

An Answer to Drid Williams

Williams has reviewed my book *The Nature of Dance*, London: Macdonald & Evans Ltd., 1975. An answer is necessary as many of her allegations are based on misinterpretations.

Chapter 1, "Dance and its Origin," is certainly not a history of dance as Williams indicates, but a historical survey of the concepts on dance. This involves naturally the problem of origin of dance and the different ideas expressed on this topic in the past.

I have introduced the problem of the texture of dance, the human movement. This is the main issue of chapters 2-5 (pp. 28-60). The shaping character of rhythm, the changes observable in the application of rhythm depending on cultural background, the changing of movement texture in dance as compared with every day life movement, have been discussed. Analytical tables with notated movement sequences have also been included. All these four very essential chapters, forming one half of my book have characteristically not even been mentioned in Williams' review.

Instead she has arrived at the conclusion that there is indeed little difference between my book and Curt Sachs's *The World History of Dance*. Anybody reading this famous work knows that Sachs has certainly not included any discussion on the texture of dance. Movement analysis and notation were not available in his time.

Also, Williams refers to Sachs's book as "completely outdated." This is not quite so. One has to remember that this first outstanding, scholarly study on dance has appeared in 1933 and it is certainly outdated in some parts. However, no other work of this standing has taken its place.

My criticism of Sachs's work is contained on pages 20-21 and 86-87 of my book. There are certainly shortcomings in his work like, for example, his attempt to establish typologies without having viewed dance in its cultural context. Sachs applied mechanistic criteria typical for his period. Sachs was not a dancer himself.

But Sachs did offer solutions in his book which open the doors to a new understanding of dance. Firstly, he defines dance as rhythmical movement without stressing any utilitarian aspect (p. 6), ("Tanz jede rhythmische Bewegung, die nicht dem Werkantrieb dient"—dance is any rhythmic movement which does not serve the ends of labour). (p. 3, German ed.). Secondly, he states that dance as an art is basic and prior to any other creative expression in man, as the dancer uses his own body. The work and the creator are contained in the same person before other substance, for example, stone, canvas, word, sound, places itself between the artist and his inner experience (p. 3). Thirdly, as a result of his historical analysis, he points out that already in the Stone Age dancing had become art. It was only then, with the advent of the Metal Ages, that myth took over and raised dance to the status of drama; but as soon as dance became "art" in the narrower sense and started to serve man instead of spirits, it was degraded to a spectacle and its all-embracing power was broken. It split. The different components of dance emancipated themselves and became separate activities and arts such as games, physical exercises, drama and religions (p. 6). (pp. 20-21 of my book)

I have presented in my book the broad concept of dance, including also dance manifestations which may not be art but have purely biological significance as a means of communication and expression. In this appearance these dance manifestations are not confined to human beings only. This is observable among the whole animal world. Dance as a means to express abstract ideas, spiritual content, is however only confined to Man. In this way dance becomes art only with Man. Williams' allegation that this distinction is confined only to "some doubt" on my part is dubious in the light of chapters 4 and 5 of my book ("When Movement Becomes Dance" and "Dance Becomes Art") elaborating this point extensively.

I do not think that the biological aspect could be omitted in any work discussing dance and its significance for human beings. That it leads to similarities observable with the animal world is only confirming the truth that Man, in spite of his highly specialised brain activities, retained an animal body. This has practical significance in dance as the human body is the dancer's instrument. The dance's texture consists of human movement transformed into poetry when it becomes art. Even in contemporary "civilised" dance there is no lack of physiological elements turned into symbols. We cannot part from the body discussing dance as this is perhaps one of the very few human activities left where Man expresses himself directly through his own body.

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Williams implies that I am confidently citing ethologists like Konrad Lorenz without any indication that there is a serious criticism of this trend. Certainly I could not avoid citing ethologists because there is some profound evidence gathered by them referring to the biological make-up of Man, particularly relevant to such a primary means of expression as is dance. However, I have mentioned that some ethological contentions have been strongly criticised and a well known current publication on that topic has been quoted (A. Montagu, *Man and Aggression*, p. 52 of my book).

Williams accuses me of not including current works on updated dance anthropology. She quotes just one—S. Youngerman's article which appeared in *CORD News* 1(2), July 1974. It is enough to look at my preface dated December 1973 for any reviewer to understand that there would have been little possibility to update the book after July 1974. It has by then been in production. I have in fact quoted many major works before 1973 which were relevant to my book. Also, I quoted many items of European literature in foreign languages, and I do belong to a European school of Anthropology. What is wrong about this?

Williams states further that I have said that dance is an "inherited predisposition." I have said this nowhere. I said, instead, that one of the primary means of human expression is movement, the instrument used by the dancer is his own body, and that there is a personal content evident in dance. However, I also said that:

... The personal style of single dancers is only the exponent of a dancing style that is valid for a particular group of people, nation or school, and this is always culturally conditioned. Even dances that are completely improvised reveal at the same time some stereotype movement sets 'owned' by the social group in question. This is because the individual is socially conditioned. ... (p. 80),

and further,

But the main determinant of culture is human society itself. Thus the dance repertory is always shaped to the needs of a given society. Dance is used by a social group in a particular form, determined by the group's needs and aesthetic norms, and valid for a given period and given territory (p. 105).

Williams predicts that I have not witnessed most of the material included in my book. How could I? It is the same as to ask a historian of art if he has seen all the pictures and objects of art in the whole world. One has to rely on one's own experience and apply critically the available literature. In my book I have indicated clearly what my own observations are. Also, I have quoted other sources.

Williams is fanatically stirred that Frazer's, Tylor's and Evans-Pritchard's notions about religion have been placed together. It happened so because I have had to oppose Frazer's assumption on the

priority of magic to religion and have quoted Evans-Pritchard, Parrinder and Eliade who have expressed the opposite, namely that magic and religion existed at many levels of culture together (pp. 65-66). What is wrong about this? Yes, I have read Evans-Pritchard's *Theories of Primitive Religions*, but the paragraph from it quoted by Williams is evidently out of any context in respect to that which I have just clarified.

Then there is an indication that I am pursuing Unilineal Evolution. This again is not true. On page 50 of my book I am saying clearly that this idea has long been discredited. Discussing Sachs's absolute chronologies (pp. 87-88) I say that he tried to show dance's

... development from the simplest to the most complex forms, in historical perspective. This would imply that dance *only* ever developed in one way, and that it has been necessary for all people to go through the succession of more and more complex forms. In reality, it seems more probable that the universality of human nature secures a similar response in similar conditions, ... In similar conditions producing certain social attitudes, similar forms are applied (p. 87-88).

Surely this stand cannot be identified with unilineal evolutionism?

On hand of the above "findings" Williams recommends that my book should not be allowed for usage at any dance department, colleges of physical education, teacher-training colleges etc. This sounds like wanting to impose censorship on my work because somebody does not like somebody else publishing a book. This tactic is certainly known in some political systems. However, we are not yet under any dictatorship.

Generously enough Williams grants me the status of a European expert in Labanotation and urges me to restrain my activities to that area only. Yes, I learned movement notation years ago and have treated it as an indispensable tool for my anthropological work on dance. All my students specialising in dance have had to learn it and to use it. This conditions literacy in work on dance.

Williams implies also that I am not an anthropologist. Well, I am. Anthropology was the subject of my university studies. I have spent 12 years in professional field work on dance and since 1965 I have lectured at several universities. I have published about 40 items and I am not unknown to folklorists and anthropologists.

Williams goes so far in her review that she wants me to quit anthropology once and for ever. Well, I shall not follow her "expert" advice. I shall go on quietly with my work.

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