

REVIEW*

TO DANCE IS HUMAN: A THEORY OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION.
 Judith Lynne Hanna. Austin: University of Texas Press,
 1979. xvi + 327 pp., figures, illustrations, appendixes,
 notes, references, index. \$14.95 (cloth).

Where is the study of dance today? Are we any further along now in our understanding of the complex phenomena of human movement than we were with Boas or Kurath? Hanna believes that we are, or at least that she is. In To Dance Is Human she has gathered together a series of articles that she has published elsewhere, or written for different purposes, and presents them along with new material from her doctoral study of Ubakala dance plays. In their book format, some of her thoughts make rather strange bedfellows. The definitional chapter has been presented in part elsewhere and its inadequacies have been noted (Current Anthropology 20: 313-339, 1979). It is unlikely at this point that any two individuals will be able to agree as to what dance is, what it all means, or how to study it. As an emerging speciality, the anthropological study of dance is having its growing pains. There are too few detailed studies of human movement and those who feel the need to theorize will continue to be hampered by lack of empirical data until more relevant studies have been carried out and published.

The contribution made by Hanna lies not in theory, but in the data she presents on dance and the importance of dance among the Ubakala of Nigeria. I suggest that the unwary or unconverted readers skip the first three chapters because they will likely become impatient with the setting up and knocking down of straw men that Royce commented on in the CA review treatment. In these first three chapters, and sporadically thereafter, an almost indigestible array of main courses is piled one upon the other. Every one is referred to, but the ideas are not sufficiently developed. Indeed, by the end of the third chapter one has the uncomfortable feeling that all the words and concepts are there, they just seem to be in the wrong order. By attempting to be all things to all people in these early chapters, Hanna has played down the value of her real contribution to the study of dance. It is unnecessary to convince us that she has read everything, and the attempt to throw light on all aspects of human movement from every perspective can only lead to confusion. A critical distillation with a solid, well-developed viewpoint is more useful than a potpourri that gives everyone his due (or more often his "undo").

Starting with chapter 4, however, we are led into the world of the Ubakala. "Using a sociolinguistic perspective, [Hanna] focuses on associations between movement and social relations which appear in the dance-plays" (p. 38). Inasmuch as this reviewer believes that dance

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movement is primarily a visual extension of social relationships among people, the gods, and the universe, it is fascinating to follow the metaphorical use of movement for conveying larger concepts. Although the materials are scattered throughout the book, there is enough information, especially in her Case Study B of chapter 6, to gain a feeling for Ubakala movement. I cannot find a clear statement of how dance among the Ubakala can be conceptually separated from other spheres of movement, but it is clear that dance-plays and world view are intimately related to each other.

Hanna does not present basic data in detail and the reader must simply accept her conclusions about world view principles and values. How do we (or she) know, for example, that the "primary Ubakala value is fertility and continuity" (p. 163)? Although she gives us numerous examples of, and insights on, the importance of birth and its celebrations, we are left without knowing why, and how, this value is basic to others. Such information is usually too complicated to include in journal articles, but one expects it in a book.

Except for an appended chart, we are not given a description of the dance-plays, an example of a text, or an analysis of the structure or the movements. Is there a relationship between the dance structure or movement syntax that is also found in social structures or other cultural spheres? What do movements or structural relationships communicate, and to whom do they communicate them? Why can dance mediate paradox better than something else?

Other statements, such as "dancers symbolically portray group cooperation for common goals when they form a circular spatial pattern" (p. 169) are equally intriguing. Questions are raised, but answers are not forthcoming. What is the association between circles and group cooperation? Is either group cooperation or the circle important in social structure? Is there a similar symbolism in two-dimensional art? And, what is a circular spatial pattern, anyway? Do the performers stand in a circle and dance, move around in a circle, move to a circle and out again, or does each dancer create his own circle while standing in a circle or in some other formation?

All of the things that Hanna says dance does, and all of the values it expresses, are difficult to visualize on the ground. It is exasperating that the reader is not given the necessary information so as to use his own thinking or at least to be able to follow the abstracting process. If Hanna had presented Ubakala dance and its context as a detailed empirical study, it would serve as a data base for her theoretical concerns. As it is, her "communicative theory of dance" is a series of statements that one can only accept on faith.

More important, however, one wonders if the study of dance as exemplified in this book is not just a form of butterfly collecting. Gathering bits of dance unsystematically, and trying to put them together in a theory that will please all researchers does not really advance our understanding of human movement. Labeling some bits of movement as 'dance' while regarding others as "not dance" only obscures the importance

of the study of movement as a social and cultural phenomenon. The study of formalized movement per se in a specific culture might be a more appropriate starting point. From there, with an ethnoscientific analysis, we might discover from the point of view of the people of that society if "to dance is human".

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