

BOOK REVIEWS

Anya Peterson Royce. The Anthropology of Dance. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press. 1977. 238pp.

This book represents the first general introduction to the study of dance from an anthropological perspective. (Roderyk Lange's earlier book The Nature of Dance is, by comparison, an idiosyncratic expression of the author's views and hardly a broad-based introduction.) Ms. Royce has drawn upon her experience as a dancer, an anthropologist, and a field worker among the Zapotec Indians of southern Mexico to produce a comprehensive and highly readable book.

The time for such work is certainly right. Although anthropologists have long recognised dancing to be a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of human social life, it has nevertheless suffered from a relative lack of rigorous documentation and analysis. In the past twenty-five years or so, and particularly in the last few, the increase in general academic and anthropological interest in dance has resulted in numerous articles and theses, and the odd book here and there. A general introduction, presenting in an orderly fashion the various ideas and approaches which anthropologists have brought to the study of dance, has been sorely lacking.

Royce presents a broad review of the literature within a well-organised outline of some of the main theoretical issues involved in the anthropological study of dance. It is not clear to what type of audience she is addressing herself; however, it would appear from her fairly basic explanations of anthropological assumptions and theoretical frameworks that she aims her efforts toward laymen (or perhaps dance scholars within other disciplines) who may be unfamiliar with the methods of anthropology. The discussions of some of these basic issues, for instance the problem of defining and classifying social phenomena, are quite clear, illustrating, but not belabouring, certain theoretical pitfalls. Experienced anthropologists may well find these sections elementary, but they provide a solid foundation for the consideration of more specialized issues. Royce manages to give a lucid mix of theoretical discussion and concrete examples, so that the reader need not feel that he or she is being led too far astray from the actual social activity of dancing as it occurs among various peoples.

The book is particularly strong on the methods and history of dance research, including the history of techniques of recording and notating dance. Like others currently writing on the anthropology of dance (for instance, Drid Williams or Judith Lynne Hanna) she agrees that the system of notation developed by Rudolf Laban - Labanotation - is the most subtle and accurate means of recording dances; unlike the others, however, she raises doubts about the practicality of such a highly refined tool to anthropologists in the field. The point is well taken, especially since she follows it up with suggestions toward the development of a personal practical method for recording dances in the field. This sort of method would be **advantageous** not only to anthropologists whose primary interest is the study of dance or kinesics, but even more to those for whom dance or movement may be a secondary interest and who are unwilling to master the rather time-consuming techniques of Labanotation.

Although Royce is to be commended for her comprehensive outline of the various theoretical issues which confront the anthropologist interested in dance, her presentation of them nonetheless can be faulted in certain respects. In the chapter entitled 'Symbol and Style', for example, her use of the term 'symbol' is somewhat misleading, since it is usually employed within the field of dance research to refer to the representation by movements or gestures of more abstract levels of feeling or meaning. Royce, on the other hand, uses the word to make the argument that dance constitutes an 'identity marker' (156) by which a group represents itself in contradistinction to other groups. 'Ultimately', she claims,

'what we can say is that dance is a powerful, frequently adopted symbol of the way people feel about themselves' (163). Dance is thus an important part of a complex of features which she calls a 'style', by which a group of people characterises or identifies itself. (Royce rejects the usefulness of the word 'tradition' as implying too static a situation, whereas the expression 'style' can encompass more flexibly the flow of time and events.) In this case she is making an unfortunate simplification of a number of complex issues by reverting to an apparently functionalist predilection.

Other problems crop up as a result of the author's functionalist bias. Her characterisation of dance as a symbol, for example, leads her to differentiate between dances used as symbols of identity and dances used for recreation (163). Not only is this distinction unsupported (and, I think, unsupportable), but also it is doubtful that one can meaningfully speak of dance as being 'used' at all. A second problem in the author's approach concerns her rather vague notion of style: she tends to gloss over the interesting question of the particular relations between a people's dances and their other habitual movements. She mentions this issue in passing, but nowhere does she cite Mauss' article 'Techniques of the Body', still one of the most provocative anthropological discussions of movements and gestures. Curiously, in the light of her functionalist bias, Royce, in her description of theoretical positions in anthropological research in dance, is cautious about recommending a functionalist approach and quick to point out its limitations.

The final section of the book is devoted to a consideration of future directions in the anthropological study of dance, and here the functionalist/structuralist dichotomy occupies a key position in her assessment: '... just as this basic dichotomy has underlain previous research, so it will determine the nature of future research' (177). I find this troubling. While she may be correct in perceiving this dichotomy to be a guiding force in dance studies in the past, it is questionable to what extent this is reflected or influential in present studies. Even more debatable is the degree to which it will or should determine the course of future studies.

Part of Royce's problem may be that in seizing upon the functionalist/structuralist dichotomy as a means of distinguishing approaches to the study of dance, she has made an unfortunate choice of terminology. The distinction she wishes to establish is that between approaches which concern the forms of dances and which stress the treatment of these dances as self-contained entities ('structuralist') and approaches which consider dances primarily as they exist in relation to the cultures of which they are a part ('functionalist'). This distinction does not need the use of the terms which the author has chosen, and they have the muddying effect of invoking vast areas of theoretical debate in the discipline.

These categories also need not be portrayed as being mutually exclusive - a consequence of Royce's dividing the discussion of future directions in dance studies into 'The Morphology of Dance' and 'The Meaning of Dance'. The most serious consequence of this division is that the whole theoretical problem of the relationship between the forms and the meanings of dances is left unexplored. Another unfortunate effect of this treatment is to relegate her consideration of creativity in dance to the realm of form, as if creativity and the meanings of dances were unrelated issues. Her notion of creativity in dance is further restricted by her tendency to treat it as an individual phenomenon, and not particularly as a social one. I would argue that an anthropological approach to studies of the arts must wrestle with the issue of whether, or how, creativity is a social phenomenon.

Such reservations as I have about the presentation of theoretical issues in this book do not diminish seriously its importance as a contribution to the field of anthropological studies of dance. In any introductory survey of a discipline there are bound to be difficulties in dealing with areas of theoretical disagreement, and The Anthropology of Dance is no exception. Royce may be commended for not shying away from controversial issues, although she could perhaps have been more careful to have kept her own functionalist bias in check, and she could have gone somewhat more deeply into her evaluation of various approaches. Her anthropological background information, her historical material, and her general organisation and style still make this book an excellent point of departure for anyone interested in what anthropologists have to say about dance.

Paula Schlinger.

John Blacking (Ed.). The Anthropology of the Body. A.S.A. Monograph 15. London: Academic Press. 1977. xii, 426pp. £8.80.

A.S.A. Monograph 15 provides an initiation into the bewildering variety of issues concerning the social aspects of the human body. Since the volume simply furnishes a record of the A.S.A. conference on the anthropology of the body and is not constructed around a close-knit set of selected themes it is exempt from certain types of textual criticism; yet one wonders to what extent a compendium is possible in such an intractable area of research.

For the most part, the contributors show little concern with the question of whether an anthropology of the body can stand as a legitimate field of analysis. They seem pleased simply to get on with their respective researches; and while some contributors seem able to define the inherent theoretical difficulties more successfully than others, the book as a whole gains its continuity from the reflections of each anthropologist on his or her special interest. Thus whereas some writers treat the human body as a source of natural resemblances, others consider the physical body without primary reference to these categorical difficulties. While it is disturbing that one can so easily distinguish between anthropologists who criticize assumptions and those who confidently build upon them, The Anthropology of the Body succeeds in suggesting novel ideas and analytical techniques, as well as in discussing the problem of the commensurability of various cultural notions of the self. It not only makes fascinating reading, but is an index of possible turning points in anthropological theory.

The study of certain conditions of being human can function as a means by which one may diagnose problems in many other fields of concern. The anthropology of the body is an especially fruitful example of this; the essays in this volume use the theme as a vehicle for discussing taxonomy, categorizing, metaphysics - cultural as well as purely physiological problems raised by our consciousness of our bodies. One is tempted, in fact, to suggest that the contributions are linked by a common recognition of the obvious, namely that man's quest for knowledge is always affected by his awareness of himself, that, among those things which puzzle him, his awareness of himself is primary, and that those things which preoccupy him most in the external world are considered by him with reference to his own physical presence. As Ellen puts it, in 'The Semiotics of the Body':

the very fact that human beings perceive and think anthropocentrically in relation to the non-human universe, together with the demonstrable elaboration of human anatomical classification compared with that of other animals, suggests that, generally speaking, the human body is the primary model in both an evolutionary and logico-operational sense (353).

As one might anticipate, several authors show an interest in alternative methods of charting physical movement. From the Benesh's research on movement notation (whose theatrical applications have been widely recognized) to Lange's work on the anthropology of dance or Baily's lengthy contribution on movement patterns involved in playing Afghan string instruments, we find evidence for a concern with the relativities of physical relationships through body movement. (See also Schlinger's review of The Anthropology of Dance, p.200 of this issue.) Whether these relativities are explicable by what Hanna, in 'To Dance is Human', calls psychobiological factors, or whether they provide us solely with culturally-derived means of organizing physical experience, the idea that alternative methods of organizing movement might yield qualitatively different informational modes appears as a dominant hypothesis if not an overriding conviction.

Other contributors examine ways in which various classifications of the human body can serve to mediate or illustrate features of social relations: there is, for instance, Sutherland's analysis of pollution concepts among gypsies or Strathern's study in New Guinea of the curious notion whereby shame may be described as being 'on the skin'. The totality of social life itself may be inscribed in the body as a symbol. Thus, Dogon society is meant to be like a human body; it may be reduced or analyzed in terms of 'my' body; a Dogon should be able to increase his understanding of it as he increases his understanding of himself. That the body may become its own interpretative device becomes paradoxical insofar as analogies always refer to things which are simultaneously alike yet different. In The Anthropology of the Body this paradox of self-reference would bear most directly upon Polunin's quest to define what it is that a culture -- even our own 'scientific' culture -- signified in classifying a particular physical condition as diseased. The idea that in their descriptions of relationships, classifications can mediate complex symbolic systems and certain features of social relations is reinforced by several noteworthy anthropological contributions in this volume. That the anthropology of the body may function as a vehicle for discussing a plethora of issues which are common to all varieties of anthropological analysis is not just a comment on the diverse nature of that anthropology; it also shows the way in which those issues, as different approaches to experience, can awaken us to possibilities and, in general, to human potentialities.

David Napier.

J.K. Dover. Greek Homosexuality. London: Duckworth. 1978. 224pp. £15.00

The existence of some form of homosexual practice among the ancient Greeks has always been common knowledge and has often aroused interest, both scholarly and amateur. Typically, however, the questions asked about it have been both morally loaded and empirically simplistic: were the ancient Greeks really homosexual (or just good friends, or, enter Plato, merely indulging in a hyperbolic idiom to express the marriage of true male minds)?; if so, how many of them? (surely not the man in the agora or the stalwart peasant? -- more likely just the rich and the aristocratic, since wealth leads to decadence and decadence to degradation); and could homosexuality have been generally accepted (or merely tolerated on the fringe, its evidential prevalence unfortunately reflecting the tastes of pornographers, poets, philosophers, and other such marginal but notably expressive individuals)?

The answers to these questions tended to be vague. We should remember that strong feelings were not averse to a little imprecision. At a time when our own traditions still saw in Greece the origins of that Civilization which

it was their duty to perpetuate, rumours of a perverted past could create some unease (their detailed examination even more). More importantly, the ancient evidence itself seemed disturbingly contradictory. Whenever the Sokratic circle extolled 'love', it was homosexual eros that was praised; yet Sokrates, or at least Plato, forbade its consummation. Comedy, philosophy, history, the casual asides of law-court speeches and, most explicitly, the artistic representations of vase-painting, make it clear that homosexual affairs (and male prostitution) were commonplace; yet these practices were frequently reviled and the man who 'sold' his body forfeited citizenship. Even though Aristophanes' sturdy heroes could lust after boys as well as girls, effeminates were lampooned in a manner which would have done a rugby club proud.

Clearly the simple empirical questions -- how many? who? and were they really? -- will not suffice. A reorientation is required to confront the question of exactly what constituted 'homosexuality' in the ancient Greek context -- and this we now possess in J.K. Dover's new book.

Let it be stressed, however, that Greek Homosexuality, like Sir Kenneth's earlier Greek Popular Morality, remains very much an empirical work -- a meticulous compilation and analysis of all the available evidence in the best tradition of British classical scholarship. For some this will make it a less than easy book to read, for generalizations follow on exhaustive presentation of the data; but it gives us for the first time, and in a manner which will require no further addition of information, an unshakable foundation of fact. Out of that body of fact the required reorientation grows.

There can be no doubt that, due allowance being made for individual variation and preference, homosexuality -- physical homosexuality, anal, inter-crural, and manual -- was a deeply entrenched part of Greek culture, and that, from a strictly physical point of view, young men and girls were equally the objects of male sexual desire. What remains complex is the cultural response to that recognized desire and the constraints which Greek society built round its fulfilment.

Though, as the objects of male desire, boys and girls could be classified together, the opposition between masculinity and femininity remained intact. No confusion was made between 'homosexuality' and 'effeminacy'. The first was permissible, the second most certainly not. Yet if 'homosexual' did not equal 'effeminate', the 'passive' partner in a homosexual relationship came close to being placed in a 'female' situation -- close indeed to being subordinated. Hence a socially required display of reluctance on his part. Hence also a question of relative age. No man played simultaneously the 'active' and 'passive' role with another. A younger man submitted himself, but not without difficulty, to an older man, his superior and perhaps his mentor. An older man who continued to play the 'female' role was disgraced. And the younger man, we should note, was supposed to derive no pleasure from the sexual act. To do so would have been effeminate. His masculinity was preserved by the austere denial of physical enjoyment. If he admitted pleasure or if he instigated the relationship, he demeaned himself as a prostitute did. Indeed the prostitute who sold his body was the 'slave' both of his sexuality and of the person who had bought him. He was a man who had lost his freedom -- and, like a slave or like a woman, he was therefore excluded from the body politic.

In a society, then, where homosexual desire was as freely admitted as heterosexual desire (at least for the 'active' partner), but where rigid social and moral constraints still operated, the evidence can appear confusing for those who would assume simplistically that if homosexuality was

prevalent then Greece was Sodom and Gomorrah. Greek civilization was firmly committed to a 'masculine' ideal -- an ideal which stressed physical prowess, rational self-control, self-denial and endurance, and which all too readily defined the antitheses of these as 'feminine'. What men admired, even in the context of a consummated homosexual erotic relationship, were still 'men'.

Roger Just.

BOOKS RECEIVED

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