On dance and difference: bodies, movement and experience in Khoesān trance-dancing – perceptions of ‘a raver’

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‘If there is one feature of indigenous life which has been the subject of the cinematographer, be they commercial, professional, academic or tourist, it has been dancing’ (Gordon 2000, p. 1)

As asserted in the quote above, the dances of ‘the primitive Other’ have fascinated observers from the time of European contact to today. In particular, the perceived abandonment of body and movement exhibited by ‘the dancing native’ – epitomised by apparent attainment of ecstatic states of trance through dancing – has been exoticised and reified as a ‘marker’ of difference. Further, these frequently have been linked to defined ethnic categories, usually those characterised by ‘primitive’ and small-scale socio-political organisation. Widlok (1999, p. 234) describes for Khoe-speaking Namibian Hai||om, for example, that ‘[a] close examination of the Hai||om medicine [trance] dance is promising with regard to questions of cultural variability and diversity because it is … an important ethnic marker …’. The reification and increasing commodification of dance as marker of particular and authentically ‘traditional’ ethnic identities has been further enhanced by touristic and consumptive requirements for a sacralised and noble Other: offsetting both what Durkheim delineated as the anomie of modern life and reiterating the civilised and advanced state of the observer (Garland and Gordon 1999; Gordon 2000). As Rony (1996, p. 65 in Gordon 2000, p. 1) argues, indigenous peoples thereby are identified with ‘the body’ in a way that affirms the conventional dualisms of modernity: between mind, culture and civilisation on the one hand, and the body, nature and wildness on the other. It is not difficult to locate where the various ‘typical’ observers of ritualised dances fall in relation to this conceptual divide, and where, by default, the indigenous participants of dances are situated.

In this article I wish to argue that these distinctions and separations tell us more about
what distinguishes a constructed Occidental culture of observers than about the particular defining ‘traits’ of those being observed. My arguments are based on observations of Khoe-speaking Damara people in north-west Namibia, and via secondary sources – and on my participation and ethnographic work in largely urban-based dance events or ‘raves’, i.e. those that permit and promote the experience of trance-like states through dance movement. I emphasise the term experience because it seems to me that a commitment to the experiential aspects of ‘participant observation’ in an anthropology of the body and of dance often is missing from analyses of ritual and performative events based crucially on body movement and varied subjective states.

In this regard the ‘language’ through which I understand and interpret the significance of dance movement is that of movement itself – drawing on my own technical training in, and experience of, a range of dance movement practices. These include: long-term training in classical ballet; preliminary training and practice in dance movement therapy, ‘authentic movement’ (e.g. Chodorow 1991; Pallaro 1999) and the ‘5 Rhythms’ movement system formulated by Gabrielle Roth (1989 (1998), 1997); ongoing performance work in contemporary dance with Gravitas Dance Company; and, in particular, my regular participation as ‘a raver’ in the dance-based events characterising a more-or-less ‘underground’ dance ‘sub-culture’ in London (cf. Collin and Godfrey 1997; Saunders 1997; Malbon 1999; Silcott 1999).

I explore here some concordances that I believe to exist between the trance-dance practices of Khoe-speaking peoples located in southern Africa, and those of dancers in the rave events that have emerged in industrialised and technocratic society. These suggest to me a universal ability to attain trance-like states through dance movement. Given the globalising dominance of what Laughlin (1992) describes as the ‘monophasic’ culture of ‘the west’ i.e. that values the perceptual mode associated with waking, rational consciousness above all else, a common ability to experience a range of perceptual processes, coupled with the cultural sanctioning and valuing of these experiences, has significant psychological, socio-cultural and political implications (cf. Lumpkin 2000). By extension, I argue that resistance to such experiences, incorporating considerations of their ‘deviant’ nature, perhaps reveal more about the characteristics and psychological ‘ill-health’ (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1988) of a conventional Occidental patriarchal and capitalist culture of observers than about anything else.

I focus on three aspects of trance-dance experiences and events. First, I describe and discuss what I believe to be some components of the individual experience of a trance-like state, especially of the attainment of such a body-mind state through unchoreographed dance movement. Second, I explore some social and cultural
phenomena associated with the communal experience of dance movement events that build on such spontaneous and improvised dance movements. Here I focus on the interplay between concepts of ritual and theatre, and of spectator and performer, drawing particularly on the explanatory relevance of the Polish theatre director Jerzi Grotowski’s concept of ‘paratheatre’ (Kumeiga 1985). Finally, I draw some parallels between Khoesān ‘groups’ and ‘ravers’ in what I believe to constitute multifaceted assertions of autonomy, autarky and affective affluence, focusing on the ‘staging’ and performance of dance events as a crucial expressive component of these. Here I draw on theorists such as Lefebvre (1971) and de Certeau (1984) to frame individual and group participation in dance events as powerful political acts that embody the appropriation of bodyspaces, mindsaces and physical spaces from an otherwise all-encompassing political economy of the body and space built on conceptual dualities (e.g. mind-body, nature-culture, male-female, etc.), economic affluence and control (cf. Foucault 1961, 1973, 1975; Deleuze and Guattari 1988). Throughout, I raise some issues regarding authenticity and legitimacy vis à vis the experience of trance-dance: asserting, for example, that the transrational (cf. Lumpkin 2000), transpersonal and transformative experiences articulated as part of the practice of dancing for many ‘ravers’, as well as the ‘subculture’ of ‘rave’ itself, are no less ‘authentic’ or ‘culturally-situated’ than contemporary trance-dancing rituals ‘performed’ by ‘indigenes’ such as Khoesān.

Dance like nobody’s watching …

“When I’m dancing … it feels like my stomach is in my heart, like a burst of energy, like a glow. You feel like expressing yourself. You can dance however you want. … people can express themselves and let themselves out and have no fear.” (rave dancer quoted in Malyon 1998, p. 188).

‘The songs of the trance dance, … are said to possess n|om, a special kind of energy or spiritual power. N|om is invisible, dwelling in the n|om songs and in the bodies of the trancers, … There it lies latent until it is activated by the singing and the dancing.’ (Biesele 1993, p. 74).

Although using different words, oral testimony accounts of the mind-body experiences described by individual dancers are remarkably similar: whether these are by Khoesān participants of an age-old tradition of social trance dances, or ‘ravers’ participating in the various ‘underground’ dance events held every weekend in the industrialised world in formal venues, warehouses, squatted buildings and country fields. Particular
similarities are the experience of a powerful energy rising through the body upwards from the base of the spine as movement and rhythmic music begins to ‘take over’ the dancer (e.g. Katz 1982); the experience of a ‘loss-of-ego-self’ and a sense of what the psychologist Abraham Maslow (1973) framed as ‘transpersonal’ (or ‘beyond-the-self’) experiences, connecting ‘the self’ with both other people and with the dance-space or environment (cf. Fox 1990); and the sensation of accessing ‘other worlds’ or alternative ‘mindspaces’ through movement and setting. Importantly, these are empirical phenomena in that they generate knowledge based on experience and the validity of sense-data (The Concise Oxford English Dictionary 1982, p. 315). They also are verifiable, in the sense that similar individual experiences can be, and are, reproduced at different dance events.

In terms of the form and content of dance movement involved in such dance events, again there are numerous parallels. In both contexts, and as Malbon (1999, p. 86) describes, ‘… dancing is a conceptual language with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings, premised upon physical movement, and with interrelated rules and notions of technique and competency guiding performances’. This implies an importance of form in guiding the types of dance movements that are acceptable. Dancing thus is a non-verbal expressive and communicative language that can both cement and extend bonds between individuals. Given an oft-quoted statistic that verbal communication comprises only around 7% of all communication, dancing in and of itself can be said to have a cohesive and socially ‘healing’ effect (cf. as described by dramatherapist and anthropologist Sue Jennings as a primary outcome of social trance dances among Senoi Temiar of Malaysia (1994, p. 2).

Of further importance in both rave and Khoesān contexts, however, is the ability of individual dancers to express and extend their individuality through movements that are unique and idiosyncratic. In this sense, the setting of dances encourages individual spontaneity of movement: i.e. comprising an up-welling of the ‘body based intelligence’ of the dancer that allows ‘… internal, inner dimensions, rhythms, [and] patterns’ to ‘… open through the body into space’ (Dymoke 1999, p. 19). Such a ‘retreat’ into the inward energies of the mind-body can propel the dancer into a meditative state: i.e. defined here as a ‘quieting of … inner dialogue’ and a perception of ‘reality’ that is ‘… unsullied by the categorizing imperatives of language’ (Moxley n.d.). As Roth (1989) describes, mental stillness and clarity can be found in the extremes of spontaneous and both rhythmic and chaotic movement.

Among Khoesān peoples, an ability and inclination to trance-dance is highly valued. As Biesele (1993, p. 75) describes for Ju‘hoan, ‘… trancers go through a fearful discipline … in learning to trance’, and trances are considered to require ‘… the courage a man
needs to “die and then come alive again”. The act of trance-dancing thus is one of bravery in which dancers experience a ‘mini-death’ through temporarily relinquishing the power of the rational mind over the body, as well as undertaking possibly fearful metaphysical journeys to a powerful ‘other world’. That this is a common and cross-cultural trajectory of ‘traditional’ trance dance rituals is illustrated by Jennings’ (1994, xxviii) descriptions of the ‘risky business’ of ‘forgetting’ the self, articulated as crucial to the communal trance dances of the Senoi Temiar of Malaysia.

In ‘the west’, spontaneity and creativity of dance movement, entwined with the opening up of patterns of movement and internal experiences of ‘the body’, has become the basis for a range of dance movement and body-based psychotherapies. In these, and based on the premises ‘… that mind and body are inseparable’, and ‘that what is experienced in the mind is also experienced in the body’ (Levy 1995, p. 1), knowledge of ‘the self’, including past experiences, are accessed bodily and later articulated verbally (i.e. representing their integration into the conscious or ego self) (e.g. Rowan 1988; Whitfield 1988; Boadella 1988). Significantly again, such an integration may involve the loss or ‘death’ of previously held constructions of the self, in order that a more healthy psycho-somatic self may emerge. The movement therapist Mary Starks Whitehouse in Frantz (1999: 23), for example, asserts that ‘[a]n authentic movement is in and of the Self at the moment it is done. … When I see someone moving authentically, it is so real that it is undiluted by any pretense or any appearance or images. … to get to this authenticity a sacrifice [i.e. of the ego-self] is involved’ (emphasis added). As such, and as articulated by ‘ravers’, trance-dance experiences in the context of ‘raves’ can be personally transformative and, I would suggest, may qualify fully for a description as courageous, in the same way as applied to Khoesâän and other ‘traditional’ trance-dancers.

As observed elsewhere (e.g. Malbon 1999), these experiences conform well to Victor Turner’s notions of both liminality and antistructure. These describe significant aspects of culturally-important ‘rites of passage’, in which a subject ‘… becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification; he (sic) passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state’ (Turner 1974, p. 232). Gordon and Sholto Douglas (2000, p. 239) utilise these concepts to explain the position of ‘Bushmen’ in relation to a broader and dominant political economy to suggest that like the liminal subject Bushmen are ‘… are in but not of the world. They are different but alike, despised yet held in awe. They have both animal and human qualities and possess both secular and mystical power.’ Similarly, ‘ravers’ pursuing trance-dance and ‘alternative’ mind-body experiences can be seen to travel a rite of passage sanctioned and legitimised by a rave subculture (cf. Malbon 1999), and to place themselves in an ambiguous state vis à vis the mind-body
and other activities legitimised by wider society. In both contexts the liminal subject, as individual and group, is vilified as peripheral to the norms of conventional society, and also perhaps viewed with an element of awe in their ability to maintain a certain degree of autonomy and autarky.

Tellingly for all marginal ‘groups’, and as Gordon and Sholto Douglas (2000, p. 239) remind us, ‘… those seen as outside or anti the structure of the state are always persecuted; and such persecution requires discourses which dehumanise them’. Thus, while appreciated and valorised internally for the heroism and ego-strength accompanying an ability to enter trance, it comes as no surprise that an Occidental culture of dance-observers views such practices with a range of responses from bemusement to disgust. As Bourguignon (1973, p. 342) states, ‘[t]he nineteenth-century view of progress, not only from simple to complex but from a primitive mentality to a civilized one, is associated with an evaluation of the ecstatic as savage and childlike’. Just as the colonial and typically male cinematographer would not permit himself to abandon his rational control by allowing his body to become ‘entrained’ with the dance movements of ‘the observed native’ (cf. Gordon 2000), so a ‘phallogocentric’ (cf. Irigaray 1977) ‘establishment’ of the modern world distances itself from a ‘rave subculture’ built on ‘alternative’ experiences of the ‘mind-body-spirit’ nexus, and seems set to put in place more and more punitive measures to disallow the possibilities for different ‘ways of being-in-the-world’ (cf. Heidegger 1962). Organisers and participants of ‘rave’ dance events (frequently free or low-fee parties) thus have been vilified by the media and the state, and subjected to systematic harassment by the authorities with the support in the UK of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 (Bender 1998; Malyon 1998). Further, a whole gamut of legislation imposes controls over a citizen’s freedom of choice and responsibility regarding mind-body experiences. As discussed below, it is perhaps tribute to the growing power of an emerging culture that has alternative mind-body experiences and ‘ways-of-being-in-the-world’ at its core that formal society is and has been so virulent in its suppression of such experiences and of their political correlates.

**Resurrecting the Festival: from ritual to paratheatre**

As Jennings (1994, p. 8) points out, conventional analyses of ritual, drama and theatrical performance, have posited a number of polarised relationships: primarily between ritual and drama on the one hand, and theatre on the other (cf. Schechner 1988). In these terms, the enacting of ‘traditional’ ritual, and the immediacy associated with drama (i.e. ‘as a creative action based on improvisation’ (Jennings 1994, p. 8)), are considered distinct from the ‘high art’ of theatrical performances. Moreover, an
evolutionary relationship frequently is considered to exist such that theatre emerged from ritual. Within these schemata, the trance dances of Khoesan peoples would be considered as rituals, with the cultural ‘functions’ of facilitating healing events and promoting social cohesion. ‘Raves’ on the other hand, might also qualify in some respects as comprising both elements of ritual and drama: it is perhaps unlikely that they would be considered as theatre or art.

These categories, however, are of limited heuristic value in exploring the properly theatrical and creative dimensions of trance dance events in both contexts. As Lefebvre (1971, p. 36) points out, they also leave as unproblematic the alienation from everyday life that art in ‘the west’, including theatre, perhaps embodies, having become ‘an increasingly specialized activity …, an ornament adorning everyday life but failing to transform it’.

I would suggest that communal events with music-driven spontaneous movement and the possibilities of transformative trance-dance experiences at their core, shatter the boundaries between these categories. Thus ‘traditional’ rituals involving dancing usually also involve a range of other creative and skilled activities (singing, musicianship, costuming, etc.) and involve complex interrelationships between elements of performance, improvisation and spectatorship. Similarly, ‘raves’ comprise spaces where creative behaviour is not limited to an élite of ‘artists’. Instead, and as clearly articulated in the interview transcript below, all participants potentially are themselves artists as in ‘art-producers’: in dress; in dance; in ‘body-painting’; in playful and imaginative conversation and interactions with others, including dance improvisation. Given this appropriation of creativity by everyday culture, such events might qualify fully as the potentially revolutionary ‘… resurrection of the Festival’ called for by Lefebvre (1971, p. 36).

This spontaneity of creativity, coupled with a breakdown of the distinctions between audience and spectator, and between art specialist and the ‘ordinary person’, has been a dream of western theatre directors in the latter part of the 20th century. Perhaps the most famous proponent of these potentialities is Jerzi Grotowski, whose Theatre of Sources was an attempt to plumb the direct primeval experience and the creativity of ordinary people (Grotowski 1969 in Jennings 1994, p. 10). In the latter part of his career, Grotowski endeavoured to create situations where ‘paratheatre’ might occur: ‘a genuine encounter between individuals who … as they lose their fear and distrust of each other, move towards a more fundamental encounter in which they themselves are the active and creative participants in their own drama of rituals and ceremonials’ (Roose-Evans 1984, p. 154 in Jennings 1994, p. 10). Might not ‘rave’ constitute an embodiment of the ‘paratheatrical’ process that Grotowski was seeking? The following interview
transcript, from Dot, a rave participant who herself has a background in the performing arts, would suggest this to be the case:

‘Sometimes, at the end of a rave, when the lights come up, the music fades out, and everyone begins to clap and cheer, I have the sensation that it’s not just the DJ and the organisers that we’re applauding – it’s also ourselves. It’s as though there’s an unspoken acknowledgement that we are all responsible for the success of a night. Our performances, the characters we’ve played, the selves we’ve created and the spectacles we’ve participated in as observers, work together with the music played, the lighting and the décor. At the end of it we deserve applause too, because we’ve been part and parcel of the creation of an experience – both as creative performers and as spectators’. (Interview with Dot, 23rd November 2000).

If I can’t dance, it ain’t my revolution …

‘The failure of modern society lies in our alienation – a sense of powerlessness in trying to influence the world in which we live; of meaninglessness in our search for guides to conduct and belief; of isolation from others; of estrangement from one’s self. For modern society to have meaning, to convey a sense of coherence, it must find some purpose beyond consumption. Lefebvre argues that it ought to be the production of autonomous, thinking, feeling individuals able to experience their own desires and develop their own style’ (Wander 1984, ix).

‘The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the “social-worker”-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he (sic) may find himself, subjects to it his body, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements’ (Foucault 1975, p. 304).

From the 19th century to recent decades, assertions of Khoesān and Bushman identity by scholars and observers have served to prevent them from participating as ‘full citizens’ in wider discourses8. Since the 19th century, ‘Bushmen’ have been ‘explained’ as coming prior to ‘humans’ on the evolutionary scale, due to various assertions of their difference, manifest as ‘primitiveness’. It was considered that ‘[t]he inclination of the moment is decisive to him’ (Ratzel 1897, p. 267), i.e. that they display no ‘… drive to
create something beyond everyday needs, to secure or permanently to improve systematically the conditions of existence, even the most primitive ones like the procurement of food’ and thereby ‘… lack entirely the precondition of any cultural development’ (Schultze 1914, p. 290). Such assertions reappear in different guises throughout this century, usually justifying further exclusion of ‘Bushmen’ from opportunities to participate economically and politically as ‘citizens’ at least equal to ‘blacks’ as classified under the South African administration’s schemata of colour. The Afrikaner anthropologist Schoeman, who headed a government Commission for the Preservation of the Bushmen in the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, argued that ‘[t]he Bushmen seem to lack something … some inner or spiritual ability’ which would enable them to ‘… adapt themselves to a new way of life’ (Schoeman n.d.). Similarly, Coertze (1963, p. 47), in an introductory university text to volkekunde (ethnology), argued that the Bushmen typify an ‘[e]xaggerated conservatism’ which meant that ‘… despite close contact with whites on the one hand and Bantu on the other, they became neither Bantuized nor westernized’. Apparently they ‘… were intrinsically incapable of adapting to changed living circumstances, … not simply because they were conservative, but because they had an inherent incapability of meeting new challenges’ (all quotes in Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000, pp. 44, 63, 160, 164). Passarge in the early 1900s lays the blame for ‘Bushmen’ inequality relative to Bantu-speakers firmly with the oppressed, stating that ‘[t]heir inability to accept cultural imperatives, to rise to the cultural level of their suppressors is their own fault’ (1997 (1907), p. 128).9

Again, there are parallels between these perceptions of ‘Bushmen’ and descriptions of with those choosing variously autarkic existences in the industrialised ‘west’: as well as rave-participants, we might think, for example, of New-Agers, ‘travellers’, ‘communitarians’ of various descriptions, anti-capitalist protesters, and a growing DIY-culture with many shapes and forms (cf. McKay 1998). In other words, those people portrayed variously as a rag-bag bunch living on the margins of formal society: deemed incapable of participating in wider (capitalist) society (particularly when it comes to investing in the future); seen as revelling in immediate-returns, pleasure-seeking and irrational behaviours such as trance-dancing and other mind-body ‘altering’ practices; and generally considered a threat to the norms and ideals of what Lefebvre (1971) terms a bureaucratic society of controlled consumption (e.g. Carey n.d.; Floyd 2001).

But an adherence to such practices and internally reinforcing behaviours instead might be interpreted as assertions of autonomy and autarky vis à vis a colonising and dominant cultural mainstream. Among Khoesân peoples, for example, and paraphrasing Gordon and Sholto Douglas (2000, pp. 234-235, after Comaroff and Comaroff 1986), the strength of Bushman ideological autonomy needs to be viewed against the need of
the colonial project to colonise the minds of indigenes through the internalisation of the norms, categories and values of the industrial capitalist world: one that is a ‘properly Cartesian’ world of rational individuals. Similarly, rave-participants and ‘groups’ attempting degrees of self-sufficient and communal existences in ‘the west’ might be viewed as comprising individuals making various choices towards lifeways comprising ‘affective affluence’ (cf. Van der Sluys 2000)\textsuperscript{10}, while perhaps remaining in relative financial poverty (cf. McKay 1998). Against this backdrop, and drawing on Lefebvre’s (1971) and de Certeau’s (1984) affirmation of the possibilities for transcending quotidian mundanity, both ‘rave’ and a current resurgence of ‘Bushman’ trance dances (e.g. Shostak 1990 (1981), 219; Widlok 1999) thus might be interpreted more broadly as acts of defiance and resistance in relation to a domineering mainstream political economy and culture.

Thus, as described above, the mind-body experiences articulated by trance-dancers in both ‘rave’ and Khoes\textȩn contexts bring to mind Foucault’s validation and pursuit of ‘limit experiences’: framed as an individual’s means of extending her- or him-self beyond socially-defined dictates of the person as a unique nexus of mind-body-spirit (cf. Miller 1994). Given this apparently anarchic aspect of spontaneous and improvised dance movement (cf. Dymoke 1999, p. 20), and combined with the possibilities of transformative self-knowing experiences presented by spontaneous movement and trance-dancing, and the empathic and communicative experiences generated in communal dances, the act of dancing can be articulated as powerful individual and group expressions of political will and autonomy. Each dance act thus becomes simultaneously a multifaceted political act of appropriation: of one’s own mind-body space; of physical spaces in which communal dances are located; and of a shared identity marginal to that sanctioned by conventional society.

**Concluding comments**

“‘Nomad thought’ does not immure itself in the edifice of an ordered interiority; it moves freely in an element of exteriority. It does not repose on identity; it rides difference. … The concepts it creates do not merely reflect the eternal form of a legislating subject, but are defined by a communicable force in relation to which their subject … is only secondary. They do not reflect upon the world but are immersed in a changing state of things. … The modus operandi of nomad thought is affirmation, …’ (Massumi 1988, pp. xii).

In this article I have drawn on a range of theoretical, vocational and experiential
perspectives to explore possible concordances between the trance dance practices of Khoesän indigenes and participants of an emergent ‘rave culture’ in the industrialised and bureaucratised ‘west’. By way of a conclusion, I wish to affirm the importance of a serious exploration of the social, cultural, political and historical significance of subjective practices that embrace ‘alternative’ mind-body experiences. This is particularly important if one concedes that the emancipatory potential of post-structural and post-modern thinking has to a large extent been hijacked by an emphasis on a representational and linguistic analytics – that seems to suggest that experience exists only in the retelling, and that language and importantly the text thereby are the areas worthy of academic analysis and reflection (e.g. Cupitt 1998). As potently articulated several decades ago in a critique of patriarchal society by Mary Starks Whitehouse ‘[w]ords have become his primary means of communication and realization … movement is non-verbal and yet it communicates. … just as the body changes in the course of working with the psyche, so the psyche changes in the course of working with the body. We would do well to remember that the two are not separate entities but mysteriously a totality’ (1999 (1958), pp. 41-42).

Living is embodied and experience is felt. ‘Literacy’ in these domains offers great possibilities for critical analysis and wise interpretation. By embracing the dynamic and plural potentialities made possible by a poststructural dismantling of modernity’s ontological certainties in favour of indeterminate complexity (cf. Deleuze and Guattari (1988 (1980); Irigaray 2002) 11, we might also accept that subjective reflection and dynamic awareness confers possibilities for agency and choice, both within, and with the ability to affect and transform, broader structures (cf. Giddens 1985). The state of consciousness embodied in trance-dance practices in broadly different cultural contexts, suggest to me that here is a domain of activity where identity and ideas of difference are potentially malleable, being subject to individual intentionality and possible transformation. This may pose a threat to some, and liberation to others. But following Lefebvre, it also may be a significant means of thinking beyond the phallogocentric cultural confines defining what is legitimate in terms of constructed bodies and experiences in ‘our’ bureaucratic society of controlled consumption; thereby making manifest the creative potential both latent and present in everyday life.

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CAPTIONS


BIOGRAPHY

Sian Sullivan trained in dance at the Royal Ballet School, London. She gained her Ph.D. in Anthropology from London University in 1998 and currently is a Lecturer in the Geography Department at King's College London. Her academic interests include dance and 'the body', cultural landscapes, people-environment relationships, phenomenology and embodiment, gender, globalisation and protest events. Among her publications are *Political Ecology: Science, Myth and Power*, 2000 Edward Arnold, London (co-edited with P. Stott), articles in *Anthropos, Africa e Mediterraneo, Journal of Biogeography, Cimbebasia*, and *Economic Botany* and chapters in several edited volumes. She dances and performs with a small London-based contemporary dance group called Gravitas Dance Company (www.gravitasdance.com).

ENDNOTES

1 The term ‘Khoesăn’ refers to those southern African peoples who are part of a ‘click’ language-cluster comprised of Khoekhoegowab (spoken by Nama, Damara and Hai||om) and a variety of Sâăn (or ‘Bushman’) languages (Haacke et al. 1997). Although I draw in this article on trance dance practices among Khoesăn peoples, I believe that many of the same arguments could be made for other peoples for whom trance dance events are important parts of social and ceremonial life. For example, see Jennings’ (1997) ethnography of social and individual significances of trance dance and dramatic events among the Senoi Temiar of Malaysia.

2 For more information, go to www.gravitasdance.com

3 By ‘underground’ I mean a dance culture that involves actions and norms framed as ‘deviant’ and/or
illegal by formal society; predominantly the use of psychoactive substances (‘drugs’) and the ‘squatting’ or appropriation of disused urban and other spaces.

4 By ‘universal ability’ I mean that the potential to access trance-like states through body movement is something akin to Merleau-Ponty’s (1961) concept of cross-cultural bodily constants (cf. Couzens Hoy 1999, p. 6). As the rest of the article should make clear, however, and following Foucault (e.g. 1977(1975)) I also consider that possibilities for accessing these types of experiences are deeply influenced by the situatedness of the body and self in socio-political and cultural contexts.

5 As psychological anthropologist Erika Bourguignon (1973, p. 11) states on observing ‘[t]he presence of institutionalised forms of altered states of consciousness in 90% of … sample societies’ it would seem that this is ‘… a psychobiological capacity available to all societies’.

6 The experience of dancing at ‘raves’ frequently is accompanied by consumption of psychoactive drugs, predominantly MDMA (3, 4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) or ‘Ecstasy. Indeed, it is the interaction of imbibed chemicals with new genres of popular music (from the original 1980s House, Garage and Techno to the relatively recent sounds of Psychedelic Trance, Hardcore and Gabba) that usually is credited with responsibility for the subcultural phenomena that comprise ‘rave’ (Collins and Godfrey 1997; Robb 1999). This significance of psychoactive substances makes the experiential aspects of rave events easy to discredit by an establishment that is profoundly fearful of, and anti-‘recreational-drugs’ (unless, of course, these are alcohol or tobacco). It might also be used to suggest that the movement experiences of ravers are somehow less legitimate than those participating in ‘traditional’ trance-dance practices and rituals. This is not the place to enter into a discussion about the legitimacy or otherwise of mind-body experiences facilitated or enhanced by consumption of psychoactive substances (although see Saunders, Saunders and Pauli 2000). What I would suggest, however, is first, that such consumption does not necessarily detract from the personal significance of trance-dance experiences for an individual, and second, to point out that the supposedly more legitimate ritualised trance-dance practices of ‘the native Other’ are themselves frequently accompanied and enhanced by consumption of various substances – from tobacco amongst Khoesán, to the profoundly psychoactive ayahuasca consumed by indigenous peoples of the Amazon.

7 As an aside, this significance of non-verbal communication makes me wonder at the current lack of body-awareness and movement training available for anthropologists and other social scientists. It seems to me that the success or otherwise of ethnographic and participant observation research practices rests crucially on a sensitivity to bodily aspects of communication and to nuanced ‘readings’ of these.

8 The following paragraph derives from Sullivan (2001).

9 I am grateful to Michael Taylor for drawing my attention to this quote.

10 Following Markovič in Wander (1984, pp. xvii-xviii) affective affluence might be described as affirming some or all of the following aspects of being: a range of sensory experiences and imaginative possibilities; capacities for communication and creative activity, and abilities to harmonize interests with other individuals, choose between alternative possibilities, and develop a critical consciousness of the self.

11 i.e. whereby political, cultural and physical hierarchies can be conceptualised as permeable, dynamic, non-equilibrial, evolving through time and space, and coupled with intersections across multiple levels, cf. the rich conceptual metaphors offered by what the South African philosopher Paul Cilliers terms a ‘postmodern science of complexity’ (Cilliers 1999).