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DANCE CULTURE AS A MICROCOSM

OF HOLISTIC CULTURE

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The word "microcosm" has kept coming to mind during my studies of Hopi Indian dance. That is not surprising, because there is an obvious viable relationship of Hopi dance to the over-all Hopi culture. Hopi dance culture is an ideal model for the topic of this paper, in which I will illustrate the Hopi paradigm, and then examine the possibility of extending the theoretical principles which emerge from that paradigm to other dance cultures.

I want to emphasize the term "dance culture." By this term, I am referring to an entire configuration, rather than just a performance. By dance culture, I mean the implicit as well as explicit aspects of the dance and its reasons for being; the entire conception of the dance within the larger culture, both on a diachronic basis through time and on a synchronic basis of the several parts occurring at the same time. A dance culture, like the greater culture of which it is a part, must be researched for answers to the same questions asked by the good journalist--that is, who, what, when, where, why, and how? Too often "what" and

"how" are the prime considerations given by dance researchers, but the others are of equal importance. These criteria should include the negative as well as the positive measurements. In other words, we should also ask who does not participate, what is not included, when is it not done, where is it not given, why are certain reasons for existence not appropriate, and what selective process has excluded certain possibilities of the "how" criterion? Indeed, the negative aspects are often as instructive as the positive aspects.

In the Hopi paradigm, dances which are required parts of the ceremonial calendar function as the religion made visible. The fact that these dances are performed and supervised by the members of a society points to the significance of corporate groups. The further fact, that the management of societies is inherited through matrilineal clanship, signifies that the understanding of this will reveal much about Hopi social organization.

Because the public performances of the societies are really ritual enactments, albeit abstract in dramatic content, of the mytho-historical basis for the society and its power, and, ergo, of the clan's culture history, these dances are the manifest charter for a clan and its associated society. The performances function to reinforce the validity of the society's contribution to greater Hopi society. This, in turn, promotes what the sociologists would call social solidarity.

It is important to realize that a performance requires the participation of many people who are not dancers. That is an obvious statement to any dancer who remembers the debt he has

owed to the many people who helped arrange a performance--costumers, publicity and public relations people, and so forth. However, many dance researchers have not recognized the importance of these non-dancer participants in their research. For example, Hopi ceremonial dances must be performed at the right time of the year, and the right time is determined by a designated person who must watch for and sight certain astro-phenomena. The sighting must be announced by a crier who tells the requisite number of days which must pass before the performance occurs. When the crier has made his announcement, a great flurry of activity is set into motion. On the other hand, if the crier does not make the announcement, the dance event does not occur, even though everyone knows that the time is ripe. To my certain knowledge, this failure to cry out has happened. In other words, the announcement sanctions all further activity. When the announcement is made, everyone within the clan, and all those who are related to clan members by blood relationships, marriage ties, or fictive kinship, plunge into obligatory actions designed to promote the success of the dance event.

During the dance itself, a variety of roles are performed. Some are obvious, others are not. These roles reflect the division of labor and the network of interpersonal relationships between male and female, chief to village member, maternal uncle to nephew, paternal aunt to nephew, brother to sister, man to nature, and man to the supernatural. From the analysis of these roles, one becomes increasingly aware of the ethos of the people.

The actual performance event is complexly orchestrated

through the activities of many people. There are often several things going on simultaneously (such as those who have been attending this Conference saw in the Yaqui Palm Sunday Fiesta). In Hopi dances, several classifications of personnel are involved and may include a variety of dancers, priests, musicians, clowns, and people who perform blessing ceremonies for the dancers.

At the same time, the observers of the public performances are definite participants also, and the interrelationship between observers and the performance are complex and often subtle. In fact, the success or failure of the performance can depend upon the proper thinking, or psychic commitment of the audience.

From this total complex dance event, synchronically and diachronically, the Hopi World View is revealed. This intense experience becomes, in fact, a microcosm of the entire Hopi culture, at least on the overt level.

On the covert level, a number of other things are going on, not the least of which are psychologically fulfilling aspects that include the gratifying importance accorded to males during dance and ritual, which appears to be necessary in this otherwise female-oriented society. The performance, with all the attendant obligations, tends also to act as a leveling agent, economically speaking, and a balancing agent to keep the homeostasis for this more or less egalitarian society. Certainly a dance performance strengthens the feeling of clan identity and pride.

The Hopi situation is an ideal paradigm, because it so clearly illustrates the microcosmic approach. The question is whether this approach can be used for the understanding of other

dance cultures as well.

Webster defines "microcosm" as a "little world that is an epitome of the world or universe . . . a unity that is the epitome of a larger unity." Under epitome, however, we find three alternative definitions which overlap but are not the same in impact. One definition calls epitome "a summary." The second states that an epitome is a "typical representation." The third says it is an "ideal expression" of the whole. A "summary," a "typical representation," and an "ideal expression" are, clearly, quite different in connotation. To expect dance culture to provide a summary of holistic culture may be too ambitious. However, I posit that data in depth will show that dance culture is indeed an epitome of the total culture as either a "typical representation" or an "ideal expression," and sometimes both.

In any case, it is self-evident that dance is not a total reproduction of the holistic culture. Obviously, it selectively reveals the culture, with either a limited but accurate mirroring of the culture, or with such a heavy emphasis that the emphasis actually causes a distorted reflection.

One dimension of the quality of that reflection is to distinguish who are the performers qua performers. For example, if performers are selected, in contrast to, say, letting anyone perform, then those who are chosen represent some kind of a model. They may be chosen because they are the prettiest, strongest, most talented, most enduring, most dedicated, best trained, and so forth. All of the criteria in that list are quite different one from the other, and what may be important in one culture may

not be important at all in another. At any rate, all of the criteria use a superlative, and the superlative indicates that these criteria reflect part of the value system.

Of course, the selections may be made from a group of people who are atypical of the group at large; for example, if it is thought that any candidate for a dancing girl must be, by virtue of her candidacy, an immoral person, presumably the number of available candidates is limited. If the screening is from such an atypical group, will the chosen performer still be a model? Yes, in that a narrow choice also reflects the value system at work. The selected performer is still a model, but of a restricted universe, so to speak.

The willingness of artists to suffer for their art is a widespread phenomenon which is fraught with implications. The most exacting suffering is experienced by the performing artist, because a public performance gives no opportunity to withdraw the product if it is faulty. Once performed, it is part of history, for better or for worse, and a mistake cannot be erased from that performance. It is different for the artist working in the plastic arts, for example, who can examine the product before it is shown to the public and can correct or even destroy the product. Perhaps, because of the threatening immutability of a performance, we find that the suffering of the performing artist is often self-imposed--a kind of ascetic flagellation created by avoiding certain activities, or subjecting oneself to excruciating discipline, and the like. But not all dancers are artists. Even with non-artists, however, a public performance will call forth

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preparatory sacrifices of some sort, and a willingness to perform, despite great discomforts. Thus, Hopis (who do not consider themselves as dance artists) who are going to perform as Kachinas must fast, become continent for a prescribed number of days, go without sleep, and be willing to perform barefooted in the snow, or unflaggingly in the broiling sun. In order to explain the willingness to suffer for the performance, we must conclude that the performance is an intensely value-laden epitome of the culture. Whether the performers of such an intense experience are artists, *per se*, or non-artists working within a prescribed formula, the experience doubtless reveals something crucial about the emphasis on values. If the emphasis is on artistry, the thrust is on the skillful behavior of the artist, and the ultimate aesthetic is assessed by the perfection of the performance. If the emphasis is on participation, the thrust is on the correct following of rules, and the ultimate aesthetic is on the total effect of the event.

Within any given society, of course, there may be dancers who are artists and dancers who are non-artists. Numbers of dance systems within a culture seem to increase with the amount of heterogeneity of a culture. Toward understanding the categories of dance, the question can be raised: who is the dance performed for? The answers, broadly speaking, can include: for themselves; for a generalized audience; for special people; and, for cosmic forces. Dances done for themselves require no outward projection. Dances done for special people and for cosmic forces require no projection, per se, but rather a kind of "tuning in." The focus

will indicate immediately the nature of the microcosm of the world being reflected.

In a heterogeneous culture, then, the dance culture may include several correlated dance systems which comprise the microcosmic world of the holistic culture. Thus, in our own culture, such systems include at least social dance, religious exercises, educational dance, and concert dance. But if these four systems are considered as part of a total dance culture, we find that they reveal as many things about us as Hopi dance culture does about the Hopis. Our dance culture is an expression of our institutions; it shows the nature of interpersonal relationships; and it reveals much about aesthetics and morals. Some of these expressions are "typical representations" of our universe, and some are "ideal expressions." The screening process may reflect a limited, but accurate, mirroring of the culture or, through its emphasis, a distortion of the culture. Who dances? For whom do they dance? What are the conditions of the sacrifices necessary for the intense experience of dance? The answers to these questions, for each of the several dance systems, comprise the foundation for our dance culture.

Because dance systems require the involvement of so many people, even non-dancers, and because they reflect so much about the culture of which they are a part, and at the same time demand the intense commitment of the performers, I suggest that dance cultures are indeed microcosms of holistic cultures.