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## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

**Thomas J. Csordas**, *Language, Charisma and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, xxii + 320 pages, \$40.00 (cloth).

Reviewer: *Paul Antze*  
*York University*

In his first book, *The Sacred Self* (University of California Press, 1994), Thomas Csordas offered a detailed phenomenological analysis of healing practices among members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States. In the present work he takes up a larger and more vexing set of questions about the Charismatic movement as a whole. How are we to understand a "movement" that is both acephalous and authoritarian, that makes equal virtues of spontaneity and control, that preaches "retreat from the world" while its members lead relatively conventional lives? How can its strict rules of conduct be reconciled with ecstatic practices like speaking in tongues? How does "charisma" operate in the absence of a charismatic leader? For Csordas such questions are of more than local interest. Taken seriously, in fact, they serve to challenge some fundamental anthropological assumptions—about social movements, postmodernity, charisma, religious innovation, performativity and the creative possibilities of ritual, to name just a few. Because Csordas takes them very seriously indeed, his book is an ethnography, but it is also something more—a series of critical but very fruitful conversations with theorists ranging from Max Weber and Irving Hallowell to Pierre Bourdieu, Johannes Fabian, Maurice Bloch and Stanley Tambiah.

The book falls into three parts, moving from basic questions about the Charismatic movement and the evolution of its practices to a subtler array of problems involving language, performance and creativity. The first part examines the movement's history and its place in contemporary culture. Here Csordas notes important affinities between Catholic Pentecostalism and other emerging "religions of the self" in India, Japan and Africa. In this and other respects, he argues, the movement vividly reflects the "breakdown of boundaries between symbolic forms" and the "montage of transposable spiritualities" that have become hallmarks of postmodern culture.

In the second part, Csordas examines the process driving the steadily growing intensity and complexity of life in

Charismatic communities since the late 1960s, a process that has yielded both a high degree of commitment and an enormous diversity of visions within the movement. He argues that the dynamic behind this transformation can be understood discursively as one of "rhetorical involution"—a complex interplay between what Bourdieu called ritualization of practice and a second process that Csordas calls "radicalization of charisma."

This discussion then sets the stage for a fascinating theoretical chapter on the anthropology of charisma. Here Csordas makes a persuasive case for rejecting the personalistic theory bequeathed by Weber in favour of the discursive approach pioneered by Johannes Fabian. From this standpoint, as Csordas puts it, "charisma is rhetoric," and the task of understanding specific cases becomes a matter of seeing just how they are enacted, both discursively and practically.

Csordas takes up this challenge in the final and most original part of the book, which examines the ritual performance of charisma among Catholic Pentecostals with special attention to the weightiest of ritual genres, "prophetic utterance." In a dense and extremely rich discussion, Csordas examines the ways in which the Charismatic vocabulary of motives and the illocutionary force of prophetic speech serve to construct a "sacred self" while providing strong incitements to radicalization.

This is an important book. While perhaps too difficult for most undergraduates, it would be an excellent choice for graduate courses dealing with ritual, social movements rhetoric or the anthropology of religion.

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**Desley Deacon**, *Elsie Clews Parsons: Inventing Modern Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, xvi + 520 pages, \$29.95 (cloth).

Reviewer: *Sally Cole*  
*Concordia University*

Born in 1874 into elite New York circles to summer at Newport and follow a rigorous round of "calling" when in New York, Elsie Clews Parsons died in 1941, the first woman to be elected President of the American Anthropological Association. It was the discovery of anthropology, Elsie wrote, that