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Lund, Sweden, June 16, 2018.

Dear reader,

This is the first draft of a paper on dance and international relations. Or, to be more precise, a paper on dance and inter-civilizational encounters.

The abstract:

Our bodies are far better at encountering others than are our rational, cogitating, minds. Our bodies are not prejudiced by cultural scripts and by evaluative standards. Dance provides an example. In the early modern era, Europeans often danced. Dance was an essential activity which served ontological and epistemological ends. The first generations of European explorers were literate in matters terpsichorean and this provided them with a good way to encounter non-European others. By the nineteenth-century, however, the Europeans came to redefine the relationship between their bodies and their minds. As a result, dance was redefined as a theatrical performance and as a recreational pastime. This meant that that Europeans no longer could understand the natives who they encountered. European colonialism proceeded on the basis of this misunderstanding.

I'm off to a conference in Berlin with this paper, and hopefully it will have a proper home after that.

Happy reading, happy summer,

Erik

Dancing with Strangers: Bodies in Inter-civilizational Encounters

ERIK RINGMAR

The problem of inter-civilizational encounters is the problem of how to meet another, how to acknowledge both our similarities and the differences that separate us, but how to refrain from evaluative judgments.¹ The problem is how to meet face to face, on the same level, without feelings of superiority or inferiority. The suggestion of this paper is that our bodies are far better at inter-civilizational encounters than are our rational minds. The experience of being in the presence of another person is first and foremost the experience of being in the presence of another body. Bodies engage with each other before persons do; bodies understand each other before our rational faculties have made sense of the situation. This understanding is more generous since it is unmediated by culture and by evaluative standards.

Dance provides an example. Bodies that dance together are forced to coordinate their actions and from this coordination a mutual understanding arises which is prior to all cultural scripts.² These effects can be studied by means of neuroscience. In bodies that dance together various physiological processes are synchronized — breathing, heart rates, endocrinal and gastric processes — and this, in turn, has implications for cognition. People whose bodies have danced together are more likely to empathize with each other and even to think alike.³ Bodies, in short, are good at fraternizing — the kind of “embrothering” you get shot for during a war.

1 Ringmar, *International Movements*.

2 McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time*.

3 Beausoleil and LeBaron, “What Moves Us”; Bläsing et al., “Neurocognitive Control in Dance Perception and Performance”; Brown and Parsons, “The Neuroscience of Dance.”

Indeed, having “danced with the enemy” is a common accusation leveled at the presumed fraternizers.

First encounters

“In the morning the Captain sent a party to communicate with the Fuegians,” wrote Charles Darwin in his diary on December 17, 1832, as the *Beagle* made a stop-over in Tierra del Fuego. The natives, he reported, are a sad lot. “Their very attitudes were abject, and the expression of their countenances distrustful, surprised, and startled.”⁴ Yet they turned out to be excellent mimics and this was convenient since Europeans and Fuegians had no language in common. As soon as we coughed or yawned or made any odd motion, Darwin recalled, they immediately imitated us. This is how a face pulling competition got under way. At first “some of our party began to squint and look awry,” but sure enough one of the young Fuegians “succeeded in making far more hideous grimaces.” Next an old man patted Darwin on the chest and made “a chuckling kind of noise, as people do when feeding chickens,” and this demonstration of friendship was repeated several times. “It was concluded by three hard slaps, which were given me on the breast and back at the same time. He then bared his bosom for me to return the compliment, which being done, he seemed highly pleased.”⁵ The face pulling and the front-and-back slapping eventually gave way to dance. “When a song was struck up by our party, I thought the Fuegians would have fallen down with astonishment. With equal surprise they viewed our dancing; but one of the young men, when asked, had no objection to a little waltzing.”

A similar interaction took place on 29 January 1788, three days after the first British convict ship — the “first fleeters” — arrived in New South Wales, Australia.⁶ The natives they encountered here were welcoming enough and they pointed out a good landing place “in the most cheerful manner, shouting and dancing” in excitement. And as soon as the British had

4 Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, 208; Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*.

5 Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, 206–7.

6 Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*.

gone on shore they joined in. “We had frequent meetings with different parties of the natives,” John Hunter, a naval officer, reported in his journal. “They danced and such with us, and imitated our words and motions, as we did theirs.”⁷ “These people mixed with ours,” William Bradley, an officer, explained, “and all hands danced together.” A picture which Bradley painted of the event shows Englishmen and natives joining hands and dancing like children at a picnic.⁸

Dancing in early modern Europe

To us these encounters are surprising. To dance is not the first thing we would consider doing together with a stranger even if we lacked a common language in which to communicate. In early modern Europe, however, dance came easily to everyone. Europeans danced often, and merrily, and it was one of the main ways in which people spent time together. Ordinary people danced at festivals and fairs, aristocrats danced at banquets and at court, and even the monarchs danced, in stage productions designed to manifest their power and view of the world. Before we can return to our inter-civilizational encounters, we need to say more about this early modern attention to matters terpsichorean.

Much has been made, especially by left-wing historians, of the suppression of carnivals in Protestant Europe in the century after the Reformation.⁹ Carnivals were festive occasions characterized by plenty of dancing and carousing, drinking and debauchery. As such, they constituted an alternative reality in which experiments could be made with alternative ways of organizing social relations. However, as a new form of rulers, calling themselves “sovereign,” came to assert their power, such experiments were soon discouraged. And yet, people did not stop dancing. Rather, under the purview of the state, they came to dance in a more organized, more orderly, fashion. In fact, dance provided a good metaphor for describing a society, such as early modern European society, in which people increasingly were on the move.

7 Hunter, *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*, 52–53.

8 Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*.

9 Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 97–117.

In dance, just as in business or in social life, each person seemed to be in charge of him or herself, yet dance requires both discipline and coordination. A dancing society is a society of self-coordinating parts in which everyone moves in sync with the same music.

The dance metaphor was particularly applicable to members of the aristocracy which increasingly left their landed estates and assembled at the courts of the new sovereign rulers. For these courtiers, dancing served as a means of distinguishing themselves from the rest of society. By learning how to dance you would acquire that elusive “aristocratic air” which identified you as a member of the social elite.¹⁰ Social standing was not only a metaphor, that is; it implied a certain way to stand, but also a certain way to carry oneself, to move, walk and gesture. Other arts could be practiced to the same effect — both fencing and horse riding were good for one’s posture — but dancing required less equipment and it could be engaged in anywhere. In addition dancing taught self-control. By learning how to dance you learned how to take charge of yourself and how to move your body in a deliberate fashion. By controlling your body, you could control your mind, and only people who knew how to control their bodies and minds knew how to control the bodies and minds of others.

In addition, various occupations had their respective ways of dancing. The lawyers at the Inns of Court in London were famous for their masques, and they staged dance performances several times throughout the year.¹¹ Teachers at Jesuit colleges staged dances too, as did priests in and outside of churches. In Spain, in particular, liturgical dances were common. Soldiers danced as well, to show off their ferociousness and readiness for battle.¹² Dances of war — modeled after classical, Phrygian, examples — were popular features of many court entertainments, of which equestrian ballets were a particularly spectacular version.¹³ Sailors danced too — often the hornpipe, a jig-like dance nowhere more popular than in Scotland.¹⁴ Captain James Cook, for one, insisted that nothing was more conducive to the preservation of

10 Nevile, *The Eloquent Body*.

11 Cunningham, *Dancing in the Inns of Court*.

12 Anglo, “The Barriers.”

13 Orden, *Music, Discipline, and Arms in Early Modern France*.

14 Emerson, “The Hornpipe.”

the health of his crews than a daily practice of the hornpipe.¹⁵ For the members of these professions too dance was a way to acquire poise and self-control but also a way to display coordination of movements and an *esprit de corps*.

The most spectacular dancers, however, were the new, sovereign, monarchs. Elizabeth I of England often danced before foreign visitors, and Charles I danced, repeatedly and enthusiastically, until he lost his head in 1649.¹⁶ In Stockholm, Queen Christina danced in a number of roles from the 1640s onward, including at her own coronation, and her successors, Karl X Gustav and Karl XI, were at least as successful on the dance-floor as they were on the battlefield.¹⁷ The rulers of Burgundy and Savoy danced, and so did Austrian emperors and princes all over German territories. Yet the most celebrated dancers were the kings of France — Henri IV, Louis XIII, but above all Louis XIV. The Sun King was the leading performer in no fewer than 80 different stage productions in a dancing career which spanned some twenty years.¹⁸ In these *ballets de cour* the monarchs would dress up as allegorical figures and dance before the courtiers and assorted dignitaries who had assembled for the occasion. Dressed as Mars, the king would embark on a justified war, or as Pax he would conclude an advantageous peace. Here dancing was a way to create a certain world and to get others to believe in its existence. Dancing, we might say, served an ontological function.¹⁹ The monarchs embodied their states and in their interaction with other dancers the meaning of political affairs was explained. Stage-craft was a form of statecraft, and dancing was a form of world-making. The monarchs were actors on the world-stage just as they were actors on the stage of the court.

Native dances and European explorers

The bodies of early modern Europeans were thus fully literate in dance and this literacy served them well in their geographical explorations. For European explorers, dance was an

15 Grove, *Dancing*, 72.

16 Mirabella, "In the Sight of All."

17 Skeaping, *Den Svenska Hovbaletten*.

18 Nevile, *The Eloquent Body*; Nevile, "Dance and the Garden."

19 Dillon, *The Language of Space in Court Performance, 1400-1625*.

epistemological technique, a way to communicate with and to get to know the alien other. Consequently their descriptions of native dances were often detailed and knowledgeable; they paid close attention to the performances they attended and they knew what they were looking for. On occasion they happily joined the natives in their dances or they staged performances of their own to which the natives were invited.

However, much as the upper-classes in Europe, the explorers were often dismissive of the kinds of spontaneous, riotous, dancing which they saw taking place at popular festivals. Spanish missionaries in the Americas, for example, would often complain about *fiestas* that ended in drunkenness and immorality.²⁰ What interested them was rather the kind of choreographed performances which the natives staged on ceremonial occasions. These dances revealed a predetermined design and a high degree of control, precision and synchronization, which, as the Europeans knew only too well, required a lot of hard practice. Many of these dances told the history of the people dancing or of their gods, or they provided a means of conveying social values and legal prohibitions. Some dances even recorded the atrocities committed during the Spanish conquest itself. As such, sympathetic observers like Bartolomé de las Casas noted, the dances took the place of the books which the natives lacked. Their dances bore testimony to their humanity.²¹ Dance, the seventeenth-century missionary Andrés Pérez de Ribas explained, relies on the body to express a religious sensibility which is common to all humans.²² Europeans and natives are not that different after all.

Given their repeated rehearsals of the hornpipe, it is not surprising that sailors were quick to join local dancers. John Hunter, on the first fleet to arrive in Australia in 1788, describes one such occasion. “Their dance was truly wild and savage,” he recalled, “yet, in many parts, there appeared order and regularity.”²³ One of the dance moves impressed him in particular — “that of placing their feet very wide apart, and by an extraordinary exertion of the

20 Scolieri, *Dancing the New World*, 12.

21 Scolieri, 35.

22 Ribas, *History of the Triumphs of Our Holy Faith amongst the Most Barbarous and Fierce Peoples of the New World*.

23 Hunter, *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*, 210–13; Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*.

muscles of the thighs and legs, moving the knees in a trembling and very surprising manner.” This was a move, he conceded, “such as none of us could imitate.” The Englishmen, as this passing comment reveals, had not just watched, but they had participated in the dancing and they had tried, but failed, to imitate the movements of the natives. “On the whole,” Hunter concluded, “this exhibition was well worth seeing; and this was the first opportunity that had offered for us to see any thing of the kind, since we had been in the country.”

In the Americas, the Church would investigate native dances in order to make sure that they did not constitute a continuation of traditional forms of idolatrous worship. Much as in Europe, the rulers of the Aztec empire had often danced — wearing the flayed skins of captured enemy warriors or waiving the severed arms or bloodied skulls of slaughtered slaves. It was all very gruesome to be sure but the ontological pretensions were not in doubt. Through their performances a certain world was constructed of which the rulers and their priests were the undisputed masters and before which the terror-stricken subjects had no choice but to kneel down in awe.²⁴ The rulers of Southeast Asia made similar ontological claims. In Java, Stamford Raffles observed, the kings often appear before their subjects in processions characterized by much pomp and circumstance. “To dance gracefully, is an accomplishment expected in every Javan of rank; and in the western districts, particularly, all the chiefs are, on days of festivity, accustomed to join in the exercise, one after the other, commencing with the youngest.”²⁵ The kings of Dahomey danced too, accompanied by their formidable guard of female warriors, carrying blunderbusses. The king, the slave-trader Robert Norris wrote in 1773, “danced some time, to convince his subjects of his health and activity, to their inexpressible joy and satisfaction; which they manifested in the loudest acclamations.”²⁶

In addition, the Europeans introduced dances of their own. Jesuit missionaries in Goa, in 1650, staged performances of “convert boys, who held garlands, and danced round a pillar crowned with a huge flower in the shape of a tulip, from which became visible the figures of

24 Scolieri, *Dancing the New World*, 3.

25 Raffles, *History of Java*, 1:383.

26 Norris, *Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahádee*, 105–6.

the Virgin and Child.”²⁷ This, the Jesuits argued, was an effective way of spreading the Christian message to illiterate locals, and the fact that the dances blended with indigenous forms of worship made conversions all the easier. The Jesuits in the Americas used similar techniques. The inauguration of a new church would be accompanied by dances in which the natives took an enthusiastic part. “Visiting Indians,” Ribas recalled, gathered “from a distance of a hundred miles for the inauguration ceremonies, which lasted eight days,” and “colorful and attractive dances” featured prominently in the proceedings.²⁸ However, the intensity of their fervor was disconcerting to the Spaniards as was the natives’ use of feathers. Dancing for days on end had been a feature of the religious ceremonies of the Aztecs too, and so had dancing dressed up in feathers.²⁹

Dancing in the nineteenth-century

The European understanding of dance, and the role of dance in European society, underwent profound changes in the course of the nineteenth-century. The Europeans danced differently, on different occasions, and with different purposes in mind. Dance no longer served ontological or epistemological purposes—it was no longer a way of establishing a certain world or a way of knowing. Instead dance became dispensable, reduced to a theatrical performance or to a form of entertainment. As a result, the relationship changed between the Europeans and their bodies, but also between Europeans and non-Europeans.³⁰

Most obviously perhaps, European kings stopped dancing. The monarchs no longer donned leotards in order to convince their audiences of the existence of a world-stage on which they acted the part of their states. The existence, and sovereignty of, the state could by now be taken for granted. What was put into question was rather how the state best was to be personified. Before 1789, the king had been the only legitimate political subject but in the

27 Grove, *Dancing*, 75.

28 Scolieri, *Dancing the New World*, 131.

29 Scolieri, 132.

30 Ringmar, “The Problem of the Modern Self.”

wake of the French Revolution the nation came to take the king's place. Only ignorant plebes were impressed with the pomp and circumstance with which the remaining monarchs occasionally still surrounded themselves.³¹ Although the new sovereign nation celebrated itself in ceremonies, festivals and song, the nation as such did not dance. Rather the court masques and the *ballets de cour* were transformed into an art-form adjusted to the tastes of the members of the rising middle-classes. Their sensibilities tended towards the romantic. As Jean-George Noverre explained in *Lettres sur la danse, sur les ballets et les arts*, 1803, the ballet should be expressive, and more than anything expressive of nature.³² The movements of the dancers should be spontaneous and organic, not geometrical; the bodies should move freely, unconstrained by court dresses and social rules.³³ “We must not merely practice steps, we must study the passions!”

No longer a pastime for soldiers, lawyers and priests, the new romantic ballet required dedicated professionals who took to the stage only after years of arduous training. More than anything the romantic ballets featured ballerinas in tutus dancing *en pointe* — a painful, tiptoe, technique which transformed them into ethereal beings, sylphs of the air and the heavens.³⁴ By now the ballets had moved out of the royal courts and into the new opera houses which were constructed across Europe — Covent Garden, 1858; Wiener Staatsoper, 1869; Opéra Garnier, 1875; The Metropolitan Opera House in New York, 1883. These institutions were public and anyone with the money was able to buy a ticket. In addition, by mid-century a number of technical innovations transformed the way the ballets were presented. Gas lighting illuminated the stage more effectively at the same time as the lights were lowered in the auditorium for the duration of the performance.³⁵ As a member of the audience you were expected to remain

31 Bagehot, *The English Constitution*.

32 Noverre, *Lettres sur la danse, sur les ballets et les arts*.

33 Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 442.

34 Cohen, *Dance as a Theatre Art*.

35 Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*.

quiet, stay passive, and pay attention to what was happening before you.³⁶ This is how ballet became a high-art, in the European tradition, which bestowed social status on its connoisseurs.

This is also how the ballet came to be coded as feminine. In the early nineteenth-century a sharp contrast was often drawn between the romantic and the rational, and this distinction corresponded to an equally sharp distinction between the body and the mind and between the male and the female. Embodied and expressive of emotions, dance thus came to be placed solidly within the purview of women. Men, by contrast, were rational and disembodied, and as a result they did not dance; or, if they did, they constituted an effeminate sort of males of whom women had better beware.³⁷ In an argument typical of the period, the influential German critic Eduard Hanslick sought to save music for rationality by severing its connection to the body. What is “beautiful” in music, he explained, is an idea which you only can appreciate only through an act of conscious judgment. To be carried away by a rhythm is to be a slave to “unreasoning, undirected, and purposeless feelings” which are “not worthy of the human mind.”³⁸ Women, by contrast, were not similarly constrained and it was as such that they were turned into goddesses, mistresses and muses. And no one was more embodied than the ballerinas. The likes of Marie Taglioni, Fanny Elssler and Carlotta Grisi were the first international superstars of the new era of mass entertainment. Promoters billed them as rivals, with their respective groups of rivaling fans, and scandalous love-lives to match.

The romantic ballets declined in popularity in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, and before the genre was revived by the Russians — by Tchaikovsky, and later by Diaghilev — it was instead in vaudeville theater and music halls that dances were performed.³⁹ The audiences at nightspots like the Empire or the Alhambra in London, or Olympia and the Moulin Rouge in Paris, were decided ordinary, and the performances tended towards the exotic and the burlesque. Here no connoisseurship was required and no cultural capital was distributed. By all

36 Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*.

37 Jordan, “Pricked Dances.”

38 Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, 128–29.

39 Grove, *Dancing*, 379; Cohen, *Dance as a Theatre Art*.

accounts, however, the performances were great fun. In 1905, Mata Hari — later shot as a German spy — began her celebrated dance performances as a Javanese princess; in 1908, an American, Maud Allen, had a great success with “the dance of the seven veils,” and in the 1920s, another American, Josephine Baker, became the talk of Paris, and of Europe, after performing “primitive dances” in her banana skirt.⁴⁰

Ordinary people danced too of course, and this, in the first part of the nineteenth-century, meant that they waltzed.⁴¹ The waltz was a dance-form long practiced in southern Germany which in the eighteenth-century moved into bourgeois homes. When the nation subsequently proceeded to take over the state, it was more than anything the waltz that accompanied it. The waltz constituted an explicit rejection of aristocratic values. The steps were easy to learn, no dancing-masters were required, and it was not a way to display one's posture or social standing. This allowed members of all social classes to mingle on the dance-floor. In addition, the waltz allowed you to move around as you saw fit. To be a good dancer was a matter of each person's individual qualities; the way you danced revealed your personality. To dance was of course, strictly speaking, quite pointless, but this was the precise reason why nineteenth-century Europeans so enthusiastically engaged in it. In a burgeoning industrial society, increasingly ruled by the interplay between the forces of supply and demand, even the most disembodied of men occasionally needed a break from their rational selves. The waltz was a good evening out and thereby a perfect form of relaxation. And as long as the men led and the women followed, there was never a risk that gender roles would become confused.⁴²

Colonial masters don't dance

In the nineteenth-century, we said, the Europeans lost much of their terpsichorean literacy as dance lost its ontological and epistemological functions. As a result, the relationship changed

40 Walkowitz, “The Vision of Salome”; Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*.

41 Katz, “The Egalitarian Waltz.”

42 Katz.

between the Europeans and their bodies, but the relationship changed too between the Europeans and everyone else. Both changes can be attributed to an evolutionary way of thinking about human development which gained prominence in the wake of the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, 1859. All societies go through stages of development, the Europeans now explained — from the childish and “primitive” to the grown-up and “civilized.” One feature of civilized people — and it was obvious to Europeans that they provided the only example — is that they are ruled by their minds, not by their bodies, and that they as a result are fully in control of their emotions and themselves. Primitive people, by contrast, are ruled by their bodies, and this is why they are emotional, unreflective, and why they often are out of control. Primitive people resemble children, or women.

As a consequence of this mind-body dualism, all inter-civilizational encounters now took place on distinctly unequal terms — between emotional non-European bodies and rational European minds. This was also the premise on which a new, and far more aggressive, form of colonialism was launched in the last decades of the nineteenth-century. Instead of letting their bodies encounter the bodies of the natives, the Europeans used their minds to control them. Obviously, Europeans and non-Europeans could no longer dance together. A colonial master cannot dance with a colonial subject since that would be to lower oneself to a previous stage of human evolution. It would also have forced the Europeans to admit to a common humanity.

In fact, dance functions entirely differently in civilized and in primitive societies. In civilized societies, as we saw, dance is understood as a theatrical performance or as a way of entertaining oneself. That is, dance serves no essential functions. In fact, the body serves no essential functions either, at least no function which cannot in principle be replaced by a machine.⁴³ Primitive peoples, by contrast, cannot do without dance. For one thing, it helps them control their minds and thereby to regulate their moods. Thus a war dance will put a savage in a bellicose mood and a rain dance will put him in a supplicant mood. Dance is furthermore a means of organizing social relations and giving coherence and direction to the

43 Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*.

activities of the group. Dance, a sociologist might say, helps to “fuse” the group.⁴⁴ In addition, since they lack access to elaborate thought, dance provides the natives with a way of expressing themselves. Above all, as European anthropologists explained, the natives dance as an expression of their beliefs in magic.⁴⁵ By dancing they call on divine powers to bring them any of a number of desired goods — rain, plentiful harvests or offspring, successful hunts, victories in war.

To the anthropologists, however, these dances were nothing but theatrical performances. As such they related to them much as people back in Europe related to all dances they saw on stage.⁴⁶ It is striking, for example, that the dances of African natives often were described as taking place at night, within a circle lit by a bonfire, with the anthropologists watching from afar. This was the exact attitude which Europeans theater-goers, in their darkened auditoriums, now assumed. Dance did not require involvement, but connoisseurship, and the anthropologists were connoisseurs. Some dances, like the dances to which Captain Cook and his crew were treated in Tahiti, were performed by lightly clad women and were understood as erotic; other dances, like the ones featured in the ceremonies of Oriental courts, were stately and grave.⁴⁷ Yet in neither case were the performances all that different from what as on show in Europe. The erotic dances resembled variety performances and the stately ceremonies were the same as those in which European monarchs too occasionally engaged. It was in all cases a matter of theatrics, nothing more, nothing important.

And yet, the anthropologists occasionally acknowledged that something else was going on. At least some of the native dances had a force which was impossible to ignore. It was as though the rhythms were calling out to them, asking the Europeans to abandon their spectatorial stance and join in the revelry. To defend themselves against such temptations, the anthropologists were quick to label what they saw as “orgies” and “barbarous rites,” and the

44 Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics.”

45 Grove, *Dancing*.

46 Carter, *Living in a New Country*.

47 Rickman, Ellis, and Newbery, *Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage*; Warburton, *The Crescent and the Cross; or, Romance and Realities of Eastern Travel*; Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*.

missionaries, who often were exposed to the same threats, denounced them as forms of devil worship and proceeded to have them banned. Perhaps, in the end, the Europeans were not really convinced by the evolutionary theories they pretended to espouse. Civilization, many nineteenth-century Europeans secretly feared, was but a fragile illusion.⁴⁸ All it took to revert back to a previous stage of human development was “the monotonous beating of a big drum,” or the “steady droning sound of many men chanting.”⁴⁹ Confronted with such invitations to dance their “unlawful souls” were soon beguiled, “beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations,” and in some cases the Europeans quite simply went mad. It was all perfectly horrible.

At the same time, it was possible to harness these primitive forces for recreational ends. In the nineteenth-century, we said, dance was generally understood as an irrational preoccupation and strictly speaking as a waste of time, and yet for these precise reasons it constituted a good way to take time off from life's more serious pursuits. All recreational dancing, for that reason, took place as though within quotation marks. Dance allowed one to temporarily be someone one was not; to assume a different, more lighthearted, personality. In the first decades of the twentieth-century such make-believe was often carried out through “natives dances” like the charleston, the quickstep, the tango and an assortment of Latino dance crazes. Not that the custodians of European civilization were convinced of course, and young people were often warned, in no uncertain terms, not to succumb to these temptations. “The dancer who is nothing more than the slave and the ape of rhythm is reduced to nothingness.”⁵⁰ And yet, it was all quite safe. The jungles were far away, the orchestras contained no real savages, and every reveler had to get up early on Monday morning to go to work.

48 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

49 Conrad, “The Heart of Darkness.”

50 Levison, “Le ‘step’ et le rythme.”

Dancing diplomats

In early modern Europe, we said, dance provided a way to distinguish an aristocrat from other members of society. Aristocrats knew how to carry themselves, and they knew how to carry themselves since they knew how to dance. As a result, an aristocrat from one country had more in common with an aristocrat from another country than with other social classes in their own countries. The aristocratic culture of the early modern Europe was perfectly transnational. This was obvious, if not before, at the balls that regularly were staged at European courts, where the presence of members of the foreign *corps diplomatique* was a given. When they appeared at the king's palace, and took up their designated places according to the elaborate rules of precedence, the metaphor of a "world stage" took on a concrete manifestation. The court was a world, but it was also a stage on which the diplomats danced together. This was an image of an international society.

Once the nation, in the wake of the French Revolution, came to take over the state, and once middle-class values came to dominate all European societies, this aristocratic transnationalism was under threat and so was the international society which it symbolized. Militant nationalists were unlikely to dance with each other. Yet, rather surprisingly, the diplomatic culture of the *anciens régimes* survived. In September 1814, the crowned heads of Europe, together with an assortment of princes, dukes and counts, assembled in Vienna to clear up the mess left by the Napoleonic wars. For the next ten months they negotiated, but they also socialized, and more than anything they danced. Indeed, since there were no plenary sessions, negotiating, socializing and dancing often happened in the same place and at the same time. Experienced negotiators, a French aristocrat recalled, would assemble for talks in one part of a room, while "the young waltzers would occasionally stop short near these groups, and, apparently occupied exclusively with their amusement and their fair partners, would listen attentively to the conversations of the politicians."⁵¹ In this way national secrets soon became

51 Garde-Chambonas, *The Journal of a Nobleman*, 88.

common knowledge. Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne famously cast doubts on the efficiency of the method. "Le Congrès ne marche pas," he complained, "il danse." Yet the Prince died in December 1814, and in June the next year a final settlement was reached.

Equally surprisingly, the aristocratic culture of diplomacy was sustained throughout much of the nineteenth-century. Foreign affairs, it turned out, was one field which actually lent itself quite badly to democratic decision-making. Many issues of high politics could not be discussed beforehand and were instead best resolved informally and in secret; successful negotiations required expertise, personal connections and access to information. The traditional, pre-revolutionary, diplomats were the masters of all this, and despite their misgivings, the new nationalist leaders eventually came to realize as much. As a result, diplomacy survived as a protected enclave of aristocratic, *ancien régime*, values. Basically the diplomats just kept on dancing. And it worked. Europe was strikingly peaceful throughout much of the nineteenth-century, despite the tremendous economic and social changes which each society went through. The Europe-wide society survived and so did the sense of shared values. The Europeans were not united in relation to each other to be sure, but they were united in relation to the rest of the world. The Europeans stayed together since they danced together.

Yet observe what has happened here. By the nineteenth-century Europeans were no longer dancing with strangers, but only dancing with each other; with people, that is, who were more or less like themselves. Most of the time it was perfectly obvious who was invited to these balls — who belonged, or not, to civilized, international, society — but there were also some marginal cases. As non-Christian, and Asian, the Ottoman empire constituted one such case. Yet, in 1856 in Paris, when a treaty was to be negotiated to conclude the Crimean War, representatives of the Sultan were invited, and without hesitating in the least the Turkish diplomats took to the dance-floor. Indeed, the Ottoman ambassador to Paris organized a ball of his own, at which Napoleon III was present, in return for a ball organized by the French

ambassador to Istanbul, where the Sultan had been a guest of honor.⁵² Dancing with the Europeans, the Ottomans became European.

Another, equally disputed, case was Japan. Japan too was unquestionably un-Christian and decidedly “Oriental,” and for those reasons the Europeans long hesitated to include the country as one of its own. Yet in the 1880s, the Japanese went to extraordinary lengths to adopt the codes which governed European diplomatic practices. One of their efforts was to build a European-style amusement center, the Rokumeikan, in central Tokyo, in which balls regularly were held.⁵³ Here domestic elites could learn how to dance in the European fashion, wearing European dress, and Japanese diplomats could prepare themselves for their foreign assignments. And the diplomatic corps stationed in Tokyo frequently attended these events. Everyone seems to have enjoyed themselves, despite the occasional awkward moments — few Japanese knew the proper dance steps, and many could not decide whether to greet each other in the Japanese or the European fashion.⁵⁴

Conclusion

The picture painted by William Bradley, the first-fleeter, of Englishmen and native Australians dancing hand in hand like children at a picnic brings a smile to our faces. It is wonderful example of an inter-civilizational encounter which took place on equal terms. In much the same way, the image of Fuegians waltzing with English botanists is endearing. Yet, lest we forget, in both cases the pre-linguistic communion was a prelude to genocide — the Australian natives were hunted like animals and the people of Tierra del Fuego were eventually completely annihilated.⁵⁵ An initial, successful, body-to-body encounter is thus not a guarantee of a later, language-based, understanding. So what happened? What went wrong?

52 Fleury and Sonolet, *La société du second empire*, 244.

53 Fiévé, “Pouvoir politique, modernité architecturale et paysage urbain dans le Japon de l’ère Meiji.”

54 Loti, *Japoneries d’automne*, 101.

55 Lemarchand, *Forgotten Genocides*.

One answer is that the Europeans never constituted a homogeneous group who shared a common view of the natives. Las Casas defended them, in no equivocal terms, while the conquistadors enslaved them; Arthur Phillip, the first governor of the penal colony in New South Wales, was determined to establish a good rapport with the locals, but after four years on the post, his health failing, he was replaced by officials who took far harsher views. Likewise, in the nineteenth-century, there was a great difference between the attitudes of European adventurers, anthropologists, colonial administrators and missionaries. Activities that the adventurers appreciated were banned by the missionaries. The people who danced with the locals were never the same people who killed them.

Another answer is that the Europeans by the end of the nineteenth-century had lost their terpsichorean literacy. Civilization was now defined in terms of self-control — the mind's control over the body — and the more pride the Europeans took in their civilizational achievements, the more alienated they became from their embodied selves. In the nineteenth-century dance was no longer a way to know; instead knowledge was exclusively pursued in rationalistic terms. The Europeans no longer danced with strangers but only with each other. As a result bodies no longer encountered bodies and civilizations could no longer meet on equal terms.

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