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Spreading the Net

Anthony Shay
Pomona College

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III. Speaking Back

As the only person at this roundtable who is avowedly not an ethnographer, I feel compelled to enter the discourse triply assigned to objecthood, first as a former dancer, then as someone born in India now living in the United States, and finally as a Parsee, a community originally from Iran, inscribed with eleven centuries of cultural hybridity in its adopted homeland, presently named India. I start to speak back now....

Even though the unknowable mysteriousness of "the other" has been theorized, poeticized, analyzed, mythologized, demystified, and criticized ad nauseum, simplistic representations of the otherness of others in dominant media and cultural narratives persist. Simultaneously, hybrid minds abound, produced by migrations, race and gender colonizations, multinational industries, global economies, and electronic communications.

When the split subject is not the deviation, but the norm, why is unitary being an ideal for the writings of culture? The split subject, like the hybrid, is and is not her own other. She knows both subject and object positions, insider and outsider spaces. Cultural hybridity offers a place from which the writings of one culture to another might proceed from an intimate knowing of both the represented peoples and the ones being addressed. It is the embodied/bodily experience of performing that further supports my call for placing hybrid perspectives at the center. If performance is most effective when the performer's awareness is split between attention to subjective/objective modes, then why is this way of knowing not acknowledged in related activities?

I argue that at this historical moment, hybridity and its opposite, integral wholeness, are simply perspectives, politically assumed positions that indicate how we have chosen to construct ourselves. Hybridity as a position signals an inclusive, nonintrusive

acceptance of a multiplicity of differences. It involves neither erasure of difference nor the othering of difference.

Recent dance writings are already well ensconced in the hybrid territory between disciplines, exploring spaces between writer and dancer, self and object of representation. I am calling here for more of the same, for disclosing up front the writer's own dualistic/pluralistic subjectivities. Yet, this idea has disturbed people. Is it because what was swept under the rug in past writings most often turns out to be the crucial stuff of misconstructions, of enactments of a (single or collective) will-to-power?

Uttara Coorlawala

Princeton University, Long Island University,
C.W. Post campus

IV. Spreading the Net

The ballet and modern dance establishment has a stranglehold on dance programs throughout North America. Dance ethnology, with one or two exceptions, takes a back seat to the study of Western theater dance forms and its major figures. Individuals highly trained in dance ethnology have a difficult time accumulating sufficient "cultural capital," in Bourdieu's terms, to secure meaningful positions. As a consequence, we must "spread our nets" in order that our research and writings become more relevant outside the dance field. Dance ethnologists are uniquely poised to repond to the strong emphasis on popular culture that currently characterizes the social studies and humanities.

It is likely that for some time to come, research and work in the field—in non-Western genres such as classical dance in Asia, dance events in rural and tribal areas of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, and immigrant groups in urban centers—will continue to form the core of research for dance ethnologists. However, this emphasis

on research in the field has taken on a sort of "holy grail" mentality, carrying greater legitimacy than other areas of inquiry. This attitude, by implication, marginalizes other areas of investigation such as into ethnic dance as less legitimate, less valid, and less important. Instead, I suggest that, as dance ethnologists, we look beyond "dancing in the field" to the wide variety of what I call "parallel traditions" (see my article in *DRJ* 31, no. 1, 1999).

Globalization affects virtually everyone through the sound bites of television and the bytes of the Internet and other electronic media. Ethnic dance, as I witnessed on several CNN advertisements recently, becomes an instant symbol for particular ethnic groups. One click of the castanets and a swirling skirt and you know all of Spain is before you. One swish of a hula dancer's skirt evokes the palms and sunshine of Hawaii. Ethnic dance has also become popular through commercial media and blockbuster Broadway hits like *Riverdance* and *Burn the Floor*. These "parallel" genres are ripe for research, not merely to push the boundaries of dance ethnology but to become part of the core of our discipline. They are ubiquitous in today's world. Sophisticated theoretical analysis of parallel dance traditions can energize our field as well as contribute to the humanities and social sciences, creating widespread interest in dance.

I suggest a few areas that I think will provide fruitful possibilities for future research: (1) the international folk dance movement in the United States; (2) state and local folk dance ensembles; (3) the belly dance movement; (4) *Riverdance* and other blockbuster stage performances, and tango revues; (5) dance in commercial films and advertisements; (6) popular ballet, as for example, the annual *Nutcracker* ritual; (7) dance and tourism; (8) dance on ice; and (9) ethnic dance in rock videos. This list is designed to stimulate dialogue and enable us to "spread the net." There are many rich fish

awaiting us in the very large and uncharted ocean of ethnic dance research.

Anthony Shay

Artistic Director

Avaz International Dance Theatre

Los Angeles, California