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## II. Dance Ethnology and the Anthropology of Dance

Choreographers, dancers, and viewers of dance are socially and historically placed individuals who operate according to socio-cultural conventions and aesthetic systems. This is also the case with those who study and write about dance—dance historians, dance ethnologists, anthropologists. This essay will focus on dance studies by anthropologists, dance ethnologists, and indigenous scholars and how their interpretations have been presented as well as how they have evolved and changed.

Although Western dance and its music have made inroads into the performing arts of even the most remote corners of the world, the indigenous dance traditions of most nations are still alive and well, and indeed continue to influence dance in the West. Studies of non-Western dance traditions are usually carried out by anthropologists or dance ethnologists who are likely to have the background knowledge that would help them to appreciate and understand

dance and other structured movement systems in the larger scheme of cultural forms. There are also numerous studies of dance by indigenous researchers who work on the dance traditions of their own cultures as well as the dance traditions of others, including ballet and modern dance. What these researchers have in common is that they feel that dance is not transparent, giving up its secrets to the uninitiated, but that it must be seen as an integral part of a total way of life. Unlike most dance in the West, in many other parts of the world dance is not simply entertainment.

Recent trends in dance studies suggest that the terms "Western dance" and "non-Western dance" perpetuate false dichotomies and that a focus on who studies the dances, and their points of view, might be more appropriate. Some studies result from turning the anthropological eye upon "ourselves" while others use insights from dance history to explore the "other." For

example, Susan Foster's dance history work is informed by anthropological theory, while Cynthia Novak's anthropological studies were informed by dance history. The work of Margaret Drewal in performance studies is informed by both—as is evidenced by her work on African dance and her study of the Rockettes. Joann Keali'inohomoku also has written on Hopi dance and ballet as an ethnic dance, while Anya Royce, a ballet dancer, has written a general book on the anthropology of dance. My own work invokes a variety of disciplines in my studies of Polynesian dance—for example, in comparing Polynesian traditions with the Broadway musical *Cats* to raise questions about how poetic and movement idioms are conveyed and understood in performance, thereby emphasizing the necessity of understanding the total culture in order to understand specific performances.

Most anthro/ethno researchers agree that it is necessary to examine how individuals involved in studying dance learn to interpret what they see. The notion that dance is a “universal language” is still too common and is often associated with the idea that “outsiders” can understand body movements of others without knowing the cultural movement language. On the other hand, many dancers and researchers feel that ballet and modern dance are universal movement languages that can (and have been) adopted “universally.” What can we learn from ways in which anthro/ethno/indigenous researchers have interpreted dance, dances, and dancing?

### **Dance as a Structured Movement System**

Cultural forms that result from the creative use of human bodies in time and space are often glossed as “dance,” but the word itself carries with it preconceptions that mask the importance and usefulness of analyzing the movement dimensions of human action and interaction. Dance is a multi-faceted phenomenon that includes, in addition to what we see and hear, the “invisible” underlying system, the processes that produce both the system and the product, and the socio-political context. In many societies there traditionally were no categories comparable to the Western concept and the word “dance” has been adopted into many languages.

Movement analyses from anthropological points of view encompass all structured movement systems, including those associated with religious and secular ritual, ceremony, entertainment, martial arts, sign languages, sports, and games. What these systems share is that they result from creative processes that manipulate (i.e., handle with skill) human bodies in time and space. Some categories of structured movement may be further marked or elaborated, for example, by being integrally related to “music” (a specially marked or elaborated category of “structured sound”), and text.

Analyses that would make it possible to separate movement systems conceptualized as “dance” and “non-dance” according to indigenous points of view (or even asking if there are such concepts) have not yet been carried out in many areas. Most researchers simply use the term “dance” for any and all body movement associated with music, but it should be remembered that “dance” is a Western term and concept (just as is the term “music”).

Structured movement systems are systems of knowledge—the products of action and interaction as well as processes through which action and interaction take place—and are usually part of a larger activity or activity system. These systems of knowledge are socially and culturally constructed—created by, known, and agreed upon by a group of people and primarily preserved in memory. Though transient, movement systems have structured content, they can be visual manifestations of social relations, the subjects of elaborate aesthetic systems, and may assist in understanding cultural values and the deep structure of the society. Ideal movement studies would analyze all activities in which human bodies are manipulated in time and space, the social processes that produce them according to the aesthetic precepts of a specific group of people at a specific point in time, and the components that group or separate the various movement dimensions and activities they project into kinesthetic and visual form. Indigenous categories can best define what movement systems, if any, fit these, or other, characterizations and how they should be classified. Discovering the structure and content of structured movement systems, as

well as the creative processes, movement theories and philosophies from indigenous points of view are difficult tasks, but they are necessary for understanding culture and society.

In order to be understood as dance (or some other special movement category), movements must be grammatical, they must be intended as dance and interpreted as dance. The grammar of a movement idiom—like the grammar of any language—involves structure, style, and meaning; and one must learn to recognize the movements that make up the system, how they can be stylistically varied, and their syntax (rules about how they can be put together to form motifs, phrases, larger forms, and whole pieces). Competence to understand specific pieces depends not only on movement itself, but on knowledge of cultural context and philosophy.

### **Anthropological/Ethnological Dance Studies and their Roots**

Cultural and academic differences must be considered when reading dance studies. Some European traditions derived from comparative musicology and folkloristics, American studies derived primarily from the anthropological views of Franz Boas, while traditions in other parts of the world derive from historic written accounts, oral tradition, and colonial encounters. In recent years, owing to meetings of the ethnochoreological study group of the International Council for Traditional Music, there is more understanding of this variety of perspectives that has led to sharing and adoption of each other's views.

European dance studies often used comparative methods to derive classifications, local and regional styles, historical layers, and intercultural influences—similar to the aims of musical folklorists at the time. There was also a focus on dance structure that was systematized by a group of Eastern European scholars under the aegis of the International Folk Music Council (now the International Council for Traditional Music, ICTM) which published its syllabus in 1974 (Giurchescu and others). Work on structural analysis is still part of the ICTM Ethnochoreology Study Group. Recent books incorporating structural traditions in-

clude Anca Giurchescu and Sunni Bloland (1995), Egil Bakka (1995) and Lisbet Torp (1990).

British traditions include derivations from folklore (such as Buckland's studies of Morris dancing) and social anthropology (such as studies by John Blacking and Andrée Grau [Grau 1993]). Several British social anthropologists published their dance perspectives in a book edited by Paul Spencer (1985).

American dance researchers (usually termed "dance ethnologists" or "anthropologists of human movement") continue to question what constitutes the field: should dance studies be primarily about movement products or should they incorporate more anthropological notions about process, event, ethnoaesthetics, and cultural constructions about structured movement? Unlike European dance researchers, Americans have often worked with movement traditions not their own, and their research tends to be more diffuse and less detailed in movement content.

Gertrude Kurath noted that the ethnographic study of dance was "an approach toward, and a method of, eliciting the place of dance in human life—in a word, as a branch of anthropology" (1960:250). Kurath was drawn into the study of American Indian dance by William Fenton and Frank Speck to examine dance in areas where they had already carried out ethnographic research. Recognizing that movement or "dance" was an important part of ritual activity in Indian life, they looked for someone who would be able to describe, analyze, and make sense of the movements. They had already done the "context," and Kurath's task was to assist them in amassing the empirical data they were after—descriptions of choreographic groundplans, generalized descriptions of body movement, and statements about cultural symbolism as reflected in choreographic patterns.

Kurath was a pioneer of empirical, product-oriented studies in America, but her colleagues were in Europe. They included Curt Sachs, whom she called "the amiable wizard," as well as folklorists and musicologists working within their own cultural traditions that focused on systemization, classification, and diffusion. She was also inter-

ested in comparisons, and often drew them from European folkdance traditions, such as studies made by Danica and Ljubica Jankovic of South Slav populations. Most of Kurath's publications, however, are descriptions of specific dance occasions, with detailed information on costumes, musical instruments, ground plans, postures, gestures, and steps, with some analysis, comparisons, and context.

Franz Boas was one of the founders of anthropology in the United States; although he came from a German scientific tradition, he rejected many of the ideas of his homeland and focussed on cultural variability, rejecting universal languages of art or dance and laying a foundation for the possibility of examining dance in the context of cultural relativism. Boas's daughter, Franziska, was a dancer and Boas himself wrote articles about Northwest Coast Indian dance (1944). The intellectual descendants of this Boasian tradition can be followed from Boas, through Herskovits and Merriam to Joann Keali'inohomoku and Anya Royce. Merriam was an important anthropological voice in American ethnomusicology from the 1950s until his death, and his students were imbued with the Boasian doctrine that dance and music must be considered in the context of the society of which they are parts. The Boasian and Herskovitzian emphasis on cultural relativism was widespread in America and was elaborated by proponents of ethnoscience in the 1960s. These ideas were intermixed with Malinowski's concept that our goal should be "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (1922:25) and Kenneth Pike's dictum that we should "attempt to discover and to describe the pattern of that particular language or culture in reference to the way in which the various elements of that culture are related to each other in the functioning of the particular pattern" (1954:8). From Pike came the "etic/emic" distinction (1954:11) that has continued as a theoretical basis that informs the work of many American anthro/ethno dance researchers. In addition, ideas about competence and performance derived from concepts promulgated by Saussure and Chomsky remain current.

Etic/emic distinctions, derived by

"contrastive analysis," were elaborated as ethnotheories and ethnoscientific structuralism. Movements and choreographies were analyzed to find underlying systems. Systems, of course, cannot be observed, but must be *derived* from the social and cultural construction of specific movement worlds. Existing in memory and recalled as movement motifs, as imagery, and as system, movements are used to create compositions that produce social and cultural meaning in performance. Such analyses involve deconstructing the movements into culturally recognized pieces and learning the rules for constructing compositions according to the system. This type of analysis has been used primarily by anthropologists, for example, Kaeppler on the structure of Tongan dance (1972); Irene Loutzaki, in a study of dance style among Greek refugees from Northern Thrace now resident in Greece (1989); and Frank Hall, in a study of improvisation in American clog dance (1985). Drid Williams, studying with British anthropologists, adapted concepts from Chomsky, Saussure, semiotics, and "semasiology" into a methodology concerned with the semantics of body languages in which the focus is on meaning. The methods of semasiology have been used by Brenda Farnell in her study of Plains Indian "sign language" (1994) and by Rajika Puri to investigate the place of *hasta mudra* in Indian dance as an expression of Indian society (1983).

Judith Lynne Hanna has worked on gender, communication, and emotion, and has investigated the psychobiological basis of dance, and in what ways human dance differs from the so-called "dances" of other animals. Christine Loken-Kim explored the social construction of female gender in Korea by investigating the representation of emotion in dance and the sentiment terms used by Koreans both in evaluating women's *salp'uri* dance and in first-person accounts of Korean women's lives (1989). Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi, working in various parts of the Middle East, delineated aesthetic principles and examined how they were manifested in various cultural forms and how they might be applied to human movement. She noted that although dance is not considered an art form in this area, human movements express the same aesthetic evaluative concepts as

other Islamic visual arts such as architecture (1978).

What makes movement studies anthropological is the focus on system, the importance of intention, meaning, and cultural evaluation. Anthropologists are interested in socially constructed movement systems, the activities that generate them, how and by whom they are judged, and how they can assist in understanding society. Some anthropologists, such as Cowan (1990) and Schieffelin (1976) choose not to get involved in movement detail, but focus primarily on context and meaning. Other anthropologists combine detailed attention to the movement itself with the historical, social and cultural systems in which the movement is embedded. Farnell's work on Plains Indian sign language focuses on the movements of the signing tradition, the stories told, and the culture they express—all of which can be accessed by reading her monograph or through a CD ROM which, in addition teaches the rudiments of Labanotation. Kaeppler's monograph on Hawaiian *hula pahu* (1993), focuses on the ritual non-Christian basis of a modern Hawaiian dance genre with the underlying theme of how tradition is negotiated to make it appropriate for its time. A study by Susan Reed focusses on the political importance of dance in Sri Lanka (1998). Other anthropological concerns include Cartesian mind/body dualism (Farnell 1995; Varela 1992), martial arts (Lewis 1992), iconography (Seebass 1991), tourism (Sweet 1985), and urban multiculturalism (Ness 1992). In short, the aim of anthropological works is not simply to understand dance in its cultural context, but rather to understand society through analyzing movement systems.

In contrast to anthropological studies of dance, the focus of dance ethnologists is often on dance content, and the study of cultural context aims at illuminating the dance. For example, research on the court context of the Javanese Bedhaya is brought to bear on understanding the dance (rather than researching the Bedhaya in order to understand the Javanese court). Allegra Fuller Snyder's work on Yaqui Easter ceremonies deals with the events within which dances occur and the syncretism of Christian and pre-Christian movements from

which they are composed. In addition, her cross-cultural emphasis and work on dance symbolism (1974) are important ethnological concerns, which also deal with cultural identity (1989). Elsie Dunin's extensive work on Balkan dance, carried out in the Balkans, California, and Chile, is focused on movements and choreography and how these persist or change over time in their area of origin and when they are transplanted, plus the events in which they occur and concerns with ethnicity and ethnic identity. Dancing in the diaspora has also been addressed by Judy Van Zile who has focussed on the transplantation of Bon dance traditions from Japan to Hawaii (1982). Van Zile has also carried out research on historical aspects of Korean dance movement and has done extensive work on Labanotation and its application to non-Western movement systems. Colin Quigley, in his work on Newfoundland traditions and North American step-dancing (1985), raises the important issue of expressive identity in diverse dance cultures within the pluralism of American society—how and why distinctive traditions are perpetuated and/or changed through contact with other cultural worlds. Concerns with ethnic identity, minority status, gender, the concepts of body, self, and personhood are topics receiving attention within dance ethnology. In these studies, the social relationships of the people dancing are often backgrounded while the dance itself and its changes over time are foregrounded.

Beyond Europe and America are dance researchers from the rest of the world with numerous studies of dances of their own traditions and elsewhere—the following lists only a sampling of the riches that lie beyond: Dance has been an academic subject at the University of Ghana since 1962 and several theses have been written by African scholars. At the School of the Performing Arts at Hong Kong the three-pronged curriculum includes ballet, modern, and Chinese dance. The Japanese scholar Kimiko Ohtani has researched dance in Japan, Okinawa, Hawaii, and India. Korean scholars have researched their own dances and their basis in shamanism and Buddhism as well as ballet and modern dance. Kapila Vatsyayan has published extensively on Indian dance and cul-

ture. Mohawk Indian Nina de Shane has worked on the political importance of dance to ethnic identity. Arzu Ozturkman has worked on dance and nationalism in her native Turkey. Indonesian scholars including I Made Bandem, Soedarsono, Sal Murygianto, and I Yayan Dibia have done extensive research on dance traditions of their own culture as well as elsewhere in Indonesia and beyond. The research of Mohd Anis Md Nor in his native Malaysia, Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman on Hawaiian dance, Kauraka Kauraka and Jon Jonassen on Cook Island dance, Maria Susana Azzi on Tango, and a myriad of others suggest that we have only begun to realize the importance of dance to political and national values, as art, and as a marker of ethnic and cultural identity throughout the world.

### **Studies of Dance in the New Century**

Finally, I want to mention two types of analysis which I believe will be important in the 21st century—ethnotheory and meaning.

1. *Theoretical and Ethnotheoretical Analysis.* Important in the study of human movement systems is the study of movement theory and philosophy of movement from the point of view of the society in which the movement takes place. The use of Western dance theory for analysis of non-Western dance is inappropriate, and a researcher must attempt to discover indigenous theories about movement. How did the structured movement systems originate? Are they codified into genres? How and by whom can dances be composed? How can (and cannot) movements and postures be combined? Is there a vocabulary of motifs and a grammar for their use? Are there notions about energy and how it should be visually displayed? On the basis of movement, can dance be separated from ritual? And more basic still, does a culture have such concepts?

2. *Movement and Meaning.* Perhaps most difficult is the analysis of meaning of specific movements and meanings of a movement system as a whole. Meaning is usually associated with communication and the presentation of the self to others and ourselves. Concepts that can be usefully employed are those derived from Chomsky, based on competence and performance, and Saussure, based on *langue* and *parole*. "Competence" or knowledge about a specific dance tradition is acquired in much the same way as competence in a spoken language is acquired. Competence relates to the cognitive learning of the shared rules of a specific dance tradition as *langue* is acquired in a Saussurian mode. Competence enables the viewer to understand a grammatical movement sequence that he/she has never seen before. "Performance" refers to an actual rendering of a movement sequence, *parole* of Saussure, which assumes that the performer has a certain level of competence and the skill to carry it out. A viewer must have communicative competence in order to understand movement messages.

Anthro/ethno researchers derive their data from a wide variety of sources, but basic to their studies is the importance of fieldwork. A recent book edited by Theresa Buckland has focussed our attention on the importance of fieldwork to dance studies (1999). What anthro/ethno/indigenous fieldworkers do with their data and how it is presented in publication varies widely. But all of these researchers focus our attention on movement content as well as social, cultural and political concerns such as gender, the body, ethnic, cultural and national identity, the negotiation of tradition, and turning the ethnographic eye on any society. In order to find the larger view as advocated here, fieldwork is not only recommended but is necessary in order to bring movement into focus as part of a total cultural system.

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### III. Dance Theory, Sociology, and Aesthetics

My brief is to discuss recent developments in dance theory, touching on the areas of sociology and aesthetics in the light of the coming millennium. In considering how current my focus should be, I have reflected upon the pace at which dance scholarship and indeed knowledge as a whole can sometimes move. My initial plan was to point out that dance theory is not just for dance scholars; dance artists like Isadora Duncan and Yvonne Rainer have recognised the need to articulate the theoretical aspects of their art in order to create a discursive context for the reception of their work. Indeed, progress and change in dance practice necessitate reciprocal developments within dance scholarship. I was therefore going to look at the ways in which some of the more radical as-

pects of recent dance theory and practice issue a challenge to rethink the relationship between the sociology of dance and aesthetics. While I still intend to cover this area, two recent incidents have caused me to change my focus and look more critically than I originally intended at the work which I and others have been doing on dance and representation.

The first incident is a conversation during a conference in April 1999 with an American who teaches performance studies. Why, she asked me, were so many dance scholars working on issues concerning identity? My reply at the time was that in my opinion the majority of dance scholars actively publishing work were concerned with establishing a history of canonical artists,