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**Objects and Bodies:
Some Phenomenological Implications
of *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte***

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in collective interactions that are often quite contentious, knowledge is formulated in the world (objectified), and tangibly experienced (embodied) by the agents engaged in these interaction. As means of acting on the world in order to transform it, knowledge is implicitly powerful. Yet, the consequences of that power are only realized through the context in which they are carried out. Thus, the ambiguous character of such knowledge must be evaluated by social agents in the course of their activities. By drawing attention to these dimensions of knowledge as power which enable social agents to act on, and so tranform themselves as they transform the world, this essay broadly considers the implications the dialectics of objectification and embodiment so ably detailed by Lambek,.

keywords: objectification, embodiment, phenomenology, practice, power

Introduction: Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte and Elsewhere

Michael Lambek's remarkably rich ethnographic exegeses invite a parallel retelling of an encounter. This encounter entailed a discussion concerned, as Lambek and other *fundi's* are, with the conjunction of theoretical knowledge and the authority it commands in a concrete, pragmatic context. One afternoon in the Haya village (Northwest Tanzania) where I was living and working, my housemate discovered that his nearly new hoe was missing. He was quite certain he knew who had stolen the hoe, and was irately making accusations and garnering the moral backing and sympathy of our neighbors. Should he summon the local police and have the suspect taken to the nearest court, or were these officials likely to demand exorbitant bribes without giving him any satisfaction? He could attack the thief by force, but it was likely that the hoe was by now hidden away with distant kin, or had perhaps already been sold and resold several times. One neighbor suggested that the matter might be taken to a 'healer' *mganga* who could perform what has been called 'stick-divination' in order to make known the whereabouts of both the suspected thief and the stolen hoe. According to this man, this divination technique involved the leaf and a twig of a certain variety of tree. The healer would spit on the twig and quickly rub the spittle with the leaf along the length of the twig, all the while asking questions of the oracle: 'Was so-and-so in the house?' 'Has "X" told the truth?' 'Did "Y" steal the hoe?' The oracle revealed a true answer, our friend continued, when the leaf stuck fast in place, and could not be rubbed along the stick. I was not the only one of those gathered who had never heard of such divinatory techniques (at least not in Buhaya).(1) Many of those gathered objected that this practice made little sense. 'How could such a thing work? A stick?!' To which our stick-divination advocate replied, 'It's *medicine!*

This explanatory theory, at once a truth claim and a claim to authorized, presumably incontrovertible knowledge, is a common-place in Haya discussions of the potency of material objects in their effects on the human world. My neighbors and I may never have seen, or even heard of such a divinatory technique, but the claim that such techniques - and especially such material forms and substances - must work because they are 'medicine' (*omubazi* in Oluhaya, *dawa* in Kiswahili) was one that all of us were familiar with. Such an assertion instantiates an understanding of power which seems simultaneously to rest on an extreme objectification of knowledge, and (perhaps consequently) a complete marginalization of human agency. It is not the learning, skill, or reputation of the practitioner that carries the greatest claim to credibility and efficacy, rather it is the substance itself that is presented as the 'final word' in such matters. But it is equally clear from the account just provided that medicine does not simply grow on trees; the unplucked twig and leaf have no significance- or perhaps remain only of significance *in potentia*- until they are concretely (and bodily) engaged by a diviner who pragmatically seeks a resolution to a client's predicament.

One of the many great strengths of Lambek's analysis and the theoretical terrain he opens up, is the way in which he draws our attention precisely to this persistent dialectic between objectification and embodiment. And such insight is especially important for analysts of African cultural contexts like the Haya in which much of social experience and meaning is so often described in terms like 'unconscious,' 'preverbal,' or 'corporeal.' Lambek's treatment of Arabic and especially Islamic texts as performative forms, at once embodied and objectified, can further be taken as a model that provides an essential corrective to long-standing, by now tedious debates about the contrast between orality and literacy. There are communities, like the Haya, throughout Africa in which literacy and text-based systems of knowledge are of a relatively more recent introduction, and are less pervasive in their social effects than they are in Mayotte. Scholars of colonialism in such contexts all too frequently

continue to draw the contrast between the written and the spoken in Manichean terms. But Lambek's work convincingly demonstrates that texts are appropriated in *practices*, and therefore have an intrinsically embodied dimension in the memorizations, recitations, and even inscriptions through which they come into being.⁽²⁾ The texts *fundis* on Mayotte recite are no less 'corporeal' than the healing capacities enacted by Haya diviners are externalized in objective forms- they're 'medicine.' Thus, rather than asking whether a practice is 'more or less' objectified or embodied than another, it becomes necessary to ask *how* a given activity is realized as bodily experience and materialized form. The value of Lambek's careful, rigorously grounded exposition of these issues, then, is the way it allows us to *compare* alternative modes of knowing and doing (even and especially within the same sociocultural context) in terms that are not graded along a relative - and perhaps teleological scale.

Discourse, Debate, and Cultural Coherence

Let me return to the scenario sketched above. The viability of the diviner's practice is not only described, it is *defended*, and this dimension of practice is also illuminated in Lambek's study. This discussion suggests that the Haya 'political economy of knowledge' might also be characterized as a repertoire of 'incommensurable discourses' each authorized and (re)producible by distinct methods. Should we seek resolutions from the police, or from the diviner? Whose methods are likely to bear fruit, whose are a sham? Which avenue is accessible, and to whom? The contestation of these alternatives in which the claim to a certain kind of knowledge is made - 'its "medicine!"' - is not merely part of the context in which such practices must be understood, it is also an aspect of the *character* of that knowledge itself. That is, the theoretical explanation - if not theory itself - offered for a particular form of action

emerges as a *justification*, an assertion of legitimacy in a field of diverse actions and skeptical actors. Theory is an intrinsically pragmatic discourse, manifest in time and situated in social interaction.

The situated quality of this knowledge is of particular interest. Lambek's work is notable for its attempt to integrate Schutzian sociology with speech act theory in an effort to get at the levels of interaction and the entailments of any particular 'situation.' Accounts that explore the unevenness of this integration of levels and perspectives in social dynamics are, perhaps, a hallmark of post-modern ethnography. Dissonance, cross-purposes, and manipulation are emphasized in the attempt to counter metanarratives of Culture, and the totalizing systematicity of Structure. Lambek's interest and his ethnography are similarly concerned with the multiplicity of motives and the 'open-endedness of debates,' the ways in which all meanings, implicit or explicit, are provisional, all conclusions, inconclusive (Lambek 1993: 395ff). Yet Lambek's discussion, from my perspective, does not reduce to a demonstration of polyphony (if not cacophony) for its own sake; this is no mere celebration of the anarchic collapse of 'social solidarities' that never existed in the first place. Instead, Lambek's focus on the pragmatics of sociality allow him rightly to insist on the on-going, emergent, and unstable qualities of collective life while simultaneously allowing for a significant degree of *coherence* -and not *uniformity* - within the field of social interaction. This is nowhere better illustrated, I think, than in his account of divergent views of sorcery, and the apparent skepticism which Lambek notes in Saidu Bwana, the *fundi* of *'ilim fakihi* whose knowledge- and character- seem the most abstract and divorced from practical concerns. Saidu refutes the significance of *sairy*, the packets of bodily exuviae that sorcerers insert into and mediums extract from the flesh of victims. He insists that '*sairys* are 'fictions' on the part of the *fundi's*. Anyone can make up a *sairy*, the *fundi's* pretend to extract them because it brings them money' (Lambek 1993: 281). Such a claim is precisely the kind of 'voice' now oft-cited in anthropological accounts of

'postmodern cultures' as a domain of crude manipulation and self-interested calculation. Lambek, though, does his informants on Mayotte as well as his readers the distinct service of exploring the implications of this skepticism further. Saidu Bwana is indeed skeptical of *sairy* and the motives of mediums; but this skepticism is rooted in his fuller knowledge of the *reality* of sorcery as a practice. True sorcery, in Saidu's view, is carried out by the nefarious use of sacred texts. Sorcery, as Lambek argues, can resist the hegemony of Islamic knowledge, and Islamic hegemony can reassert its authority over all practice. The same is true for the skeptics who challenged the validity of stick-divination. Some hold that such techniques are medicine and highly effective, while others doubt the legitimacy of this practice. But what is never at issue is the truth that medicines are extraordinary powerful substances.⁽³⁾ The Haya conflict turns on whether divination is *dawa*, not on whether *dawa* 'really' works. The larger point of Lambek's position is that such fundamental discrepancies and disjunctions depend upon a point of convergence -the reality of sorcery, or medicine- around which debates and multiplying perspectives can be generated. The polyvocality of cultural knowledge and practice, in other words, is implicated in a coherent process. Perspectives may be partial, fragmentary, incompatible, and uncertain, but all that contention need not dissolve the reality of the world in question. Indeed, I would argue, the coherence of these debates may well solidify the reality of the real.

The Ambiguities of Power

If knowledge *of* the world can never be separated from knowledge *in* the world - that is, if theory always implies practice - then knowledge is always realized as a form of power. By 'power' I mean not only the ways in which certain forms and understandings of knowledge are reproduced through a specific structure of authority, restricted to specific categories of social actors, or even that knowledge as knowledge *in* the world may serve to enhance or undermine those authorized positions. Lambek's use of speech act theory as a means of assessing the social consequence of knowledge and knowing emphasizes the fact that knowledge is power not just because it has ideological effects (a claim widely made in many contemporary analyses that rarely amounts to more than an appeal to functionalist instrumentalism), but because knowledge is a capacity to *do* things. This power to effectively enact, a potential to bring forth and transform, makes the men and women of Mayotte who participate in the varieties of knowledge Lambek describes highly inventive, creative, and resourceful. At the same time, if knowledge is always wedded to a specific field of interactions, then the potency of knowing must also be recognized as threatening, subversive, and potentially dangerous. If knowledge is a way of doing, it may also serve to undo.

This inherent ambiguity apparent in the power of knowledge is, again, clearly illustrated in Lambek's discussion of sorcery. Sorcery in Mayotte *is* (colloquially) 'knowledge,' *'ilim*, a fact which underscores the subversive potential in *all* ways of knowing (Lambek 1993: 241). Sorcery is not a separate domain of knowledge, a discipline unto itself, but a concrete position with respect to knowing practices themselves. Thus, Islam and spirit possession can each lay claim to the validity of divergent etiologies and therapeutic techniques for addressing sorcery from within the frameworks of their divergent - if overlapping - perspectives. This recognition of the intrinsic links between knowledge as transformative power, and its consequent

ambiguity as both a creative and a subversive potential is further evidenced by the Haya conversation described. A Haya aphorism states *Omutambi nomurogi*, 'The healer is a sorcerer,' and this clear insistence that knowledge is bound to particular social purposes and thus inherently open to multiple, even conflicting enactments, is further objectified in the material form of such knowledge, namely, 'medicine.' In the encounter described, the efficacy and truth of divination is defended as medicine, but it is far more common in everyday gossip and conversation to hear 'medicine' used as a shorthand for sorcery. The wealthy man who has fallen low, the woman who suffers a series of miscarriages, the chronic pains an otherwise vigorous youngster complains of, all of these provide an occasion for neighbors to knowingly comment 'it must be medicine.' Like 'knowledge' in Mayotte, 'medicine' in Buhaya is highly transformative, condensed, substantial power. That condensation gives medicine its efficacy, but it also allows for a degree of deception. Condensed power can be readily hidden from general knowledge, which may be designed to protect the patient from their predators, or allow the healer to control access to their expertise - but it may equally permit illicit actions to be concealed. Again, the efficacy of medicine is a potential to effect a *concrete* field of interactions, and so medicine is emblematic of positive and negative interventions - and of the all too frequent difficulty of distinguishing one from the other.

The Moral Force of Performance

'Knowledge' on Mayotte, like 'medicine' in Buhaya, is both sorcery, and the means to control it. These deliberate dualities emphasize the performative character of these discourses, their inescapable ties to the contexts in which they are put into practice. Such ambivalences demonstrate how necessary it is to appreciate the specifics of context in order to evaluate the implications and the consequences of these discourses.

Given these not only potential, but necessary ambivalences, in the character of these discourse, and especially the extraordinary consequences for of the kinds of power to harm or to cure they make manifest, it is clear that social beings must be able to make *judgments* in order to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate acts, ensorcelling from healing 'medical knowledge' (to draw a not too farfetched connection). That is, the embedding of ways of knowing in social action itself clearly connects informed practice to morality.

Lambek has characterized all of the the discourses on Mayotte as forms of 'practical morality,' *phronesis* as it has been taken up by hermeneutics. In Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte, this use of *phronesis* serves, I would argue two purposes. One the one hand, as Lambek argues in his overview, '[*Phronesis*] is precisely distinct from abstract, or universal knowledge and hence from purely objectified textual knowledge, in that it addresses change rather than constancy.' Again, moral judgment is an imminently practical matter, and not the mere application of an abstract code. Lambek also employs the notion of *phronesis* in order to distinguish moral awareness from *techne*, an instrumental knowledge of how to do things, of pragmatic, embodied techniques, as the etymology implies. In his overview Lambek claims that he might have drawn this distinction between practical morality and pragmatic technique, *phronesis* and *techne*, more clearly, but I think the implicit practice of his work (if not the explicit theorizing) make this distinction clear enough. In particular, Lambek's use of speech act theory to work towards a more general theory of ritual action depends upon a similar kind of division in the effects of performance. In Austin's terms, the locutionary acts of a statement inhere in the expression of the utterance. They allow that utterance to be evaluated as both grammatically correct and semantically well formed. Locutionary acts, then, are like embodied techniques; they can be evaluated against the conditions of their performance as relatively well or poorly executed. Just as one can be a poor swimmer, so one can have poor command of Spanish grammar, or make

inaccurate statements. The moral effects of ritual actions, Lambek - following Rappaport - tells us are equally performed, but cannot be evaluated according to the same criteria as the efficacy of technical acts. As Lambek says, 'Rendering a statement performative does not bring about material results, but it does entail moral ones,' (Lambek 1993: 109). A ritual act, then, is not well or poorly done, but its effects are demonstrated by the moral condition assumed by the agent- just as making a promise cannot be judged true or false, but the promise is demonstrated by being kept. Prayer, sacrifice, and possession in Mayotte similarly entail conventional acts that have profound moral implications for those who carry them out. The illocutionary effects of ritual performance are the moral force of these acts. Thus, *phronesis* might be distinguished from *techné* as illocutionary forces are distinguishable from (some) locutionary acts.

Objects and Bodies Reconsidered

I have tried to trace a continuous thread that runs through the broader pattern of Lambek's presentation. This singular thread is spun out of a profound concern with how knowledge is situated. Grounded in collective interactions that are often quite contentious, knowledge is formulated in the world (objectified), and tangibly experienced (embodied) by the agents engaged in these interaction. As means of acting on the world in order to transform it, knowledge is implicitly powerful. Yet, the consequences of that power are only realized through the context in which they are carried out. Thus, the ambiguous character of such knowledge must be evaluated by social agents in the course of their activities. The power implicit in knowledge, therefore, makes its proper exercise a moral concern, for healers and their patients, for *fundi* and their clients, for 'performers' and their 'audiences.' These issues take us to

the heart, I feel, of Lambek's arguments, and I hope it is clear that they have important implications for ethnographic description, anthropological analysis, and social theory more generally.

One critical contribution of Lambek's work, at least for those of us working towards developing phenomenological perspectives on collective lived experience, is his demonstration of the ways in which what might appear to be over-arching, institutionalized structures of social life- institutions like 'Islam' and 'literacy,' but also 'kinship' and 'possession,' are motivated from *within* complex fields of interaction, and are never simply imposed upon it. Schutz's description of this complexity in terms of the shifting and developing perspectives of differently motivated social beings, each with distinct degrees of interest and experience in the action at hand, goes a long way towards helping us understand how apparently overwhelming structural forces are themselves highly dependent on their realization in social practices occurring in time and space. These forces do not (in any simple way) deterministically constrain activity, rather they are *of it*.

It is in the active interpenetration of these emerging and evolving perspectives that knowledge is constituted. Ways of knowing in Lambek's work are configured in these pragmatic contexts. But I think it might be useful, as well, to consider the terms of this process from yet another perspective and ask how it is that practice is shaped, and with what consequence. In Lambek's analyses his principle concern is to reveal the performative character of knowledge, to show that asking what knowledge on Mayotte *is* is indivisible from asking *how* this knowledge comes into being - how it is produced and reproduced. The complementary perspective I propose would ask not only what constitutes knowledge on Mayotte, but what does knowledge on Mayotte *do*; not only what makes practice on Mayotte well formed, but what makes it *effective*. This perspective, I think, may indicate some possible absences in Lambek's account,

absences which can only lead to an expansion of the open spaces within the shared horizons inspired by this work.

Let me make it clear, first of all, that by asking what knowing practice does in Mayotte I do not mean to propose a functionalist framework. I am quite in sympathy with Lambek's contention that practice theory has too frequently been adopted as a means of focusing on strategizing, self-seeking, individualistic social actors. But I would also suggest that while meaning is not simply a convenient tool for covering over ulterior motives- i.e., that meaning is never merely an ideological effect - the meaning of practice is formulated in relation to the kinds of purposes that practice is intended to achieve. Practice, that is, can also be understood from a phenomenological perspective that explores the ways in which social agents construct themselves as they constitute the world in which they act. To a degree Lambek has addressed this aspect of practice in Mayotte in his assessment of the performative dimensions of ritual. His discussion of the illocutionary effects of prayer, supplication, as well as sorcery, shows that practitioners demonstrate their will and so concretize their moral condition as a dimension of their own identity. But, at the same time, Lambek asserts - in keeping with Austin's and Rappaport's theories of performance - that these transformations are strictly moral in nature. '[W]hat the invocation of sorcery or *antambu* establishes,' for example, 'is less efficient cause or instrument per se than social accountability' (Lambek 1993: 389), while - even more forcefully- sorcery's 'primary consequences are moral rather than material . . . In the end the diversity of means ascribed to the sorcerer *is irrelevant* [emphasis added]. In his act the sorcerer does not and cannot cause significant events, but he *assumes moral responsibility for them*' (Lambek 1993: 262).

My concern with assertions like these is that they seem to rest on a fundamental distinction between 'instrumental' and 'expressive' practices, as though they were distinct kinds of action. An insistence on such a distinction would seem to undermine one of the principle claims of practice theory, namely that effective, instrumental action

presumes a meaningfully constituted order of relations in which such action can be understood and evaluated. The instrumental *is* expressive, just as the expressive is constituted by instrumental (i.e., productive) acts. Again, I think Lambek is quite right to draw our attention to *phronesis* as a dimension of practice that has been overlooked to the benefit of the political. But it is equally important that we not sever the connections between power (by which I mean much more than politics) and morality. We can, and should consider ethical know-how as a dimension of know-how more generally, *phronesis*, that is, as a dimension of *techne*. For while it is surely the case that simply knowing how to perform one's prayers is not sufficient to ensure one's piety, it seems equally clear from Lambek's persuasive ethnography, that piety cannot be achieved in absence of the proper techniques of performance.

The phenomenological dimension of practice that I think might be more concretely addressed, then, might be simplistically summarized as 'the world.' Lambek's work emphasizes the performative effects of action on the performer - demonstrates how conventionalized practices constitute the character of their agent. But this leaves open the question of the specific means by which these acts are carried out, and the world in which they are made sense of as effective. What are the meanings of the specific material forms in and through which performance is made both persuasive and powerful? To get at these complex issues, it might be useful to reexamine the dialectics of objectification and embodiment as Lambek has described them in a few critical cases.

Consider, for example, the significance of *swadaka*, the sacrifice, or offerings that accompany prayers (Lambek 1993: 108-9). Lambek notes that the offering of *swadaka* creates a tangible model of the supplicants intentions, and of their supplication. Its offering objectifies the dependence of the supplicant, and so acknowledges the power of the the entity to whom the *swadaka* is given; in this way the power of the *swadaka* might be characterized in terms of the dialectic of passion and

action Lambek - following Lienhardt - uses to describe possession. All of these exegeses of *swadaka* ring true, but they also raise a number of questions. Just how is it that an object - even, perhaps especially, 'worthless' ones like tree leaves - is able to concretize supplication? Why is an offering not an expression of the superiority of the giver viz the recipient, as is certainly the case with any number of offerings in other contexts? And if, as Lambek has convincingly demonstrated, words are also objects, substantive forms with concrete qualities of sound and tone and cadence, then we need to know why *swadaka* are required as an additional objectification. And in particular we need to know why *these* objects; why the particular forms suited to the particular purposes of supplication. If *swadaka* is supposed to 'clear the channels' (Lambek 1993: 108), then we need to know precisely how this is accomplished. Lambek argues that objects beyond prayers help to transform words into rituals. The conventional act of *swadaka* has illocutionary force. But in order to demonstrate that force we need to understand how objects are engaged in exchange practices outside of these ritual contexts, to grasp the sense of how meaning becomes embedded in objects that makes *swadaka* appropriate vehicles for 'clearing the channels.' I don't doubt that offerings objectify intentions - but *how* this is so is always a culturally and historically specific question, and not a generic feature of 'the gift.'

We might ask similar questions about *sairy*, the packets of sorcery substance extracted by healers, that might be seen as inversions of *swadaka* offerings. Lambek's discussion of extraction is a tour de force analysis of performance, and its implications both for the client and, crucially, the healer. But a dimension of that persuasive performance itself that demands more attention is the *sairy* itself. Of course, outside of the performative context of extraction, the *sairy* has no significance. As Tumbu himself argues, curing sorcery is based not on the objective origins of the *sairy*, but the subjective experience of its extraction. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the subjective experience configured in the effective performance of extraction is focused

on the *sairy*. What accounts for the effectiveness of this object? Why are spirits attracted to these objects and enlisted to attack the sorcerer's victim through this offering? What gives these objects the capacity for penetration and transformation? To argue that they provide a means of concretizing a sorcerer's intention, and so assuming the moral responsibility for future affliction is to focus primarily on the subjective dimensions of this process. But if *sairy* implantations and extractions are *conventional* acts, and so possessed of illocutionary force, then the question of why these particular objects remains critical.

We might also ask, turning from objectification to embodiment, what kinds of bodies are susceptible to *sairy* implantation, and what bodies feel relief at their extraction. How are these specific bodily experiences formulated in social practice on Mayotte? Consider, again, the use of *singa* and other inscribed amulets as healing practices. Texts are always embodied, through recitation, memorization, or speech itself, yet drinking the erased inscription of a Qur'anic verse would seem more - or differently - potent than these other forms of embodiment. Understanding the particular bodily dimensions of such practices is critical, especially as they are so pervasive in any number of African contexts. What are the specific bodily qualities generated, or invoked by this healing practice? From the perspective of bodiliness, how does swallowing differ from speaking? In all of the discourses he discusses, Lambek clearly demonstrates that these forms of knowledge entail embodied experiences as well as objectified codes. Muslim *fundis* recite 'eternal' texts, cosmologers count out the 'fixed' position of the stars on their fingers, sorcerers conventionally dance on graves, spirit mediums enter trance in highly routinized performances. To push Lambek's analyses a bit further, though, we might ask how the dialectics of objectification and embodiment are distinctively configured in each of these discourses. Saidu Bwana's knowledge is no less embodied than is Tumbu's, but it clearly is embodied differently. How are

recitation, dance, and trance appropriate as bodily experience to their respective discourses?

Conclusions

Lambek has expressed a reluctance discuss 'the body *tout court*,' and the perspective I am encouraging here is equally hesitant to address such issues. But I would not identify that (essentializing) impulse with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. For Merleau-Ponty the significance of 'the body' is not as an independent entity capable of 'authentic' experience. Rather, he describes bodiliness (and never simply the form or structure of the body itself) as a the medium through which we encounter our tasks at hand. The body, in other words, is nothing less than being-*in-the-world*, a perspective from which objects - including the body itself - come to acquire their significance through our bodily engagement with them. Such a perspective, I would (and have in many places) suggested is quite compatible with precisely the kind of practice orientation that Lambek has so successfully developed in his treatment of discourse on Mayotte.

I must say that I hate reviewers who address their criticisms to what is not in a work rather than to what is. The point of my suggestions is not to ask 'What about exchange? What about disease? What about mortuary?' *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte* is already a sufficiently large book, and cannot be faulted for what some readers might like to see it address. Rather, my comments are offered in the spirit of the book itself, and are intended to enrich the terms of the argument, and the goals that Lambek sets for himself. At the very least, it is refreshing to me to find that interpretive and phenomenological approaches in anthropology are capable of such rich and insightful understandings of social, and not simply personal, experience. If I want to suggest that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology might complement those of Schutz and

Gadamer so ably deployed by Lambek, this can be understood as part of an attempt to open more spaces within the shared horizons of these orientations. *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte* is a powerful model, a singular example not only of how ethnographic description can be tied to theoretical acumen, but how theoretical clarity is ineluctably linked to sociocultural practice. In this sense, Lambek has not only expanded our knowledge, he has given us some good medicine!

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¹ Nor was I ever able to observe this technique.

²Lambek writes specifically about *singa* inscriptions and related written amulets as powerful "textualization[s], hence sanctification[s] of the body," (142) but I would add that *all* forms of writing (and reading- or, perhaps, "visualizing" for if verses can be recited without their linguistic content being intelligible, than surely they can be seen and admired for reasons beyond their semantic content) are necessarily realized through the medium of the body. *Somebody* must write, and does so in ways that are constrained and enabled by specific contexts of meaning.

³This was so even for Haya who were trained as physician's assistant and laboratory technicians, many of whom told me some of the most vivid accounts of the nefarious and protective uses of *dawa*.