
REPORTS**ETHNOESTHETICS OF CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN DANCE**

submitted by Judith Lynne Hanna

Donald N. Brown, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Department of Sociology, and Extension Coordinator, Oklahoma Indian Programs, College of Arts and Sciences Extension, Oklahoma State University, has been selected for a 1974 Faculty Summer Research Award. He welcomes comments concerning the proposed project which he describes below:

Dance remains a vital element of contemporary Native American Life. Pow-wows sponsored by tribal groups and urban clubs are held throughout the year. Traditional ceremonies which include dance continue among many tribal groups. Participation in these dances, either as dancers or as spectators, has become a basic means of developing and maintaining an "Indian identity" in a world dominated by non-Indians. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into contemporary Native American dance as it is viewed and understood by the participants.

The methods used in this study will be those of ethno-science which emphasizes an "emic" approach to cultural phenomena. This approach attempts to discover the various perspectives of the participants within the cultural system and contrasts with the "etic" approach which uses categories from an outside observer's cultural system (Sturtevant 1964). Special attention will be focused on three areas of dance phenomena:

1. What are the boundaries of the domain "dance"?
2. What are the categories within the domain "dance"?
3. What are the judgements concerning "dance"?

Whenever possible native languages will be used, although English will be used for informants who have a low facility in a native language.

Except on rare occasions, previous studies of Native American dance phenomena have been limited to the etic approach. Dance costumes have been described (Smith and Kroha 1972; Howard 1972); dance movements have been notated (Howard and Kurath 1959; Kurath 1958); descriptions of dance have been presented (Powers 1962); and classifications of dance have been developed (Gamble 1952). [These examples of dance studies are included only as examples of past research in this area of interest. Kurath's article (1960) includes an exhaustive listing and analysis of dance research up to the date of publication]. Only two studies of Native American dance, however, have utilized an emic approach -- a brief study by Slotkin (1955) and a study by Brown (1960). Although this emic approach is rare in the study of dance, it has proved most successful in the study of the esthetics of art in other cultural systems (Schneider 1966).

The applicant has maintained an interest in dance research since his first field research on dance at Taos Pueblo, New Mexico, in 1958. He has published five articles on Native American dance, and has recorded and edited four phonograph recordings of Native American music. He is presently a member of the Dance Research Center of Ann Arbor, Michigan, and was elected in 1972 to serve on the Board of Directors of the Committee on Research in Dance (CORD).

The proposed study could produce significant findings for both dance ethnology and anthropology. It could provide the foundation for an extensive research program on contemporary Native American dance. Proposals for external funding have not yet been submitted for this research. If the proposed research is successful, proposals for funding could be submitted for further research to the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

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