

Looking at past ethnographic and anthropological dance studies in the UK, and their possible meaning for dance/movement psychotherapy

It is accepted that Dance/Movement Psychotherapy (I will use DMT here) in the UK developed out of educational dance. The educational dance developed in a society with such a rich, social, communal and multicultural dance milieu. Interested in the past of this dance culture, I started to read old ethnographic and anthropological dance studies..

Ethnographers, folklorists, military personnel, lawyers and others studied dance as an integral part of societies worldwide. They paved way for UK anthropologists to enter the fields at the end of the 1800s. Focus is here on the UK studies, even though it is not always easy to isolate the UK developments from wider perspectives.

Old ethnographic studies

Ethnographic studies of dance stem from the 1700s; dance and music were studied as a part of the life of a society. *Africa Association* was founded in England in 1788 for a systematic study of all aspect of African societies. This study served the purposes of the expanding colonization in Africa. *Notes and Queries in Anthropology* was published, and reprinted continuously; it was a methodological bible for generations of anthropologists in the English-speaking world.

Towards the end of the 1800s professionalism in anthropology changed the focus from colonial interest to studies of societies and cultures in their own right. Dance in these was studied as an integral part of its society and culture.

A few great anthropological expeditions deserve mention. Indian tribes were studied in Northern Canada, organized by one of the pioneers in British anthropology, E.B. Tylor (Tylor 1871). An anthropological expedition from the Cambridge University, to Torres, north of Australia in 1898, was directed by professor A.C. Haddon: Secular and ceremonial dances of the Torres Strait Islands as a part of the configuration of the culture described dances, costumes, decorations, dance occasions, music, musical instruments, myths and legends, and included drawings. Haddon's concern was the natives' point of view. He used first person singular when stating his views. Haddon's student Tremaine studied Bori cults in North- and West-Africa.

British anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, the founder of the British school of social anthropology, a part of the Cambridge research milieu, conducted his first fieldwork on the Adaman Islands in 1906-1908. He classed the dances of the Andaman islanders as communal, ceremonial and entertainment. He described occasions, settings, people's involvement, dance patterns, songs, rhythms, everything in detail the way Haddon had done. Fine photos intermediate Andaman sentiments. Radcliffe-Brown conducted field studies in Australia in 1910.

Sir E. Evans-Pritchard in Oxford saw anthropology as a humanistic discipline. He was the first European social anthropologist who engaged himself explicitly in dance research. He analyzed the social functions of a single dance as a part of the Azande society of Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1928). He introduced scientific objectivism into anthropology. He objectified his subjects using third person singular when describing his observations. It is often unclear whose voice is speaking. His objectifying attitude makes the accounts somewhat colorless, and they seem to lack perspective.

Social anthropological dance studies seem of two kinds, studies in which dance occupies a part of the study, and studies of dance as the prime interest, that is, dance anthropology proper.

Dance anthropology

European dance anthropology was developed by John Blacking, ethnomusicologist at Queen's University of Belfast, by Paul Spencer, senior lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies at University of London, and by Peter Brinson, a collaborator of Blacking at the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance, and John Baily, an ethnomusicologist and other followers of Blacking.

The first inter-collegiate seminar between dance and social science scholars was held at the University of London in 1979. The Dance Research Journal of the Society for Dance Research was founded in London in 1983. The papers "Society and Dance" were edited (Spencer 1989). Spencer outlines the difference between American cultural anthropology, the approach to embrace the whole culture, and the narrow European social anthropology, dance seen as social action (Spencer 1985,x). Brinson assesses dance in the context of culture and social life, he sees dance as an active creator of culture "We need to acquire inevitably a wider perspective of culture and of the nature of knowing and its transmission." "This is the intensely rich area of new knowledge" (Brinson 1985, 211-214).

Dance anthropology with its long epistemological tradition and its insights seems to have borne influence on parts of UK dance, and through dance on DMT. Herbert Spencer: "I emphasized the psycho-physical law that muscular movements in general are oriented by feelings in general. ... the first are always the results of the last: at least, after excluding those which are reflex and involuntary" (Spencer 1895). He may have got the ideas from French Françoise Delsarte who used the law of correspondence in his actor education. The psycho-physical law (emphasized by a railroad engineer in 1857) sounds familiar to a dance therapist.

Blacking saw the basic assumptions that underlie all of anthropology as: "Human beings bring meaning to their experience; human beings transform the world around them through practical action.....; andeverything is socially constructed". (Grau 1993). These assumptions seem to bear direct relation to DMT; clients need to bring meaning to their experiences; clients transform their lives through practical dance actions; and dance therapy is a socially constructed process between those who partake in it, clients and their therapist.

This little account may show how DMT, a product of its society and culture, also reinforces its culture, and thus has a future in its society.

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