

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

With this issue JASHM begins its third volume and also enters its fifth year of publication. While four years is a short period in the life of a journal, to those who have been involved in its production from the outset, the completion of two volumes does seem significant -- if only of the fact that the enterprise has been well and truly launched. Instead of worrying about how (and even if) a group of graduate students could put together, type, xerox, and then circulate a journal without having any money to spend, and while simultaneously fulfilling the rigorous demands of academic course-work, more time is now spent wondering about what the next issue should look like. Consequently I am delighted to be invited to comment on these developments.

The shift in focus from whether it can be done to how best it should be done has been due in part to the generosity of the Office for Student Activities at New York University which, through the Society for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement (SASHM), has sponsored the production of the last six issues. It is also due to the simple fact that there have been more people involved. Apart from the editors named on the front of each issue (and there have been four different student editors in all working in concert with the faculty editor) indispensable contributions have been made by a dedicated 'treasurer-cum-fund-finder', various 'publishers', and numerous collaters and distributors, all of whom are also members of SASHM.

The development of this journal, then, has been closely related to the establishment of SASHM. From its beginnings as a small, ad-hoc group which met three times in 1979, the society has become a full-fledged student organization at this university, and now holds at least six seminars a term. Official recognition has meant both an increase in membership and access to funds, some of which are used to subsidize the publication costs of the journal, but most of which go towards broadening the scope of the society's activities. For example, it is possible to invite senior scholars, as well as colleagues, from outside the university to present papers and discuss issues of common interest. In the last four years seminars have been given by several distinguished speakers. Anthropologists like Mary Douglas, Edward Schieffelin and André Iteanu have dealt with topics as diverse as food in England and the ritual body of the Orokaiva. Others, such as Adrienne Kaeppler, Jill Sweet and Najwa Adra, whose work focuses on movement systems in particular, have spoken about dance in Tonga and the Yemen, and on the vicissitudes of becoming an anthropologist by way of an initial involvement with the study of dance. Noted members of the field of dance education, such as Allegra Fuller Snyder and Marcia Leventhal, talked about their work on cross-cultural understandings of the dance, and on models useful to dance therapy treatment in the United States, respectively. Among graduate students from other campuses who presented work that was directly related to the interests of this society are Daniel O'Connor (on the world of ballet dancers), Diane Freedman ('Dance as a Metaphor of Social Structure in Rural Romania') and Lee Ellen Friedland, who offered many insights into Birdwhistell's theory of communication, with particular reference to Kinesics.

The inter-disciplinary nature of the society's concerns is reflected by the fact that papers have been given by psychologists, psychotherapists, linguists, sociologists and philosophers, as well as by non-academic professionals, such as dance notators, practitioners of Ideokinesis and dance critics. The contributions of Charles Varela and Nancy Frishberg are specially acknowledged here because apart from offering the society the benefit of their own thinking on issues that are central to an anthropology of human movement, they spend much time guiding the efforts of less seasoned speakers as well. The knowledge that Dr. Varela is very likely to zero in regarding the epistemological implications of some supposedly innocent statement induces many presentors to give special attention to the claims they make!

Society members are no less prone to challenge ideas offered for their consideration, whether by fellow members or by visiting scholars. The stimulating discussions thus produced in no small way contribute to the final versions of these papers. But lest we sound like a bunch of over-zealous academic myopics, it should be noted that the society has also been involved in the community life that surrounds it. A few SASHM events have been organized to include members of the local population. John Crystal addressed a surprisingly large number of graduates, undergraduates and many faculty members from all over the university on the myths of the job market; Lisa Evers of the Guardian Angels presented a very useful lecture-demonstration on street survival techniques for women, which was attended by many people from the neighborhood. The society's involvement with the Guardian Angels stems not only from an admiration of their roles as protectors and benefactors of the community, but also from recognition that much of the Angel's culture includes a shared movement code. Several seminar sessions with members of this group culminated in a special issue of JASHM (Vol.2 No.1) devoted to an ethnographic report on them.

Written versions of many of the earlier mentioned seminars and presentations have already been published in JASHM (see the Index to Volumes 1 and 2 on p. 5 below); others, it is hoped, will be completed for publication in the future. As is appropriate for a student enterprise, a good half of SASHM sessions are the outcome of graduate level work. Of the thirty odd original papers and review articles published so far, two-thirds have been written by student members of the Society. It is thus gratifying to note the interest this journal has aroused, not only in the United States, but also abroad. Although the subscription list is modest in size, the libraries that carry JASHM are located all over the American continent and even across the Atlantic.

Given the great distances that separate readers, one begins to appreciate the importance of the journal in establishing communication among those who are interested in this subject. Indeed, as SASHM members themselves leave this campus and are dispersed around the globe, the need for this forum becomes more acute. From its beginnings as a partial record of dialogue and discussion that could be conducted orally and in the same room every fortnight, the journal is likely to become for many of its adherents the only means of continuing these kinds of debates and of disseminating the results of future research.

Even valuable work done before the establishment of the journal has been acknowledged in the form of articles and reviews that had been previously published elsewhere. The assistance lent by the authors of these writings in securing permission to reprint is appreciated, also because it implies an encouragement of this effort.

It thus seems appropriate at the beginning of this new volume not only to review the past eight issues and the activities which led to the papers contained in them, but also to give some thought to the future. While one hopes that the society will continue its activities on this campus, given the dispersal of many of its present members (including its faculty advisor) to academic communities as far removed from New York as Indiana, Michigan and even Guam, it has been useful to reconsider the present dependence on SASHM activities at New York University. The very geographical spread of readership and of its founding membership directs one to question the advisability of tying the future of the journal to a requirement that its producers reside at a single location. The community that this enterprise represents has to do with ideas, and ideas can be transmitted across large physical distances.

The logistics of publication and distribution when editors are at one (or even two) removes from each other as also from the location of actual publication perhaps requires some re-organization of present systems. It is, however, desirable to stay with the current physical format. Given that the editors are often typists, proof readers, collaters, distributors and correspondence secretaries, as well as readers and selectors of papers, it would be a pity to allocate additional time and energy to the production of a more attractive volume at the expense of editorial tasks that effect the content of each issue. Also, the present semi-professional format is appropriately modest and should be maintained, at least until such time as there is a sufficient number of full-fledged scholars willing to produce a more conventional looking academic journal, if then.

A shift in the spatial sense from the so far parochial bent of the journal will probably be salutary. As readership and interest grow, the journal hopes to attract a larger range of contributions from a variety of sources. If it seems that some writers are over-represented in the last two volumes, this is because all too often the core supporters of the effort have had to burn midnight oil in order to produce an article to replace one that was promised, but which somehow never arrived in time. Readers must not only be urged to contribute, they should also be assured that the journal aspires to represent a diverse set of views within the general fields of anthropology and human movement research.

Surely the recent debates between Margolis and Sheets-Johnstone on the one 'side' and Varela, Best and Williams on the other demonstrate the vitality and thought-provoking discussion produced by opposing points of view. Preaching to the converted is, in the end, an unrewarding enterprise. Being exposed to cogently expressed arguments that lead one to modify one's own strongly held beliefs (or at least to address any valid objections) is, I would have thought, the point

of it all. So in conjunction with soliciting original papers, perhaps space should be allocated to shorter commentaries, and letters, or in other words, for 'dialogue' and 'discussion' conducted on the written page.

Meanwhile, one notes that this issue is in a sense an assertion of the intention to continue publication, particularly since the main contributors are also current working members for this periodical. Future issues will include Friedland's exegesis of the work of a major figure in the field of movement research, Ray Birdwhistell, as well as essays on the compilation of ethnic minority dances in China, and on how not to study dance in Micronesia. Other topics likely to be covered are the implications of recent developments in Japanese Kyogen theater, and the world view of a dancer from the Martha Graham company.

The specific output of a journal of this kind is often not so much a question of what it should or could be, but what it is depends on the interests of those who contribute to it. One can only hope, therefore, that an increase in active readership will over time broaden the scope of this undertaking until it really begins to realize the immense diversity of the data base covered by the rubric 'systems of human movement'.

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