In the Shadow of Hollywood Orientalism: Authentic East-Indian Dancing

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Preliminaries

Combine a theory of the dance that reduces it to raw movement and "style" (Cohen 1967) with a Hollywood choreographer who avidly studied East Indian dance forms, but had no desire to "be" an Indian dancer (Jack Cole), and you possess two essential ingredients of a recipe that resulted in "Broadway Jazz:"[1] a movement *bricolage* consisting of East Indian and other "Oriental" dance movements recostumed and set to jazz music. Cole insisted on "the validity of ethnic dances as vital entertainment" (Loney 1984: 74), and his "interest in learning ethnic dance steps was insatiable at this time, [but] he realized that authentic reconstructions would be too arty for patrons who had come to have a martini or enjoy a supper [in cabarets, nightclubs, etc.]" (Loney 1984: 71).

Agnes de Mille called Jack Cole "the first important choreographer in the commercial sphere," saying that "He set the Broadway jazz style" (de Mille, cited in Loney 1984: 13-14). He was praised by the gossip columnist, Dorothy Kilgallen for taking the *art* out of dance and giving it a "hotfoot." (Loney 1984: 99). The noted dance critic, John Martin, "considered Cole's art gaunt, nervous, and flagellant, yet with an opulent, sensuous beauty. For Martin, Cole was a depersonalized being, an intense kinetic entity, rather than an individual" (Loney 1984: 99).

Although known by several names, i.e. "nautch dance," "Oriental dance," and "Hindu routines" Cole wanted his type of jazz dance to be called "Broadway Commercial," or something like that: "To me it's rife with sentimentality, it's self-indulgent, but one thing else it is—it's *commercial*. It fits in with—the stuff—on television and such kindred 'artistic' endeavors. Maybe it helps orient a dancer to the harsh realities of hoofing for a buck" (Loney 1984: 121). But how do theories of the dance enter the picture?

Jerome Delameter (1981: 4-5), quotes Selma Jean Cohen, where she "discusses the kind of communication dance most easily expresses:"

> The medium of dance is human movement. It deals with people, not with facts or ideas. And it deals with people in motion—not exhausted. We can think very well while sitting still. We can express the distance of the moon from the earth by gesturing with our fingers, but the matter is better explained in words. We might act out a marriage ceremony to identify the mother-in-law, but it is easier said than done. And what would the poor dancers do with Kant? Neither factual relations nor ideas are promising choreographic material. The area of dance is not that of concepts, which are grasped by the mind by way of words, but of percepts, which are grasped by the eye by way of movement (See Cohen, in Beardsley and Schueller 1967: 272-3).

With regard to concepts and the dance, one would go a long way to find a clearer expression of Descartes' mind-body split than is found in Cohen's

Prolegomenon, because her definition of 'dance' (and, by extension, danc*ers,* danc*ing* and danc*es*) declares that dancers retain their bodies and the movements they make, but somehow in the process, they lose their minds (See Farnell 1995: 8). They engage in a "dance area" that *excludes* concepts, but *retains* percepts (sense data). These constitute the world of the "poor dancer," who would not know what to do with Immanuel Kant, or, presumably, other philosophers.

Cohen's theory of the dance was widely prevalent for thirty years preceding its publication, and in some circles it still is. There are many, of course, who would reduce dancing to mindless movement, *sans* language and culture, since this is all that the dance has to offer, along with "individual stylizations"—or so the mythology goes. Moreover, if one thinks of dancing exclusively as technique or steps, then problems of ownership, meaning and authenticity are successfully by-passed. I say this because I am convinced that it is in Cohen's theory that we find a clear expression of Jack Cole's ideas about dancing. In his own words,

> I never wanted to *be*—people are always confusing why you are teaching them; they think you want to teach them to *be* an Indian dancer—but I was trying to expose them to a different attitude, to give them the excitement and the discovery of the thousand ways there are to move that are peculiar and different, totally different, that would never enter your head here. It opens up a new vocabulary of movement, different ways to approach the problem, rather than a balletic way. (Jack Cole, from an interview with Jerome Delameter 1981: 193)

Unlike his contemporaries (i.e. Martha Graham, Doris Humphery and Charles Weidman), Cole didn't choose to pursue serious modern dance, which was "the less-traveled path, and certainly far less well-remunerated than the work of star dancers in musicals and revues. Cole decided not to take the less-used road" (Loney 1984: 121). Nevertheless, he was a clear inheritor of Denishawn's teaching, as Adrienne McLean points out:

> Perhaps the best known and most influential dance school founded in Los Angeles was Denishawn, which opened in 1915. Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn were, through the audiences they attracted and the students they trained (e.g. Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, as well as Cole) the vanguard of what would eventually become American modern dance. Married in 1914, Shawn and St. Denis became famous for the "oriental" dances they created and performed, dances with titles like Incense, The Cobras, Nautch, Yogi, Radha—to list but one of Ruth St. Denis's early programs. Shawn and St. Denis often mixed works from one or another of their oriental "suites"—Ancient Greek, Japanese, east Indian, Persian, Siamese, Chinese, and Egyptian, for example—so that, in the same evening, an audience of the 1920s might see Sappho, Japanese Spear Dance, The Beloved and the Sufi, Kwan Yin, The Abduction of Sita, and Isis and Osiris. Through the early 1930s, Denishawn supplied dancers and dance pieces for numerous Hollywood movies. (McClean 1997: 134)

And she continues:

> The fashionable Orientalism of Denishawn was never, for the most part, based on much more than extant popular imagery (St. Denis's initial, revelatory source of dance inspiration was the image of Isis on a poster advertising "Egyptian Deities"

cigarettes—"No better Turkish cigarette can be made")[2] Even after Denishawn toured the Orient and North Africa in 1925-1926—the first American company to do so—its dances continued to rely more on conventions of costume and setting than on faithfully adapted movement for their effectiveness (McLean 1997: 134).

Cole was trained in—and he lived, thought and created in—an atmosphere of Hollywood Orientalism.[3] He had neither the intention nor a will to understand Indian performances *in terms of their originators' language and culture*. He wasn't interested in what the *hastas* meant[4] or how they are used in their own performance contexts. He simply appropriated moves from Bharatanatyam, Kathak and other "Eastern forms" using these "peculiar and different" movements for his own purposes (*cf.* Williams 2000). What he wanted was to "open up a new vocabulary of movement" that would replace ballet and, most importantly, *sell*.[5] His movement vocabulary, among other things, led to anomalous statements by his dancers regarding authenticity:

> But Jack also knew he had learned something from Denishawn. About the importance of costuming, even if it was for *pseudo-Indian dance*. When we danced with him, we had to do *absolutely authentic dances*, but in jazzy costumes, to jazz music. He learned the theatricality from Denishawn (Gwen Verdon, cited in Loney 1984: 66, italics added).[6]

Adrienne McLean recognizes Cole's beliefs, but, going beyond these, she perceives that

> Even while Jack Cole was, as an Orientalist, as a man, as an American man, an "oppressor" in some senses, he also understood what it was, as a gay man, as an artist, as a dancer, to be oppressed. He had a great deal of sympathy for female stars such as [Marilyn] Monroe and Rita Hayworth and the "ordeals" that their celebrity brought to them; this is why he was in such demand as a choreographer and coach by women stars (Loney 1978-81: 208). . . . In short, Cole's work is most interesting *because of its different hidden transcripts* and the way that, filtered through the dominant discourse that is classical Hollywood cinema, different forms of oppression intersect in it (McLean 1997: 149, italics added).

She also says, "The question is not whether Cole, or any other American, depicts non-Western cultures "authentically" or uses them to more positive ends" (*Ibid.* 1997: 132). Close reading of her essay indicates why she says this: first, Orientalism in any form is often linked with homophobia and racism. Second, to describe what Shawn, St. Denis, and Cole "learned from the Orient, one must in some sense *become* an Orientalist, with all the dismaying chauvinisms and inequities of power that this entails" (*Ibid.* 1997: 135).

Notwithstanding, I am convinced that the question of authenticity *is* a major issue, if for no other reason than the kind of reductions it implies (for example, "all there is to dance is movement"), and because it ultimately places all dancers and dance forms in the untenable position of "being represented," tying Cole's work to a fundamental assumption of Orientalist ideology—that its objects of discourse cannot (or do not) speak or move for themselves.

On a more practical level, Hollywood Orientalism has had many consequences in the wider American dance world since its inception with Denishawn in the early twentieth century. It's vast network of publicity, it's

global visibility and economic advantages tend to obscure the efforts of American dance artists who spend their lifetimes becoming authentic representatives of indigenous non-Western dance forms.[7]

Classical Hollywood cinema and its dialogue, involving as it does both spoken and body languages, constitutes "the knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse" (Said 1978: 6). In fact, "Here, one comes face-to-face with the ideology of Orientalism itself as a "fact of [Western] human production" and a projection of Said's "imaginative geography." However,

> Cole's Orientalist dance practice introduces [other] compelling issues into ongoing discussions of Orientalism—not only how American Orientalism "intertwines" with other forms of oppression but also, for example, the question of how we recognize Orientalism as a practice. That is, how do audiences "see" or comprehend oriental influence . . . unless it is conveyed by visible appurtenances of costume and narrative setting? If we are ever to understand other cultures, or to use aspects of our own inherited or chosen cultures, *how do we integrate what we learn with what we already "know," without reproducing the expected, the already legible, the stereotypical?* (McLean 1997: 151, italics added). [8]

Orientalist dance practices made great differences in the lives and careers of others, especially those who became Indian dancers. On the whole, in the United States, these people have been (and still are) a "muted group" (Ardener, S. 1975: xii). They are best thought of, perhaps, as the other side of Hollywood's coin: Americans who dedicate(d) their lives to learning, performing and celebrating the dances of other cultures. Their names, struggles, triumphs and genuine knowledge about dancing have neither been seen nor publicized nationally or internationally. They command little or no recognition in the shadow of the extraordinary political, intellectual, aesthetic and economic dominance of Hollywood's (and television's) Orientalism and commercialism.

These dancers, their admirers and supporters are frequently labeled "purists."[9] Be that as it may, their "purism" is a luxury that they could (and can) ill-afford, since, on the whole, they are not independently wealthy. The demands of a strictly commercial market for sex, sensationalism and the bizarre over-rule the alternative cultural, artistic, and ethical considerations that so-called "purists" provide. Perhaps more than anything, these proponents of authentic forms of so-called "ethnic dancing" want other cultures in this country to gain respect, understanding and admiration by speaking with uncorrupted voices through them.

Authentic [East] Indian Dancing

Altogether, Gina Lalli[10] spent 38 months (3 years, 2 months) studying in India where she also performed. Her work is outstanding among American artists, because she mastered not one, but *two* forms of Indian dancing: Bharatanatyam[11] and Kathak.[12] She first made trips to India between September 1955 and October 1956, then from September 1961 to May of 1962. Her third trip was from February 1967 to August 1968. She studied Sanskrit during the summers at the University of Pennsylvania with Norman C. Brown and his protégé, Royal Wyler.

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In India, she studied Bharatanatyam with Chokkalingam Pillai, who lived and taught in Madras, having been invited there by Rukmini Devi, a distinguished Brahmin woman who helped re-establish the form from the disrepute into which it had fallen.[13] Chokkalingam Pillai taught Pandanallur Bharatanatyam, meaning that the style originated in the village of Pandanallur, a suburb of the city of Tajore in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu where Chokkalingam was born. This is important, because one might study, for instance, Trivandram Bharatanatyam (from another town on the south coast of India). She learned her first three-hour long dance suite from Chokkalingum, performing it for the first time in her American debut in Carnegie Recital Hall in 1958. Her first performance debuts in India took place in New Delhi (Bharatanatyam only) in May 1968; Bombay (both Bharatanatyam and Kathak) in July, 1968 and Calcutta (Kathak only) in September, 1968.

Lalli first studied Kathak for a short time in Bombay, then later, in Lucknow with Vikram Singh, who was taught by Aachan Maharaj, the father of Birju Maharaj. The latter was her teacher in New Delhi. She studied *tabla baya* (north Indian drums) with Komal Krishna, and she worked and performed Kathak in India with a master *tabla* player, Afaq Husain.

Listing Lalli's Indian teachers serves both to establish her credentials with Indians themselves, and to recognize that she performed for Indian audiences, many (although not all) of whom, unlike the majority of Euro-American audiences, are deeply informed about Kathak and/or Bharatanayam. She studied (and plays) the *vina* (i.e. 'veena'; a concert instrument used in accompanying Bharatanatyam) and the *tanpura* (i.e. 'tamboura', used all over India for many dance forms). In fact, she played *tanpura* for several Indian musicians in New York concerts between the years 1958 and 1967. She has studied the drum accompaniment for Kathak. In other words, she immersed herself in the culture and language from which her two chosen dance forms emanate—necessary if one is authentically to perform the dances of another culture.

Performance Spaces

Bharatanatyam is performed on a bare floor, while members of the audience sit facing the stage. They do not surround the performance space and so are able to gain a frontal view of the dancer's body at all times. The musicians who accompany the dancer sit on the right hand side of the stage facing stage left. Unlike northern Indian music performances at which musicians are accustomed to having their students and special music lovers seated close to them at a 'conversational distance', as it were, at a Bharatanatyam recital the separation between spectators and performers is spatially marked.

Although Bharatanatyam is easily adapted to a western-style proscenium arch theater, the semantics of the space in which a dancer performs is unlike those associated with a western theatrical space. First, there is a sense in which for the duration of the recital, *the stage is a consecrated space* (these italics added). Many dancers place an image of *Nataraja* (the deity Siva in his form as King of the dance)[14] on a pedestal towards downstage left, facing the audience. On some occasions, oil lamps are placed on either side of this image or at the foot of the stage.[15] Since illumination is provided by electric stage lights, these lamps do not

serve a practical purpose but are lit and placed there in honor of the deity. Once a recital is in progress no member of the audience steps onto the stage. If any of the organizers were to enter the stage-space during an intermission, they would be expected to remove their shoes.

Apart from the cloth or rug on which the musicians sit, the stage itself is bare. There are no stage 'sets' as such and the rear of the space is marked by a plain (usually black) curtain. The front curtain, if there is one, is drawn open at the beginning of a recital and is not normally used during a recital. The lack of scenery conforms to one of the conventions of Sanskrit theater where even stage properties are rarely used. Instead, the actor is expected to suggest changes of scenery or objects that are part of the action by the skillful use of hand gestures (Puri 1997: 174-75).

Performed by women alone, the dance begins with a *namaskara* (salutation; obeisance) to Shiva, to her teacher, the musical instruments, and the audience. From center-stage, she performs a final *namaskara* to the earth, then she touches her eyes. These gestures are simply more elaborate forms of a traditional greeting called *Namaste* in Hindi (see Puri 1997: 175). Following this, Puri provides excellent descriptions of costumes, make-up and other features of Bharatanatyam which will not detain us here.

Situating Authenticity

Few people fully understand the extent and richness of India's dance traditions: there are many major dance forms in India, and all *are totally different from one another*,[16] such as

1. *Kathak* (North India, with three distinct forms: Lucknow, Benares and Jaipur) of which Lalli performs the Lucknow style from the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajastan.

2. *Bharatanatyam* (South Indian; several forms—including Trivandram and Pandanallur—associated with different temples and villages), from the state of Tamil Nadu.

3. *Kuchipudi* (from the state of Andhra Pradesh),

4. *Odissi* (from the state of Odissa),

5. *Manipuri* (from the state of Manipur),

6. *Cchau* (from the principality of Cchau in Behar),

7. *Kathakali* (from the state of Kerala),[17]

8. *Satriya* (from the state of Assam),

9. *Yaksagana* (from the state of Karnataka), and

10. *Bhagavata Mela* (from Nataka Tamil Nadu).[18]

Obviously, one of the distinctive features of an authentic Indian dancer is prolonged study in India with recognized masters of his or her chosen form(s). Regarding this aspect of her work, Lalli is no different from an

anthropologist setting out to study one or more of the world's dance forms. As Adrienne Kaeppler notes:

> In participant observation important elements include observing movement content and its contexts, taking part by learning the movements (if this is permitted) and asking questions about the movement and its contexts. Participant observation should lead to an understanding of the various structured movement systems, how they are indigenously classified, what the relationships are between and among movements of ritual, dance, everyday and ceremonial life, and if there even are cultural concepts such as 'dance'.
>
> While taking part, the structure of the movement systems can be derived by using linguistic analogies: that is, what the relevant small pieces of movement (kinemes and morphokines—analogous to phonemes and morphemes) are, what the characteristic movement motifs are, and how these movement pieces are put together (analogous to phonology and syntax in language). One observes surface manifestations and behaviour, making it necessary to ask questions about underlying systems and intentions. *Behaviour plus intention equals action, and it is human action and interaction in which anthropologists are interested* (Kaeppler 1999: 20 - italics added).

Because it is a classical dance form, Bharatanatyam comes with several structures of "small pieces of movement" that Lalli learned. For example, *adavus* have already been mentioned (see note 10): they must be mastered preliminary to *padams*. There are other structures of the form as well: *abhinaya*,[19] *alaripu, jatisvaram, sabdam, padam, varnam, tillana* and *sloka*. These are the basic seven forms of the dances.

> The main composition in a Bharatanatyam recital is called *varnam* and a dancer may take as long as an hour to interpret it. *Varnam* is also the longest and most elaborate of musical forms. The organization of *sahitya* and *svara* is the same in both cases, except for the interpolation of *jatis* in *varnams* composed specifically for dances. The word *varna* basically means 'paint', color', 'tint'. It is also used for the four main divisions of Indian society (*brahmin, kshatriya, vaisya* and *sudra*) and it also means 'depict', 'picture' and 'write'. Most Sanskrit words are polysemic, as can be noted by the many entries for each word in Sanskrit dictionaries (Puri 1997: 185, note 9).

In situating authenticity, we must consider several factors: 1. the actual postures, gestures and movements (the action signs) executed by the dancer, and where and from whom these were studied and learned;[20] 2. the performance spaces within which the dance form is performed; 3. the musical accompaniment, (in Kathak and Bharatanatyam, the *ragas*);[21] 4. the aesthetic mood of the dance (the *rasas*), the pervading emotions (*sthayi-bhava*) of the dance that gives rise to a particular mood in spectators, and finally, 5. the costumes, make-up and other details of the performance that contribute to its distinct character as the dance form that it is.

There are those who will argue that elements of classical dance forms such as Lucknow Kathak and Bharatanatyam change over time, which is true, and that, in any case, both dance forms under discussion have sections in them that are improvised, as in the *tatkar* (bell-work) sections of Kathak, and "Many *parans* are old, time-honored pieces reverently handed down by teacher to pupil who learns the original but then is expected to choreograph variations of

each piece" (Lalli, this issue, page 107). There is room for improvisation in Bharatanatyam as well (see Puri and Hart-Johnson 1995: 158-159). Now, however, I will draw attention to the main characteristics of Kathak.

Lucknow Kathak

The first English words that might come to mind when thinking about Bharatanatyam and Kathak are (respectively) 'extrovert' and 'introvert'; 'expansive' and 'withdrawn'; perhaps 'demonstrative' as against 'reserved'. Lalli tells us that

> Originally, Kathak is believed to have been a religious dance similar in character to the other classical dance styles of India which are still closely associated with religious ritual. However, because of the patronage of rulers of the Moghul courts, Kathak has undergone extensive development into a more secular form that emphasizes lyrical pure dance designs, virtuosi footwork and sensuous expressions of love themes (Lalli, this issue, page 101).

It should be remembered that the first Kathak dancers were, after all, Hindus who danced for Moghul overlords. Too much outward expression of religious belief was without doubt undesirable. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the wide use of 'abstract' dancing, intricate bell work (*tatkar*), dazzling turns and the fleeting, transient, glimpses of Radha and Krishna in Kathak arose both to remind the dancers about their reasons for dancing and (gently, unobtrusively) to deceive their courtly Moghul audiences. Perhaps *tatkar* and *tukras* formed the bulk of these first dancers' performances. Gradually more and more images, then stories of Krishna and Radha crept in. Small wonder that in the old Moghul courts, a dance form arose where

> The eyes are slightly closed, as if seeing some image in the mind. The mouth is closed and slightly curved upward at the corners. The eyes gaze steadily straight ahead at eye level, but not contacting any person in the audience. One of the great teachers, Pandit Vikram Singh, called this look of the face, "dreamy, grave."
>
> Between dance pieces the dancer's eyes will look straight ahead, but as soon as the hands are moved the eyes follow whichever hand has the predominant movement. When the hands come back to rest at the center of the chest, the eyes return to their forward gaze (Lalli, this issue, page 103).

The performance space of Kathak is somewhat similar to that of Bharatanatyam:

> The musicians sit on rugs downstage right. The stage is bare except for an image of a god at stage left (the audience's right). The image may be that of Shiva Nataraja (Shiva in a dance pose) or Ganesha, the Elephant God, patron of artists. There may be incense burning near the image and flowers strewn before it (Lalli, this issue, page 104).

Although the uncorrupted space for a performance of Kathak is not that different from that of Bharatanatyam, one of the most striking differences between Kathak and Bharatanatyam is the dancer's use of the vertical space in which he or she operates. Unlike Bharatanatyam dancing, Kathak is performed throughout from a normal standing position. It does not use the

familiar *mundi* and *ara mundi* positions characteristic of the south Indian form. That is,

In Bharatanatyam ... an Indian dancer usually appears in a 'bent-knee' position called *ara mandi*. If a photograph were to be taken of a Bharatanatyam dancer in the *ara mandi* position and a ballet dancer in [a] *demi-plié* position, it [might] superficially appear that both dancers are executing the same movement, but this is not the case. Both dancers are performing very different moves. . . . :
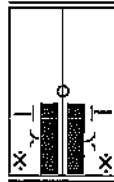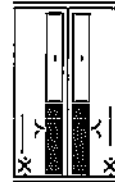
ara mandi   *demi-plié*

The texts of the two positions indicates that they are *not* the same movement—apparent even to readers who cannot read Laban's movement script. The *ara mandi* is an 'ending' position: that is, a dancer may stay in this position for long periods of time. According to Puri, *ara mandi* means "half-sitting;" (with emphasis on the 'sitting'). With reference to the whole idiom of Bharatanatyam, this 'half-sitting' position is considered to be a *middle* level of movement operation. Unlike the ballet dancer, the Indian dancer's idiom does not utilize any move that rises onto the toes, thus a 'low' position spatially would necessarily involve a full bend of the legs in a "full-sitting" position, thus:
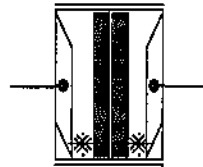
mandi

"In Bharatanatyam the dancer never uses the high level stance of ballet. The highest level used is 'middle position'. (Puri 1983: 160, quoted in Durr 1985: 73-75).

Like Bharatanatyam dancers, however, the Kathak dancer does not rise onto her toes, either "three-quarters" or full *sur la pointe* positions, but neither do they use the *mandi* or *ara mandi* positions.

Two of the main distinguishing features of Kathak in contrast to Bharatanatyam are the bell work and the stories of Radha and Krishna. Although a Baharatanatyam dancer wears a few bells on her ankles to enhance the rhythms and stamping of the feet, there is no bell-work that is comparable to the complexity and intricacy of Kathak's *tatkar*, *tukras* and *parans*. Also, fewer stories of Radha and Krishna appear in Bharatanatyam dancing.

The Krishna of the medieval period took on a curious ambivalence of character, combining superhuman characteristics of a spiritual teacher and god with a human lover, which is reflected in the figure of Krishna in the Kathak dance. Archer [1957: 92] might well be describing the essence of Lucknow Kathak when he says, "Adoration of God acquires the grace and charm of courtly loving, passionate

sensuality and all the refinement and nobility of a spiritual religion" (Lalli, this issue, page 101).

It is believed by some (this author included) that even today, Radha represents the human soul searching for the divine (Krishna). In Kathak, we find not only a vindication of human love, but the highest expression of the love themes of the milkmaid and her god. These are articulated musically through *ragas* (and dance-wise), through the *rasas* utilized by the dancer, explained in detail in the accompanying descriptions of a Kathak dance performance, thus no more will be said of them here. Instead, we will turn to some of the issues generated by the subject of authenticity.

Commercial Dancing

To his everlasting credit, Cole never wanted the type of dancing he created to be called "jazz," "Oriental dance," or any such label. Instead, he wanted it to be called "Broadway Commercial" or something akin to that. The N.Y. Times dance critic, Anna Kisselgoff, called Jack Cole's work "American Show Dancing" (Loney 1984: 15). It is unfortunate that these new categories are not widely used and accepted. "Commercial Dance," "American Show Dancing," or "Tourist Dance," are classifications that would considerably ease the enormous burden of distortion and appropriation placed upon authentic forms of dancing both at home and abroad.

So-called "Broadway Jazz" and "Oriental" or "Exotic dancing," as well as dances created for tourists have many things in common: they are commodified forms of the dance that are created, performed and marketed for the sole purpose of making money. These forms of dancing are designed to arouse enthusiasm, sexual stimulation, visual shock and excitement, and they reinforce popular, stereotyped images of the dancing (and dancers) of other cultures as well as our own.[22] Commercial dancing achieves many goals and fulfills many purposes:

> Cole's choreography was so radically different from typical club acts, that even somnolent drunks sat bolt upright to watch Cole and Dudley make the sparks fly up from the dance floor. . . . Audiences stared at Dudley and Cole in wonder. Some spectators were annoyed by the sounds of bare feet slapping on the polished floor, but, since Dutch Schultz liked Cole's work, who were they to protest?" (Loney 1984: 71).[23]

Moreover, images from pop music often assume embodied forms:

> The phrase "walk like an Egyptian" comes from an American pop song of the same name performed in the 1980s by a pop-music group, the Bangles. Upon hearing the song (or song title), high school students in California in 2002 immediately know what to do: they adopt a stereotypical two-dimensional "profile" position with arms extended, elbows and wrists bent at right angles, one arm up, one down. With alternate knees lifting and bending (also at right angles), they walk while rhythmically jerking their heads forward and back . . . . I doubt if anyone is aware of the exact origin of the stereotyped "Egyptian walking" movement . . . but I suggest that we put its origin into that familiar, but elusive discourse, "pop culture," which [produces] many strange and wonderful "impressions" (Franken 2002: 1).

In general, Tourist Dance serves to relax and entertain. Edward Bruner makes this point clearly in his laudable work on Indonesian tourism:

> What I wish to emphasize here is that the tourists voluntarily surrender control. . . . They become passive and dependent, and this is what gives them the feeling of relaxation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines surrender as 'to give oneself up into the power of another', as a prisoner, and this expresses my meaning in that tourists relinquish power over their actions for the duration of the tour (Bruner 1995: 237).

But, this is exactly the same thing that audiences of Oriental films, Tarzan films, "South Seas" movies and/or international dance festivals and nightclubs tend to do. Elsewhere, I have said,

> It is unfortunate that we do not have a similar convention of disclaimers (common to fictionalized characters in films) that says, "Any resemblance of the dancing in this film to actual dancing done by the peoples of 'X' is purely accidental and not intended to be taken as a real depiction of their dances, themselves or their culture" (Williams 2000: 356).

The creation of categories such as "Commercial Dance," "American Show Dance" and "Tourist Dance" would identify these kinds of dancing for what they are and the purposes for which they are created. It would permit *aficianados* of the form to give the choreographers and dancers the recognition they deserve minus somewhat tedious apologetics (see note 9).

Paying the Piper

Inside the dance world, there are many who know what it is like to dance in casinos, nightclubs, and commercial theatres. They are aware of the intellectual, emotional and spiritual price that choreographers and performers pay for doing so: "[Cole] seldom had major artistic control; instead, he had to tailor his contributions to the talents of others involved and to the whims of stars and producers" (Loney 1984: 20). In fact, Cole's biographer recognizes the essential problem: audiences and critics were not (and are not) sufficiently well-informed:

> There were few professional dance critics in the early 1930s when Cole first began to attract attention with his nightclub performances. John Martin and the late Walter Terry were, at that time, the best-known and the most widely respected of dance critics. Although they were mainly concerned with chronicling and critiquing the serious dance scene in America . . . Terry and Martin found time to see Cole in a supperclub performance. Their admiration for Cole's ingenuity, fantasy, intensity and astonishing technique is a matter of record. *They often felt, however, that Cole's amazing skills were in the service of dances—and perhaps audiences as well—that simply were not demanding enough.* Despite Cole's obvious brilliance, Terry occasionally wrote that he sensed something was missing (Loney 1984: 310 - italics are added).

He goes on to say that most of the reviewers who dealt with Cole's work were "critics who had little or no knowledge of dance. Their appreciation was genuine enough, but these critics were not well-informed" (*Ibid.* 311). Critics

were (and are) not alone; it is often the case that directors and producers of movies are as unknowledgeable about dance forms as their audiences.

Language Analogies and "Wannabees"

If people hear a conversation in Greek, a lecture in Italian, or observe two Native American sign-talkers exchanging information, without understanding Greek, Italian or Plains Indian sign-talk, they know they do not understand the conversation or the lecture. *They know that they do not know.* Similarly, people are not likely to attend ball games or chess tournaments if they don't understand the rules of the games. Yet, many are willing to watch dances, sign languages, rituals and ceremonies without understanding anything about them. As a result, the potential richness and meaning of the world is unobtainable to them. Hart-Johnson states one solution to this problem bluntly: "Laypeople," she says,

> must familiarize themselves with [a dance form's] 'code'—with its rules and meta-rules and the daily practices that constitute the kind of body language that it is. Until these are known, the meanings that can be transmitted through a single technique or idiom of movement—or for that matter through any system of body language—remains inaccessible (1997: 208-209).

One is reminded of Ninette de Valois, who opened a demonstration class at the Sadler's Wells School in March, 1954 by saying,

> Everyone who comes here strives to be a genius, whether they are potential dancers, choreographers or teachers. What they don't know is that genius in any field breaks rules. But, in order to break rules, you have to know them, and that's where one starts at Sadler's Wells—learning the rules. People who don't know rules *can't* break them. They waste a lot of time pretending (Williams 1999: 85).

We may ask, how does one recognize "pretenders" without sufficient knowledge of what one is seeing?

Dilworth (2002[1996]: 486) reminds her readers of "a long tradition of American fraternal and sororal organizations engaged in "playing Indian," appropriating and re-enacting various Native American cultural practices," citing Rayna Green (1988) and Philip. J. Deloria (1994).

> As much as the Smoki rhetoric emphasized the authenticity and seriousness of their performances, *they did not show respect for Hopi beliefs or cosmology* and the performances were, in fact, comic turns; as respectable members of the business elite, the Smokis played at being inferior savages (Dilworth 2002[1996]: 486, italics added).

This is not what Gina Lalli's portrayal of east Indian dances signifies, nor did Indians themselves reject or ridicule her performances.[34] Lalli (like Nala Najan, Ragini Devi, Gina Blau and Janaki Patrik), didn't "wannabee an Indian." She *did* want to be an Indian *dancer* of surpassing excellence who, through her dancing, exhibited respect for Hindu beliefs and cosmology. Having said that, we are finally in a position to address McLean's vital question: "How do we integrate what we learn with what we already "know" without reproducing the expected, the already legible, the stereotypical?" (1997: 151).

Knowers and the Known

The difficulty with this question is the assumption that there is something known about any given subject into which we can integrate new learning. If, however, we do not know (as in the case of Plains Sign Talk or the Greek or Italian languages) then integration is impossible, for there is nothing there with which to integrate new knowledge. Likewise, if what we know about Egyptians, consists mainly of popular icons and stereotypes ("walking like an Egyptian"), then we cannot integrate new learning about Egyptians (individually or as groups) into the stereotype without eradicating or discarding the stereotype—by seeing the stereotype for what it is.

If a spectator's conception of east Indian dancing consists of "Hindu routines," where indigenous cultural meanings were completely destroyed and where there is nothing "Hindu" about the costuming or the music, then authentic Indian dancing may well not be appealing, for such spectators are faced with having to learn something about the real world where authentic Indian dancing *does* take place. In such cases, spectators could start by becoming aware of the context in which they see a dance form. They could increase their knowledge about what it is they are seeing, for there are always greater authenticities available for anyone who cares to find them.

There are problems here as well that are tied to (a) the belief that *there is no prior authenticity* to which artistic constructions are related; (b) the anxiety that greater knowledge will lessen the enjoyment of artistic constructions (dance performances, films, paintings or whatever); and (c) the conviction that artistic constructions themselves exist in a vacuum. That is, dance performances, books, films, paintings, sculptures, etc. are thought *to have no connection with the "real world."* According to this doctrine (largely a result of the New Critics), they are constructions of artistic processes explainable only *in* themselves and *by* themselves—visual tautologies, as it were.

With regard to the dance, these ideas are well-reflected in current postmodern trends, where the medium of dancing (movement) is emphasized, rather than any meaning the dances might have.

> In the 1960s . . . a growing number of young dancers were no longer interested in making deeply meaningful statements or in artistic excellence as defined by the earlier generations of movers. They felt that most modern dances and ballets were overly emotional, idealistic, and elitist representations, having little to do with the experiences of the person in the street. Instead, the choreographers were, as the dance historian Sally Banes has written, engaged in finding "new ways to foreground the medium of dance rather than its meaning" (Banes, cited in Jackson 2000: 216).

Jackson also explains:

> In her introduction to *Terpsichore in Sneakers; Post Modern Dance*, Banes traces the connection of the Judson dancers to a larger trend away from meaning in art. "Sontag calls for a transparent art—and criticism—that will not 'mean,' but will illuminate and open the way for experience". . . . Banes points out that this "foregrounding of the medium" was attempted by challenging the "nature, history, and function of

dance as well as its structures. . . . The younger generation of choreographers showed in their dances that they departed not only from classical modern dance with its myths, heroes, and psychological metaphors, but also from the elegance of ballet" . . . . Choreographers . . . were engaged in saying no to everything that came before, claiming that you did not need to have virtuosic technique or use dramatic narratives in order to be a dancer or choreographer. You could be an ordinary person performing a simple task of moving a mattress from one spot to another. A person might run around in sneakers and sweatpants, spit on the floor, walk along a wall—and all that could be dance (Quotes from Banes, cited in Jackson 2000: 216).

Current Post-Modern Trends

Clearly, Selma Jean Cohen's idea of dancing only as movement fits these new post-modern representations very well [see pp. 78-79 this issue]. Not only does dancing consist of mindless movement, *sans* language and culture, it contains no concepts, ideas or meanings either.

Strictly speaking, one could not perform meaningful everyday moves in post-modern dances, for everyday gestures such as greeting friends, slapping someone's face, thumbing a ride, pointing to any location in space (to mention only a few), are all meaningful gestures. The whole indexical structure of visibility is irrevocably tied to human relationships and it partakes of meaning: "The structure of [human] action fans out from the center, the locus of *I* and *you*, to delineate where and when everything happens relative to the central actors: *he* and *she* versus *I* and *you, there* versus *here, then* versus *now*, present versus non-present (past or future)" (Urciouli 1995: 190). There is no such thing in human cultural life as pure, disembodied, physical movement.

In rejecting "virtuosic techniques," post-modernism of the Judson Theatre variety excludes any dance form in the world that displays such technique—including Bharatanatyam and Kathak, as well as that of Jack Cole, whose dancing required exceptional technical virtuosity, as does the dancing of other popular figures of the commercial dance world: Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelly and others.

All dance forms are indexically structured—as are all human action sign systems:

> Each time an index occurs, its terms depend on who the actor is being; that in turn depends on the relationship between everyone involved and what they are doing together there at that moment. The point that marks where and when *I* stand consists of an intersection of the social frame and cultural definition of a relationship and the particular events of the moment. . . . This is social action in Weber's [1978] sense; motivated, oriented toward others, and continually subject to interpretation. Defining *here* and *now* at any given moment is a social action, always dependent on the *I-you* relation. At every moment, the person is a cultural creation, which means in turn that indexicality is at every moment symbolically mediated (Urciuoli 1995: 192).

Proceeding from the account of an experience he had of a post-modern "dance" in the mid-seventies, David Best reveals the misconceptions inherent in current educational policies that apply equally well to the intensely subjectivist philosophical position assumed by post-modernists:

On a recent visit to North America I was told of a dance professor who refuses, as a matter of principle, to offer any teaching and to make any assessment of her students' work, on the grounds that to do so would be an illegitimate restriction on individual freedom of expression and development. She insists that there must be no such external 'imposition' of standards and techniques, but that each student should be free to develop in his own way, and to decide what is and what is not of artistic value. Hence she was able to raise no objection when some of her students, as their dance performance, simply sat on the floor of the studio eating [potato] crisps (Best 1982[1979]: 89).

This means that any teaching and performance of the arts are carried out *without any means of assessment*. Second, the techniques of a body language (similar to those of spoken languages) constitute the means through which we learn to see and understand the world on its own terms, therefore, the learning of bodily techniques does not *hinder* individual freedom of expression. Rather, such learning strengthens our ability to grasp the bodily skills required for the understanding of complex concepts and issues (*pace* Selma Jean Cohen).

It is easy to understand why young post-modernists "departed not only from classical modern dance" and "the elegance of ballet" and why they eventually "said no to everything that came before" (Jackson 2000: 216). The modern concert tradition established by Graham, Humpery-Weidman, Sokolow, Nagrin, Shurman, McKnight, Holm and others was daunting, as is classical ballet. The apprenticeship required was long: it may have seemed to them that everything had already been done, or that the "charmed circles" of their illustrious predecessors was impenetrable. Nevertheless, de Valois's statement regarding "the rules" remains true: creative innovators in the dance world (like their counterparts in painting and the other arts) are those who *conquer* the techniques offered by their particular expressive systems, for only by doing so can they transcend them.

It may be case that the criticisms I offer are too stringent: maybe the Judson Theatre dissidents didn't want to erase all meaning. Perhaps they simply wanted to emphasize the value of everyday movement, or, they wanted only to remove referential meanings from dances, rejecting the theory that symbolic movement invariably "stands for" something outside itself,[25] although I am unconvinced.

Finally, we may ask, what is the nature of the individuality and creativity that current art discourse wants to promote? Anthropologically speaking, the advocates of no technique and no meaning fail to recognize the extent to which a person's individuality depends upon the sociolinguistic nature of the society in which he or she lives. While it is true that a society is composed of individuals, it is equally true that each individual's personality is dependent on the language and practices of that society. As Best asserts: "by that I mean that no sense could be made of the notion of the individual apart from that language and those practices" (1982: 92).

Certainly, Jack Cole was not, nor is Gina Lalli, a post-modernist. Cole developed a way of dancing that was appropriated from east Indian, African-American, and Balinese dance forms:

It seems to me that he had an image of a perfect dancer and a perfect technique—everything else was secondary. He understood (and developed) a certain technique of *movement*, but he never really created *a dance*. Spider Kedelsky (a contemporary and sometime 'disciple' of Cole's who had to quit dancing because of knee injuries) . . . is convinced that he really had established no dance categories other than good dancing and bad dancing (Loney 1984: 346).

Gina Lalli is an American who has spent a life-time studying and performing two of India's many classical dance forms. Her work is the "greater authenticity" that is available to anyone who cares to look for it. To someone whose conception of east Indian dancing is based upon Hollywood's Orientalism, her work might be viewed as "strange," because it does not conform to the shadowy images produced by *Kismet* (William Dieterle, 1944; Vincente Minnelli, 1955). Nor would Lalli's dancing have been favorably received by Denishawn:

> In Delhi where still other dancers danced for us, my thoughts turned to Vanda Hoff, who made her debut in the Denishawn company and later starred in vaudeville in an act called 'The Dancing Girl of Delhi'. In loveliness, charm and real ability what infinite worlds above the real dancing girls of Delhi was our Vanda! (Shawn 1929: 99).

Endnotes:

[1] Although "Broadway Jazz" has been identified as "Black-American" by its association with jazz in general, it has little, if anything, to do with African-Americans or their dancing. Most African-Americans reject the Broadway jazz style created by Cole (and imitated, with variations, by Busby Berkeley, Eugene Loring, Bob Fosse, Spider Kedelsky, Matt Mattox and others). They deny any connection with it, because it has nothing to do with their dance forms. The major reason is that Broadway Jazz is in no way improvisational—a hallmark of African-American jazz music and dancing. For more discussion of African-American jazz music and dancing, see Malone (1996). [Personal communication, Jonathan David Jackson, October 6, 2002].

[2] [McLean's note]: Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988: 130. For more on the meaning and intensity of the lure of the "aura of Egypt" at this time, see Antonia Lant's essay (1997).

[3] McLean remarks: "Certainly Shawn "found" the Orient he expected to find, that he wanted to find; huge areas were therefore blocked from his field of vision . . . . Yet neither Shawn nor St. Denis ever really claimed that their oriental dance was anything more than pastiche, adaptation, a picking and choosing of the most dazzling *theatrical* effects" (1997: 135, italics added).

[4] The *hastas* are the hand gesture vocabulary of South Indian dancing. See Puri (1997: 187-192) for more complete discussion, and movement texts of the gestures.

[5] "Cole was interested in styleless dance, an almost abstracted training of the body" [Loney 1984: 347], and "Walter Terry also came to realize: "The heart of the matter was *Jack!* The core was *him*—and what he did, integrating all this dance material" [*Ibid.* 348]. The

problem is, of course, that Indian dancing without the mood, the *ragas* and *rasas*, stories and sacred content is nothing but glorified gymnastics. It lacks the honesty of gymnastics.

[6] Many people would have problems with an adapted, appropriated form of tap-dancing that attempted to reproduce the form in bare feet, perhaps, in a Grecian drapery or some other inappropriate costume, but few in Cole's time seemed to have problems with the authenticity of Indian dances performed in high-heeled shoes, tights, leotards or "jazzy costumes," with exaggerated, speeded-up gestures, having no connection at all with their original meanings and mood. Moreover, Cole's "Hindu jazz" was performed in "harem" costumes that were not Indian costumes, and Cole's costuming had little to do with what women or men wore in real harems either, since films such as 'Kismet' were simply another expression of Hollywood Orientalism and Commercialism.

[7] For example, Madelyn Taylor (Greek dancing), or Mary Jo Freshly (South Korean dancing), and several dancers, now deceased, from New York: Mara (Javanese dancing), Sophia Delza (Chinese Operatic dancing), and Nala Najan, Ragini Devi and Gina Blau (Bharatanatyam). Janaki Patrik, a former Kathak student of Lalli's, has become a student of Birju Maharaj for advanced training.

[8] A very important question, to which we shall return later.

[9] "There are some dance purists who wouldn't award Jack Cole many points for his contributions to popular entertainment . . . Cole may have preferred a Columbia sound stage to Carnegie Hall, but that did not mean that his work and his dedication as a dancer or choreographer was any less serious" (Loney 1984: 13). Serious though his work may have been, to attach the label "purist" to those who understand authentic dance forms from whatever culture is misleading. In the American dance world, "purist" is nearly equivalent to the derogatory word, "elitist," about which more will be said later.

[10] Lalli was born in Binghamton, New York near the beginning of the great Depression. She first became aware of Indian philosophy and religion at age eleven, but was unable to study Indian dancing until she went to New York at age eighteen. She studied with several people in New York before going to India the first time (September, 1955), but, of those with whom she studied, she treasures the teaching of Nala Najan, an American who studied with the Indian master, Meenakshi Sundaram. Nala Najan taught her authentic *adavus* (a dance combination—a segment of "pure dance" that has no story content). In India, students must learn at least forty of these. Lalli learned eighty. Chokkalingam was so impressed with her knowledge that she was able to start learning *padams* (story dances) almost immediately with him. It usually takes about six months (because of having to learn *adavus*) for a student to arrive at studying *padams*.

[11] The name Bharatanatyam (the dance form from south India most familiar to Europeans and Americans) is a combination of the name of a sage, 'Bharata' who lived *circa* 400 BCE and *natya* (theatre). The date is disputed, but Lalli chose 400 BCE because of her Sanskrit teacher at the University of Pennsylvania. The *natyam* part of the name is taken from the phrase *Natya Shastra*, which can be defined as 'dance-drama'. Bharatanatyam is mainly concerned with the god, Shiva.

[12] The name, 'Kathak' comes from an old word, '*Kataka*' that refers to a story-teller of the gods in the old Hindu temples before the Moghul invasions that started in the 9th century and continued more or less one city at a time through the 18th century. When the dance form began, people simply dropped the final 'a', calling it Kathak. It is a north Indian form, and

very different with regard to use of space, posture, gesture and facial expression from Bharatanatyam. Also, rather than Shiva, Kathak is mainly concerned with Krishna (one of the nine incarnations of Vishnu) and to a lesser extent, Rama (also an incarnation of Vishnu).

[13] "In Madras a group of dance and music scholars fought the anti-*nautch* movement attempting to demonstrate that far from being immoral, the dance was an intrinsic part of Indian aesthetic, philosophical and religious beliefs and practices. In the early nineteen-thirties this group created a furor among the educated upper classes by presenting Sadir Nac on the urban secular stage. In spite of initial resistance these scholars were eventually successful. After about twenty years young girls from respected families began to study Sadir Nac and to present it to more receptive audiences in Madras" (Puri 1997: 173). Rukmini Devi was part of this movement. She established a school near Madras called Kalakshetra, that is still in existence.

[14] [Puri's Note]: This Divinity's name is also frequently spelled 'Shiva'.

[15] [Puri's Note]: Specific information about the spatial relationships between dancer, deity and audience in the rituals of Tanjore *devadasis* is not available, but it is likely that the dancer stood to the right of the deity, facing the audience. In Indian temples the deity's image usually faces east, and in the few extant dances that are addressed to the guardians of the eight corners of the universe, 'east' is always towards the audience, i.e. the direction in which the image of the deity faces. On the other hand, when addressing a deity during a dance, the dancer's gestures are directed to a point straight in front of her body but *behind* the audience, while gestures addressing spectators are directed towards the two front diagonals.

[16] This is a point worth making in this context because one of these traditions, Kathakali (*only* from the state of Kerala on the western side of India), is often confused in conversation with Kathak because of the similarity of the sound of the names.

[17] Kathakali dances consist of twelve-hour-long performances of dance-dramas about gods, heroes, demons and such. The costuming is elaborate and ponderous — some of the costumes having thirty or forty over-skirts that weigh from thirty-five to forty pounds. Elaborate masks and make-up is used, and at one time, only men could perform these dances. Now, women can play women's parts in the dance-dramas, but long and arduous training is required for any aspirant to this form.

[18] There are, of course, many more Indian dances than are listed here — all of the tribal dances, for instance; and traditions such as Kandyan Dance from Sri Lanka (Hockings 2003), but space prevents recognizing all of them, even by name.

[19] "Strictly speaking, *abhinaya* carries the sense of 'communication' or 'the bringing forth of meaning'. It is also used to describe the various mediums of expression used by the actor, i.e. *angika-abhinaya* (*abhinaya* through the body and limbs), *vacaka-abhinaya* (the *abhinaya* of speech and sound, *aharya-abhinaya* (*abhinaya* of inner mental states or 'sentiments'). Although dance scholars through the ages have attempted to analyze the many meanings of the term *abhinaya*, they have reached no definitive consensus on its 'proper' significance. For most dancers and teachers of Bharatanatyam, *abhinaya* refers to the mime elements of dances in which facial expressions and hand gestures in particular are used to convey dramatic, narrative and spoken language meanings. In this latter simple sense, it is opposed to *nrtta* movements which are devoid of those kinds of meaning. Both

abhinaya and *nrtta* are included in *nrtya*, the word that is closest to the idea of 'dance' in India. And, *nrtya* is the main vehicle of *natya* (theatre)" (Puri 1997: 179).

[20] For example, although Jack Cole did some work with Uday Shankar—an authentic exponent of Bharatanatyam—he also studied with La Meri and others who did not know or perform authentic Indian dances.

[21] In putting the movements he learned to 'jazz' music, Cole demolished the elements of *raga* and *rasa*, without which the movements cease to be Indian dancing.

[22] From an aspiring performer's point of view, for example, learning "Broadway Commercial" dancing provides the possibility of getting a job, where the study of authentic African-American jazz dancing does not.

[23] "In December, 1933, when prohibition came to an end, Cole danced with a partner, Alice Dudley, at the Embassy Club in New York: "There was a need for flash and glitter, for entertainment that dazzled, but which didn't discourage drinking. . . . Mobster Dutch Schultz ran the Embassy, and he obviously respected Cole's energy and seeming toughness" (Loney 1984: 70).

[24] Lalli has received critical acclaim in India: "The part of the demoness Putana was excellently played by Miss Lalli" (*Nava Bharat*, New Delhi). "The purity of lines and precision of movements were reminiscent of the Pandanallur style. . . . The Kathak style accentuated her soft and graceful personality as she rendered certain movements with *eclat* . . . She performed all the criss-cross rhythms of the *laya* in Tatkar and Tukras with confidence. Her Parans were notable for their finesse" (*Times of India*, Bombay). "Brilliant Kathak by American Artiste: Her genuine regard and love for Indian dance imparted a grace to her steady progress of movement . . . uncommon control over *laya* (cross-rhythm) and accuracy of time-measure. . . . She could nicely interpret the stories and justified her claim as a Kathak dancer" (*Amrit Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta).

[25] These points were drawn to my attention by Dr. Brenda Farnell. I am grateful for them, however, further research will produce evidence of whether or not these ideas entered into post-modernist considerations. The matter cannot be adequately dealt with here, and must wait for subsequent treatment.

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