

## ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF DANCE

A reactive report on the Performing Arts Section of the IX International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES) and the Pre-Congress Conference on Theory and Methodology in Comparative Aesthetics, August 28 to September 3, 1973, Chicago.

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ICAES provides an opportunity for anthropologists from throughout the world to assemble every five years. This year, a number of pre-congress conferences were organized to provide settings for intensive interaction among small groups of specialists preparatory to the general Congress sessions. The report I was asked to present to the general ICAES section drew heavily upon discussions by pre-Congress participants in dance, music, oral literature, and visual arts, as well as comments at other contemporaneous formal and informal meetings with dance anthropologists (including two active CORD members, Joann Kealiinohomoku and Anya P. Royce) and two participants from the 1972 CORD conference on Dance and Anthropology (Alan P. Merriam and Beryl Bellman). The report was, of course, also shaped by my own perspectives on the anthropological study of dance. The paragraphs which follow include what is essentially an abstract of my report to the Congress.

The importance of dance as a phenomenon for anthropological study derives from its near universality, its possible biological and evolutionary significance as innate behavior with survival value (Norbeck, ICAES 1973, Blacking, ICAES 1973)\*, its stylistic endurance, episodic nature which is in some sense repeated by other actors, malleability, apparent record in antiquity, interrelation with other behavioral phenomena, accessibility to empirical observation and film recording (Collier 1967, Sorenson 1967, Prost, ICAES 1973, Sorenson and Jablonko, ICAES 1973) and relative lack of systematic study by any of the social science disciplines (see Royce 1973 and Merriam 1973 on approaches to the study of dance). Dance as recurring human behavior thus constitutes a legitimate cultural field of inquiry.

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\*A complete reference to all ICAES papers appears in the text of this report.

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Development of the anthropological study of dance has been seriously hampered by the fact that anthropologists in the past were not acquainted with dance--its elements (space-rhythm-dynamics) and its instrument (the human body) in motion. A second handicap was that anthropologists tended to have ethnocentric concepts of dance and attitudes of puritanical dislike of the body or shame toward it. To this we may add that anthropologists felt the need to be scientific (the "arts" to many being inappropriate for this approach), the state of recording technology and notation were underdeveloped, and other reasons why phenomena categorized as arts have not received the attention they deserve.

Despite the lack of understanding dance per se (as opposed to its context) and prevailing scholarly attitudes and skills, some useful dance descriptions appear in the literature. And of greater importance, scholars such as Radcliffe-Brown, Mead, Waterman, Evans-Pritchard, Courlander, Holt and Beteson, Griaule, Kurath, J. C. Mitchell, Fernandez, Blacking, Ottenberg, Jablonko and Blank go beyond mere description. (See Merriam 1973, Royce 1973, and Hanna 1968 for a review of some of these.)

In these and other researches, there appear examples of dance viewed synchronically (concern with a complex of events existing in a limited time, ignoring historical antecedents) and diachronically (relating to phenomena as they change over time), emicly (specific information about reality as an indigene sees it) and eticly (information about reality as observed by the analyst; comparative perspective is involved, and considerations external to the dance phenomena themselves are taken into account). Thus Kealiinohomoku, Lomax, Royce and I are among those attempting to test hypotheses cross-culturally about conditions under which dance elements, symbolism, functions, and accoutrements change in societies and also various relationships between dance and other societal elements and processes. These studies seem to involve attempts to demonstrate conditioning relationships between antecedent causes and consequent effects. On the other hand, a structuralist approach is illustrated by Kaeppeler who has attempted to apply a linguistic model to the study of Tongan dance.

One of the prime concerns of the pre-Congress dance section was the distinction (applicable cross-culturally) between dance and nondance. The question was posed: "Can we find characteristics in common about the kinds of phenomena different people call dance (or what westerners would generally categorize as dance)?" It seems to me that examining dance cross-culturally in order to formulate general hypotheses, to establish the range of variation of dance phenomena, and to demonstrate relationships among different aspects of culture or social organization, one is forced to develop an overarching analytic

definition, one that transcends participants' concepts (which undoubtedly include some criteria that other groups exclude, and vice versa) and includes behavior which has the appearance of what is generally considered dance, but for the participants involved is not "dance" because they have no such word.

Dance, in my opinion, can be most usefully defined as human behavior composed of (a) purposefully, (b) intentionally rhythmical, and (c) culturally patterned sequences of (d) nonverbal body movement and gesture which are not ordinary motor activities, the motion having inherent value. Behavior must meet each of the four criteria in order to be classified "dance". That is to say, each behavioral characteristic is necessary and the set of four constitutes sufficiency; the combination of all these factors must exist.<sup>1</sup>

The following dance-related papers were presented to the Congress:

- Barwicke, Laura, "Dance as Non-verbal Communication"  
 Blacking, John, "The Study of Man as Music-maker"  
 Hanna, Judith Lynne, "Toward a Cross-Cultural Conceptualization of Dance and Some Correlate Considerations"  
 Kealiinohomoku, Joann W., "Correlation between Affective Culture and Social Organization: Functional and Disfunctional"  
 Krebs, Stephanie L., "The Communication of Thai Social Norms and Values Through Thai Dance-Drama"  
 Kurath, Gertrude P., "Space Rock: Music and Dance of the Electronic Era"  
 Mladenovic, Olivera, "Kolo upon Kolo in Yugoslavia"  
 Moore, J. G., "Music and dance as Expressions of Religious Worship in Jamaica"  
 Norbeck, Edward, "Religion and Human Play"  
 Ottenberg, Simon, "The Analysis of an African Masked Parade"  
 Peacock, James, "Notes on the Sociology of Art"  
 Petrosayan, E. Kh., "Totemic Dances of Armenia"  
 Prost, J.H., "Filming Body Behaviour"  
 Sorenson, E. Richard, and Allison Jablonko, "Research Filming of Naturally Occurring Phenomena: Basic Strategies"  
 Suna, Harry, "Baltic Origin and Development Tendencies of Latvian Dance"  
 Vogt, Evon Z., "Ritual of Reversal as a Means of Rewiring Social Structure."

Many of these will appear in the World Anthropology volume advertised as: John Blacking, ed., The Performing Arts: Music, Dance, Theater, Mouton (P.O. Box 482, the Hague 2076, the Netherlands).

Looking to the future, it appears that certain needs must be met and certain questions explored. Perhaps of greatest importance, there

must be more dance studies, or ethnographies which incorporate dance and are theoretically informed.<sup>2</sup> Dance should be studied as social, cultural (concern with values, beliefs, and attitudes), semiotic and physical behavior. Anthropologists should become familiar with body movement, dance vocabulary, analysis, and experience, so that they can study dance primarily or in conjunction with other interests. (With background in physical anthropology, they have a good basis for this). Without a developed corpus of dance studies, it is difficult to develop cross-cultural perspectives, to be able to know what is universal about dance.

Here are some other suggestions which were made: (1) The application of Levy-Strauss structuralism might possibly be a fruitful approach this is now being applied to the study of other cultural forms. (2) We should explore why dance is chosen from among alternative linguistic, paralinguistic, and non-verbal modes of affective and cognitive communication. What is actually communicated? How can we find out? What are the cross-cultural meanings of dance to the performer and to the spectator? (3) To what extent can dance be viewed as a system *sui generis*, meaning deriving from internal relations between parts of the system rather than by reference to some external source, relating to the beholder not as a mere manifestation of some other order of cultural fact such as mythology or religion? (4) To what extent does social structure reflect aesthetic principles found in the dance? (5) What are the relationships of different styles and dancers' roles, etc. to such factors as economy, polity, community structure, stratification systems, social class, urban/rural distinctions, role differentiation, religious qualities, images of the universe, value orientations, etc.? (6) How does a society and analyst measure viability and creativity in dance? What are the conditions under which they flourish? How does style develop? What is the nature of choreographic creation?

On the basis of the status and needs of ethnochoreology, dialogues are necessary in which one "expert" constructively indicates where another expert may need to refine hypotheses, develop further supportive arguments, consult other fields, etc. The Congress was told about the plans underway to have such exchanges under the auspices of CORD's Annual meeting in 1974 and also in 1975 (plans are developing so that this might take place in Mexico to coincide with a significant dance event there).

#### Footnotes

1. These characteristics are elaborated in the paper "Toward a Cross-Cultural Conceptualization of Dance . . ." which I presented to the ICAES Arts and Anthropology pre-Congress. A limited number of copies of this draft paper are available upon request to those interested

in commenting on it. For other useful attempts to define dance, see Kurath 1960, Lomax et al 1968, and Kealiinohomoku 1970; these are noted in Merriam 1973.

2. I hope CORD members will respond to this need for theoretical and empirical work by proposing specific ideas for panels, papers, and individual paper and discussant participants for CORD's 1974 conference. Since I am a co-chairman, please write to me immediately with suggestions (see address under CORD INFORMATION).

#### References Cited

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- Hanna, Judith Lynne. "Field Research in African Dance: Opportunities and Utilities." Ethnomusicology 12:101-106, 1968.
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- Royce, Anya P. "Choreology Today: a Review of the Field. Anthropology and the Dance." New York: CORD Publication, 1973 forthcoming.
- Sorenson, E. Richard. "A Research Film Program in the Study of Changing Man: Research Filmed Material as a Foundation for Continued Study of Non-recurring Human Events." Current Anthropology 8(5):443-469, 1967.