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Dance, Culture, and Identity

Peeking above the trees of Grant Park, the tops of some of Chicago's most famous buildings scrape a perfect clear blue July sky. The lakefront park is taken over by the Taste of Chicago, a mega-festival featuring cuisine from scores of the city's numerous and diverse restaurants. In addition to food, "The Taste" offers entertainment. The city provides a number of performance venues, and reflecting a strategy that embraces (and channels) ethnic diversity, it has invited the Mexican Dance Ensemble of Chicago to perform on the "Fun Time Stage." The stage anchors an open meadow lined by booths and tents oriented to children and parents and even a merry-go-round (but no beer vendors). The space and presentation construct not only ethnic diversity, but appropriate family fun as well.

As it is Sunday morning, the festival is lightly attended and the audience is small. The performance, however, is enthusiastic. Dress and props are carefully controlled, uniform. In one presentation, all the men wear identical pants, boots, and bandanas, although their belts vary slightly. The backs of their identical jackets are adorned with identical appliqués featuring the iconic Mexican image of eagle, snake in beak, perched on a cactus. In another performance, women's costumes are identical in form down to matching earrings, although their flowing layered skirts vary in color. This visual, near-complete sublimation of individual to group (and culture) extends to movement

and sound. The dancing is crisp; bodies are coordinated tightly to one another and to the music. The effect is particularly dramatic in pieces that feature stamping. The perfect simultaneity of several dancers stamping in unison with the beat of the music overtly communicates precision of performance. Beneath the surface are more subtle messages about unity in the expression of tradition.

Viewing the performance reminds me of other forms I have been observing. Traditional K'iche' dance, partly because it is fundamentally narrative, features vestments, masks, and steps that vary by character but adhere to convention for each figure. Powwow dancers construct regalia and perform dances that afford a greater degree of personal expression within general aesthetic guidelines. All, however, to a varying extent, articulate individual dancer to dance convention.

1.1. Unity in the Expression of Tradition. Members of the Mexican Dance Ensemble of Chicago perform at Taste of Chicago, July 2006. (Photograph by author.)

I approach dance not as a choreographer or as a dancer, but as a social scientist interested in how people form, contest, and communicate culture (and particularly the culture of identity). However, dance is linked in the popular imagination to anthropology more than it is actually investigated by anthropologists. This is unfortunate as dance is instructive of cultural knowledge and social practice to insiders and outsiders alike. It communicates overt information about the current state of social affairs but also tacit information about the conduct of social affairs and even the nature of human experience.

However, before getting into dance as a cultural and social act, some attention to defining it specifically is warranted.

Dance is diverse and difficult to define, and the focus here necessarily favors depth of field over sharp clarity. At root, dance involves formal, intentional movement. This intentional movement, even in its "free" forms, involves some degree of bodily conformity to socially shared conventions. Music is common but not necessary to dance. Continuing the notion that individuals express connection to group and convention through dance, rhythm, an essential component of music, provides an auditory framework to organize particular (or particle-like) dancers into coordinated movement. As such, dance enacts the coordination of individuals to group through convention. It may help to employ a common metaphor articulated by early thinkers in social science.[1] If we take human society as an organism, dance provides a code for forming cells into organs and organs into organism. It is more complex, however, than individuals simply articulating themselves bodily to convention.

The commonality of dance across a wide variety of societies reflects a basic challenge of human social organization. Regardless of scale and complexity, societies must articulate individuals with self-awareness and self-oriented drives to group purposes. The degree to which human beings share knowledge and cooperate socially marks us as a species and is at the root of our adaptive fitness. Alone we are slow and weak, but together, sharing accumulated knowledge through symbolic systems of communication, we become the world's dominant species. In social *groups*, from families to communities to polities, the human potential is realized. Although it is clear that individual human beings survive and thrive in social groups, we do not generally follow the guidelines expressed in our cultures blindly or perfectly. Cooperating with the group necessarily entails sublimation of some individual desires, and we do not always go along happily or willingly. The challenge for any society, then, is creating schemes of social organization that compel conformity but accommodate individual needs and capacities. Varying by culture, history, economy, environment, and so forth, societies have developed a dizzying array of solutions to this fundamental human problem. This is not the place for an ethnology of individual and society, but a clear and logical pattern exists. Rigid structures that rely heavily on coercion foment social tension. Loose and fluid social organizations—the type typically found among foraging bands—afford a great deal of individual autonomy and defuse social tension. Most societies exist somewhere in between, requiring more persistent organized social structure than foraging bands but relying on a combination of avenues for human expression within group conformity. This balance is never perfect, and to get people to go along sometimes requires more direct articulation of ideology and use of force.

I draw a deliberate parallel between this diversity of articulation of individual to group and the diversity of dance form. This is not to say that foragers always have free and loose dance forms that reflect their economy and social organization or that stratified complex societies produce exclusively rigid hierarchical forms of dance. Rather, dance establishes concrete patterns of body conformity (in dress and in movement) and concrete patterns of spatial relations among individuals. It, in effect, enacts and works on that basic challenge of human social organization. When individuals dance they embrace or challenge tradition and express conformity or individualism. It may complicate or make the picture more interesting to point out that, varying by genre and context, dance allows the individual to do all of these things at once. A dancer can follow tradition and innovate while expressing individualism that conforms to the norms of the group. As such, dance is about two basic human tensions: between cultural continuity and cultural change at the collective level and between individual expression and group conformity at the personal level.

Accordingly, dance is an ideal context for members of a society to express, to contest, to contemplate how individuals should be articulated to group. If we accept this basic premise, dance then informs an array of related topics that are governed by the culture of social organization. Most obvious among these are the norms of social interaction. Perhaps more than specific rules, dance asserts the notion that human social interactions are rule-governed. It may tell us how men and women are to interact (e.g., who is to "lead," in the common English metaphor taken from dance) but the constant is that these relations are not random. Rules that govern who does what and when they do it exist in life and in dance, sometimes clear, sometimes tacit.

So enters the topic of social status, those categories of interaction that organize individuals into social structures. Rules of social discourse are informed by roles connected to social statuses held by individuals that are activated in particular social settings. Statuses and associated roles may be hierarchically arranged, and dance can embrace and enact or challenge and invert rank. Accordingly, dance is about rule-governed social behavior, social statuses inhabited by individuals, and the arrangement of these statuses (hierarchical or otherwise). How it fits individuals into group says something about the nature of personhood itself. In dance (as in society) people come together and follow, bend, or break the conventions of social life. Dance sets itself apart from more common activities by doing all of this in an overt and formalized fashion. As such, the anthropological definition of dance that I propose is as follows: intentional, formalized movement of bodies that expresses and contests shared ideas about social structure (including its norms, statuses, and notion of personhood) and the articulation of individuals and groups to social structure.

At this point I begin to narrow the focus to a specific category of dance. The forms I described in the opening paragraphs are *representational* dances. To define representational dance, some exploration of *representation* as a concept is necessary. Representation is a heavily loaded term whether employed by social scientists or other social actors. It has social, cultural, artistic, and political dimensions. Basic to human culture are the variety and intensity with which we use acts and objects to stand for or signify concepts and other acts and objects. We experience life through systems of symbols. A combination of sounds represents, by convention, an idea; representation is linguistic and symbolic. Moreover, in language and particularly in art and performance, representations are multivalent. Acts and objects represent multiple ideas, some explicit and highly conventional, others tacit and circulated in subsets of a society.

Representation, however, is about more than symbols and meanings. It has clear political and material dimensions as well. Politicians in democratic societies (ideally) represent their constituents. In disputes, attorneys represent their clients. Beyond the ideals of democracy and peaceful resolution of conflict, social inequality is reflected in representation. A given segment of society (e.g., men) may be overrepresented among formal governing bodies or in the organization of economic production. Others (say, women) may be underrepresented in politics and economy. Compounding problems of underrepresentation, minority or marginal peoples are frequently *mis*represented either by well-intentioned but ethnocentric advocates or by compromised but official bureaucrats and politicians.

The point of stressing the complexity of representation is to bring to the surface how a given act can have both symbolic and political dimensions. Particularly useful to the present discussion is Terrence Turner's (1992, 2002) treatments of Kayapo (Xingu River Basin, Brazil) use of audiovisual technology as a medium of self-representation. Turner responds to critics who assert that the incorporation of high-tech video equipment undermines Kayapo culture because its origin is outside of their horticultural and foraging lifeway. Turner counters that it is not the medium of expression or the stabilization of expression in repeatable images that matters as much as the relationships among those who represent. Through shot composition, editing choices, and other technical aspects of filmmaking, the Kayapo have made video their own. They indigenize technology in two ways. They use it to express a distinct Kayapo worldview but also to effect political power and protect themselves from the "developmentalist state" of Brazil (Turner and Fajans-Turner 2006:3). As such, the resulting video products are complex technically and in the audiences that they attempt to reach. Turner terms the consequent multiplicity of messages (some available only to some members of the audience)

"polyphony" (2002). Kayapo leaders contest and construct power through their use of complex metaphorically loaded speechmaking that is compelling to other Kayapo. Video aimed at and circulated among wider audiences serves to shame state officials and state institutions and thus undermines attempts to realize developmentalist policies. Turner (2002:246) concludes that "power is an effect of representation," not the other way around. Kayapo motivate one another to action, build alliances with other indigenous groups, and reach sympathetic nonindigenous outsiders through acts of representation that are symbolically compelling in multiple ways. Kayapo video, then, is representation of concepts through symbols and images that also seek to effect and protect collective political autonomy or self-representation.

What, then, makes a dance representational? Drawing on the work of Nahachewsky (1995) and Trimillos (1995), Anthony Shay, in *Choreographing Identities*, discerns between "representational and social modes" of dance (2006:27). However, as I outlined earlier, it is clear that dance is inherently social *and* representational. If the premise that dance is cultural behavior is accepted, then all dance represents a myriad of ideas about social life. What sets representational dance apart is its emphasis on deliberate representation, what it attempts to represent, and how it does so. First, representational dances are performed publicly, with a clear division between performers and audience. They intentionally construct images and messages intended for viewers who do not directly participate in the dancing. Although representational dance is performed in a context of socializing and socialization, it is not social in the sense of a prom. Just as a video recording of a political meeting is not actual decision making, courting may be referenced in representational dance, but the performance is not a part of actual courtship. Although distinct forms exist, Shay is careful to avoid reification of the categories of dance that he deploys, favoring instead the concept of "parallel traditions" (2006:9–14). Forms coexist. A dance presented in a formal venue in front of a paying audience may draw on several forms that are danced "in the field" (Shay 2006:9). Field dances, in turn, are enacted on various social occasions, at weddings, as rituals, and so forth. Shay rejects the evolutionism that has plagued the social sciences, recognizing that "dances in the field" and representational dances coexist. The modern does not replace the traditional but re-creates (or represents) it in novel settings. In short, representational dance is distinguished among various other dances by its *overt* theatricality.

Representational dances also differ from other forms in the relationship between audience and performer. First, as indicated above, an audience is necessary for representational dance. This is not to say that other kinds of dances are never observed. Rather, whereas representational dance requires an audience, social or sacred dancing can occur without spectators. Without

an audience, representational dances are rehearsals. Second, dance forms vary in composition of performer and audience. Where social and sacred dances are generally performed within social groups, representational dance, particularly in the global era, is performed with audiences that include insiders and outsiders. Indeed, as I will explore below, sometimes the whole point of representational dance is to perform for outsiders. As such, it is appropriate to consider what a representational dance can say about collective identity as well as individual identity. In short, *what* representational dance works to construct is a unique cultural tradition, the foundation of identity. Similar to video described by Turner, representational dance is an intersection of politics and image, wherein performance works to influence and even compel insiders and outsiders.

DANCE AND ETHNICITY

Don Diego was a familiar client at the morería of my apprenticeship. He organized a dance group that performed the Dance of the Conquest, and his young son was learning traditional dance by taking a child's role in the Dance of the Mexicans. He had become comfortable enough with my presence that he invited me to an event he was hosting at his home. Although I did not know it at the time, that day on Don Diego's land would become one of the most important in my fieldwork. I would learn that a form of popular theater that I saw primarily as a tale about politics was as much about cosmology and mythology. I would come to better understand the effect of manipulating symbols in ritual and to learn of the power of kuux *(clandestine liquor distilled from fruit). As with much of my fieldwork, I cannot claim such a day resulted from intentional "research design" or the like. I am fairly certain in retrospect that Don Diego invited Chepe (one of my teachers) with me, to ensure that I would attend. Lest the ethnographer from the States get lost or forget, Don Diego arranged for an escort. He seemed to have had an interest in my getting the significance of traditional dance right. He may have had a sense that we ethnographers, who pride ourselves on interpreting meaning, sometimes miss the point.*

On that morning, during a ritual in celebration of the day of the Holy Cross, I learned that the red-masked Ajitz, a religious practitioner in the Dance of the Conquest, represents east, the traditional association of red in the Maya color-direction cosmology. The character and the dance had whole other layers of meaning that I was just beginning to grasp. While this play about the military defeat of the K'iche' was still about ethnic conflict, it was also about a particular Maya ordering of the world.

Ajitz was not the only character that would become more layered that day. I had come to realize that the white-masked Monacho character represented a particular strategy for dealing with powerful ethnic Others. This indigenous character, in some versions of the dance, assists the Spanish, guides them, and even betrays K'iche' military plans

to the invaders. I had read Monacho as a symbol of betrayal, of placing self-interest above community, of how not to be Maya in a general sense. Chepe made clear just how salient the character was as a lens for contemporary events. In the woods, away from the road, away from Don Diego's house and milpa, Chepe steered our conversation to Monacho. It seems that the character more than represents sixteenth-century division among the Highland Maya. Chepe explained to me that through Monacho we could better understand the behavior of people at specific events. In fact, the stories in the paper about a military officer implicated in gross human rights violations were also stories about an indigenous man who had been led astray by the promises of power and wealth offered by the powerful ethnic Other, just as Monacho had been.

*1.2. Treason and the Traitor. Masks for Monacho from the Guatemalan Dance of the Conquest reflect changes in the character's approach to the invading Spanish. Monacho begins the conquest story loyal to the Maya (*left*) but eventually aids the Castillians (*right*). Collection of the Morería Nima' K'iche', December 2007. (Photograph by author.)*

Interestingly enough, dance in the modern popular imagination is a common marker of exoticism. From the mindless movie entertainment of *Krippendorf's Tribe* to the operatic art of Bizet's *Carmen*, we imagine and present Others as *dancing* Others. While dance in general says something to members of social groups about their shared notions of personhood, social order, norms of interaction, and so forth, representational dance, by definition, is observed by outsiders as well. So we enter the domain of identity relative to Others.

More specifically, we address forms that dwell on how we are different culturally from them. That is, representational dances are frequently about ethnic identity.

Anthony Shay has remarked that dance is a particularly effective way to represent ethnicity. "[D]ance constitutes one of the major vehicles for ethnic reinvention and the construction of ethnicity, identity, and heritage" (2006:56). As I outlined above, there are a number of features of dance that suit it well to constructing images and messages about ethnicity. A group of people dancing together necessarily speaks to the nature of human interaction in a larger sense. Adding music and specialized dress gives to presenters the means to construct complex ideas about tradition and culture in addition to tacit notions of social discourse. Moreover, the theatrical dimension of representational dance introduces the possibility of performing for a culturally diverse audience. It should not be surprising that ethnicity is frequently danced.

Beyond the qualities of dance to embody it, ethnicity has two basic characteristics that compel people to express it both through mundane social discourse and through art and performance. First, ethnicity is contested. It relies on opposition for its construction and is often a way to label actors in conflicts over wealth and power. Second, for a variety of reasons, ethnicity is difficult to conceptualize in everyday language. For present purposes, I define ethnicity broadly as categories of identity based on shared culture and history that are activated in social settings marked by cultural diversity. While some distinction among ethnic groups, indigenous peoples, and ethnonationalist movements is warranted,[2] here I focus on ethnicity as a principal mechanism of identity formation present in all people. Like race, ethnicity is a social construction. Both seek to sort and classify continuous human diversity into a limited set of named categories. Both are bound to the social contexts where they are deployed and both are dependent on social interactions in their creation and for their continuance. However, simply interchanging the terms confuses the matter. Ethnicity differs from race in that it emphasizes cultural and historical markers of identity over ones of *presumed* biological diversity. This is not to say that ethnic categories never reference "blood," skin color, or other outward features of human diversity. Rather, ethnicity subordinates biological difference to cultural, social, and historical differences.

Ethnicity does not always generate social conflict, but it is cognitively oppositional. In other words, ethnic identity cannot define itself without some sort of Other. Among people with whom we share identity, our ethnicity is not primary; ethnicity is activated in social discourse marked by cultural diversity. This is not to suggest that ethnicity is only about labeling and sorting of individual social experience. It also provides the material for the emotive connections of social bonding. Through the stuff of ethnicity—shared symbols,

practices, experiences, and memories—human beings form social groups. Human social groups, no matter their basis of composition, instill a sense of identity and purpose in individuals. When social groups operate in economic or political realms, they function to produce, protect, and compete for wealth and power. Given the degree to which persistent and growing social and economic inequality dominates globalized relationships, it should not come as a surprise that ethnicity often becomes the means through which stratification is constructed and contested. At times popular notions of progress attribute the accumulation of wealth and power to particular cultural features. Others disagree and point to social privilege obtained by virtue of ethnic inequality. Social stratification is both justified and challenged in terms of ethnicity. As is the case with most social relations in a world marked by inequality, power matters in ethnic relations.

Attachment to ethnic identity is founded on more than actual social groups and contemporary cultural diversity. To share ethnicity with someone is to share a particular history, and that shared memory generates a sense of connection rooted in the past. Histories of conflict deepen our sense of connection and may generate actual conflict. Defeats become sources of grievance, memories that rally people to social action and commitment to the group. Victories become sources of pride, but they also provide privilege that must be justified, protected, and defended. Although academic discussion of ethnic conflict often emphasizes the suffering of the weak, the need of the privileged to justify their positions and their fear about losing such advantages also drives ethnic conflict.[3]

The process through which the powerful justify power and by which the weak are subordinated generates negative stereotyped notions of the weak (that are worked through class, caste, race, or ethnicity). In the process, stereotypes both confirm and extend social inequality. Accordingly, the ideology and images of ethnic identity are highly charged foundations of power and stratification. The powerful insist that the weak are stupid, simple, natural, and so forth. The weak challenge and invert ideologies of the powerful, even as they seem to comply with them. Accordingly, this realm of interethnic relations is a social domain that takes on a culture of its own. In sustained relations, this interethnic culture becomes regularized, building its own set of norms of interaction. This is not to say that the symbols and behavior of border maintenance are the culture as a whole. Particularly in conflict or in persistent and gross inequality, interethnic relations manifest symbols and conceptions of the source cultures that are distorted and often oversimplified. The weak appear subservient and simple or even fulfill more specific stereotypes of the powerful as a matter of survival. To take unequal ethnic relations as the entire culture of the weak is poor social science, prone to reiterate stereotypes.

Actors in ethnic conflict do not always directly address material and political issues. As shared history is a fundamental element of ethnic identity, the past itself is contested. Not only what happened but what it meant are subject to debate. Thinking of ethnic relations as potentially conflicted and of this conflict having both material and ideational dimensions helps explain why ethnicity is danced. The semi-integrated global economy raises the stakes and puts actors in close real and virtual proximity. Contestation of power and wealth manifests in the usual channels, in public policy debates, in protest and strikes, and in capital's pursuit of low wages. It also plays out in *image*. Representational dance is evocative and effective in the creation of ethnic images. Its performance provides a venue to assert and contest ethnic ideology.

Beyond the overt politics of inequality, ethnicity is danced because it is part of a difficult area of human society: social identity. Human beings need to classify and make order of every dimension of experience. Identity in general is about just this process of categorization of social reality, of ourselves and the various Others that we encounter. Within tightly knit social groups and communities, we sort such experience primarily through gender, kin, and age. Outside of intimate settings, we create and employ other systems of classification: caste, class, race, ethnicity. Categories of social identities, across cultures, form along various composites of these axes, and an individual's identity is rooted in a collection of such positions. As a result, even in small-scale societies, individual and group identities are complex and multilayered. Ethnicity, then, works to classify and sort experience within the larger and untidy domain of social identity.

Three dimensions of ethnicity make it a particularly complex level of identification. First, interethnic relations present challenges to social discourse, bringing together people whose norms of social interaction may differ substantially. Second, ethnicity is conceptually slippery, employing multivalent and unstable symbols to represent identity. Third, ethnicity has the potential to generate abstract cover categories of identity that become remote from actual social relations.

As norms of behavior are culturally conditioned, some accommodation is necessary in intercultural relations. Sometimes we simply read the Other through our own culture and fumble along. In sustained relations more regular adjustments are made. Even in stable interethnic relations, where interethnic relations form a regular social domain and acquire their own culture, how we act and understand ethnic Others involves a degree of uncertainty not present in our relations with those more familiar.

Ethnicity is a muddied concept not only because it works in an area of experience that is already difficult but also because it is inconsistent in the

symbols it deploys. Sometimes religion is a primary marker of ethnicity. Other times it is language, and at still others it is economic practice, such as the role of corn farming in marking a Guatemalan as indigenous. Moreover, these various labels may be referenced inconsistently, depending on social context; not all Maya are corn farmers. In fact, at times, ethnicity goes unnamed. It is unactivated in settings where we interact with folks with whom we share culture. However, social instability and social inequality both raise the potential for competition and conflict, and ethnic identity that has gone unmarked can become primary.

As not all ethnicity is marked by the same kinds of symbols, not all groups with ethnicity are the same. Groups who share culture and history include small, politically marginalized indigenous groups and large, yet still marginalized, indigenous groups, and even wealthy Native nations. Ethnic groups can be minorities within larger states but majorities in some regions of the same state. Some ethnic groups are less territorialized and more integrated, but not necessarily on equal footing.[4] So, a variety of human groups and identities form around notions of shared culture and history.

Just as ethnicity is part of a larger system of human identity, so is ethnic community subject to a range from real to imagined social connection. Some social groups we inhabit require little imagination as we encounter the members of the group regularly in real face-to-face interactions. Other communities, more remote from face-to-face social discourse, are more difficult to conceptualize. Nationality and the nation-state require us to imagine ourselves as members of what Benedict Anderson (1983) termed "imagined political communities." In such imagined communities we share membership among large masses of people, the vast majority of whom we will never encounter in face-to-face interaction. In other words, some of our layers of identity are expressed in concrete social spaces with corporeal human beings. Other parts of identity are abstractions, broad categories that cannot be experienced in actual social interaction. As a species, however, we evolved and have spent the vast majority of our time in small face-to-face social groups. Consequently, we tend to find the actual social group more satisfying than the abstract imagined one. Larger, abstract levels of identification require something more to make them socially meaningful.

Beyond issues of scale of identity group, broad categories present cognitive challenges. Broad categories of classification inevitably encompass significant diversity, whatever domain of experience they attempt to sort. In classifying social reality, high-level, abstract categories imply that widely varied individuals are essentially the same. The inevitable divergence of particular human beings from the expectations entailed in generalized labels of identity presents certain cognitive and social challenges. As the gap between actual

experience and high-level abstract categories widens, the likelihood of cognitive dissonance, that uneasy feeling when our conceptual framework fails to make order of what we encounter, increases. Not surprisingly, broad categories of identity are often the subject of political discourse and art. Which characteristics are associated with a given abstract level of identification are frequently contested.

Expansive nationalist identity categories are not the only ones that demand abstraction and imagination. Pan-ethnic classifications also subsume a good deal of human diversity under broad categories. Often the product of colonialism, pan-ethnic categories group peoples inhabiting large geographic areas together based on general shared history or culture. For example, one may be classified as Asian by virtue of living in, coming from, or having ancestry in a wide variety of countries, many of which themselves are profoundly diverse. The pan-ethnic classification Latino, which I will explore in more detail later, reflects similar wholesale lumping. The countries of Latin America are culturally, linguistically, politically, and economically diverse, reflecting varied histories, geographies, and so forth. Within their borders additional diversity abounds. Yet, a person (or her descendants) born and raised in any of these varied places upon arrival in the United States is classified, usually primarily, as Latina.

The obvious question is, why do we form categories of identification that are so general? In the case of Latino (or Hispanic) some of the answer lies with the bureaucratic needs of states (here, specifically the U.S. state). States, one way or another, count, sort, and classify people and in such processes are seldom interested in highly refined systems of classification. The breadth of such categories also reflects the political power of the dominant sectors of a given society. To be able to decide how people are sorted and identified is an exercise of power. Those who enjoy social privilege enjoy the ability to encounter social reality with a simple system of classification—us and them—with a few superficial refinements. In the process, certain kinds and a limited degree of diversity are made official, while other diversity goes unnamed. Representational dance is used to express ethnicity but in a multitude of ways, sometimes presenting localness, and uniqueness but at others stressing broader, more imagined political communities. As such, the identities constructed in dance considered in this work are connected by form as well as by content. White, Latino, and Native are all rather broad, abstract identity categories. Each classification, in its way, subsumes regional, class, and cultural diversity under one label. In one of the cases considered presently, whites who adopt Indian sports mascots assert their ability to define the image of a politically marginalized Other. All Indians are (at least partly) Plains Indians in the world of sports mascots.

However, state and social power only partly explains the persistence of occasionally confusing pan-ethnic classifications. Those who are grouped together have reason to maintain their categories as well. For Latinos and Native Americans political voice and power are found in embracing a label that unifies peoples of various nations and cultures. There also lurk, however, in broad pan-ethnic identities, the twin dangers of overgeneralization and inaccuracy. Not every Native American is a Plains Indian and not every Latino is Mexican or Puerto Rican. (Nor, for that matter, is every white person wealthy and powerful and every African American poor and marginalized.)

The prolific (if unequal) circulation of people and the mass distribution of image so characteristic of globalization create an unprecedented multiplicity of cross-cultural interaction (real and virtual). The underlying complexity of human identity only further complicates matters. Construction of twenty-first-century ethnicity is multifaceted and shifting work. Similar to our cognitive work in spiritual life, it deals with something that is quite difficult to conceptualize and express in everyday language. Also, like religion, in certain circumstances ethnicity can be totalizing, the only level of identity that matters. In the following section I will endeavor to explain the roots of the power of representational dance to express this confusing but salient feature of life on the twenty-first-century globe. In doing so, I also establish a conceptual framework through which I will analyze specific forms of dance.

REPRESENTATIONAL DANCE AND SECULAR RITUAL

As my wife drops me off a block east of Memorial Stadium, it occurs to me that it is a beautiful day for football. The sky is clear, the air warm with a pleasant cooling breeze. As impressive as the weather is the similarly enveloping effect of the social environment. The deployment of the color orange in t-shirts, hats, flags, tents, stadium seat cushions, bumper stickers, and so forth is pervasive enough to make me self-conscious of what I thought was an unexceptional blue t-shirt. The messages carried on these varied fields of orange are often not about what brought me to Urbana-Champaign, the main campus of the University of Illinois. As a result of concerted and sustained local and national activism, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has banned Chief Illiniwek (the "honored symbol" or "racist mascot" of the U of I, depending on perspective) in image and performance. His continued presence has meant that the university will not be allowed to host NCAA championship competitions. At the moment, it appears that this may be the last football season to feature the dancing Indian manifestation of the "Fighting Illini." Retirement of the Chief has not come without considerable resistance from a broad base of students and alumni as well as members of the board of trustees. Beyond the campus, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Dennis Hastert sponsored legislation to prevent the NCAA

from implementing its ban on Indian mascots. (His tenure would end before the bill reached the floor.) As a consequence of this vigorous contestation, I expect there to be a proliferation of "save the chief" t-shirts and activities. While the iconic Indian-head image with its solar-like war bonnet appears in all sorts of contexts and the word "Chief" boldly fronts a fair proportion of t-shirts, it seems that just as many messages and symbols identify folks with the university without specifically referencing the imaginary Indian. Moreover, the raucous (and perhaps uncivil) marketplace of ideas that I anticipated with petition drives, protest signs, shouting, and the like is not present. Rather, walking around the stadium in narrowing circles from tailgate/parking areas to entrance gates, I encounter an innocuous marketplace of stuff. I find multiple opportunities to sign up for a University of Illinois credit card and buy t-shirts, hats, programs, food, and beverages, but I do not find a place to sign a petition (to save or retire the Chief).

What impresses most before, during, and after the game is the multiple ways that individuals connect themselves to the university and its various social groups and communities. These expressions of identity mute individuality and emphasize group unity. The sea of orange t-shirts in the student section (magnified by the fact that the opponent is Syracuse) is only one marker of communal identity. Pregame activities include a parade complete with a uniformed band marching in unison. In fact, uniforms of one sort or another are everywhere. Sheriffs who direct traffic, students who offer courteous assistance to visitors, event staff who coordinate parking, ticket takers, cheerleaders, trainers, coaches, and, of course, athletes all wear distinctive clothing that sublimates individual diversity to specific, game-related activities.

It occurs to me that my preconceived ideas about how to approach and understand Chief Illiniwek need modification. The context of athletic contest (particularly football) merits more attention than I had been directing at it. By the end of the day, I conclude that a more complete picture of the Chief emerges when his performance is understood as a secular ritual within a large complex of secular rituals dedicated to community through uniform and formalized behaviors.

To determine what makes a ritual a secular ritual, comparing sacred and representational dance is useful. Representational dance is similar to sacred dance; the latter can be public, and ritual specialists are performers in a sense. Representational dances, however, deal less directly with matters that are beyond the five senses than do sacred dances. As I will describe later, the sacred (or the rituals designed to access the sacred) are sometimes referenced in representational dance but are not central to performance. However, this is not to say that representational dances do not have ritual-like qualities.

What, then, is ritual? For present purposes, I will define "ritual" as symbolic action that is designed to access an order that is not available to the

1.3. Articulation of Individuals to Group Purpose. The University of Illinois marching band performs at halftime, September 2006. (Photograph by author.)

normal five senses. I further note that such symbolic action is routinized to a varied extent. Certain rituals demand precise execution of procedure; others provide actors a degree of room for improvisation. Rituals also typically carry a sense of obligation that sets them apart from other routine human behavior. To miss work is one thing; to fail to conduct a necessary ritual can carry spiritual consequences. Moreover, ritual involves heavy symbolic loading of act and object. It can demand that we rigidly control our bodies and dedicate concentration on extraordinary material culture. Special objects not seen in everyday life are displayed, or regular mundane objects are infused with intense meaning. Moreover, in this environment rich with signification, a given sign often references multiple meanings. Rituals are moments of particularly polysemous symbolic actions and objects. Ritual accesses an unseen order, but it also creates a sense of time and space that transcends everyday mundane experience.

With the exception of individualized forms such as meditation, rituals are highly social behavior. Participation can define one as a member of a congregation, a community, or an ethnic group. Often abstract, difficult-to-express notions and symbols are presented to the group and shared. Much as does good art, good ritual expresses that which cannot be expressed in normal mundane language. Also as does good art, ritual can give people a sense that

they have encountered and understood, if only briefly, something profoundly true. Even for the ardent skeptic, expression of nonbelief in the moment of ritual can be exceedingly difficult. Similarly, even the dedicated individualist will find connection to community difficult to deny. As such, effective ritual establishes bases for both conformity and social solidarity.

Developed to apply what anthropologists had learned about ritual in small-scale communities to complex, industrialized societies, the concept achieved some currency following the publication of *Secular Ritual* (Moore and Myerhoff 1977). For reasons not completely clear, secular ritual as a conceptual tool has had a diminished presence in anthropology since the early 1990s. A complementing concept of *civil religion* enjoyed currency among scholars of religion during approximately the same period. Michael Angrosino (2002) has argued for reinvigoration of civil religion as a theoretical framework in anthropology. I agree with Angrosino but favor here the emphasis that ritual places on behavioral culture (whereas religion focuses on the ideational). Moreover, its attention to public representational activities (sporting events, political rallies, concerts, etc.) makes the concept of secular ritual readily employable here.

If a religious ritual is a formalized behavior designed to influence or access the supernatural or sacred, then what is a secular ritual? After all, clear in standard definitions of ritual is the notion of an unseen order, something beyond the five senses. Modifying ritual with *secular* directs us to things more ordinary. The distinction then between secular ritual and other mundane activities is a matter of degree in three areas: the nature of symbols employed, the sociality of performance, and the effect on participants.

All human behavior is symbolic. From speech, which obviously carries messages, to something as simple as donning a hat, what we do is read and interpreted by others. Moreover, these acts carry multiple ideas. *How* one speaks—tone, register, accent, and so forth—tells the listener and audience something about one's identity in addition to the content of the message. What I label "secular ritual" is particularly symbolically loaded behavior that does not make reference or connection to an unseen primary order.

Secular rituals, like sacred rituals, deploy symbols to work on the abstract, sometimes contradictory dimensions of belief and enact them. Both deal in areas that are difficult to express in everyday language. Sacred rituals concern cosmology, the relationship between human beings and the divine, unseen orders. Secular rituals are more rooted in social reality but nonetheless deal with concepts difficult to express in routine speech. In some cases the difficulty derives from political oppression and the associated fear. That is, the messages are unspoken because powerful outsiders deem and make them dangerous. Sometimes messages are unspeakable because they are abstract, contradictory, contested, unresolved, or all of the above. How to be a good human

being and locating the social unit in which to be that good person are fundamentally challenging in an era marked by intensive flows of culture and gross inequality. Secular ritual is a way to address this problem of self and communal perception. It is identity in globalized, stratified social settings that necessitates the cognitive work presented in representational dances.

Secular rituals express what Sherry Ortner has termed "key symbols" (1973). Key symbols are particularly salient and loaded symbols that people put to broad use across a wide array of domains of experience. Ortner distinguishes between summarizing symbols and elaborating symbols. "Summarizing" symbols deal with abstractions unifying concepts, the stuff of cosmology, fundamental structures that classify experience. The flag for Americans and the crucifix for Catholics are such symbols; they are powerful and carry an array of meanings that transcend ordinary language. As such, summarizing key symbols present and reinforce the basic shared framework for interpreting experience. They provide the mechanisms by which a group of human beings puts order to a continuous and chaotic reality. "Elaborating" key symbols, particularly "key scenarios," provide schemes or scripts for behavior in contexts beyond their ritual enactment. Where summarizing symbols form the foundation of systems of sorting and understanding experience, elaborating symbols help us *construct* behavior. Key scenarios give our action a reference point and provide us a way to act that makes sense. Not surprisingly, lore, from folktales to creation myths, often constructs key scenarios. Evangelical Christians who cite the Bible and K'iche' Mayas who recount episodes from the *Popul Wuj* both deploy key scenarios to understand, justify, influence, or explain actual behavior.

The representational dances considered here have multiple means to symbolize ideas and moods, such as music, movement, and dress. All are well capable of carrying more than one idea. Music can evoke a feeling; a familiar tune, a whole set of ideas. The stylized dress of representational dance places people in time and place and references all sorts of ideas about "tradition." Coordinated movement, as I explored above, communicates all sorts of ideas about social discourse and social structure. In combination, music, movement, and dress provide a robust, multilayered means of expression. Dance performance, accordingly, expresses at once history, identity, culture, and community. How these ideas are read and what meanings are available, in turn, depend on the cultures and experiences of the audience. As I will detail in later chapters, representational dance constructs elaborating symbols when it deals directly with ethnic identity. It presents notions of how to be a particular kind of person that are transferable to actual interethnic and other social relations. As I examine specific forms of dances more closely, it will become clear that traditional K'iche' dance and Native American powwow also construct key summarizing symbols.

In addition to their symbolic complexity, rituals are social and secular rituals are particularly social. Indeed as I mentioned above, the secular ritual lens has often been used to examine events that feature large audiences or crowds. We social scientists, after all, are as interested in the shared behavior and culture of the group as we are in personal or individual ritualized behavior. In the present case, representational dance is performed for audiences. The coordinated action of dancers and the presence of the audience are all highly social behaviors, some regulated deliberately, some guided by tacit norms. In the process, dense messages of culture and identity are constructed and shared. In the end, to perform dance or to attend representational dance is to engage one's own community and perhaps the communities of Others.

Finally, secular rituals, drawing on Clifford Geertz's often cited definition of religion, work to create "long-lasting moods and motivations" in people (1973:90). Everyday movement in society provides opportunities to behave and observe behavior. These actions, while instructive of culture and identity, tend to reinforce rather than elaborate primary models of behavior. It is ritual that lays out symbols and ideals to contemplate beyond the performance and apply to other settings. As the term "moods" suggests, these are not strictly rational or rationalized norms that are presented and enacted, but ritual, secular or religious, has a strong emotional component. Effective ritual moves people emotionally but also provides rationales for believing and acting. So rituals (sacred or secular) provide cognitive frameworks and bases for embracing particular models of construction of behavior and interpretation of experience.

DANCE AND MYTHS OF IDENTIFICATION

Framing representational dance as secular ritual necessarily introduces the topic of myth. When we consider the relationship between myth and ritual within the domain of the sacred, myths are stories that necessitate and explain rituals, and rituals in turn make real or enact myths. It is in telling myths that the conceptual content of symbols circulates and takes particular form. In some cases dance enacts the myth directly. K'iche' traditional dance, for example, features a clear narrative, telling a story about the past that helps people understand the present. In other cases representational dances of identity deploy symbols of a mythic story or theme, leaving it to performers and audiences to discuss and circulate more general stories.

Long a subject of social science, philosophy, and theology, myth is a common form of storytelling that resists easy definition. A standard introductory cultural anthropology text, *Humanity*, defines myths as "stories that recount the deeds of supernatural powers and culture heroes in the past" (Peoples

and Bailey 2003:399). Spradley and McCurdy (2009:300), editors of a widely used ethnographic reader, add that cosmology explains how the world is at present, while mythology explains how it got to be the way it is. These are workable approaches, particularly when we focus on beliefs and practices that are obviously religious in nature. However, human beings tell whole ranges of stories about the past that fall somewhere between the history of documented events and the past of the supernatural, otherworldly, unseen order. Realms of human discourse lie between myth as defined and employed in anthropology texts and history as an evidence-based recounting and interpretation of the past. I retain the notion that myths concern how the world arrived at its current state and that they involve the extraordinary, but I also contend that myths are not exclusively confined to the supernatural.

To illustrate the point, consider two related types of myth: creation stories and origin stories. Both tell us something important about where it all began. The former often include the creation of the cosmos, of important natural features, of the order of nature, of life in general. The latter tend to focus on us, the human component of creation. Moreover, our origins do not end with our creation. We may wander, struggle with the gods, or fight with other peoples before we arrive at who we are. Dennis Tedlock (1993, 1996), in his exploration of the K'iche' Maya *Popul Wuj*, reveals that a story recounting the creation of people also chronicles the rise of the K'iche' as a political force in southern Mesoamerica. The primordial K'iche' enter into a special relationship with Tojil, granter of fire and demander of sacrifice. Later, K'iche' political power is explained and justified by their particular relationship with the supernatural. Conrad and Demarest (1984) note parallels in Aztec mythology. The rise of the Aztec state and empire is tied in myth with the rise of the Aztec patron Huitzilopochtli. Myths of human origin can also be stories of ethnic and political origin.

The obvious question then is how can these various stories of the past be sorted? What are we to make of them? First, let us dispose of the notion that the past is knowable in a strictly objective sense. As popular as it is to demand that historians "teach the facts," the past is an abstraction; only the present is concrete. This is not to say that all stories of the past are equal in purpose or in objectivity or subjectivity. Distance of time and emotion and mode of recording shape the nature of the story. What begins as a shared oral story about the origin of a community can, with time, become a myth explaining the creation of all of humankind. A moment important in local history can become crucial in the construction of stories of national origin.

Such shared history, while possibly rooted in events, derives its power of identification and motivation to action in its telling. As such, it should come as no surprise that myths of origin are told in a way that emphasizes the posi-

tive in self and the negative in Others. For example, in telling their communal history, Zapotec Ixtepejanos emphasize victimization of Santa Catarina Ixtepeji by neighboring communities. Events in which they visited suffering on their neighbors are deemphasized (Kearney 1972:37–41). An effective myth of beginnings constructs "the good" and finds it in collective self. So we arrive at a refined definition of myth (or of a particular type of myth). Myths of *identification* are stories about the distant past that create, share, and reinforce positive, meaningful, and satisfying identities in the present. The task of the historian is to determine which stories of the distant past are supported by documentary evidence (and to figure out what constitutes good written evidence). The task of the social scientist is to explore how origin stories are used by social actors at present. The boundaries in practice, of course, are not as clear as I imply. To fully understand a given myth requires a bit of both.

The mainstream story of the first Thanksgiving is a particularly salient example of the representation of indigenous culture in secular rituals. Familiar to anyone who attended primary school in the United States, the first Thanksgiving story relates the past with both historical and mythical dimensions. Celebrated at grade-school pageants across the country each November, the tale is replete with a ritual-like set of standard symbols and artifacts. Turkeys, hats with shoe buckles, and (most germane to the current discussion) pilgrims and Indians crowd gyms and auditoriums. Common narrative elements include the initial pilgrims' struggles to survive, indigenous assistance offered to struggling pilgrims through subsistence knowledge and technology, subsequent bountiful pilgrim harvest, and a feast marked by pious thanks to God and harmonious interethnic relations.

In terms of history, it is clear that the early seventeenth-century Northeast was co-occupied by various indigenous societies and a rapidly expanding population of European colonists. Some colonists were indeed on the continent to escape religious persecution (or at least end their role as victims of it). Others were soldiers, merchants, entrepreneurs, or bureaucrats, among other things. Also true, Algonkian and Iroquoian peoples of the Northeast did (and do) make offerings of thanks at various harvests (or "appearances"; Tooker 1975), a central theme of ritual. Certain also is the success of Northern European colonization of first the East Coast and eventually the entire continent.

In terms of myth, the first Thanksgiving is a loaded text that makes choices, as all myths do. In artifact, Natives are frequently designated by feathered headdresses more reminiscent of Plains peoples than of northeastern Algonkians. Accordingly, the myth references a generalized image of Indianness. How the Europeans are represented also involves some interesting choices. The notion that the first such feast can be narrowed to a particular place is difficult to verify. Indeed, it seems likely that countless bountiful

feasts that included ritual giving of thanks were shared between European and Native trading partners before Puritan pilgrims sat down to break bread with their Native neighbors. Trade relations preceded direct colonization and settlement, and the mutual trust necessary for trading partnerships are commonly cemented by ceremonial gift exchange and feasting. Moreover, the strong material incentives to maintain good relations with trading partners created a more convivial atmosphere than Puritanical religious ideology. Although it is not strictly knowable, the first Thanksgiving almost certainly did not include pilgrims (and more likely included French traders).

So why then does the myth select pilgrims? And why are two readily available alternatives not employed? Featuring traders or merchants would reference ambivalence about commerce and highlight the economic exploitation associated with colonization. Deploy soldiers and officers and we enter the sticky area of colonization through the violence of military conquest. The myth, instead, chooses victims of religious persecution to represent European colonists at the first Thanksgiving. Rather than material profit or imperial expansion, the pursuit of religious freedom is emphasized. That those fleeing persecution can be remembered as humble and pious makes pilgrims an even better symbol.

In effect, myth asserts as knowable the unknowable. The less knowable the past, the more latitude of choice available to the myth teller. In addition to choices of place, time, and attendees, the tenor of a feast shared by pilgrims and Indians is difficult to know. In addressing the unknowable, the myth chooses to emphasize peace and harmony. Given the nature of Puritan belief and practice, it seems unlikely that such a feast was not marked by considerable tension. It is difficult for the dedicated purist not to demand similar dedication from others. Would Puritan pilgrims have tolerated non-Christian sacred oratory or ritual offering? Recall that Christian settlers of similar beliefs occasionally drowned accused witches (members of their own communities) for not confessing witchcraft. Indeed, the whole notion of harmonious coexistence strains credulity. That the inheritors of the state that evolved partly from the colonies of these religious refugees would make religious conversion of indigenous people official policy is an unexplored backstory in the myth of the first Thanksgiving. These we see at the first Thanksgiving are tolerant religious Puritans.

So what does this myth do and why do people share and perform it at present? It is in effect a story of national origin. We see it as an important moment in the process by which the United States came into existence. That Native people offered assistance and shared in the feast implies strongly that they accepted (and now accept) colonial domination. By way of corollary, the legitimacy of Euro-American hegemony is asserted and resistance to it is

denied legitimacy. All of it is accomplished by victims of persecution in pursuit of freedom, uncontaminated by greed or violence. The first Thanksgiving is indeed an *origin* story. It ends without much reference to the subsequent history. What happens after the feast is left unspecified. Least implied is the notion that Native societies would struggle to retain political autonomy and cultural distinctiveness. Other broader myths (explored later) take up the slack and fill in the blanks. The first Thanksgiving is a tale of beginning (a kind of *first* supper) that leaves the middle available for other myths of vanishing Americans, of self-conquest, of progress.

This myth of national origin is complex. While making choices that present the origin of white identity as uniformly positive, it also depicts aspects of Native culture positively. Dependence of colonists on Native subsistence knowledge and technology is recognized (and contemporary global dependence on myriad domesticates of indigenous origin is at least implied). Natives are cooperative, generous, and peaceful, more noble than savage. As a result of these positive elements, Native resistance has occasionally referenced the story. Seneca leader Sagoyewatha (Red Jacket) took elements of the first Thanksgiving story and put them to counter-hegemonic purposes in an address to the missionary Reverend Jacob Cram in 1805.

> Your forefathers crossed the great water and landed on this island. Their numbers were small. They found friends and not enemies. They told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men and had come here to enjoy their religion. They asked for a small seat. We took pity on them, granted their request, and they sat down among us. We gave them corn and meat; they gave us poison (alluding, it is supposed, to ardent spirits) in return. (Ganter 2006:141, parenthetical note in original)

Based on a few positive elements of the text and their use in political rhetoric, are we to conclude that performing the first Thanksgiving "honors" Native Americans? Because mainstream formal education fails to realistically cover indigenous histories and cultures, does this myth become insurance against forgetting Native history? Is a myth better than simply forgetting? Is it better than self-critical remembering? What are we to make of contemporary Native Americans who contest the myth of the first Thanksgiving, some identifying it as a "National Day of Mourning" (Wilkins 2002:104)?

In this chapter I have explored the social and cultural dimensions of dance. In narrowing the focus to representational dance, I have articulated a common human practice to a common human challenge. Dance, in this light, works to construct identity within and between human social groups. Framing

representational dance as secular ritual highlights and allows exploration of the difficult and compelling dimensions of identity. Stories of origin and myths of identification deepen meaning and justify and even necessitate performance.

I have emphasized that all of this takes place in a world marked by intensified circulation of people and images of culture. Given increasing global inequality, cross-cultural representational dances are performed in contexts that are marked by a paradox of familiarity combined with social distance. As such, not only are representations contested, but so is the *quality* of representation. Accordingly, before addressing specific dance forms in Parts Two through Five, the next chapter considers the ill-defined yet powerful notion of authenticity.

NOTES

1. Most notably Spencer (1988 [1877]).

2. This distinction is made by Niezen (2003:6–11) in detail.

3. See Green (1994:236) concerning how fear of the indigenous Other drives policies of state-sponsored violence in Guatemala.

4. Niezen (2003:4–9) and Maybury-Lewis (2002:44–45) agree that there are a variety of types of groups that form around culture and history, but they disagree on whether they can be grouped along a continuum (Maybury-Lewis) or if indigenous groups should be classed as distinct from ethnonationalist ones.