

LOOKING BACK

Along with the new year of 1986, an important book has emerged in the field of human movement studies: Theatrical Movement: A Bibliographical Anthology, edited by Bob Fleshman, Loyola University, New Orleans), published by Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, New Jersey. It is primarily a reference book for libraries. Its cost (although reasonable, given today's inflated prices) will be prohibitive for many individuals (approximately \$60 - \$65, including tax), especially graduate students. Its value, however, is really inestimable, for in spite of its defects (many of which are noted by Fleshman in the Preface) readers will find structured lists of references, information, commentaries, observations and critical evaluations of the literature of human movement studies which appear in no other volume on the subject. For that, both Fleshman and the publisher are to be thanked.

It will be interesting to monitor the kinds of reception this book gets. One wonders, for example, if critics will take into account the enormity of the undertaking, and its ultimate impossibility, as conceived:

In the execution of such a bibliographical guide, there are several main difficulties related to the nature of the literature being covered. The problems are especially acute when dealing with other cultures, but they run through all areas of study. First, the state of scholarship is not equally developed in all areas. A good example of this can be seen by comparing the sections on the Middle East and Asia. The indigenous forms in the Middle East to a great extent have been flattened by the impact of Western influence, and only very recently have there been attempts to rediscover and develop those original sources. Because of a cultural bias against representational arts and especially ones using the human body as a medium of expression, little scholarly work has been done in the area of movement performance, and of that, even less has found its way into Western publications. Asia, on the other hand, is composed of many cultures that have practiced many forms of theatrical arts for many centuries; the amount of scholarship has been great both in Asia and in the West (Fleshman, Preface, p. xi).

The continent of Africa is represented in two sections: "Western Asia and North Africa" (Chapters 18-24), and "Africa" (including the entire remaining geographical land mass and its profusion of peoples) by one chapter -- and one author -- a feature of imbalance of presentation that will surely be noticed. "Second", the author says, "the natures of the literature of a particular area of study

varies according to the purpose and the audience, forming various groupings of literature, ranging from popular magazine articles to detailed scholarly works for other scholars. These groupings must be understood if they are to be of value in a bibliographical anthology. Third, a literary work is the product not only of an individual with special interests, but of a person working within a particular discipline. Each discipline holds special points of view and methods, and the various disciplines are not necessarily obligated to be wholly compatible with one another ... No matter how much we might secretly wish for a comprehensive scholarly work of carefully aligned information such a publication is not possible for this work. The present work must content itself to be a simple guide, nowhere near a comprehensive one, to further study and work in the areas of human movement and performance. It gets us soundly started on the first leg of a journey ... " (Fleshman, Unedited Preface, relates to p.xi).

One wonders, too, if the situation this statement alludes to will be fully comprehended. Usually, it is not, and because the vision which prompted the effort to encompass a global survey of the field is reasonable on the face of it, the difficulties were not obvious in the planning stages. Yet,

The original shape of the project had a much larger vision and was to include a more expansive coverage of the great variety of Euro-American performance forms with some emphasis on the developing 'theatre of movement', detailed coverage of movement training techniques, a rounded study of dance as a theatrical art form, and a more complete investigation of studies in the human sciences as they relate to theatrical movement. However, as the work progressed, it became obvious that it would have to be limited to preliminary studies. With much anxiety, the scope was trimmed and the framework tightened (Fleshman, Preface, p. xii).

The "trimmed scope" and "tightened framework" can be seen, in outline, in the list of contents, reproduced below:

PART ONE. PRELIMINARY STUDIES

- Chapter 1. 'Meaning in Artistic Movement: The Objective and the Subjective'.
- Chapter 2. 'Contemporary Approaches to Movement Training for Actors in the U.S.'
- Chapter 3. 'The Commedia dell'Arte and the Mime'.
- Chapter 4. 'On the Meaning of Mime and Pantomime'.
- Chapter 5. 'Body Language and Nonverbal Communication'.
- Chapter 6. 'Systems of Dance/Movement Notation'.
- Chapter 7. 'Body Systems'.
- Chapter 8. 'Toward a Cognitive Psychology of Human Movement'.
- Chapter 9. '(Non) Anthropologists, the Dance and Human Movement'.

PART TWO. MOVEMENT PERFORMANCE OF OTHER CULTURES

- Chapter 10. 'Asian Performance: General Introduction'.
- Chapter 11. 'South Asian Performance'.
- Chapter 12. 'Southeast Asian Performance'.
- Chapter 13. 'East Asian Performance: Japan'.
- Chapter 14. 'East Asian Performance: China'.
- Chapter 15. 'East Asian Performance: Korea'.
- Chapter 16. 'Asian Martial Arts and Performance'.
- Chapter 17. 'Asian Puppet Theatre and Human Motion'.

(Subsection: WESTERN ASIA AND NORTH AFRICA)

- Chapter 18. 'Introduction to Section'.
- Chapter 19. 'Theatre in Turkey'.
- Chapter 20. 'Theatrical Movement of the Arabs'.
- Chapter 21. 'Development of Theatre in Iran'.
- Chapter 22. 'Drama and Theatre in the Russian East'.
- Chapter 23. 'Theatrical Movement in the Hebrew Theatre'.
- Chapter 24. 'Bibliographical Supplement'.

(Subsection: AFRICA)

- Chapter 25. 'Movement in African Performance'.

(Subsection: OCEANIA)

- Chapter 26. 'Movement in the Performing Arts of the Pacific Islands'.
- Chapter 27. 'Australian Aboriginal Theatrical Movement'.

(Subsection: NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS, LATIN AMERICAN INDIANS, ESKIMO)

- Chapter 28. 'Native American Dance and Drama'.
- Chapter 29. 'Dance and Drama-Dance of Latin American Indians'.
- Chapter 30. 'Eskimo Performance'.

Anthropologically, this list of titles, taken as loose subject-headings, and as a set of classifications and categories, is itself fascinating, but it is not the purpose of this essay to embark on a critical analysis of these, or of the contents of the Anthology; rather, it is an attempt to discover features of the conception, process and manifestation of the work that are of interest.

The volume was seven years in the making: seven years from the Editor's initial approach to the many authors represented until its completion. It is not often that a Journal's readership is privileged to look "behind the scenes" or to gain the wisdom of hindsight into a project of this kind, but JASHM's readership has been singled out for special consideration, not only because of the long-standing association

between Fleshman and Drid Williams, but because the story of the Anthology's editing process and the many (often painful) lessons learned therefrom is in some senses an important set of insights into the nature, scope and characteristics of the field of human movement studies itself.

In a personal communication¹ from which the title of this editorial essay has been taken, Fleshman remarks,

I would like to say that the book speaks for itself ... but by the time I put together the final draft, I had begun referring to the work as "The Monster" (Personal Communication, 8 January, 1986).

"In a great seven-year gulp", the Monster devoured Fleshman's time, it had no remorse, was insensitive to feelings and it ran roughshod over all other areas in his life. Yet, he says that he entered the project with "wide-eyed enthusiasm" and that the initial work was fun -- designing the project and seeking the right person(s) in each field to do the work.

Once the right person was located, problems began. Often key people were over-committed. In some cases, they suggested a replacement. A few were late in getting the material in, not a little over the deadlines but continually postponing until the total was several years late. Still others committed themselves and were never heard of again (Personal Communication).

There were a few who, one after another, committed themselves, only to abandon writing before they had submitted anything. The Editor found himself in the midst of conflicts between disciplines and/or involved in political rivalries within disciplines. The result of it all was that years passed and the book was still not done.

Having started in 1978-79, by the time 1985 rolled around, the "publication process" had taken over: that is to say that the usual galley proofs stage of production was omitted and the Editor was faced with camera-ready page proofs which discouraged changes because of the expense involved in changing them -- although in some cases, changes had been made by the "in-house editor". Not only was Fleshman thus pressured to accept these changes, authors were denied the right of final proofreading of their work and passing it on for publication. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon feature of the publishing scene in the United States in the last decade. Because of it, Fleshman has found himself in the unenviable position of having to apologize to the authors of several of the essays; part of his editorial experience which caused him to conclude:

I entered this project as someone, at least in my own eyes, of youthful middle age, and now as I look in the mirror I see someone greatly older and somehow a little embarrassed by the whole affair and somewhat bitter -- maybe wiser. No, I wouldn't do it all again (Personal Communication).

The flaws in the Anthology as a whole which cause Fleshman serious concern are these:

1. Because the project took place over a long period of time and some of the essays and bibliographies were submitted according to deadlines, on time, there was no way of updating this material before publication.
2. The area of theatrical movement in Western theatre is only briefly handled because it seemed impossible to get the chosen scholars in this field of study to follow through with their commitments, and
3. The chapters of the Anthology are uneven in quality and depth.

It is not, in Fleshman's eyes, "as large or as steady a step" as he had wished to make with the volume, but it is "a first step" in an attempt to organize a vast amount of material related to human movement in theatrical or performance situations. That the volume will be criticized by others on these grounds is undoubtedly true, but the fact remains that there are several important essays and bibliographies now available in this collection to which future generations of investigators would not otherwise have had access -- and this, we think, is the most important thing.

Williams, in Chapter 9 of the Anthology, makes a relevant point:

They (keen students and serious investigators) must resign themselves, perhaps, to searching where possible for the 'facts' of publication and take the trouble to find out something about the authors. They must make dedicated efforts towards looking at books and journals, not as if they miraculously 'appear out of nowhere', but look at them in the spirit of a search to understand the human realities (both 'positive' and 'negative') that they represent.

Each Chapter of the Anthology will have to be looked at on its own merits -- even though it is included in a collection, because, as Fleshman points out in the conclusion of his Preface, "It is all very human and natural to believe in some sort of 'knowledge-tree', where facts of information and even understanding fall off the branches of scholarship like ripe fruit". The fact remains that a "unified approach" such as the Editor initially envisioned simply is not possible. It is not possible because the notion is rooted, at least in part, in a major myth² about the dance (if not about all movement systems): its 'universality'.

In a recently written Master's thesis on the relation between American Sign Language and Martha Graham Technique, the author makes these points:

The most persistent myth about the dance -- that it can be universally understood -- stands squarely in defiance of Saussure's condition of arbitrariness in linguistic signs, as this condition applies to human action signs as well. The examples in Chapter VI provide a fair illustration of how difficult it may be to understand the meanings generated by body languages in someone's own society, if their codes are unknown. In Chapter VII, it has been shown that homokines of two body languages from the same society, as in the case of ASL and Graham Technique can have totally different meanings ... The notion that people can understand the meanings of whole systems of body language generated in different cultural contexts is absurd (Hart-Johnson, 1984:163 -- underline supplied).

Absurd or not, old mythologies die hard, mainly because they tend to remain unexamined, and because they possess an elusive sense of 'respectability' that is attractive since they are so widely believed. One can in some sense assume a kind of ready acceptance of such a theory because nearly everyone knows about it, thus it is not difficult to understand. In today's world, ease of understanding, regardless of its evidential or other bases, is an important feature of publication.

Yet, in spite of its flaws, the 'Anthology' is an important, valuable and outstanding book. Fully to comprehend that assessment of its merit, it is necessary to see it in relationship to other reference books on the dance, theatre and movement that we have inherited from the past. For example (and with specific reference to the dance), we will momentarily turn to a review of the information sources listed in Sheehy (1976:408-410), which is a standard reference work used by most librarians when asked questions concerning sources for "the dance".

Under the heading, 'THE DANCE, Bibliography', six items are listed. All of these refer either to ballet dancing (Nos. BG79, 80, 82, 84) or to Collections (BG81) or to "lists of books and articles on the dance and related subjects" (BG82) that are largely, if not wholly confined to western dancing (i.e. ballet, jazz, tap, folk and square-dancing and such). There is nothing in any of these references that would contribute to an anthropological study of the dance unless the researcher was attempting the study of the ballet as an ethnic form of dancing (See Keali'inohomoku, 1980, for references).³

The Indexes listed in Sheehy (1976), i.e. BH85 and BH86, are mainly concerned with trade newspapers, focusing heavily on what is happening on the professional dance scene, or they point to descriptive materials that are of interest, perhaps, to someone doing research from a less analytical viewpoint than is required in anthropology. The Annuals listed in Sheehy (1976:409) are those which concern ballet and the New York theatre world. It is not clear to many students of the subject why periodicals like the Dance Research Journal or JASHM are not cited in this kind of reference book⁴ but the net result, whatever the reasons, is that most of the good, scholarly research materials, particularly relating to the fields of dance ethnology and anthropology of human movement, get left out.

All but five of the Encyclopedias and Handbooks listed in Sheehy are primarily about the ballet (i.e. BG87, BG88, BG89, BG90, BG92 and BG97). One handbook is devoted to the subject of American cowboy dances (BG100). The five non-balletically oriented reference sources are instructive, however, because here, we discover attempts to deal with dances of the world. It is this kind of reference that presents the major problems for teacher and students of anthropology, especially, because here, we find many theoretical explanations of what the dance consists, of what human nature consists, and of what human reality is composed, but very little that is of methodological value, or (any other than out-dated) theoretical value. Specifically, these references never include the many different levels of historical or theoretical explanation that are vitally necessary to an understanding of this area of study and on the whole, they do not even seem to be informed by this kind of understanding.

The five reference sources to which we allude are these:

1. Bowers's Survey of Asian Dance and Drama (BG93),
2. The Chujoy and Manchester Dance Encyclopedia (BG94),
3. Sachs's World History of the Dance (BG99),
4. de Mille's Book of the Dance (BG95), and
5. Martin's Book of the Dance (BG98).

These kinds of reference works are critically discussed in Keali'inohomoku (1980). In particular has Sachs's work been criticized by many leading anthropologists of movement and dancing, i.e. Kaeppler (1978), Youngerman (1974), Williams (1976), but apparently to no real effect. Of the five remaining reference works listed in Sheehy (which are really dictionaries), one can be included with the Sachs, Bowers, de Mille and Martin offerings above: Raffee's Dictionary of the Dance (BG104), which, unlike its companions (i.e. BG101, BG102, BG103, and BG105) is not really a "dictionary" of the ballet, but purports to "define numerous terms relating to dances and dancing in all countries and periods". Here is an example of the notion of 'universality' of the dance writ large!

The point is that seeing the Fleshman Anthology against a background of such reference sources as these, and of the usual fare of reference sources in dance like those cited in Sheehy, one can begin to appreciate the value of the new Anthology, because

1. Even though 'universality' is mentioned in the Preface to the Anthology, it is a notion that is invoked more or less as a receding horizon of some kind, or as an impossible ideal -- not as a "fact".
2. The Anthology very wisely stays away from a misguided veneration of the past, and offers, instead, the bibliographies of working scholars in the field from many different disciplines, thereby offering the keen student (a) a platform from which to agree or

disagree with each individual author, and (b) a compendium of works from different areas of the world which he or she can safely assume to have some relevance to the study of "theatrical movement" in its many forms; whether the relevance is positive or negative is a matter of choice depending upon the student's own orientation and interests.

3. The Anthology does not attempt to persuade readers of any particular point of view, and the Editor has covered, in the Preface, the many problems inherent in the literature as it presently exists, and the uneven nature of the scholarship in various areas of study. We think that the acknowledgement of the conflicts in different disciplinary approaches is especially valuable, too.

Looked at against the background of reference sources that are (a) traditional and (b) most easily accessible to students throughout the country -- and indeed, to any researcher into the subject -- the Anthology emerges as an extremely valuable piece of work. It is one of which its Editor can be justly proud, if for no other reason than the fact that the book tries to do something different with the subject. Whether it was worth the personal price of a minor nervous breakdown on the part of its originator remains to be seen. It is to be hoped that especially librarians, heads of departments in the relevant disciplines, graduate students and seasoned researchers in these fields of study will use the book, for it can only be to their individual and collective advantages.

The Anthology's existence is amply justified if only for the fact that it could represent the thin edge of a wedge into a traditional literature that is virtually solidified into predictable and monolithic theoretical molds. For that alone, it deserves kudos.

Drid Williams
Editorial Advisor

NOTES

1. Among the correspondence which accumulated during the life of this project was an unedited preface, an extended letter, and a short essay, entitled "Looking Back" written by Fleshman to Williams. The latter contained a personal account of his editorial experiences. We have permission to publish parts of this essay and to use the title of the essay.
2. The myths about the dance are discussed in greater detail in Hart-Johnson (1983). See Index to Volumes I and II of JASHM in the Anthology, pp. 217-218.

3. I can do no better than to refer readers to Keali'inohomoku's controversial article, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance" (1980), not only because of the critical review of many standard dance reference books, but because of her thesis that the ballet, too, is "ethnic". This is a disconcerting proposition to many, because the term is often used to refer, not to "us" and our dance forms, but to "them" and the dancing that they do.
4. Professional librarians understand that Sheehy lists few or no 'content' journals or monographs in his reference work, and they are aware of the differences between, say, an index as a reference work, a bibliography and other such categories of references. But, how many users are aware of these differences? How many users consult the listings in Sheehy precisely for 'content'? This is not to say that a work like Sheehy should necessarily list Journals, Annuals and the like, but it is to say that Sheehy is a major reference work for the dance that is used nationally. Perhaps the problem is that Sheehy does not cite works like the Humanities or Social Sciences Indexes, or any of the further sources that need consultation. This means that the librarian should know the larger topics that pertain to the dance so that he or she can lead the user towards these. The Anthology would certainly be one such source.

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