper,

1985). These affective conditions are different than the states of intuitive feeling defined earlier, and the emphasis on them in intercultural theory masks the deeper phenomenon of the embodied feeling of culture.

The strength of the Western social science approach to intercultural relations is its ability to generate culture-general (etic) cognitive frames of reference for contrasting cultures, its methodology for interaction analysis, and its identification of certain traits that seem to be associated with intercultural competence. The major limitation of the current intercultural approach is its inability to adequately explain the translation of cognition and attitude into behavior. Of course, interculturalists are not alone among social scientists in grappling with this issue. But because of their tendency to reify culture as a mental construct, interculturalists may be particularly impeded in recognizing how adaptive behavior is related to the embodied feeling of culture.

The limitation of the intercultural approach is most noticeable in the area of cultural adaptation. Although there are fine studies on the sequence and forms of adaptation in cross-cultural situations (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1988), those models do not seek to explain the mechanism of adaptation itself. Even the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986, 1993), despite its attempt to avoid reification by emphasizing experiential worldviews, nevertheless becomes somewhat vague in explaining how the worldview of “adaptation” translates into actual adaptive behavior.

#### LOSS OF THE BODY IN WESTERN THINKING

The difficulty interculturalists have in explaining intercultural adaptation is most likely rooted in the general inability of Western science to deal with issues related to body and feeling, or “lived experience” (Maturana, 1988). As noted earlier, we believe that intercultural adaptation depends on attaining a conscious “embodied feeling” for other cultures generally and for one or more particular cultures specifically, including one’s own. However, the ideas of “body”

## 252 • THEORY INTO PRACTICE

and “feeling” have been systematically excluded from Western thought, making it difficult to theorize about lived experience.

In the Greek philosophy that we consider fundamental to Western culture, Plato held that values, ideas, the spirit, and mental consciousness are the true reality, as opposed to things, bodies, and the material world. According to his view, it was the nonmaterial nature of the soul and its transcendence of the material world that expressed the essence of existence (Galimberti, 1983). It is true that Aristotle set the problem of the soul in “biological” terms by defining it as an indivisible part of the body. For instance, in referring to Homer, he made a distinction between the living body, as with soul, and the dead body, as without it. Yet, in spite of the importance eventually given to Aristotle’s thought, Plato’s position largely permeated Western philosophy. One reason for his early precedence could be that until late medieval times, Aristotle’s writings were available only to certain elite of the Christian church (Galimberti, 1999).

One link by which medicine did pass to the medieval era was through Galen’s *Ars Medica*, written in Hadrian’s time (130 AD). This work still tied the body to the soul. The four temperaments (or psychological states deriving from a different combination of heat and fluids in the body) strengthened the traditional Greek view of the body as heat. However, the Judeo-Christian tradition fundamentally ignored the Greek ideas of body, to the point that it does not have the words to indicate the body, soul, and spirit of the Greek and Latin tradition. In Judeo-Christian usage, *logos*, the divine connection between words, means “words on which light has been cast.” From a theological viewpoint, God was associated with light, which is everywhere. The process of becoming “enlightened” was the process of transforming one’s bodily desires, of stepping out of one’s body into the light (Sennett, 1994).

Radicalization of this thought can be found centuries later in Cartesian reason, though divested of any mythical or religious covering. By distinguishing reality as *res extensa* (body experience and things of the world) and *res cogitans* (ideas and soul, thought as pure intellect), Descartes basically defined what was good and

what was bad in terms of this dualism. And we all know which was which. Truth (goodness) could be achieved only by developing rational abilities and the evidence of ideas (*cogito ergo sum*). This line of thinking allowed a clear distinction of body and spirit as two separate entities. The mind was a source of wonder and mystery. The body was a machine that followed the same physical rules as any machine. With the appearance of William Harvey’s *De Motu Cordis* in 1628 and Descartes’ *Discourse de la Méthode* in 1637, bodily phenomena were described as mechanical relationships of cause and effect. Emphasis was given to the nervous system and to neuroendocrinal (limbic) substances that were considered the linking structures between mental processes (cognitive and emotional) and visceral processes. This idea is preserved today by social scientists who, as we mentioned earlier, assume that the somewhat amorphous emotional condition of “attitude” is the link between cognition and behavior.

Until the first half of the 19th century, the separation of mind and body occurred at the level of intellectual elite. Now this separation is very easily recognizable in the general populations of many Western countries. It shows mainly through physical rigidity of the body that occurs when proprioceptive sensation is blocked, with a consequent seeking of extreme sensations through drugs, medicines, or adrenaline generated by extreme or addictive physical stimuli. Children who watch a lot of TV, for instance, experience a strong separation between mind and body, as they receive a great quantity of external input while they are holding their bodies immobile. This immobility is a cause of stress and of a loss of the ability to perceive sensations coming from the body, and the same is true for people who overtrain in sports—the “natural” perception of the body can be compromised (Luciano Marchino, personal communication, 1996).

#### REDISCOVERY OF LIVED EXPERIENCE IN WESTERN THINKING

A sign of paradigmatic change in Western science is the notion of *autopoiesis*, as it is represented in some radical (cybernetic) constructivist

theories and especially by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. These authors, together with Rosalind Onians, Umberto Galimberti, and others, retrace in Western thought the origin of the neglect of embodied feeling from philosophical, historical, and psychological perspectives and suggest a more integrated view. When the body is involved, the idea of culture cannot be separated from our direct experience.

Galimberti (1999) argues that in the word “ek-sistence” (*sic*), the prefix “ek” stands for being outside what we consider the chain of living beings, with human beings at the top as the most evolved and specialized beings. This condition of *ek-sisting* from any determined world environment offers the opportunity for humans to be open to a world that is a nonoriented space, with no signs, horizons, or feedback immediately available to their nonspecialized perception. That is why humans *construct* the world.

Orientation and interpretation of the world are never a given for humans. That is why, as Gehlen (1942/1990) suggests, “Culture is part of the physical condition of existence. This assertion would not be true for any animal.” Unlike other animals that live *in* an environment (*Um-welt*), humans live the world (*Welt*) (Gehlen, 1942/1990). This idea of *lived experience* is what Maturana (1988) refers to when he writes:

The praxis of living, the experience of the observer as such, just happens . . . but when it happens to us that we explain, it turns out that between language and bodyhood the praxis of living of the observer changes as he or she generates explanations of his or her praxis of living. This is why everything that we say or think has consequences in the way we live. (p. 26)

Maturana’s position is similar to that of Galimberti, who suggests that if culture is considered part of the physical condition of our existence, then all dualism between soul and body, nature and culture, and the spirit and material worlds dissolve. This paradigm shift would have a dramatic impact on all academic disciplines and all moral and religious systems that generate and thrive on this dualism (Galimberti, 1999).

Of course, the idea of integrated mind and body—embodied feeling and lived experience—is not new. For instance, pre-Platonic Greek writing suggests that experience was always conceived as a unit: perception and cognition were associated or immediately followed by an emotion or a tendency toward action (Onians, 1998). Emotion could come before the idea—it could be vaguely perceived before being shaped in consciousness and definitely intellectualized. In Homer’s time, “thinking” was equal to “speaking,” and this capacity was identified with the diaphragm. The soul was rooted first in the diaphragm and subsequently in the lungs, both related to the act of breathing. Ancient Anglo-Saxons (as presented in *Beowulf*) used the same word to indicate heart, chest, and mind. All were located in the same area (the area of the lungs), and all could be filled with breathing.

This ancient Greek thought was already mirrored in the 1920s in a “modern” psychology called ideomotory (Onians, 1998). According to ideomotory, every idea is not just a condition or an act of knowledge but a tendency toward movement. Around this time, Wilhelm Reich was also establishing a clinical relationship between psychological states and physical states, based on his observation of Freud’s patients. These studies, although highly disputed in the middle of the 20th century, gave rise to further studies and approaches to psychoanalysis, including the influential movements of Gestalt therapy and Bioenergetics.

The 1960s in the United States and the 1970s in Europe renewed the interest in approaches to mind-body integration, although a large part of the reason for this may have been the emphasis at the time on sexual freedom. In spite of this, interesting developments occurred within the humanistic psychology movement and the countless body-oriented therapies and psychotherapies that developed, including Rolfing, Hellework, Radix, and so on.

In the 1980s and 1990s, researchers returned to a deeper understanding of these approaches. Especially in Norway, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, many researchers began to break out of the orthodoxy that characterized some of the schools in the United States. In Europe today, new mind-body approaches include the

## 254 • THEORY INTO PRACTICE

neo-Reichian body psychotherapies, David Boadella's Biosynthesis, the Norwegian body psychotherapists, Lowen's Bioenergetic Analysis, the newer Danish-based Bodydynamics, Gerda Boyesen's Biodynamic Psychology, Jay Stattman's Unitive Psychology, Malcom Brown's Organismic Psychotherapy training, George Downing's training, Energy Stream and Chiron in the United Kingdom, Arnie Mindell's process-oriented psychotherapists, and others. In spite of the fragmented panorama presented by these movements, taken together, they clearly represent a not-to-be neglected position as one of the 10 major streams of psychotherapy today (with at least 20 subdivisions) (Young, 1997).

The renewed emphasis on body in Western thought is not restricted to psychology. Beginning in the 1970s and continuing to the present, there has been an explosion of neo-Darwinian explanations of social behavior. Many of these works are based on Dawkin's (1976) seminal work on the "selfish gene," which treats behavior in the context of physical evolution. Dawkins departs from the early ethologists by eschewing simple explanations of human behavior in evolutionary terms, although he acknowledges that human behavior is undoubtedly influenced by genetic imperative. To account for the complexity of human culture, he introduces the idea of a "meme," which is analogous to a gene in that it is primarily a replicator. He suggests that memetic replication occurs in the cultural domain, where it supports the continued existence of varying beliefs that form the core of human cultures. This idea has been expanded by Blackmore (1999) to create a connection between biological and cultural phenomena that is consistent with the approach to "embodied culture" that we discuss here.

The rediscovery of the body is also occurring in linguistic philosophy. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have laid this groundwork in *Metaphors We Live By*, wherein they make the case that much of our metaphoric world is composed of images related to bodily experience. Lakoff (1987) continues this theme in *Women, Fire, and Other Dangerous Things*, where he makes the following statement about embodiment:

Cognitive models are embodied, either directly or indirectly by way of systematic links to embodied

concepts. A concept is embodied when its content or other properties are motivated by bodily or social experience. This does not necessarily mean that the concept is predictable from the experience, but rather that it makes sense that it has the content (or other properties) that it has, given the nature of the corresponding experience. Embodiment thus provides a *nonarbitrary* link between cognition and experience. (p. 154)

In their latest work, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) bring together many of the themes of this historical context of embodiment:

Categorization is therefore a consequence of how we are embodied. We have evolved to categorize. . . . We categorize as we do because we have the brains and bodies we have and because we interact in the world the way we do. . . . the formation and use of categories is the stuff of experience. (pp. 18-19)

This reference to categorization is particularly crucial to the idea of embodied culture, as a more traditional view of categorization would treat it as a purely cognitive activity.

Thus it appears that there is a current synchrony of research into body phenomena. Philosophers as diverse as Gail Weiss, Augusto Ponzio, Humberto Maturana, and Umberto Galimberti are developing concepts in the same stream, almost at the same time, together with anthropologists such as Thomas Csordas, linguists such as George Lakoff, sociologists such as Alberto Melucci, and many others. The topic of the body has been rediscovered. Most important for our present purposes, the studies about embodiment are not about the body per se but are about culture and experience as these can be understood from the standpoint of bodily being-in-the-world (Csordas, 1999).

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#### THE FEELING AND FORMING OF CULTURE

*Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one should remain silent.*

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922, p. 72)

The context of this famous statement is the basis for what we hope will offer some insight into how cognition and attitude translate into behavior in terms of “embodied feeling.” Wittgenstein’s closing statement in the *Tractatus* follows an extensive description of the logical forms that he claims describe all of ordinary reality. But after his description, Wittgenstein (1922) writes, “there is more. . . . What the law of causality is meant to exclude cannot even be described” because it is essentially “mystical.” Still, he ventures that this indescribable quality is the “feeling for the whole thus described” (all quotations from p. 72). We assume that this “feeling for the whole” is an ineluctable part of communication, including intercultural communication.

In his initial work on this topic, Bennett (1977) suggested a process whereby “forming is felt and feeling is formed in an ongoing, interactive process” (p. 102). By “forming,” he meant the *forming of discriminations, or boundaries, that generate figure or ground distinctions*.<sup>4</sup> In the cognitive dimension, such distinctions generate the set of categories or constructs that constitute our worldview (including, of course, the distinction among cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains) (Kelly, 1963).<sup>6</sup> In the affective domain, similar distinctions allow us to construct particular emotions out of the general background of limbic activity. In the behavioral domain, we both individually and collectively delimit reality by performing certain behaviors and not others. In other words, the form of reality we experience is described by the sum of the figures that we discriminate.

On the other side of the dialectic, feeling is the *sense of the whole configured by the set of boundaries just described*. Although the derivation of the feeling for the whole is usually opaque, occasionally we can catch the feeling just emerging from a new configuration of form. This happens most notably when a figure-ground shift occurs, such as in the “old woman, young woman” ambiguous figure. At the instant when the alternative figure comes into focus (changes from ground to figure), we experience an “aha” that marks the shift in reality. A similar “aha” occurs when the punchline to a joke suddenly brings a portion of the background into figure (Koestler, 1964).<sup>5</sup>

Other examples of “feeling for the whole” are longer term and not so obviously connected to a given configuration of boundaries. For instance, accomplished cooks, bartenders, and hair stylists all report that they perform their skills “by feel.” When asked, they acknowledge that in the beginning, when they were first learning their craft, they had to resort to conscious forming of the behavior. In the case of cooking and drink mixing, this meant having to measure the amounts of different ingredients. But as they got better, they no longer had to measure—they just had a feel for the right amount. Similarly, hair stylists report that they achieve a feel for the client’s hair, such that the cutting is expressing that feeling rather than following any particular pattern.

The giving of form to feeling, where the forms given are cognitive constructs, particular behaviors, and specific emotions, was defined as communication, and perception was defined as the feeling for the whole of reality configured by a constellation of particular forms (Bennett, 1977). Thus, in a dialectical process, perception involves the apprehension of the configuration of reality, and the feeling of that configuration is in turn given form in a way that either perpetuates or modifies the original reality. In this model, any particular “perception,” such as the discrimination of figure from ground in an embedded figure test, is already a form—in this case, a form of the feeling for the whole of the new figure-ground constellation. The same is true of a particular emotion—“anger,” for instance, is one form of the feeling for the whole of a reality that might include forms such as particular social relations, interpersonal behavior, and attitudes.

A major application of this forming-feeling model was to understanding creativity and consciousness. In the case of artistic creativity, the creation of a work of art can be described as an initial expression of feeling in the form of a particular medium, such as paint on canvas. After the initial forming (say, a brushstroke), the artist feels the new reality, which is the original constellation of forms associated with the original feeling, now reconfigured to include the new form of the brushstroke. The new feeling for the whole of this modified reality is then given form in the next brushstroke, and so the process continues. This process can be seen in any act of

## 256 • THEORY INTO PRACTICE

creation, including the creation of culture (discussed later).

*Consciousness* was defined as the forming of forming and *awareness* as the feeling of feeling (Bennett, 1977). Consciousness and awareness interact on a metalevel in the same complementary bimodal dialectic, as do communication and perception. When we are conscious of something, it means that we are able to give form to some aspect of the forming-feeling process. For example, when an author is conscious of writing words, it means that he or she can give a form (“writing”) to the process whereby his or her feeling for the subject is given linguistic form. As any writer knows, consciousness is a two-edged sword. Too much consciousness, and the writer becomes “self-conscious,” in the sense of not being able to feel the flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)<sup>7</sup> of the ideas taking form; in other words, the writer loses feeling, or awareness, of the process. Too little consciousness, and the flow is not moderated sufficiently to fit the focus of the writing. This can be stated in general as *consciousness without awareness generates form divorced from feeling; awareness without consciousness generates feeling divorced from appropriate form.*

Culture can be seen as a dialectical interplay of perception and communication following the same course as other acts of creation. Edward T. Hall (1973) originally suggested that “culture is communication” and implied that people experienced cultural events as a whole constellation of connotative and denotative symbols. Hall did not dwell on the perceptual side of the dialectic, but the working of the elements of culture he described can be understood more fully as “acts of creation” in forming-feeling terms.

We can see the cultural interplay of forming and feeling in verbal and nonverbal behavior. “Language” as a system is a forming of forming. That is, it is a description of how phenomena are discriminated by speakers of the language. As such, language is a reification of “*linguaging*”: the actual giving of linguistic form to feeling. The term *linguaging* and its ontology is described by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1987):

It is by linguaging that the act of knowing, in the behavioral coordination which is language, brings

forth a world. We work out our lives in a mutual linguistic coupling, not because language permits us to reveal ourselves but because we are constituted in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others. We find ourselves in this co-ontogenetic coupling, not as a preexisting reference nor in reference to an origin, but as an ongoing transformation in the becoming of the linguistic world that we build with other human beings. (pp. 234-235)

The form of language elicits a feeling of recognition. Because language is a description of reality construction, what is recognized is the existence of a pattern of rules (grammar) that guide the construction of reality. A speaker of that language will recognize any form of the language that is appropriate (that follows the rules) as fitting into the limited whole of the language. Even the formation of random or nonsense words into grammatically correct patterns is recognized (felt) as potentially meaningful.

Familiar syntax engenders the general feeling of recognition. Semantic meaning is the tendency of members of a language community to use similar forming-feeling links. Thus, if I hear someone of my own culture say “I had a falling out with my business partner,” I can be fairly certain that the feeling elicited in me by the sentence form is similar to the feeling of which the statement is a form. In other words, I assume that the other person and I are following roughly the same set of rules for discriminating phenomena—that we more or less share the same worldview. This process of communicating and perceiving meaning is the basic forming and feeling of culture or, as Maturana and Varela (1987) put it, it is the “continuous co-ontogenetic coupling that brings forth the world.”

Linguaging is the linguistic forming of feeling; nonverbal behavior is the extralinguistic forming of feeling. The difference is that linguaging is capable of referring to itself with the metaforming of “*language*” (Russell, 1948).<sup>8</sup> As such, we are more likely to be conscious of linguaging and to use it intentionally. Despite efforts to create a language of nonverbal behavior (Hall, 1973), such behavior has not been reified to the extent that linguaging has. Consequently, nonverbal behavior is less accessible to consciousness and less likely to be used



intentionally. This distinction parallels Erving Goffman's (1959) definition of behavior "given off" as opposed to behavior "given." Verbal behavior is more likely to be *given* in the sense that language is usually used intentionally (a forming of forming)—nonverbal behavior is more likely to be an unintentional forming of feeling. Goffman notes that behavior *given off* is more credible because it is perceived as inaccessible to conscious manipulation. Studies in the perception of nonverbal behavior support Goffman's observation (Watzlawick, Bevin, & Jackson, 1967).

The distinction between verbal and nonverbal forms of feeling is important to our forthcoming discussion of the embodied feeling of culture. We will argue that behavior given off has eluded the full attention of interculturalists. Language and all that it can describe provide us with a reified view of culture—the iceberg waiting to sink the unwary voyager. A similar attempt to reify nonverbal behavior treats it as a code to be broken. We believe that an alternative approach is to treat behavior given off as a window into the forming-feeling process of our own and others' cultures. The apprehension of behavior given off cannot occur in language. It must occur in the medium that gives rise to the behavior—our bodies.

#### THE EMBODIED FEELING OF CULTURE

In his extraordinary book *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, the neuroscientist Damasio (1999)<sup>9</sup> states:

In a curious way, consciousness begins as the feeling of what happens when we see or hear or touch . . . it is a feeling that accompanies the making of any kind of image—visual, auditory, tactile, visceral—within our living organisms. (p. 26)

Damasio (1999) provides an empirical grounding for Bennett's (1977) assertion that consciousness is "the giving of form to feeling." We can give the feeling form with a particular thought or a particular emotion, but that indescribable sense of the whole is located in the gestalt of our physical (ontogenetic) condition.

Using the physical definition of "feeling," let us give an illustration involving touch. The skin is the most ancient sense organ in the body. It is the primary point of contact between the organism and the environment; in other words, it is the predominant means by which the external world is perceived by the body. In the average adult, skin occupies about 18,000 square centimeters, and it weighs from 16% to 18% of the total body weight. Within a surface as big as a 25-cent coin, there are more than 3 million cells, about 3.5 meters of nerves, 100 sudorific glands, 50 nerve terminations, and 1 meter of blood vessels. There are about 50 receptors per 100 square centimeters, for a total of 900,000 sense receptors. Tactile points vary from 7 to 135 per square meter. The number of sense fibers that enter the spinal cord is about half a million. In other words, the skin is an incredible communication system (Montagu & Matson, 1981).

When we are going to buy a dress or a shirt, we do not only look at it. Generally, at least before e-commerce (and its antecedent, mail commerce), we wanted to touch clothing we were thinking of acquiring. When anything in a shop attracts our attention, we touch it to "have a look" at it. It is as if an object is not real until we verify it by touching. "Tactility, constituting habit, exerts a decisive impact on optical reception" (p. 144) as Michael Taussig (1992) suggests. The act of touching gives a child its first lesson on its selfness. And, as Ponzio (1997) states, "Isn't the true knowing . . . the knowing of the body who knows about its alterity (otherness), about its intercorporeality?" (p. 25). Throughout our subsequent interpersonal and intercultural encounters, our bodies are always in relationship, simultaneously and in succession, even before words meet in the dialogue. They are, from the very beginning, involved in their intercorporeality (Ponzio, 1997). Or, as Maturana and Varela (1987) would put it, they are engaged in ontogenetic costructural coupling in the praxis of existence.

Maturana and Varela (1987) define cultural behaviors (culture) as "Those behavioral patterns which have been acquired ontogenetically in the communicative dynamics of a social environment and which have been stable through generations" (p. 201). By "ontogenetic," Maturana (1988) means that patterns emerge in our

## 258 • THEORY INTO PRACTICE

“bodyhood” by means of a process he calls “co-structural drift.” In evolutionary terms, ontogenetic patterns emerge as organisms engage in transaction with their environments, which include other organisms. Through the process of autopoiesis, organisms are both autonomous and related to the network in which they emerged:

The most striking feature of an autopoietic system is that it pulls itself up by its own bootstraps and becomes distinct from its environment through its own dynamics, in such a way that both things are inseparable. (p. 46)

As organisms become increasingly autonomous (e.g. develop a nervous system), they generate behavior (bodyhood) that feeds back into the network. At the level of “second-order couplings,” the reflexive behavior of autonomous organisms becomes part of the environmental transaction with other organisms. Human evolution is characterized by the drift of these couplings toward more complex systems.

Culture is a case of “third-order couplings,” wherein recurrent patterns of second-order couplings become part of the network. The autopoietic organization of such a network includes the relatively stable patterns that we refer to as culture. For our discussion here, the important part of this definition is that adaptation to culture is indistinguishable in essence from the physical adaptation that characterizes all living systems. Such adaptation occurs in the bodyhood of autonomous organisms, and thus it follows that cultural adaptation also occurs through our bodies. The following paragraphs explore the implications of this assumption.

What happens, for instance, when our bodies experience different spatial situations? If we enter a formal Japanese restaurant, with flat tables, rice-paper walls, silence, and low light, this atmosphere induces in us a certain psychophysical state that is totally different from the one we would have in a typical Italian trattoria. Apart from any preference we might have, we may perhaps notice that something happens to the way we breathe. In fact, to fit in the Italian place, where everybody is sitting next to each other and people are talking loudly, we probably

shorten the depth of our breathing. We shrink the breath to mimic a necessary shrinking of our body. Or, in forming-feeling terms, shallow breathing is one behavior that we give off as a forming of the feeling for the whole of the trattoria reality. Conversely, our breathing might relax and deepen in the formal Japanese restaurant.

Of course, the situation does not determine (in a linear causal way) our response. Rather, the restaurant is the environment in which our coontogenetic adaptation occurs. Among the many autonomous human organisms simultaneously coupled to this environment, there will be variations of experience. But the similarity of adaptation (in this case, breathing) that characterizes each situation is indicative of a third-order coupling among the organisms themselves. In other words, people in each situation are feeling the culture of the place. By giving form to that feeling with their bodies, they feed back into the network the behavior that in turn becomes the form of the environment, and so forth. In this way, the culture of Japanese restaurants is preserved as different from that of Italian trattorias.

It is not at all new that the organization of space affects the body and mind; just think of the ancient feng shui practices or the newer bioarchitecture. What we want to assert here is that interculturalists ought to be particularly interested in how space feels in different cultural contexts. This interest should extend beyond the study of proxemics, through which established cultural patterns can be observed and categorized. The core issue here is not so much what the patterns are, but how we feel them. By developing an awareness of the feeling of space (and by extension, a feeling for other dimensions of culture), we should be able to recognize several things important to intercultural adaptation. For instance, the feeling of familiar space may represent a kind *embodied ethnocentrism*. The stronger our identification with the space that surrounds us and with the familiar body state associated with that space, the more difficult it may be to change spaces without experiencing a lot of discomfort. People who live in spaces that strongly reflect them, or people who are strongly reflective of the spaces in which they live, may need to make some internal adjustments to cope with spatial change

(Tolja & Speciani, 2000). As in other forms of ethnocentrism, the key to greater adaptability is to become culturally self-aware. The internal adjustment necessary may thus be the simple act of becoming aware of how feeling is associated with forming in one's home culture.

Certain generalizations about the relationship of space, breathing, and the sense of self may help in bringing our attention to how forming and feeling might be related. For each one of us, the critical quantity of space is defined by personal history, needs, and adaptive strategies. We may have an "unnatural" relationship with space if we have been disturbed in the area of vital space. In addition to restricted physical space, this might include being invaded by others' words, smells, requests for attention, and so on. A pattern of restrained breathing may have been created in conjunction with this closeness. In general terms, it is likely that our need for space under these conditions will be restrained, and our sense of self may also be restricted compared to our potential. Conversely, deep breathing and a more expansive sense of self are likely to be associated with larger space. Note that breathing and space are coupled—that is, breathing is no more an adaptation to space than space is an adaptation to breathing. The way people shape space is not different from how people structure their bodies. They are coontogenetic.

In any case, focusing attention on breathing already gives a good indication of how the feeling of self is associated with the forming of space. The fundamental question here is to how to identify the right quantity of space for ourselves, considering the volume of body and breath, the size of our living space, and so on. Additionally, we need to consider how the boundaries of the body go beyond the limit of the skin and include an "energetic field"—the area around us where we are particularly sensitive to the presence of others. A common experience of this "field" occurs when we are sitting in a room or on a train and someone we consider unpleasant sits close to us. Our natural tendency is to constrict not only our breathing, but also the space around us. In crowded public spaces, we may even retreat inside our skin. Under these conditions, if we are touched lightly we do not respond to the contact. Conversely, if we sit

close to someone we like, our body relaxes and our breath and energetic field expand toward the other. Under these conditions, even the slightest touch may engender a strong response.

The expansion and constriction of our body boundaries is the basis of empathy. At the simplest level, when we ride a horse or drive a car in an accomplished way, it is as if we are living the experience of the horse or the car. (The car *does* have an experience—it is simply a mechanical one.) We have extended the boundaries of our bodies to include the outside objects, and their experience can thus be incorporated into our own embodied experience. This kind of empathy with objects is very common, allowing us to express intention through objects such as cars, skis, swords, and musical instruments.<sup>11</sup> In the case of empathy with organisms, empathy also allows us to feel their intentions. (Again, objects can also be thought to have "intentions" within their own context, so empathy is really a two-way process in all cases.) Empathy as we are discussing it here involves the capacity for modifying, contracting, and expanding the body scheme according to situations—the original plasticity of humankind, according to Gehlen (1983).<sup>10</sup>

The way in which we habitually maintain our body scheme is called the "habit body" by Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962). For instance, we habitually maintain certain body postures when driving a car, sitting at a computer keyboard, or communicating with others. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is "an inner necessity for the most integrated experience to provide itself with an habitual body" (p. 43). The development of this habit body plays a stabilizing role in the perceptual process (in Merleau-Ponty's words, "the perceptual habit as the coming into possession of a world" (p. 146). Or, in Maturana's (1988) terms, our postures are part of the structural coupling that gives rise both to the world in a particular form and to our experience of it.

It is most difficult to "come into possession" of the world of another human being. This is because, in Maturana and Varela's (1987) terms, human beings exchange emotions in a third-order structural coupling. They create their worlds through communication. According to Galimberti (1983), the first drafts of communication are to be sought in the emotional world,

## 260 • THEORY INTO PRACTICE

emotion being our first reaction to the spectacle of the world. For instance, mimics reveal different emotions that transcend the anatomic body to make it an “emotional body,” something immediately expressive. But to make this expression understood, it is necessary that the counterpart live in the same world of the one who is expressing. The meaning of our gestures and of our words is not given, but understood, or comprehended; that is to say, the meaning occurs when the spectator recognizes a personal emotion. Communication is possible, according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), only if “everything happens as if the intention of the other is to live my body or as if my intentions would live his” (p. 256).

This allows the “golden rule”<sup>12</sup> to be understood at its root, which is becoming aware of how others would like to be treated from their own perspectives, acknowledging the difference, and attempting empathy to respect the equal (but different) humanity of others. The way we intend empathy here is as an ability that can be developed and eventually used unconsciously in an intentional way.

#### AN APPROACH TO INCORPORATING THE EMBODIED FEELING OF CULTURE INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

The intentional use of empathy is the key to developing intercultural competence. We can use empathy to apprehend experience that is inaccessible to us in our own cultural worlds. The most straightforward way to develop this kind of empathy is to reestablish connection with our bodies so that we are (a) aware of our embodied experience in our own culture and (b) able to shift body boundaries into the forms that elicit the feeling of the other culture. Eventually, we can give form to our feeling for a different culture in such a way that our behavior becomes “adapted” to the other culture.

Culturally adapted behavior is not generated solely by employing cognition with the appropriate attitude, as is sometimes supposed in intercultural theory. Of course, it is necessary to know in a cognitive sense as much as possible

about another culture, and certainly there are attitudes that appear to either facilitate or impede adaptation. What we are adding here is the additional link that can generate the feeling for the other culture. With that feeling, behavior appropriate in the other cultural context can flow naturally from our embodied experience, just as it does in our own culture. The challenge is to create methods usable in intercultural training and other developmental efforts that will provide learners with (a) access to the embodied feeling of their own culture, (b) techniques for apprehending the embodied feeling of other cultures, and (c) the mindset necessary to support these skills. In this chapter, we will simply suggest an initial approach to generating these methods.

There are a plethora of techniques in the general area of “somatics” (Murphy, 1992). Several systems that organize techniques around a particular psychological or philosophical system were mentioned earlier. We want to be clear that we are not suggesting that any one somatic system be adopted as a good training approach for intercultural competence. Such training should have many elements, only one of which might be use with somatic techniques. The job is to select or create somatic methods that fit with the overall strategy of developing intercultural competence and that are effective for the particular purpose of training awareness of embodied feeling. We note that there is a connection between various cultural structures and psychophysiological states. We will use the term *ethnophysiological* to refer to these culturally contexted psychophysiological states. Ethnophysiological states are those that embody the feeling of culture.

One method that is almost certainly useful is “breathing work.” Every time a person deeply changes his or her way of breathing, the body faces a series of reorganizations, mostly at the neurological level. Following the idea of costructural coupling, changes in an individual’s breathing patterns may be associated with changes in the surrounding environment. For instance, people who learn to alter their breathing patterns may feel an urge to change their physical environment. Conversely, when we are exposed to an unfamiliar environment, we can intentionally change our breathing to improve our adaptation.

It is well known that we tend to synchronize our breathing to that of people around us. Recent studies show that another characteristic that influences our psychophysiological response is the prevalent dimension of a place (Tolja & Speciani, 2000). Italians who go to the United States or to Japan are likely to experience a variety of different collective spaces. They may perhaps change their way of breathing, which, as we have seen, will alter body perception and state of consciousness. If they maintain their Italian breathing, they may feel ill adapted to their new surroundings. Or, if they unconsciously change their breathing, the strangeness of the new ethnophysiological state this change engenders may be disorienting.

Another possible source of somatic methods is the idea that space and movement are correlated. In this view, different structures of physical movement are associated with different built and natural environments, and the patterns of movement are associated with psychophysiological states. For instance, if a resort is characterized by a prevalence of horizontal lines, movements that are activated are mostly those on the horizontal level of rotary muscles. Vertical lines activate flexion movements, and longitudinal lines are associated with movements of the anterior-posterior musculature. It is thought that activation of these three modalities of the nervous system can engender particular psychological states. For instance, the horizontal dimension evokes a “womb-like” condition and a sense of belonging, and the vertical one stimulates the cortical nervous system and rational thinking. The longitudinal dimension activates the muscle system and action. Assuming that such correspondences may exist to some degree, awareness of them may be a powerful tool both for recognizing the effect of culturally contexted space and for producing intentional change as part of cultural adaptation.

On this same subject of space, but more generally, Tolja and Speciani (2000) speculate that some spatial forms are conceived in a certain way because of a certain habitual state of mind and body. So, for instance, the buildings in New York City would tend to reflect the mind-body state of city dwellers. This would not be too surprising, as the choice of building design is certainly a subjective event that is frequently

subject to prevailing tastes. And, of course, the opposite would then be true: The built environment of New York would engender an ethnophysiological state different than that engendered by, say, Christchurch in New Zealand. And what about the influence of architecture from another age? How might living around Renaissance architecture in Italy affect people differently than living around stave churches in Norway? The correspondence probably varies a lot from individual to individual, exactly like music or food. But this is undoubtedly an important area affecting our adaptation to new environments. Architects are reputed to hold that they can design a house in which a couple will certainly be divorced within the year.

Intercultural adaptation involves change, and change always means confronting established structures—physical structures of the body, emotional patterns, belief systems, and so on. How can the structure of the self shift and change and still stay related to the world in healthy ways? Together with various psychosomatic approaches, we highlight the importance of sensitizing people in transition to a different use of mind-body relationships. To do this, we need to sense and feel more subtly both the space around us and the effect of it on the restructuring of the self.

Bennett (1993) has theorized that there is a link between the “experience of difference” and “ethnocentrism.” We have made the case that there is a link between culturally contexted experience and psychophysiological states, which we have termed *ethnophysiological*. It would follow that ethnocentrism is a physical state as well as a psychological disposition, a condition we have referred to as *embodied ethnocentrism*.

Taking the definition of ethnocentrism as “assuming one’s culture is central to reality,” we can see several implications for psychophysiological states. First, individuals who lack cultural self-awareness also may lack ethnophysiological self-awareness. They may not be willing or able to identify their embodied feeling of culture, and they will thus be unable to imagine alternatives to it. Second, people who are ethnocentric (in states of denial and defense) avoid contact with cultural difference (Bennett, 1993). This can be explained in ethnophysiological terms as their avoiding situations that

## 262 • THEORY INTO PRACTICE

unconsciously elicit unfamiliar states that, in turn, threaten their out-of-awareness structural integrity. Third, people who are ethnocentric (defense) may use power as a way of structuring their physical and social environment in familiar ways. The exercise of power may take the form of an attempt to control feelings in general, including judgments about the assumed feelings of others. This controlling judgment continues in the minimization form of ethnocentrism, although it takes the more subtle form of positive judgments about similarities with one's own culture. Overall, the addition of an ethnophysiological interpretation to ethnocentrism helps explain the general attitude of judgment associated with that state.

On the ethnorelative side of development, several contrasting ethnophysiological interpretations can be made. First, ethnorelative people appear to be more aware of their embodied feeling of culture, which is part of their general cultural self-awareness. This means that they are more likely to identify themselves in terms of process and change, which means that change and growth are seen as natural rather than threatening. Second, they seek connection. They recognize that experiencing other cultures (through both people and objects) provides them with access to different ethnophysiological states, and that the self is made richer by access to those states. Third, they tend to consider the creation and destruction of ethnophysiological states as aspects of change, so they are willing to feel the widest possible range of emotions and value the maintenance of a "witness" of consciousness throughout any process.

In inhabiting the world, our bodies develop habits. The experience of the world for the body is a truth, as it is not derived by either induction or deduction but is what we live, what we *inhabit* (Galimberti, 1983). By in-habiting the world in particular ways, the body takes the form of the feeling of those habits. Earlier, we describe the habits, or embodied feeling, of ethnorelativism and ethnocentrism. The body does not know (or care) that interculturalists think that ethnorelativism is better than ethnocentrism. Whatever way we in-habit the world is the "right" form of things, because it elicits the feeling of "rightness," which is then expressed through the self-fulfilling prophecy of culture.

The key to transcending ethnocentrism is cultural self-awareness. Cultural self-awareness is shorthand for *experiencing one's self as operating in cultural context*. We suggest that body awareness techniques can add an ethnophysiological dimension to cultural self-awareness. In addition to the breathing and movement techniques mentioned above, various procedures for feeling the threat of experiencing others in unfamiliar ways can be employed to this end. Our bodies offer the last resistance to ethnorelativism. We can learn culture-general strategies of adaptation, we can learn culture-specific constructs in the objective and subjective realms, we can learn the language, but we generally do not learn how to adapt our bodies consciously into the "appropriate" cultural form. This can be done first through the observation of how we carry our bodies in our cultural context and then of how our bodies react to cultural differences in space, shape, rhythm, and so on.

In addition to developing a more ethnorelative capability, we can use our bodies more effectively as instruments for gathering information about other cultures. Is there a way to become more flexible in the ways in which we decode and use the information received by our bodies in unfamiliar contexts? To do so is to become more conscious of the processes of symbolization and categorization.<sup>14</sup> By apprehending the feeling of the continuous process of category construction, we give ourselves the opportunity to modify that process—to give different form to feeling, and to feel forms in different ways. With this flexibility, we can experiment to create experience that is appropriate to varying cultural contexts.

In intercultural training sessions, we can create simulations and other situations in which people can experience their body's reactions. These situations should be unfamiliar ones—perhaps whimsical, not necessarily threatening. In these situations, we draw attention to the feeling of the situation but not yet the interpretation of it. We ask the participants to apprehend their perception in as concrete a way as possible<sup>13</sup>—we feel a vibration, the expansion or reduction of the breath, pain to the legs . . . and little by little we learn to transform these perceptual experiences into something else, something that has to do with our way of being and our emotional (embodied) experience.

In the short run, these and other somatic methods should be a complementary approach to the cognitive, attitudinal, and social behavioral methods generally used to teach and to facilitate sessions in intercultural relations. In the long run, we believe that the rapidly developing theories of embodied experience in linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and cybernetic constructivism will be modified for intercultural communication and form the ground for new research and practice in the field.

## NOTES

1. This article incorporates material distributed at a presentation to the International Academy of Intercultural Research, University of Mississippi, Oxford, April 22, 2001, titled "The Cultural Body: American and Italian Perspectives on the Feeling of Culture," and material from a presentation at SIETAR Europa, Stavanger, Norway, May 18, 2001, titled "The Cultural Body: Embodied Ethnocentrism."

2. We will use the term *intercultural communication* to refer to the study of human interaction across cultural differences, located in the discipline of human communication studies. The term *intercultural relations* refers to a larger interdisciplinary social science context that generally includes cross-cultural interactive studies in psychology, anthropology, education, cultural geography, and other disciplines.

3. Judith Martin (Martin & Nakayama, 1997) has noted that studies of intercultural relations also include *interpretive* and critical approaches that stress more phenomenological factors. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the predominance of the social science perspective.

4. George Spenser Brown (1972) provides a brilliant rationale for this assertion in the introduction to his surprisingly readable mathematics of perception and categorization, *Laws of Form*.

5. George Kelly (1963) continues to be influential in how people think about cognitive constructs. See his *A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. This work, and its extension by Heinz von Foerster, Ernst von Glasersfeld, Paul Watzlawick, and others, has been referred to as "constructivism," or sometimes "cognitive constructivism" to differentiate it from the "social constructivism" of

postmodern humanities thinkers. See Watzlawick's *The Invented Reality: Contributions to Constructivism* (1984).

6. Arthur Koestler's (1964) *The Act of Creation* is the classic statement of the link between creativity and humor. There is also a 1990 paperback edition available.

7. For a discussion of the immediate sensing of behavior, see Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*.

8. Bertrand Russell (1948) and other ordinary language philosophers have defined the difference between language and metalanguage. In this paper, the basic level of language is referred to as "linguaging" and the level of metalanguage as "language" to stress the direct forming of feeling involved in linguaging and the forming of forming implied by metalanguage.

9. It is interesting, in the context of this discussion, that Damasio is also the author of *Descartes' Error*.

10. E. T. Hall (1973) refers to this ability as an "extension." Later, Marshal McLuhan and Quentin Fiore (1967) expanded the idea of mechanical extension to include extension of the nervous system into electronic media.

11. Gehlen (1983) says that anatomic-functional incompleteness and nonspecialized instinct are put together in humans with plasticity; that is to say, humans possess a polyvalent ability of adaptation that allows them to live everywhere and to "accomplish" themselves—to not just live, but lead, their lives. Humanity takes its position in the chain of life through procedures of selection and stabilization with which it culturally achieves that selectivity and stability that animals, thanks to instinct, have by nature.

12. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12 [Authorized King James Version]). Bennett (1979, 1998) suggests that the rule is usually used in an ethnocentric way, rather than in the more culturally sensitive way indicated in the text.

13. In addition to the works of Lakoff (1987) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) cited earlier, a new work by Lakoff and Johnson (1999), *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (Basic Books, 1999) expands this idea significantly.

14. We use "concrete" here in a way that is similar to Kichiro Hayashi's (1995) use of the term "analogic" or Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) use of the term "metaphor."

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*Embodied Ethnocentrism and Feeling of Culture* • 265

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