Dance*

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Cultural forms that result from the creative use of human bodies in time and space are often glossed in the anthropological literature as dance, but the word carries preconceptions that tend to mask the importance and usefulness of analyzing the movement dimensions of human action and interaction. In many societies there is no category comparable to the Western concept; in the past decade the dance purview of interested anthropologists has been enlarged to encompass all structured movement systems, including, but not limited to, systems associated with religious and secular ritual, ceremony, entertainment, martial arts, sign languages, sports, and play. What these systems share is that they result from creative processes that manipulate 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.

Structured movement systems occur in all known human societies. They 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 by a group of people and primarily preserved in memory. Although 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. An ideal movement study of a society or social group analyzes all activities and cultural forms 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. What is it, for example, that makes it possible for Westerners to classify ballet, square dancing, the waltz, and rock and roll together but separate these movement systems from ice skating, cheerleading, and church processionals, which are not considered dancing? Is it the content, context, or both that blur the classification boundaries?

In anthropological fieldwork a researcher should attempt to study all human movement that formalizes the nonformal in order to elucidate what the movement dimensions of various activities are communicating and to whom. Research should delineate similarities and differences in the movement dimensions and their contexts, how these dimensions are regarded and

categorized, and how the components are grouped or separated. Patterns in the social uses of movement and how movement is used to create meaning in a specific society should also be determined. What are the relationships among movements of ritual, specially marked and elaborated movement activities, martial arts, sign languages, everyday life, ceremony, and the systems of knowledge in which they are embedded? What do individuals find meaningful in these activities and relationships, and what are cultural conceptions of human movement?

A variety of definitions of dance have been proposed by researchers. Judith Lynne Hanna (1979) defines dance as "human behavior composed, from the dancer's perspective, of purposeful, intentionally rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of nonverbal body movement other than ordinary motor activities, the motion having inherent and aesthetic value." Joann W. Kealiinohomoku (1976a) defines dance as "a transient art of expression, performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space. Dance occurs through purposefully selected and controlled rhythmic movements; the resulting phenomenon is recognized as dance both by the performer and the observing members of a given group." In this article the term "dance" refers to specially marked or elaborated movement systems that result from creative processes that manipulate human bodies in time and space in such a way that movement is formalized and intensified in much the same manner as poetry intensifies and formalizes language. Often the process of performing is as important as the cultural form produced. These specially marked movement systems may be considered art, work, ritual, ceremony, entertainment, or any combination of these, depending on the society and context. A person may perform the same or a similar movement sequence, consisting of grammatically structured movement motifs, as a ritual supplicant, a political act, an entertainer, or an ethnic identity marker. Thus, the same movement sequence may be meant to be decoded differently if performed for the gods, a human audience, or as a participant for fun. An individual's background and understanding of a particular performance as well as the individual's mental and emotional state at the time will also affect the meaning.

Choreographers, performers, and viewers are socially and historically placed individuals who operate according to sociocultural conventions and aesthetic systems. For example, the movement dimension of a Balinese religious festival conveys certain information to specific supernatural beings in order to obtain specific ends. The same movement sequences performed on a secular stage will convey different artistic and aesthetic meanings to a human audience, and reactions to these dances will vary depending on whether the viewer is from the dancer's own village, a Balinese from a different village, an Indonesian who is not Balinese, a non-Indonesian who understands the specific movement form through study or participation, or a non-Indonesian who knows little or nothing about this cultural form.

Specially marked or elaborated and grammatically structured human movement may convey meaning by mime, dramatic realism, story telling, metaphor, or with abstract conventions. The movements may be signs,

symbols, or signifiers, in any combination. Essentially, movements are cultural artifacts that convey the idea that these movements belong to a specific culture or subculture or that a specific type of movement is being activated for a particular purpose. Movement sequences may be audience-oriented to admire as art or work, they may be participatory to be enjoyed as entertainment, they may make political or social statements, they may bring religious ecstasy or trance, and they may be performed as a social duty. Movements given by the gods and ancestors may be perpetuated as cultural artifacts and aesthetic performances even if their meanings have been changed or forgotten as reference points for ethnic or cultural identity.

In order to understand movement, the performer and observer must have "competence." Competence or knowledge about a specific dance tradition is acquired in much the same way as competence in a language. Competence relates to the cognitive learning of the shared rules of a specific dance tradition, just as Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of language is acquired. Competence enables the beholder to understand a grammatical movement sequence never seen before. Performance refers to an actual rendering of a movement sequence and assumes that the performer has a level of competence and the skill to carry it out. The concept of competence-performance has been refined by sociolinguists and discourse analysts. Dell Hymes posits rules for performance as well as grammar in what he calls "communicative competence." Mikhail Bakhtin makes an analogy between utterances and movement sequences, and if one does not know the movement conventions, one will not have communicative competence and will be unable to understand what is being conveyed. Dance is not a universal language. In addition to movement meaning, meaning in a larger sense (e.g., symbolic or narrative) is not inherent in movement itself. Meaning is attributed to movement by people who are part of the larger activity and depends on knowledge of the cultural system, such as male and female roles in movement, social status, social structure, and access to politics and power.

Movement is notated in the dance literature, and increasingly in anthropological literature, by using Labanotation, or Kinetography Laban, as it is called in Europe, an international system for notating movement created by Rudolf von Laban in the 1920s. Benesh notation, originally devised for notating ballet, is also applicable to other dance forms. Computers are also used for movement notation and data control, and the use of film or video helps in analysis and memory.

Anthropological interpretations of dance have evolved and changed along the same lines as general anthropological theory. The collection, organization, and analysis of data according to the basic tenets of the time, followed by the dissatisfaction of subsequent analysts with the data, is as characteristic of dance as of other fields of anthropology. Although many anthropologists have ignored the importance of human movement and the body through which movement occurs, others have found that focusing on body movement could help explicate basic cultural values. Although the founders of anthropology occasionally mentioned dance, there are only a few anthropologists before 1950 whose work on dance need be considered. Franz Boas was a fieldworker

par excellence, concerned with data collection and the empirical tradition, and his orientation offered a scope for analyzing dance as culture rather than using dance data to fit theories and generalizations. He insisted that dance be looked at in the context of the individual society. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1922), in his study of the Andaman Islanders, brings in dance throughout his monograph, describing movements, ceremonies in which they are used, and their social function. E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1928) published an analysis of one Azande dance, and noted "it requires a stereotyped form, a prescribed mode of performance, concerted activities, recognized leadership, and elaborate organization and regulation. If these problems are not in the mind of the observer he will give us an interesting description perhaps, but not a detailed account of great value to the theoretical worker." In contrast to the more empirical American and British schools, Curt Sachs published his *Eine Weltgeschichte des Tanzes* (World History of Dance) in 1933 as a theoretical treatise in which dance was used as an example of the *Kulturkreis* (culture circles) theories of Wilhelm Schmidt and Fritz Graebner, in which worldwide diffusion resulted in a form of unilineal evolution. Translated into English in 1937, it was long used as a definitive study of dance, but as Sachs's theory has since been put to rest, so should his book.

Since 1950, there have been many more anthropologists studying dance. Marcel Mauss (1950) discusses the notion of the body and its movements in cross-cultural perspective. Gertrude Prokosch Kurath analyzed the content of dances so they could be related to their cultural background and in 1960 published her pioneering "Panorama of Dance Ethnology." Alan Lomax (1968) attempted to describe distinctive patterns of body movement and interaction by comparing and classifying dance styles cross-culturally, a method known as choreometrics. Lomax's grand scheme for an evolutionary taxonomy of culture was based on coding dance from viewing films, from which he concluded "that dance style varies in a regular way in terms of the level of complexity and the type of subsistence activity of the culture which supports it." Anthropologists who work on human movement studies, however, have found Lomax's study unacceptable (Kealiinohomoku 1974, 1991; Williams 1974; Youngerman 1974). The intellectual descendants of the Boasian tradition in the study of dance include Kealiinohomoku (1976a, 1976b) and Anya Peterson Royce (1977). The British tradition was elaborated by John Blacking and Andrée Grau, whose special concerns were understanding the nature of dance cross-culturally based on the "thinking moving body" (Grau 1993). Other British social anthropology perspectives can be found in *Society and the Dance: The Social Anthropology of Performance and Process* (Spencer 1985).

Anthropologists from both sides of the Atlantic, using analogies from linguistics, have advanced the anthropological study of dance from the perspective of structural analysis. A focus on dance structure goes back to the studies of Hungarian dance by Gyorgy Martin and Erno Pesovar and was elaborated and systematized by a group of Eastern European scholars under the aegis of the International Folk Music Council, now known as the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), which published their syllabus in 1975. Meanwhile, Adrienne L. Kaeppler (1967, 1993b), using

linguistic analogies to analyze Polynesian materials, examined movements, choreographies, and social action to find an underlying system. Noting that movement systems cannot be observed but exist in memory and are recalled primarily as movement motifs and imagery, indigenous theories about movement are activated to create compositions that produce social and cultural meaning in performance. Kaeppler's methodology was used as a basis for an analysis of style by Irene Loutzaki (1989) and improvisation by Frank Hall (1985). Work on structural analysis is still part of the ICTM Ethnochoreology Study Group (Nahachewsky 1993). Linguistic analogies were also used by Drid Williams (1991), who built a theory of human actions focusing on the semantics of human body languages called semasiology. These concepts were used by Brenda M. Farnell (1990) to analyze Plains Indian sign language and by Rajika Puri (1983) to investigate the place of *hasta mudra* (hand gestures) in Indian dance.

Communication, emotion, and the psychobiological basis of dance has been investigated by Hanna (1979) from an etic perspective, while Christine Loken-Kim (1989) investigated the representation of emotion in dance emically by examining sentiment terms used by Korean women to evaluate dance and first-person accounts of their lives. Other human movement studies focus on gender (Cowan 1990; Hanna 1988), the negotiation of tradition (Kaeppler 1993a), Cartesian mind-body dualism (Farnell 1995; Varela 1992), martial arts (Lewis 1992), iconography (Seebass 1991), tourism (Sweet 1985), urban multiculturalism (Ness 1992), and understanding American culture (Novak 1990). The aim of anthropological works on human movement is not simply to understand dance in its cultural context, but to understand society through analyzing movement systems. Anthropologists are interested in meaning, intention, and cultural evaluation, in the activities that generate movement systems, how and by whom they are judged, and how study of movement can assist in understanding society.

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