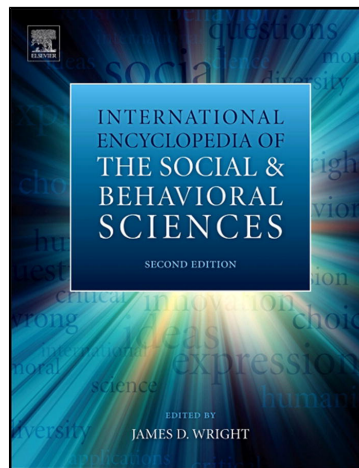


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Dance, Anthropology of

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Abstract

Dance as a topic for systematic anthropological investigation was established in the 1960s. As the Western category of dance did not always work in a cross-cultural perspective, bounded rhythmical movements were identified, as well as dance events. Dance is an expression of wider social and cultural situations, often indicating transition or conflict, as well as unity. Dance anthropologists study all forms of dance, Western and non-Western, ranging from ritual dance and social dance to street dance and staged dance performance. Dance and movement are understood in relation to theories of the body and gender, and to ethnicity, nationalism, and transnationality.

Dance has been studied in anthropology for over a century; it has also been studied in classical works, but mostly in passing as an element in ritual and ceremony. This neglect is likely to have come about because of the elusive nature of dance, in combination with the fact that dance has the potential of releasing emotional and erotic forces that are kept at bay most of the time in everyday life. There are many examples of political and religious control of dance, not least in colonial contexts. This has often produced resistance, expressed through the creation or revitalization of ethnic and national dances.

In an article about the beer dance among the Azande, E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1928) was among the first anthropologists to show that the study of dance had a wider analytical potential and that dance needed to be understood within a social and cultural context. More than 30 years later, Gertrude P. Kurath (1960) wrote an article outlining research on dance in American anthropology. A dancer herself, Kurath stressed the importance of dance training for the anthropological study of dance. This article prefigured the emergence of the anthropology of dance as a subdiscipline in the 1960s and 1970s, which was consolidated by Anya Peterson Royce's foundational *The Anthropology of Dance* (2002), first published in 1977. There is also the recent volume (in French) edited by Andr  e Grau and Georgina Wierre-Gore (2005) for the early history of dance research in the United States and Europe. At first, the anthropological focus on dance stimulated discussions about the origins and definition of dance that became complicated by the cross-cultural perspective. As Adrienne Kaeppler (1985: p. 93) has remarked, the concept of 'dance' is a Western category that often fails to distinguish among different cultural activities. This concern is also paralleled, however, in the anthropology of music and the arts. Drawing on her research in Tonga, where movement around ceremonial pig presentations, *kava* mixing, and choreographed group speeches revealed hierarchy and social solidarity, Kaeppler suggested 'structured movement systems' as an alternative concept to dance. Another anthropological strategy has been to identify *dance events* as units of study, rather than to look for particular dances in isolation. On the whole, dance anthropologists seem to converge on a consideration of bounded rhythmical movements that are performed during some kind of altered state of consciousness, an elevation or even trance.

The pioneering dance anthropologists had to deal with the ethnocentric assumptions, prevalent among the then mostly

autodidactic dance historians, about dance as a universal language and 'primitive dance' (often constructed in terms of a generalized 'African dance'), as an early phase in a Western scheme of dance evolution entailing a hierarchizing where ballet was regarded as a superior dance form. This prompted Joann Kealiinohomoku (1983) to write an article where she argued for a view of ballet as an ethnic dance, as one dance form among others. This is a crucial anthropological contribution to dance scholarship, but Kealiinohomoku's idea that ballet reflects Western cultural traditions is perhaps a bit exaggerated, especially in the long run. Admittedly, Western classical ballet speaks to a limited historically dominant segment of the West, in contrast to the shifting multicultural landscape of contemporary Europe and North America. To state that ballet is a form of ethnic dance also disregards the traditional difference between ethnic dance as a participatory ritual practice and ballet as a stage art performance separated from the audience, although ethnic and folk dance are now frequently moved from secular and sacred ritual to the realm of art in stage dance. The genres are further blurred by contemporary stage dance experiments with the audience taking part in the performance and even being invited to go onstage, as well as by so-called site-specific dance often being performed outdoors in city parks and subway stations, but also in rural places such as in the forest.

The central quest and *raison d'  tre* for the anthropology of dance have been to find out what dance says about its society, informing about social or cultural circumstances that cannot be sufficiently expressed in any other way. As the contributors in Paul Spencer's *Society and the Dance* (1985) show, this comes about not only through direct reflection but also through social commentary and critique in the form of parody-like (gender) role reversal, suggestions about alternative social scenarios, and even predictions of political events. Dance has increasingly been recognized as having an impact on social change. But there is also the cathartic view of dance as a safety valve, a structural outlet, which will keep the social order and its inequalities intact. Dance is moreover often a feature of socialization. One of the functional aspects of dance is that of transformation: the classical examples are rites of passage where people are moved from one stage in the life cycle to the next one, such as initiation rites, wedding celebrations, and funerals.

Like all subdisciplines, the anthropology of dance has followed main theoretical currents in its parent discipline.

Dance has thus been analyzed through structuralism, symbolic anthropology, semiotics, and linguistic theory, generating studies of the deep structures of dance and dance as nonverbal communication. Taking these theoretical approaches as points of departure, some of the first dance anthropologists worked out their own elaborate models and classificatory schemes for movement analysis. Drid Williams's (1976; see also Williams, 2004) theory of semasiology, the meaning of human movements as action signs, for instance, has been developed further by Brenda Farnell (1995) in a study of Plains Indian sign language. With dance cases as nonverbal communication ranging from rural West Africa to the stage in New York, Judith Lynne Hanna (1987[1979]) showed how dance can be understood through communications theory.

There are basically three kinds of anthropological studies of dance. One kind has dealt with meaning, function, and the cultural context of dance, and another kind has concentrated on the choreographic form. The majority of anthropological studies of dance, however, has combined these approaches by taking both meaning, function, and context *and* choreographic form into account, and has included textual descriptions of the movements and/or illustrations such as photographs or simple movement transcriptions, consisting of circles and arrows that indicate directions and patterns of dance.

In the United States, research on dance in its cultural context has dominated, just as in the United Kingdom where John Blacking was a key figure in the emerging interest in the anthropology of dance. In continental Europe, dance ethnologists, also called choreologists, who came out of a long nationalist folklore tradition, documented folk dances in their own societies for preservation and revival, stressing formal characteristics along the lines of music research there. During the Communist era in Eastern Europe, dance (and other folklore) researchers found themselves in ideological conflict over state manipulations and control of their research (Giurchescu and Torp, 1991). Anthony Shay (2002) has documented how state-sponsored national dance companies from countries such as the former USSR as well as Turkey, Egypt, and Mexico accommodated their repertory and choreography to the prevalent state politics.

In the 1980s, a new generation of dance anthropologists joined the growing transdisciplinary area of dance and movement studies. By engaging with feminist and gender critiques, notions of the body, identity politics, and literary and cultural studies, scholars of dance and movement studies became more visible in the academic world, and also because there was an increasing number of them. With dance historians and scholars such as Helen Thomas (1995), Jane Desmond (1997), Teresa Jill Buckland (2006), and Susan L. Foster (2011), dance scholars have moved toward ethnography and social and cultural theory, redefining their field as critical dance studies, while dance anthropologists have added Western stage dance and culture, as well as European folk dance, to their previous focus on non-Western dance and movement. Most dance scholars, including dance anthropologists, have been trained as modern and/or classical dancers. The anthropological study of dance usually requires participation in the dancing, or at least some kind of bodily knowledge of the steps that are investigated. The fact that dance anthropologists learn sequences of steps and movement that are completely

different from their earlier movement experiences is something they often report on in a humble spirit, while it actually deserves recognition not least as an important methodological strategy. Some dance anthropologists have thought of their own dancing in the field as a part of the reflexive turn in anthropology, which has also had an impact on the anthropology of dance. The volume *Dance in the Field* (1999), edited by Buckland, brings together methodological deliberations on a wide variety of dance forms at home and abroad around issues of representation, reflexivity, and ethics.

Moving Bodies, Gender, and Sexuality

In the upsurge of studies in the human sciences on the body as culturally constructed, the *moving* body has nevertheless been marginal, as Susan Reed (1998) notes in her review article of the anthropology of dance, except in recent dance scholarship including dance anthropology where it has been prominent, often in tandem with issues of gender and sexuality. Such aspects were early identified by Judith Lynne Hanna (1988) in a cross-cultural panorama of different dance forms. Also, Helen Thomas (2003) delves into how moving bodies, whether in dance forms as diverse as ballet, contact improvisation, or rave, offer ideas on the politics of identity, while Eduardo P. Archetti (1999) has compared masculinities in football, polo, and tango in Argentina.

By now, a number of monographs that combine attention to moving bodies, gender, and sexuality have appeared. Jane Cowan's (1990) work on the body politics of gender in a town in northern Greece focuses on dance events, including, for example, lively wedding dances that unite a contradictory ideology of inequality and visions of closeness in the dancing bodies. For the women, dance is an ambivalent pleasure since they have to balance their sexual expression carefully between release and control; unlike that of the men, women's dancing demeanor always runs the risk of being interpreted as indecent. This is also a problem for the professional female entertainers, singers, and belly dancers in Cairo who Karin van Nieuwkerk (1995) writes about, who see their job as 'a trade like any other.' Performing at celebrations such as births, engagements, and weddings, these Egyptian entertainers create much happiness and are, in fact, crucial for the success and prestige of these occasions. Nevertheless, they are regarded as dishonorable in the context of Islam and class in Egyptian society because they make a living out of disclosing their bodies in public, thereby tantalizing men. In Cynthia Novack's (1990) ethnography of contact improvisation, the American communal art-sport that emerged in the 1960s, gender relations are quite differently featured in line with the prevailing ideology of egalitarianism. Although the body is constructed as nongendered in contact improvisation, the performers' touching and supporting of each other's weight while moving together, usually in duets, sometimes produce sexual and sensual feelings among both them and the observers.

Novack's study spans more than two decades, showing that the movements of contact improvisation, and thus the construction of these moving bodies, and the arts organizations around them followed changes in American culture so that this dance form gradually diminished together with the

egalitarian agenda of the 1960s and 1970s. A different type of body politics is articulated through Brazilian samba, which Barbara Browning (1995) writes about as a form of political resistance. Body and space are in focus in Sally Ann Ness's (1992) interpretation of the *sinulog* danced in Cebu City in the Philippines. Ness connects dance movements and space to everyday movements like walking and the urban landscape of Cebu City. A Philippine ballet, *Igorot*, which Ness (1997) discusses, produces neoethnic bodies in a structure of postcolonialism and transnationalism. J. Lowell Lewis (1992) also links everyday movement and dance movement in Brazilian *capoeira*, the martial art and dance with roots in Brazilian slavery and, further back, in Africa. Lewis analyzes *capoeira* as a cultural style through the metaphor of play: bodily, musical, and verbal. Learning *capoeira* in Salvador, Brazil, is Greg Downey's (2005) area, as he observes the bodily training having an influence on perception according to a phenomenological perspective. The significance of the black dancing body in the United States is evident in Brenda Dixon Gottschild's (2004) book. In 2005, Bryan S. Turner edited an issue of the journal *Body & Society* on 'the dancing body.' Even though the issue deals with a variety of topics, it was prompted by the ethnography that Steven P. Wainright and Turner (2005) did for their research on injuries and aging among ballet dancers. Applying a broad perspective, Farnell (2012) has pursued her interest in the body, mind, and movement by building an ontological theory of embodiment.

Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Transnationality

Ethnicity and nationalism are often negotiated through dance, but in different ways depending on historical and political circumstances. J. Clyde Mitchell's (1956) small classic monograph on the Kalela dance in colonial northern Rhodesia is an early instance of ethnic dance. The Kalela dance was performed every Sunday by labor migrants who had moved from the countryside to the town of Luanshya. While describing colonial society, the dance was also a marker of a 'tribal' group identity called for in contrast with other groups in the town. The European folk dances that European dance ethnologists have long been documenting can be categorized as ethnic dances. Yet it was the growth in studies of nationalism in the social sciences generally that inspired dance anthropologists to investigate ethnic and national dance. Located in postrevolutionary Cuba, Yvonne Daniel (1995) discusses how the government replaced ballet with rumba as the Cuban national dance. Rumba was associated with the working class and the African heritage, which suited the socialist state ideology. Studies of Javanese court dance exemplify the wider escalating concern with questions of representation, authenticity, and appropriation. In a study of the *devadasis*, female temple dancers in South India, Joan L. Erdmann (1996) points out that it is time to rewrite the history of Indian dance without Orientalism such as the Western label 'Oriental dance,' in order to make room for indigenous categories. More than a decade later, Felicia Hughes-Freeland (2008) explored how the embodied tradition in Javanese colonial court dance has turned into a national dance that influences everyday movement. And Janet O'Shea (2007) shows how the history of

the Indian dance *bharata natyam*, which is danced across the world, follows the history of India. Martha Savigliano (1995) applies a transnational perspective in her study of tango in Buenos Aires, Paris, and Tokyo. Her point of departure is the political economy of passion ideas of machismo and postcolonialism. Also, flamenco is connected with passion, as William Washabaugh (1996) points out: this popular culture had a political impact during Franco's reign in Spain. The transnationality of the salsa scene in Montreal, Canada, is scrutinized by Sheenagh Pietrobruno (2006), who contextualizes this in the city's economy. Tango and salsa are among the Latin dances that can be included in ballroom dance, among waltzes and other European social dances. Competitive ballroom dance, so-called dancesport, as a global arena, has been studied by Jonathan S. Marion (2008).

Ritual dance is firstly conceptualized as a conduit for national identity and ethnicity by Zoila Mendoza (2000) in relation to dance in the Peruvian Andes, and secondly by Deirdre Sklar (2001) in relation to a Virgin of Guadalupe fiesta dance in New Mexico in the United States. Francesca Castaldi (2006) writes about the National Ballet and Senghor's Négritude in Senegal. The politics of race and African American culture in the United States is examined by Thomas F. DeFrantz (2004) through the history of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Helena Wulff (2007) has related Irish dance forms, including traditional folk dance, Irish dance theater, and Riverdance (the Irish dance show), to the development of Ireland as an independent nation. Although most dance anthropologists seem to agree that all dance forms are more or less mixed, with increasing global contacts, ethnic and national dance forms are becoming even more mixed than before. *Igorot*, the Philippine ballet that is a mixture of classical ballet and traditional Philippine dance, has been described as an instance of cultural hybridity (Ness, 1997). Drawing on Howard Becker's (1982) notion of art worlds, Wulff (1998) explores homogeneity and diversity in the transnational world of ballet.

Mediation and Preservation

As dance is elusive, its movements are difficult to document for preservation, distribution, or revival of performances. Dance is mediated to a great extent through text, scholarly as well as journalistic, a fact that is pondered by Sally Banes et al. (2007). To convey movement through the text is an obvious ambition for dance anthropologists. In her little book on tango and the multidimensional national Argentine identity, accurately entitled *Paper Tangos*, Julie Taylor (1998) has inserted small black-and-white photographs in the margin on every page. A quick flipping through the pages thus creates an image of motion, of a couple dancing the tango.

In addition to simple figures illustrating the text, some dance anthropologists have learned advanced standardized notation systems for transcription and preservation of movements, such as Labanotation, which is the most widely used, or the Benesh or Eskhol-Wachmann notation systems. The period of organized training to master any of these systems completely is often said to be like that of learning another language. In the Western dance world, trained notators, or choreologists, document ballet and dance productions through these systems,

and they have also been important in the medical rehabilitation of disabled people. There is, however, a degree of interpretation involved in the notating process, which means that different notators may describe the same movement somewhat differently. In *Choreographics* (1989), Ann Hutchinson Guest discusses in great detail a number of historical as well as contemporary dance notation systems. For notators, dance notation has been available in software, LabanWriter, for some time, and recently as an iPad app. In dance anthropology, there has been a discussion about the applicability of these Western notation systems to non-Western dance and movement forms, although there seems to be agreement that they can be used for such purposes as well. Certain conventions have developed to deal with cultural translation problems, so that the particular use of Labanotation, for example, may be explained in a 'key' for readers.

Photography and film are other, often complementary, media for conveying and preserving dance and movement. There is, however, an element of cultural selectivity in their use, as in film and video recording, which has increased substantially. Video and film have also become significant aids in the mechanical work of drawing the symbols for the scores of Labanotation and the Benesh notation system. The expanded use of technology in dance research has accentuated questions of copyright and ownership, which are further complicated in a transnational cross-cultural context. The area of dance and mediation, also including television, DVDs, and certainly the Internet, is generating an accelerating amount of new research, as exemplified by Susan Kozel's (2008) work with and about digital dance and phenomenology.

Future research in the anthropology of dance is likely to include more systematic reception and audience research. The anthropological inquiry into dance is being extended to popular dance genres such as rave, dance shows, and dance in musical videos, and to world dance, in both Western and non-Western contexts. Street dances, such as breakdance in Mary Fogarty's (2012) research, and flash mobs, the sudden, brief mass dances in public places that are arranged through mobile phones and Facebook, studied by Georgina Gore (2010), are also emerging topics for anthropological dance research; so are health and healing, which Karen Lüdke (2008) has related to the tarantula rite in southern Italy. Also disability, as in Ann Albright Cooper's (1998) work, is attracting scholarly attention. Dance and the senses is yet another emerging topic in the anthropology of dance, as shown by Tomie Hahn (2007) in her account of the traditional Japanese dance, *nihon buyo*. Even issues such as human rights and social movements are expanding areas for dance research, as Naomi Jackson and Toni Samantha Phim (2008) show. Unlike the anthropology of music, which attracts mostly men, the majority of dance anthropologists have been women. This may have played a role in the relatively modest position of the subdiscipline, at least in the past. Its present growth is shown in the volume *Dancing Cultures* (2012), where the editors Hélène Neveu Kringelbach and Jonathan Skinner argue for the importance of dance in social life, in relation to social change. They explore the shift of movements between dance and nondance contexts.

The anthropology of dance keeps contributing to central debates in the human sciences, especially to an understanding

of culture in terms of process and diversity. Importantly, dance and movement not only are shaped by society but also shape society. This occurs in increasingly complex ways as the genres of dance and movement in society shift and grow, inviting more studies of the anthropology of dance.

See also: Body: Anthropological Aspects; Cultural Relativism, Anthropology of; Entertainment; Evans-Pritchard, Sir Edward E. (1902–73); Religion: Nationalism and Identity; Ritual and Symbolism, Archaeology of; Ritual.

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