

Why can we not simply try to understand the nature of The Dance as people on this earth perform it? What prevents us from understanding the gestural languages of people who dance, including ourselves? If the anthropology of dance is to assume its rightful place as a major contributor to general anthropological knowledge, we must be suspicious of methodology and theory which trivializes dance, making what in fact are supremely meaningful human actions into empty, meaningless 'gross physical behaviour'. One would have thought that the effects upon dance education and dance departments might be considered as well: does anyone really agree that future dance research should be determined by the results of Mr. Lomax's project?

RUST, FRANCES, *DANCE IN SOCIETY: an Analysis of the Relationship between the Social Dance and Society in England from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969, 280 pages, 3.25.

Reviewed by Drid Williams

Reading Frances Rust's book on English dancing leaves one with very divided impressions: some very good and some quite the opposite. The ninety-odd pages of historical research, taken by themselves, are very good indeed. This section of Rust's book represents a solid contribution to our subject. However, pressed into the service of a functionalist explanation and a statistical survey, her socio-historical study suffers.

Why does it suffer? Rust defines the scope of her book as a 'small-scale pioneer approach to the sociology of dance' which is concerned with one particular classification of dance; i.e. social dance as against all other classifications, and which is also 'scaled down to one particular country' (England) and to a specific period of history (p.xiii). So far, so good. These statements of intention reflect a laudable clarity of expression to be found throughout her work.

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But, these definitions being the case, this reviewer finds it impossible to understand the comparison of so-called 'primitive' dance and modern English forms of dancing contained in a paragraph on p. 199. Here she mentions modern disco-dancing as 'new, so far as England is concerned', but 'anything but new in the history of dance'. She says

All primitive dancing is of this nature, the partnered style being a product of civilization, and, in comparison, artificial and inhibiting. It may be that today's young people want to dissociate themselves completely from the traditional ballroom style of dancing and much prefer a link with primitive man. Indeed, in view of the theory that dancing preceded speech, one might go further and claim that contemporary social dancing has returned to the very beginning of the cycle -- to the jungle!

Yes, one might agree with this if one thought that such theories of origins (whether of religion or dance) had any credibility at all in modern social anthropology -- which they do not; cf. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion, O.U.P. 1965. Or, one might agree with Rust if one habitually used terms like 'primitive' loosely. But with reference to dance, many of us would agree with Kealiinohomoku (CORD: Ethnic Historical Study: July 4-5, 1969) who said, 'The term is meaningless.'

On a basis of Rust's study we must now add yet another group of people to that already over-loaded category 'primitive': English teen-agers. And if it is true that the 'function' of modern disco-dancing as performed by these youngsters is 'pure pleasure in motor activity and expressive body movement' (which I doubt) and that this function may not be comparable to the 'function' that dancing has in primitive society (as we are told on p. 132) then how are we to understand the second of Rust's hypotheses, stated at the beginning of her statistical survey (p. 135); e.g. 'the hypothesis of a basic similarity between modern beat dancing and the dancing of primitive societies'?

With Kealiinohomoku, we ask, similarity to the dancing of which 'primitive' society? For if by 'primitive dance' is meant African dance, then we can only point out first, that it is a gross error to think of African dance as some sort of monolithic whole. Second, if by 'primitive society' is meant the Anuak of southern Sudan, for example, then we submit that on a basis of R.G. Lienhardt's research (1952-3) in which the Agwaga Dance is described as a dramatic representation of the relation between a headman and his villagers, cf.

Anuak Village Headmen, (I) Headmen and Their Culture, Africa, xxvii, 4, 1957, then there is no similarity between that dance and 'modern beat dancing'. If by 'primitive society' is meant multi-racial Zambia, or the participants of the Kalela Dance (cf. Mitchell, Manchester U. Press, no. 27, 1956 - Rhodes-Livingston Institute Papers) most of whom are Bisa; then we suggest there is no similarity, because the Kalela dance as described by Mitchell is supposed to reveal a tendency towards tribalism and tradition, and 'beat' dancing, by Rust's definition is evidently a reaction against tradition. My own work on Ghanaian dancing and that of Judith L. Hanna in other traditional areas of Africa provide further counter-evidence and negative cases against Rust's hypothesis -- and her conclusions.

Rust's historical account of English dance is at once interesting, competent and extremely well done, but her over-all conclusions are, like Radcliffe Brown's tautologous and uninteresting. But then, Rust cites no anthropological work beyond The Andaman Islanders in her bibliography, thus dating her 'perspectives' in this discipline rather severely. It is a platitude by this time that social dance or any other social phenomena 'can never be properly understood or more, there is little doubt that 'sociologists should take their turn' as Rust says, at including dance in their studies and surveys. Fair enough -- we all study the same thing -- people. Perhaps the important question is how?

How and where do we start looking for the elements of the relationships of dance and society? Is it beyond our imaginations or ethnographic and academic skills to treat human dances as linguistically oriented materials? Perhaps our model of human danced action is to be forever parasitic on ethological or biological models of organisms. Be that as it may, excluding Rust's historical section, surely we can reject the rest as anachronistic in 1974. Social anthropology has long since abandoned theories and models of Victorian masters. Neo-social anthropology has also moved on, cf. Ardener, E. *The New Anthropology and Its Critics*, Man, vol. 6, no. 3, September 1971.