



1978

Royce: The Anthropology of Dance

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Recommended Citation

Adra, N. (1978). Royce: The Anthropology of Dance. 5(1), 76-78. Retrieved from <https://repository.upenn.edu/svc/vol5/iss1/14>

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uniformity in the understanding of these images. Granted that we are invited to embark upon a skip reading of the images, this venture may well result in a sort of narrative which can be invented and superimposed upon them and their ordering. It must be realized, however, that this process is both subjective and arbitrary. This is all that it can be. What is lacking here is an articulation of the shared rules and conventions which would make this succession of images as understandable as the succession of shots in, for example, a theatrical film. Film narrative, with all its structural nuances and complexities such as montage, parallel cutting, flashbacks, and so on, is intelligible only because we are familiar with filmic form and know how to deal with it. The images in *Evidence* are not intelligible in a similar sense because their form and structuring do not obey the rules and conventions of an analogous social context.

Perhaps the overall message, then, to paraphrase and reiterate Jay Ruby's remarks (1976), is the need for the creation of contexts for photographs which would be conducive to the generation of their intended meaning. For if Mandel and Sultan have provided us with anything, they have presented evidence of the "polysemic" nature of photographic images. Such evidence has far-reaching implications, particularly for the communicative capacity of these images.

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The Anthropology of Dance. Anya Peterson Royce. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977. xii + 238 pp., diagrams, illustrations, photographs, bibliography, index. \$15.00 (cloth).

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In her conclusion to this work, Royce writes that the subfield of anthropology known as the anthropology of dance has grown to the point where it can now boast of a community of scholars, exchanging ideas and building on one another's research. Gone are the days when interested scholars worked in isolation, unaware of the work of others with similar interests (p. 217). This is still a young field, however, where, theoretically, contributions

are made through dispersed articles with a variety of underlying assumptions, aims, and methodologies. The book under review presents a synthesis of research already undertaken and offers suggestions for future work. Because of Royce's training in both anthropology and dance, she deals with both relevant anthropological theory and method and principles of dance analysis. This is the first book published that can be used satisfactorily as a text in an undergraduate course on the anthropology of dance and as a basic reference for those interested in the field.

The book is divided into three major sections. The first introduces the anthropology of dance, the second presents theoretical approaches to the field, and the third discusses future directions for research and includes a one-chapter conclusion.

Royce begins the book with a chapter on the phenomenon of dance, including definitions and problems of definition. She then summarizes the various approaches to dance used by anthropologists. Following this is a description of methods and techniques of dance analysis. This section concludes with a discussion of structure and function in dance. The second section, "Problems and Perspectives," includes chapters on the historical perspective, the comparative method, and symbol and style. The last section includes discussions of the morphology of dance and its potential significance to the anthropological study of dance and the question of the meaning of dance. Three case studies on the history of Colonial dancing, contemporary American Indian powwow dancing, and Zapotec dance style are combined with extensive examples from the literature and Royce's own research on Zapotec dancing to provide illustrations for the various theoretical positions discussed.

The strengths of this work are many. Early in the book, Royce insists that dance be analyzed as part of a *dance event* rather than as an isolated phenomenon. She argues that the significance of dance in any group cannot be understood if studied independently of the cultural totality in which it is found (p. 13). Another important issue discussed is the uniqueness of the phenomenon of dance in culture. This quality of dance is not often recognized by researchers. In Royce's words, "Dance may sometimes fill the same functional slot as other culture traits, but . . . it will fill the slot in a different way" (p. 32). Therefore, an adequate understanding of dance in its cultural context must include an appreciation of its unique and "complex" properties (p. 32).

Related to the question of uniqueness is the curious impact of dance. Dance usually engenders strong emotional responses in observers. A common reaction to unfamiliar dance traditions is that they are highly immoral, or at least licentious (p. 158). A good example of this is the similarity of European reactions to West African dances and West African reactions to Euro-American ballroom dancing (p. 158). Royce relates this quality to the use of the human body as the instrument of dance. Arguing that this use results in the dance form's striking immediacy, she holds that it is more difficult to be neutral toward dancing than, for example, toward a painting, which is at least one step removed from the artist (p. 159).

Another possible reason presented for the emotional power of dance is its simultaneous use of several channels (p. 162). During any single dance event, dancers and observers are bombarded with visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and kinesthetic stimuli.

Another strength of this work is the emphasis on the need to study both form and context of the dance and to synthesize the two approaches. Royce suggests that attention paid to context, to the exclusion of dance form, has resulted in "impressionistic statements about the communicative powers of dance" (p. 216). She continues:

Only recently have we stopped to consider the implications of either the form of dance or the form of communicative channels in general. That we are working toward a synthesis of form and context in the areas of aesthetics, creativity and communication indicates, I think, a clearer appreciation of the complexity of that synthesis than has characterized any past era in the anthropology of dance.

This is a particularly important observation, because there has not yet been developed in the available literature a coherent theory of exactly what the relations between dance (form and context) and culture are. Although it is often assumed that dance "reflects" or "expresses" culture, exactly what aspects of culture are so reflected and the nature of this reflection have not been determined. Only studies which combine analysis of dance form and context can lead to a theory of the relationship between dance and culture.

Especially useful are "The Anthropological Perspective" (Chap. 2) and "Methods and Techniques" (Chap. 3), because they explain respectively, current relevant anthropology theory to nonanthropologists and principles of dance analysis and recording techniques to those untrained in dance. These two chapters demonstrate the serious lack of communication in the community of dance scholars between those trained primarily in anthropology and those trained primarily in dance. This is due not so much to conflicting interests as to a mutual lack of familiarity with the assumptions and methods of one another.

Royce's chapter on the anthropological perspective is intended not as a history of anthropology but merely as an explanation of the implications of relevant traditions in anthropology to the study of dance. As a result, it may seem simplistic to anthropologically trained scholars, but their turn will come when in the next chapter they must struggle with an introduction to methods and techniques of dance recording and analysis. It is hoped that the dance analysts will, in turn, sympathize with the needs of those untrained in dance and be patient with what may seem to them a simplified treatment. These two chapters should serve to help bridge a widening gap in the field.

Royce makes good use of her area of specialization, the use of dance as an identity marker, and she provides extensive discussion of this phenomenon. Contact situations, where a strong interest is expressed in the maintenance or revival of cultural identity and in which dance is used as at least one medium of this expression, are discussed at length. One misses, however, a discussion of situations in which an interest is shown in the revival of cultural identity but in which dance is not used as an

identity marker. Also missing is any mention of the use of identity markers other than dance (e.g., dress or song) and their relation to dance. A complete understanding of this function of dance requires an investigation of negative cases as well as the use of other cultural elements to fulfill the same function.

There are two areas which could have been treated more effectively. The first of these is the use of the concept of the aesthetic as it relates to dance, and the second is the implications of the author's treatment of change in dance.

In her discussion of aesthetic elements of dance (pp. 5, 82), Royce seems to equate aesthetic functions of dance with the dance of classical traditions such as Euro-American ballet and modern dance or East Asian traditions. In the following statement, for example, "aesthetic" is used as a synonym for "classical":

If a society wishes to have dance performed as an aesthetic activity, that is, where there is a dividing line between performers and spectators, then it must have a certain amount of leisure time in which to produce and enjoy dance performers (p. 82).

This is an unfortunate use of the term "aesthetic" because it implies the absence of an aesthetic level in dance not belonging to a well-developed classical tradition. Yet the concept of the aesthetic is crucial to the understanding of the previously mentioned uniqueness of the phenomenon of dance in culture and may, in fact, be a determining element in the kinds of messages that are transmittable through dance.

The aesthetic is not a characteristic limited to some types of dance but the identifying element of all dance. As Royce would agree, in dance the movement itself has inherent value ("dance as patterned movement performed as an end in itself," p. 8). Dance is defined as dance not because it belongs to a category of "ritual" or "entertainment" or "performance" (nondance activity may also fill these slots) but because it elaborates the kinesthetic, the sensation of movement.

To clarify, it would be useful to compare the relationship between dance and everyday movement to that between poetry and everyday language. In poetry the manipulation of words and sounds for their own sake is primary, whereas in everyday language word and sound arrangement are primarily tools for conveying messages. In poetry attention is drawn first to the manipulation of words and sound, then to other "purposes" of the poem. Similarly, in dance attention is drawn first to the movement and only secondarily to other "functions" such as the narration of a myth or performance aspects. In both dance and poetry there is a sensible exploration of the medium used—movements and movement sequences in one case, and words and word sequences in the other. It becomes apparent, then, that to divorce the aesthetic from dance is to take away the very characteristic that makes it unique and that forms the basis for its peculiar capacities for expressing the ambivalent and its potentials as a vehicle for signification. The lack of a methodology to deal with aesthetic phenomena has been a stumbling block in dance research. But to deny the essentially aesthetic quality of dance will exacerbate rather than help solve this problem.

In Royce's discussion of change, the determinants of change in dance are attributed to the flexibility of the dance style itself (pp. 104-108). The implicit assumption is that there is a one-to-one correlation between dance and culture. Therefore, when culture changes the dance will also change if the dance tradition is flexible enough to permit its adaptation. The problem is that the exact relationship between dance and culture has not been determined so far. To assume what one is trying to

establish or demonstrate is a dangerous practice in any field.

In conclusion, *The Anthropology of Dance* is a welcome introduction to the field. Royce presents students with a number of conceptual tools to use in the analysis of dance in culture. Some of these ideas may eventually be elaborated and others discarded. What is found in this book, however, is a basis on which to build further research.

