

## AN EDITORIAL COMMENT

It is with great pleasure that we welcome three Australian contributors to JASHM, with three articles by Judith Ekstein, Gillian Fisher and Kate Lidbetter. When JASHM was started, one of its stated purposes was to provide a "voice", not only for beginning writers, but younger writers who (regardless of their chronological age) were starting into the field of human movement studies at some level. This issue represents three such efforts, all of them emerging from the newly developed program at the University of Sydney funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra, A.C.T.: an M.A. (Pass) course in the Dance and the Arts of Human Movement Studies. More information about each writer can be found in the brief biographical sketches on p. 173.

Not unexpectedly, two of the articles directly pertain to Aboriginal dancing. Through comparative readings, Ekstein addresses the broader issue of how and in what ways we might see matching or parallel characteristics of Aboriginal dancing across tribal and linguistic boundaries. Her evidence tends to support the idea that dancing and singing occupy different structural categories in central Australia from Western Cape York Peninsula, leading us to question the popularly held notion that Aboriginal dancing is somehow the same, in spite of cultural, linguistic and environmental diversities.

Fisher's article, on the other hand, attempts to evaluate the effects of one of the major Australian ethnographers of Aboriginal peoples, A.P. Elkin, whose influence on the subject of Aboriginal performance is still to be reckoned with, even though social anthropology has by now moved away from his theoretical and methodological approaches -- and those of his predecessor and founder of the first Australian anthropology department at the University of Sydney, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. We gather that there is little, except historical value, in Elkin's ideas for the student of Aboriginal dancing today, but this simply follows a pattern in the field of human movement studies, noted by Williams (1989) in England and the United States.

Lidbetter's article departs entirely from Aboriginal materials, exploring a western tradition of dancing that has had wide influences in Europe and the English-speaking world on dancing, painting, poetry and music for several hundred years: dances of death. We hope that this work will prove useful to others who are interested in the subject, if for no other reason than it brings together a bibliography of writers on the subject from many different sources. Juxtaposing such different subject

materials is a feature of our publication which we feel provides a perspective on studies of human action systems which is particularly valuable: that of 'reflexivity', both as a philosophy which aims to promote cross-cultural comparison, and as an important methodological premise. An anthropology of the dance should not, we believe, only include works on 'them'. It must be balanced by equivalent studies of 'us' and our own danced traditions as well. This combination of articles therefore provides an interesting manifestation of the scope of our field of study as we conceive of it.

Ekstein's article reminds us of just how different the act of dancing is in western Cape York Peninsula from our own contemporary expressions of, say, disco-dancing, which seems near-trivial by comparison, or is it that 'trivia' is nowadays elevated to the status of a set of significant icons? Fisher's article reminds us, yet again, of the futility involved in an 'objectivist' stance in the social sciences, and Lidbetter's contribution recalls to attention the fact that old tradition and superstitions may change in form, but they tend to persist through change with much more tenacity than we think they do.

We hope that more Australian students of human movement will join our efforts to keep a continuing dialogue going at an international level, and we would welcome, as always, comments and/or criticism.

The Editors

#### REFERENCES CITED

- Williams, D. 1989. Ten Lectures on Theories of the Dance. Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, New Jersey (in press).