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Do You See What I Mean?: Plains Indian Sign Talk and the Embodiment of Action

Brenda Farnell

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Do You See What I Mean?: Plains Indian Sign Talk and the Embodiment of Action Brenda Farnell Plains Indian Sign Talk (PST), a complex system of hand signs, once served as the lingua franca among many Native American tribes of the Great Plains, who spoke very different languages. Although some researchers thought it had disappeared following the establishment of reservations and the widespread adoption of English, Brenda Farnell discovered that PST is still an integral component of the storytelling tradition in contemporary Assiniboine (Nakota) culture.

Farnell's research challenges the dominant European American view of language as a matter of words only. In Nakota language practices, she asserts, words and gestures are equal partners in the creation of meaning. Drawing on Nakota narratives videotaped during field research at the Fort Belknap reservation in northern Montana, she uses the movement script *Labanotation* to create texts of the movement content of these performances.

The first and only ethnographic study of contemporary uses of PST, *Do You See What I Mean*? draws on important developments in the study of language and culture to provide an action-centered analysis of spoken and gestural discourse. It offers a theoretical approach to language and the body that transcends the current "intellectualist" versus "phenomenological" impasse in social and linguistic theory.

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