

Where is the Religious and Philosophical Basis for Grooving?

"For who would teach rhythm to the world of machines and guns. . . .?"

Leopold Senghor

The fundamental wisdom about musicking-dancing for happiness and wholeness (becoming holy and becoming whole as one and the same goal) was never really fused as a central practice in the great counter-civilization movements of the pre-Christian era or in the counter-civilization movements of the centuries leading up to our own 21st. Somehow liberating ideas and mental opposition to civilization persist as a form of "alienation," but "participation" in social action comes and goes. Full participation in musicking-dancing for wholeness does not persist. Wherever class society, urbanism, literacy, law, monotheism, hierarchy, bureaucracy, have imposed "civilization as we have known it" upon human beings, there have been responses: reasserting diversity and complexity, reclaiming paganism or nature worship, questing for a basic equality of beings and life forces, a "search for the primitive" (Diamond), a deep desire for freedom, justice and equality here and now in earthly communities rather than in a hypothetical heaven, later. But these quests for freedom, justice and equality have always been marginalized by "progress" eventually. Some kind of transformation into a quietist religion and/or a philosophical system of meditation and acceptance winds up being a gentle path out of civilization for some people. But "surrendered men" and women don't seem to dance, or don't dance with much "enthusiasm" (lit. God inside them). Or they dance intensely until they are safely out of class society and then they quiet down. "Quietism" is an interesting word/concept. I'm not sure what it means. But I take it that "quiet" is what happens when Quakers stop quaking, or Shakers stop shaking. Other people don't go through a dance phase and simply think their way out of civilization as skeptical, rational, secular humanists or humanist-naturalists. But after you've thought your way out, shouldn't there be a party to go to where an enlightened mind can merge with other enlightened minds via *ngoma*?

Dionysian rites and dramas have been a Western theme from then till now, but how? There isn't a continuous practice or set of revivable practices that I've heard about and can recommend to people. We read our Nietzsche and wait, because Fred says the good stuff is merged with the Apollonian for best results -- you can't just "do the Dionysian" and be healed.

Why didn't the Dogs of 4th century BC -- Antisthenes, Diogenes, Crates and Hipparchia -- take the Socratic teachings and dance "know thyself"? If all the lore that has come down to us gives a full picture, they opted for the simplest life, made fun of civilization, sought happiness in personal self-sufficiency and wholeness, but didn't dance their wisdom often enough to be noticed doing it.

Buddhism is full of bells, woodblocks, gongs, chantings, vibes a plenty, but grooving seems to be out of bounds -- no clave yet, no *ngoma*. All the "participatory discrepancies" are textural, in the sound qualities sent heavenward, and sweaty dancing doesn't seem to be an intimate part of any Buddhist tradition I have encountered. I try to

keep the faith with Tibetan Buddhism because it is louder, more paired horns and drums and cymbals and chanting with overtones, and it keeps alive the practices of a “sounding sanga.” But why didn’t a tradition of “musicking-dancing sanga” emerge in the Ancient Far East eventually?

In the not so ancient (1200s) Near East, Sufi Muslims gave us Rumi the whirling poet, and practices that influenced both the Hasidic Jews and secular Greeks. In the USA the holy-rolling black and white store-front churches of Protestant Christianity seem to be the main manifestations of drummed-danced-sung monotheism. I have often wondered how we might “bring these practices to children without the monotheistic belief systems” but the beliefs and the moving-and-grooving seem to be deeply intertwined, and the beliefs seem to be compatible with or cooptable by hard-right or neocon politicians. Could a paleocon movement rescue, revive and reclaim the dancing monotheisms for the school curriculum? Doesn’t seem likely.

In my own work in afterschool programs I use the secular side of the African, Afro-Latin and African-American music-dance traditions to empower children. I assume that eventually we will borrow rhythmic interlocks from Santeria/Vodun/Condomble and related religions, learning the dance steps in the same way that students of Western music borrow and use the religious music of Bach and Handel without professing adherence to Christianity. I assume we could drum, dance and sing the Yoruba *orisha* or “saints” as a “folklore show” without the “saints” marching in and riding off with us.

The early 20th Century dance liberation movements that climaxed in the jazz age 1920s coincide in my mind with the Dalcroze and Orff reforms in music education. But I don’t find evidence for the “eurhythmics” of Dalcroze or Rudolf Steiner fusing with Isadora Duncan’s barefoot revolution or Josephine Baker’s “danse sauvage.” The bourgeois ideology and high culture categories hold sway: “Dance” is in one world and “Serious Music” is in another; people from the two worlds meet and collaborate, an aleatory John Cage loops a tape for a twitchy Merce Cunningham, but a sustainable hot fusion of musicking-dancing didn’t flow from the early 20th Century movements, or from the DJs and tech producers of the late 20th Century popular culture either. Maybe the early 21st century liberation movements will be different.