

d'AZEVEDO, WARREN L., ed. THE TRADITIONAL ARTIST IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES. Bloomington: Indiana Univeristy Press, 1973, 454 pages, \$16.

Reviewed by Judith Lynne Hanna

Although it is about the "traditional" artist, a specific geographical area, and minimally devoted to the dancer, this book has direct relevance to all dance scholars. The different theoretical orientations, methods, empirical data, and criticisms of the studies presented should help the dance scholar to design better dance studies, to understand the dance data we now have, and to be a more critical evaluator of research. The questions raised and lines of inquiry suggested might be pursued for any art form in any world area at any time.

The volume is the result of a conference challenged to explore three subjects. The first was the artist as a creative member of his society--his role, status, and social function. The second included the ethno-scientific¹ views of the arts shared by members of a culture, how things considered artistic by Westerners are defined, the cognitive processes involved, and the descriptive terminology employed in societies other than our own. The third issue was "the universality of art, its expression in different kinds of societies, its degree of institutionalization, and the possibility that a formal definition of art may lead to the conclusion that in some societies artistic activity is minimal or even lacking, or that we are dealing with a social phenomenon which is manifested in vastly divergent and multiple ways among human societies" (p. xx). Furthermore, the contributors were faced with the problem of working within a framework amenable to cross-cultural comparison.

The initial organizers were Alan P. Merriam and Roy Sieber who wrote the preface in which they note that the ten basic papers were presented by their authors at sessions of a graduate seminar on "The Humanities in Sub-Saharan Africa" they conducted at Indiana University during the spring of 1964. Thus the participants had the opportunity to revise their papers before the conference. Warren L. d'Azevedo prepared the formal proposal and contributed the introduction in which he includes some of his and the conferees' critical observations. Part I of the volume, "On African Artists" includes the following papers:

Judith Lynne Hanna, author of numerous works on dance, is a social scientist and dance teacher (African, Modern) who has been a member of several university and secondary school faculties. She is currently completing doctoral work in anthropology at Columbia University.

Yoruba Artistic Criticism, Robert Farris Thompson
 A Yoruba Master Carver: Duga of Meko, William Bascom
 The Musician in Akan Society, J. H. Kwabena Nketia
 The Role of the Carver in Anang Society, John C. Messenger
 A Sociocultural View of Hausa Musical Activity, David W. Ames
 and Kyagu as Artists in Marghi Society, James H. Vaughan, Jr.
 The Exposition and Imposition of Order: Artistic Expression in
 Fang Culture, James Fernandez
 Aesthetic Values and Professionalism in African Art: Three Cases
 from the Katanga Chokwe, Daniel J. Crowley
 The Bala Musician, Alan P. Merriam
 Sources of Gola Artistry, Warren L. d'Azevedo

Most of the papers deal with sculptors and musicians, four with singers, orators, smiths and critics; brief attention is given to weavers, dancers, storytellers, and acrobats.

Part II, "Commentaries," includes the following discussant papers which are from different disciplines as indicated below. The representative from each does not, it should be pointed out, represent all its various schools of thought:

On the Sphere of Social Validity in African Art: Sociological
 Reflections on Ethnographic Data, K. Peter Etkorn
 (sociology)
 Art and the Anthropological Lens, George Mills (anthropology)
 Conceptual Problems Relating to the Comparative Study of Art,
 John Ladd (philosophy)
 Approaches to Non-Western Art, Roy Sieber (art history)

In addition to comments on specific studies and summaries of them, the discussants, within their respective conceptual frames, raise general questions about what they think should be known about an art form and indicate future directions for research. Pulling together the ideas from Parts I and II, it is certainly possible to develop research designs for exciting dance studies.

To the four discussants' commentaries, which take the wind out of a reviewer's sails, I must add these. First, it is unfortunate that the dancer in Africa was slighted in this volume. This is understandable given the status of African dance studies.² Although I am unaware of a dance case study that focuses on all the concerns of the conference, I think enough dispersed material about different ethnic groups existed to have had dance presented more fully; I believe Robin Horton and John Blacking, for example, had dance data on the Kalabari and Venda in 1964. After all, the dance has been recognized as one of the primary idioms of artistic expression in Africa! Of course, financial considerations often preclude involving scholars who are overseas.

Second, although the book has a relatively detailed table of contents, it has no index. This is ironical since the book is dedicated to Melville

J. Herskovits. Some of his students are contributors. Before going to Africa, I met with the "father of African studies" to discuss my work. At the time he was in the midst of indexing his latest of many books. He spent a great deal of time extolling the virtues of an index, manifestly taking possessive pleasure in doing his own to properly reflect his detailed concerns and enhance the readers' use of the book. For the benefit of CORD researchers, I present the following general dance category index (an asterisk means about a paragraph or more is devoted to dance): 19, 20, 55, 82, 88, 93, 105, 117, 118, 120, 123, 125, 132, *133, *134, 140, 141, 144, 148, 150, *159, *186, 210, 228-229, *230, *232-233, 240, 247, *300-301, 308, 310, 311, *313, 315, 316-319, 331, 333, 365, *408-409, 428.

Concerns about the ethnocentrism in several of the studies presented in this volume are well identified by the Sieber and Mills contributions; these are "must" reading for cross-cultural research (and this includes ethnic, social class, and subculture--including avant garde-dance in the United States). Sieber discusses the use of Western concepts with Western histories. If they are to be applicable cross-culturally, they have to have their meanings specified for the researcher to be able to identify comparable phenomena which are not always verbally conceptualized and which if conceptualized may include more or less than our own ethnic concept does. Sieber writes:

Of primary importance to these studies are the definitions of the terms art, artist, and aesthetics. The confusions surrounding the terms are due in part to the value judgments contained in most definitions....I am not protesting the cross-cultural application of definitions, constructs, or concepts as disciplinary tools. But when they are based upon or contain value judgments derived from the culture of the researcher, overtly or covertly, the results are skewed if not pejorative (pp. 425-426).

D'Azevedo is certainly aware of the problems with the concept of "traditional" and he presents many caveats. In his formulation, focus is not on

those who represent new roles and productive processes which have emerged under conditions of European cultural domination and rapid social change in Africa during the twentieth century. This does not mean that the "traditional" artist is not continually responsive to changes and new ideas affecting his soci-cultural environment, but only that his activities are oriented primarily to institutions which derive from the ancient and relatively conservative local heritage of the indigenous society of which he is a part. The role and work of such an artist are in themselves traditions rather than responses to opportunities or alternatives presented by the more recent urban, national, or international spheres of relations.

He points out that such a formulation cannot be rigidly applied because of the dynamic and flexible societies dealt with in the volume (pp. 10-11). On a continent where the histories of many people involve migrations and contacts with non-Africans for more than 500 years it is difficult to determine what is "ancient" and to isolate the "relatively conservative local heritage." For example, Uganda's Acholi girls perform what they call their traditional dingidingi dance. This is a byproduct of African participation in World War II. Returned veterans organized dance performances to raise funds. However, the dance uses the same movement style as the much older (ancient?) women's nanga, but the dingidingi spatially and uniformly restructured the nanga into the pattern of Western military formations and had a new age-group performing it. This age-group dances as part of its historical heritage.³

In the literature on the arts, and dance in particular, the term traditional has certain connotations of passing on information, beliefs, and customs from one generation to another, of continuity, and also of backwardness or other such negatively laden value judgments or of romanticism. Terms like "traditional," "primitive," "folk," as pointed out in this volume, must be used judiciously and have clearly demarcated boundaries to be meaningful.

I conclude by praising the format and substance of the book: useful contributions, recognition of limitations, criticisms of the works, and all shared with a larger research community to encourage a more effective pursuit of knowledge. Thus all of us can build on the contributions and deficiencies.

1. This "ethosemantic," "cognitive anthropology," or emic approach as it is also called (an attempt to get at indigenous systems of classification) differs from other anthropological approaches or emphases such as the structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss which attempts to be universalistic and that emphasis wherein the analyst imposes a theoretical schema upon empirical data (an etic approach). See Ann Fischer, ed., Current Directions in Anthropology. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1970.

2. See Hanna, "The Status of African Dance Studies," Africa 36:303-307, 1966; "African Research Committee Conference on the African Arts: Report of the Dance Group," African Studies Bulletin 9(3):14-18, 1966.

3. See Hanna, "Africa's New Traditional Dance," Ethnomusicology 9:13-21, 1965 for other examples.