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Original Article

DANCING THROUGH ANTHROPOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES: FEMALE ARTIST-ETHNOGRAPHERS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

This article examines the lives and works of five women who contributed to the field of anthropology in the mid-20th century, especially to the sub-discipline, anthropology of dance. It is about the African-American artist-anthropologists Katherine Dunham (1909–2006), Pearl Primus (1919–1994), Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), the Jewish-Ukrainian experimental filmmaker Maya Deren (1917–1961), and the American dancer and dance therapist Franziska Boas (1902–1988). Even though not all had formal anthropological training, they stood out for their creative achievements and theoretical approaches to accomplish an intersection between cultures, dance, education, social justice, and racial equality. As a female researcher in the anthropology of dance and the body, I find it particularly interesting to reconsider their innovative forms of ethnographic research and applied methodologies, including actively incorporating their bodies, creative ethnographic writing, and producing visual material challenging the anthropological canon. The aim is to delimit each ethnographer's key contributions and propose a strategy to provide a valuable base to develop post-colonial approaches for dance research, particularly on popular dance practice. I emphasize the innovative proposals regarding ethnographic fieldwork, documentation, visual anthropology, and a highly reflexive perspective combined with auto-ethnographic methodologies, which, at that time, were not considered in science or had yet to be developed. This contribution reinforces that these female anthropologists were visionary and their approaches should be revalued.

Keywords: *dance, ethnography, art, methodology, reflexivity*

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> Dance has been my vehicle. Dance has been my language, my strength. In the dance I have confided my most secret thoughts and shared the inner music of all mankind. I have danced across mountains and deserts, ancient rivers and oceans and slipped through the boundaries of time and space.
>
> Pearl Primus, 1983

Introduction

When students receive training in Anthropology and study the history of the discipline, they usually get the impression that it is a field dominated by a white male elite. When female anthropologists, such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, finally appear in books, it must be admitted that they also belong to a kind of establishment and favored social group. This issue is nothing new; however, when I started my doctoral research with a focus on the anthropology of (popular) dances, I also began to question the taken-for-granted attitude that anthropology is a white male-dominated discipline, which it has been so for a long time, a fact that female issues were analyzed from a male gaze. In ethnography, "too often women and their roles are glossed over, under-analyzed, or absent from all but the edges of the description (*Reiter* 1975: 12). When it comes to dance, there is a tendency to trivialize such kind of research topics as often the academic in this field is also engaged with dance practice. However, in my doctoral thesis, I also tackled the issue of whether the sub-discipline anthropology of dance or dance ethnology considers Gertrude Kurath to be a precursor[1], among other women, trained at elite universities or dance academies (*Koeltzsch* 2021). Instead, I argue that dance anthropology and its beginnings go beyond the assumption of being a white elite discipline, as it is a science of diversity where women, immigrants, people from minority ethnic groups, and Afro-Americans contributed to the field. The problem is that they are usually not mentioned or have not received the corresponding work credits.

Considering the before-mentioned context, this paper aims to examine the lives and works of five women who contributed to the field of anthropology from the early mid-20th century, especially to the sub-discipline anthropology of dance. It is about the African-American artist-anthropologists Katherine Dunham (1909–2006), Pearl Primus (1919–1994), Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), the Jewish-Ukrainian experimental filmmaker Maya Deren (1917–1961), and the American dancer and dance therapist Franziska Boas (1902–1988). Even though not all of them had formal anthropological training, they stood out for their creative achievements and theoretical approaches to accomplish an intersection between cultures, dance, education, social justice, and racial equality.

Based on my initial question of why these women are not recognized in the discipline, I designed my research methodology with a focus on documentary analysis of material from important dance archives[2]. Furthermore, I carried out bibliographic research and applied bodily practices as a research tool, for example, taking lessons on the Dunham

[1] Kurath (1960) believed that dance ethnologists/ethnographers need in-depth training, including studying dance at top schools, such as Julliard and the best universities in the United States, as ideal conditions to initiate a career in dance research.

[2] In 2019, I earned a research grant from the University of Florida and carried out research at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division in New York.

Technique with Ned Williams Jr.[1] in New York, which allowed me to experience a practical approach from a disciple of Katherine Dunham. In some way, this also meant establishing personal contact. In addition, I tried to develop a further understanding of my body using performance auto-ethnography to actively immerse myself in comprehending kinesthetic sense and using cameras as tools for ethnographic research, especially considering what I learned from Maya Deren's work.

As a female researcher in the anthropology of dance and the body, I find it particularly interesting to reconsider their innovative forms of conducting ethnographic research and applied methodologies, including actively incorporating their bodies, creative ethnographic writing, and producing visual material challenging the anthropological canon. Therefore, this work aims to delimit the key contributions of each ethnographer, which are presented in the first part. In the second part, I outline a strategy for how the revealed information provides a helpful base for developing post-colonial approaches for dance research regarding popular dance practice. I emphasize the innovative proposals regarding ethnographic fieldwork, documentation, visual Anthropology, and a highly reflexive perspective combined with auto-ethnographic methodologies, which, at that time, were not considered in science or had not even been developed. In conclusion, to reinforce my assumption that these female anthropologists were visionary and that their approaches should be revalued in the field — these women made significant contributions to ethnography, dance theory, art, and methodology.

Artist, Researcher, and Educator: Katherine Dunham (1909–2006)

Katherine Dunham undoubtedly assumed a pioneering role in theoretical and artistic work within Dance Anthropology. However, she is not officially granted this role because few female anthropologists were recognized in the mid-20th century and because of her alternative approach combining dance research and performance. As Garcia (2017) recognizes, when she started her academic career at the University of Chicago in 1928, Dunham found herself in a world of racial and male-dominated anthropological discourses and practices. This situation has changed, albeit slowly.

Important to mention is that Katherine Dunham has always worked as an artist, researcher, and educator, considering her diasporic experience as an African-American woman, which resonates artistically and academically. A major issue of her research was to rethink the articulation of movement and the modern body. Due to her experience with dance from a very young age, movement was normal for her in different life situations (*Dunham* 1959). When she began to observe and study other groups' dances, she became aware of this "normality" of expressing herself through dancing. Therefore, she did not want to focus on the behavior of others as something exotic (*Dunham* 2005). Methodologically, she kept this aspect in mind throughout her work. Her theoretical contribution aimed to explain that dance fulfills different functions, establishing four criteria in her thesis "The dances of Haiti: form and function, organization and material aspects" (*Dunham* 1947). She established that dance is an individual or collective rhythmic notion for any of the following purposes (*Dunham* 2005: 510): 1. Play. Dancing for no other apparent reason than to amuse; 2. Release and

[1] Ned Williams Jr. (1930–2021) was born in Walterboro, SC, migrated to New York to work, and then began attending classes at Katherine Dunham School, where he earned a scholarship and became a member and performer with the Dunham Experimental Group.

building of emotional and physical tension. For example, sacred dances, funeral dances, and war dances; 3. Establishment of social cohesion or solidarity. This category includes all carnival dances; 4. Exhibition of skill. This would be individually or in a group, either the demonstration of amateur spontaneity or professional virtuosity.

One of her concerns was to link what is called popular dance and stage dance. Dunham compares both forms and concludes that: "As in the primitive community, specific movement patterns might be related to certain functions, so in the modern theater, there would be a correlation between a dance movement and the function of that dance within the framework of the theater" (*Dunham* 2005: 513). It becomes clear that she constantly transgressed the borders between anthropological research, performing in theaters, creating a modern dance technique, and appearing in Broadway musicals. Her broad knowledge of cultural patterns made it possible to bring diverse ethnic dances to the modern stage. Moreover, in the piece "Cabin in the Sky", she establishes a connection between dance in the carnival — whose function is sexual stimulation and liberation– through a Broadway musical. From Dunham's example of the interplay between everyday folk dances and professional stage dance, I applied this lens to my research, arguing that social actors also blur the lines between dance in everyday life and dramatizing it through movement (*Koeltzsch*, *Cruz* 2021a; 2021b). This shows that most popular dances happen in the same way, both in the community and on an artistic stage. This vision contributed to overcoming certain ambiguities in positioning dance between "science and art" or "exhibition and entertainment". According to Dunham (*Dunham* 2005: 515) this conflict does not arise in "primitive societies", as dance is accepted as a functional element, both on a personal and community level.

Fig. 1. Katherine Dunham. Photo: Department of Special and Area Studies Collections University of Florida, George A. Smathers Libraries Belknap, Collection, 34/G/6, Box 1

With her stage performances using a variety of ethnic elements, Dunham focused

on folk knowledge as an essential approach and dance as a meaningful practice, which stems from her anthropological training and from the perspective of her mentor, Melville Herskovits, who, at the time, sought to demystify black culture and the prejudices of American society regarding the history of African American people (*Herskovits* 1958). Both researchers tried to prioritize the informants' articulations. However, in Dunham's case, she highlights self-reflexivity by critically analyzing her entry into the field as an African American woman working with an Afro-descendant population in Haiti, recognizing her subjectivities, femininity, and belonging to the lower-middle class.

In "Island Possessed" she describes through a 'dense description' her first contact with the elite and aristocracy of Haiti that cuts across issues of race, detecting an upper-middle class behavior, more French than American, and that women have almost no contact with guests, being reduced to servant roles (*Dunham* 1994: 23). In 1936 when she first went to Haiti for fieldwork, she was a young woman, African American, a graduate student, traveling alone, which was not very usual at that time.

I would also like to point out her activism for racial equality, considering that embodied expressive culture was an essential tool for African descendants. However, she also recognized the international dimensions of the African diaspora to get involved in political activism and against racism (*Dee Das* 2017).

Analyzing her artistic work, it becomes clear that Dunham tried to learn dances from different cultures of the American continent (including Brazil, Andean dances, Tango, Caribbean, and Afro-American dances), but also from Africa and Asia. This fact contributed theoretically and artistically but was also used as an educational tool to foster intercultural communication. She developed a view towards human beings and recognized the emotions involved, but she did not apply categories such as race. As Katherine Dunham states: "I don't see any color in what we do. I see human emotions. It's only a fortunate accident that I have hit upon and used material chiefly of people with Negro backgrounds. But I feel I'd failed miserably if I were doing dance confirmed in technique or audience satisfaction to race, color, or creed. I don't think that it would be art, which is something that has to do with universal truth and a set of fundamental ideas, evaluations, and appreciations" (interview with *Elias* 1956: 17).

In other words, she tried to bring the dances to an audience not by racial criteria, of "color" or beliefs, but by considering them the most human expressions. She recognized dance as philosophy, in the search for understanding the human body, ourselves in contact with others, and thus, life itself. On the other hand, her diasporic affinity was always present, closely linked to Haiti, in a world organized in nation-states, which was of constant concern to her. She thus felt a diasporic tension because of "the disjunction between the symbolic uses of a place and the lived experience of people" (*Dee Das* 2017: 153).

In conclusion, this is only a short review of Katherine Dunham's immense oeuvre and her effort to combine an anthropological perspective with popular culture on and off stage, allowing her to disseminate her work effectively.

The Power of Dance: Pearl Primus (1919–1994)

Pearl Primus was born in Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago); as a child, she moved to the United States with her parents as labor migrants. However, even uprooted, her family never abandoned African and Trinidadian traditions; her grandfather was a voodoo doctor

and percussionist (*Glover* 1989: 2). Pearl Primus can be considered a dancer, anthropologist, and educator who had a significant impact on American arts and culture in the 20th century. She often used her dances and performances to protest the conditions of African Americans; above all, she brought ancient African dances to America after conducting fieldwork and learning dances on the African continent (*Schwartz*, *Schwartz* 2011). Her academic career was far from easy; after studying biology and pre-medicine, she could not find a job in a laboratory and failed to pursue a career in medicine because of racial obstacles. While working in various jobs, she trained in dance and studied education and psychology to complete a master's degree in Psychology at Hunter College in New York. Furthermore, she studied modern dance techniques with Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman. Her knowledge of the human body acquired in undergraduate classes in biology and medicine helped her considerably to understand the body's anatomy concerning bodily movements. Thus, within a short time and without specific training in her childhood, she learned the modern dance techniques of the masters, as mentioned above (*Glover* 1989: 31–32). In 1944, she founded her own dance company, allowing her to develop her method of blending African-American, Caribbean, and African dance styles with modern dance techniques.

Pearl Primus finally combined all her knowledge and experiences to start a doctorate in Anthropology at Columbia University. However, she then switched to New York University (NYU), earning her PhD in Anthropology in 1978 with her thesis entitled "An Anthropological Study of Masks as Teaching Aids in the Enculturation of Mano Children". One significant achievement was obtaining permission from NYU to dance her dissertation defense, which is, until today, an almost impossible undertaking due to academic rules and formal requirements. She intended that a successful presentation would open "a new dimension in teaching for other artists, musicians, and painters" (quoted in *Glover* 1989: 123).

In her creations, she incorporated academic and practical knowledge combined with inspiration; Primus considered dance a mirror to get to know other people, cultures, and people's behavior and psychology, especially observing issues related to the body and dance. Her observations included the ways of life of the humble people of the Southern states of the USA, living with them, and sharing the activities in their "black" churches (*Welsh Asante* 1994: X). In this way, developing a self-reflexive perspective, as Pearl Primus explains: "What I have been trying to express in my dancing is the culture of the Negro people. This has taken me into the field of Anthropology. I have to know the political, economic, and social life of people in order to explain them to others. Anthropology explains different peoples to one another by laying bare their cultural backgrounds" (cited in *Glover* 1989: 33).

In her theoretical approaches, she tried to demystify the vision of the "Puritan ethic" regarding African dances, considering them not having artistic forms, not being demanding, and emphasizing sexual content. Primus was convinced that art should not be set apart from some cultures as there is diversity and a broad understanding of art (*Glover* 1989). Her ideas emerged from fieldwork studying dances of more than 30 tribal groups during a year in Africa, mainly by participating in them. Later, this approach was called observant participation. Primus understood the meanings of these dances and the movements as involving her own body in the process. She wanted modern societies and academia to understand the value of dance studies, including dance as an art form, a tool for personal expression, understanding cultures, and bringing human groups together (*Glover* 1989: 129).

Like Katherine Dunham, she was engaged in scholarly research on African-American dance. Both women combined their artistic innovations with graduate work in Anthropology, a strategy that is effortful and deserves respect, and above all, it also marked their performances (*DeFrantz* 2004: 52). Both researched dance, music, art, and rituals related to Afro-Latin American cultures which should have been recognized. They were the first professionally trained black dancers who also applied an academic approach relating dance to their ancestry, which means, somehow, they introduced an auto-ethnographic perspective to dance studies. They were pioneers in education, setting up their schools and groups to contribute to the training of black artists. Both women were recognized artists with tours in America and the rest of the world. Primus created original pieces for modern dance involving her experiences of being a black woman in America (*Glover* 1989: 51). However, the fact that she danced at nightclubs, Broadway, and theaters alike, combining both her formal training and her curiosity about her African ancestors and diaspora could have been an obstacle to academic recognition.

Zora Neale Hurston: Anthropologist on the Edge of Canonical History (1891–1960)

Zora Neale Hurston was born in Notasulga, Alabama, but spent much time in Eatonville, Florida, always mentioning the latter as her birthplace. She studied at Howard University (taking language and literature), later at Barnard College, a women's college associated with Columbia, and thus trained in the tradition of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. Under the supervision of Franz Boas, she studied Anthropology and was to be the first black woman to graduate from this university. With her academic training and the sup-

Fig. 2. Pearl Primus in Prayer of Thanksgiving, Zaire. Photo: Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. 1950–1959). Retrieved from https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/97ca5180-4bfa-013b-e88a-0242ac110003

port of Franz Boas, she began extensive fieldwork in the South of the United States, Eatonville (Florida), Haiti, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Honduras, documenting cultural and religious traditions. She used ethnographic data to reconstruct people's lives, and folklore became a typical characteristic of her novels. She published many texts of diverse genres.

Zora Neale Hurston should be considered a novelist and a cultural anthropologist who was exceptionally gifted in writing. She conducted ethnographic work on music, dance, folklore, black cultures, and social issues, applying specific fieldwork techniques. Nowadays, this would be called the "postmodern approach", searching for new forms of ethnographic experience, using different interpretive techniques and innovative writing. Early on, she mixed genres in ethnographic writing, somehow anticipating anthropological approaches (*McClaurin* 2012).

As a methodological strategy, she rejects the authority of the insider/outsider position. She suggests that ethnographers cannot create spaces for themselves in societies where anthropologists define people as objects or others to view through the lens of the spyglass (*Hernández* 1993: 353). Her novel "Mules and Men" (1935) is an ethnography of African-American folklore in the Southern states where she recognizes her belonging to the black communities. It is about the community, and as she admits, no matter how much education she receives, she will always be "Zora" (*Hurston* 1990: 2). At that time, she developed an essential capacity for self-reflection, which permeates all her work.

In 1932, she took the initiative and presented herself through letters to a professor (Dr. Grover) of Rollins College (Florida), sending proposals to carry out a series of activities within the Anthropology and Music Department, such as concerts of black music, dances, and the presentation of folk tales. She called her project "Negro Theatre", for which she also applied for national grants. She could sustain her ideas well, and Edwin Grover supported her projects and publications, recognizing her excellent work. It is worth noting that Zora Neale Hurston can be considered an example of black women's agency at a time even more difficult than today, seeking to enter the academic sphere without social and economic capital.

Regarding her artistic creations and concerts, I would like to mention the piece "The Great Day", a program of original black folklore. It is one of her artistic works for the stage, combining various black Caribbean dances, music, and performances. It is advertised as a "powerful" program to bring black folklore and spirituality in its "authentic" form. In the historical context, considering the situation in the U.S. in the 1930s, this was an achievement as the play greatly impacted the general public. It was the result of several years of fieldwork observations. Despite emphasizing the African roots of Afro-American dance but analyzing it in more detail, Kraut (*Kraut* 2001: 71) proposes a more complex interpretation. "The Great Day" is a narrative that expresses a heterogeneous vision of the African diaspora, a discontinuity between America, Africa, and Caribbean folklore, and, somehow, anticipating "the black Atlantic" (*Kraut* 2001: 71). The latter is a notion of Paul Gilroy (1993), who not only thought in terms of continuity but also, above all, in the trajectories, ruptures, and cultural exchanges that are equally constitutive of the black diaspora.

Nevertheless, some critics claim that Zora Neale Hurston explicitly left aside the political question. In contrast, other critics find it between the lines of her descriptions (*Robbins* 1991: 6). I think, within all the discussions, the auto-ethnographic attempts should be recognized, as her production can be placed between autobiography and fiction, which enriches anthropological studies, in the same way as her novels were inspired by the cultural worlds of real-life African Americans, a transgression that challenges academic categorization.

Finally, I want to mention a posthumous work called "Barracoon", published for the first time in 2018. It is a non-fiction book, a life story, the account of an eyewitness of the last survivor of the slave trade. The manuscript is a historical document that no one wanted to publish during Zora Neale Hurston's lifetime. It is about the personal story of Oluale Kossola, also known as Cudjo Lewis, who was taken to North America on the last slave ship in 1860. In 1927, Zora Neale Hurston interviewed Oluale Kossola (he was 86 at the time of recording) about his life: his youth in present-day Benin, his capture and placement in the so-called "barracks," where enslaved people were locked up for sale, his time in Alabama, his liberation, and his subsequent search for his roots and identity in a country called the United States, which was highly racist in post-slavery times and during the 20th century, but somehow until present. An interesting fact is that Zora Neale Hurston lets the protagonist speak as a *griot*[1], she does not intervene; it is an unadorned narrative with authentic language.

Fig. 3. Zora Neale Hurston at Federal Writer's Project booth at New York Times Book Fair. Photo: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library. "Digital Collections. 1937. Retrieved from: https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/898ec0bf-39fb-92e7-e040-e00a18063ff1

Finally, even though this is only a summary of her work, it reflects her approaches and methodologies, such as life history, developing anthropological writing techniques, and reflexivity, which should be recognized within Anthropology. However, there is also the issue of human dignity and keeping memory; Zora Neale Hurston was not even recognized in society; when she died, her belongings were burnt, and she was buried in an unmarked grave in Fort Pierce (Florida).

[1] "In parts of West Africa, someone who passes on their society's history, especially through stories, poems, and music, and who participates in ceremonies such as weddings and funerals". Definition: Cambridge Dictionary. Source: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/griot.

Dance in Human Societies: Franziska Boas (1902–1988)

Undoubtedly, Franziska Boas was much more than "just" the daughter of the famous anthropologist Franz Boas. She was a woman committed to developing new forms of dance and dance education, an activist for racial equality and social justice. However, she also worked on therapeutic approaches to dance. Franziska Boas was educated in public schools in Englewood, N.J., and in 1923, received a B. A. degree in Zoology and Chemistry from Barnard College. In addition, she was trained in dance, percussion, and arts. In 1933, she founded and directed the Boas School of Dance in New York. She developed improvisational modern dance theories advocating for percussion accompaniment for dance.

As Franz Boas' daughter, she was acquainted with anthropological theory and its disciplinary particularities, which is reflected in her ethnographic works and theoretical contributions to the field. Her concern was focused on the function of dance in human societies, so she conducted seminars on this subject and published her research (*Boas* 1972). She carried out fieldwork with the Kwakiutl on the Northwest coast of North America (Vancouver Island, BC), observing the daily life of this group and how dance plays a significant role from the cradle to the grave, as mothers comfort their babies with songs marking the rhythm beats with their feet from the very beginning of life. Boas detects the importance of dances for the Kwakiutl and analyzes the social and religious ceremonies where solo dancers frequently appear while group dances are rarely performed. In addition, she pays attention to different body techniques, such as the importance of the position of the knees, and that the ability to use the knees is a criterion for the Kwakiutl themselves to evaluate the performance of their members, whether male or female dancers (*Boas* 1972).

An important theoretical-methodological aspect is that dance studies contribute considerably to investigating non-verbal articulations. Furthermore, dance is vital in life, not only in "exotic" societies. Boas also analyzed contemporary society at her time and the dances performed by social actors in the streets and parks in New York. However, she also points out critical educational aspects regarding movement (*Boas* 1972). She relates dance to certain lifestyles, considering the urban dance movements (break dance and hip hop) that emerged in the 1970s in New York. Other theoretical contributions are her analyses of psychological and educational approaches and the development of fantasy and emotions through dance, emphasizing that the individual is more than a physical body (*Boas* 1942). She examines these issues for educational purposes, working with diverse groups of students. In this way, she simultaneously considers aspects related to the body, sensory experiences, and therapies with contributions to child psychiatry. She published the results (*Bender*, *Boas* 1941) of her research based on observations of children in the Psychiatric Division of Bellevue Hospital using music and spontaneous dance to treat and train children.

Another primary concern was integrating all groups and human experiences in dance. Doing voluntary work in a hospital, Franziska Boas pioneered the development of dance therapy, particularly its application for children with schizophrenia. Thus, she recommends modern dance as an art form that embraces all human beings' expressions, movements, and philosophies. Following her approach, "Modern dance must continue to explore the ways of men and women in all their activities. It must learn from movements and philosophy of all age groups and all types: from the healthy and the physically disabled, from the mentally integrated, and the neurotic. It must learn from the successful action and interaction of small and large groups, from war and peace. It must turn into its substance the experience of working people in every sort of occupation and industry, going to and from work, and during their work and at play" (*Boas* 1972: 2).

Fig. 4. Boas, Franziska. Photo: Julian Garret, Jerome Robbins Dance Division and Archive, The New York Public Library. MGZEA, NYPY680034015-F.

An important aspect is that she recognized the importance of movement and that society consists of various groups and individuals who have a social influence regarding movements, e.g., observing a worker going to work and back home. These situations are reflected in bodily articulations, which should motivate artists and researchers to destroy their "own gods" and to start "humbly at the bottom of the ladder" (*Boas* 1972: 2) to understand their movements and motivations. In other words, this is the beginning of self-consciousness as a researcher and reflexivity, a concept that anthropology has developed since the 1980s.

Beyond being a dancer and researcher, Franziska Boas was actively involved in dance education. As mentioned, in 1933, she opened her own dance school, and in 1944, another one together with Katherine Dunham, with whom she shared a common interest in education and anti-racist activism (*Dee Das* 2017). As an educator, she reaffirmed her commitment to society. Ascending from a family strongly marked by humanist ideals, she considered dance a political act, a form of social activism, and interracial interaction, generating opportunities for her students to create dance pieces during her workshops. Boas actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement and was concerned about social rights and racial injustice. Regarding her personal history, she had to cope with both anti-Semitic and homophobic insults because of her family's Jewish background and for having sexual relationships with women.

Finally, it is worth noting her conviction that all dances should be taken seriously and that it is not trivial entertainment. She clarified that dance makes it possible to acquire personal and communal knowledge in exchange students. During her last stage of life, for financial reasons, she moved first to Georgia and then to Sandisfield, Mass., where she taught dance to older adults in the community. Franziska Boas was less well-known

as a professional dancer or choreographer in modern dance than other women in the 20th century. However, she was able to combine her talent for dance with a wide range of professional branches, as well as social concern and commitment. Unfortunately, she is also not recognized in the field of (dance) anthropology. However, her contribution to dance research and education is considerable as she developed a unique approach, focusing on using dance to connect oneself with the body and others rather than proficiency in technique.

Crossroads: Anthropology and Filmmaking. Maya Deren (1917–1961)

Eleanora Derenkowskaya (*Елеонора Соломонівна Деренковська*)[1] was born in 1917 in Kyiv (today, Ukraine) during the Russian Revolution. She emigrated as a child with her Jewish family to New York, where her father shortened the family name to Deren and set up his psychiatric practice. She was a student activist in college and finished her B.A. degree at New York University in 1936. Her interest in dance led her to join the company of Katherine Dunham and accompany her as secretary on a national tour. Maya Deren can be considered a dancer, ethnographer, philosopher, and "visual poet"; above all, she gave birth to the American avant-garde film movement of the postwar era in America.

The contact with Katherine Dunham allowed her to acquire ethnographical knowledge. She became fascinated with Haitian dance and was particularly interested in the voodoo ritual. In 1947, she earned a Guggenheim Fellowship, which allowed her to fund fieldwork in Haiti. Her work was the beginning of a new approach to visual ethnographic research and ethnographic writing simultaneously. As DeBouzek (*DeBouzek* 1990: 7) recognizes, Deren approaches Haiti and voodoo as an artist-ethnographer with a different, non-authoritative perspective, furthermore, without formal constructions of supposed objectivity that was considered the only valid outcome in Anthropology. Maya Deren had already recognized that subjectivity cannot be separated from the researcher; thus, she included her perceptions and self-observations in ethnographic work.

It is worth noting here that the first writings on modernist film theory included dance and ritual. Deren's first article was published in 1942 and entitled "Religious Possession in Dancing", but she also describes the notion of "ritual" as "ritualistic both in form and content" (*Jackson* 2001: 50); for example, in her visual work "Ritual in Transfigured Time" (1946). She captured the experimental image of emotional and non-rational bodies, the bodily experience, and what a human being experiences in various situations. Her distinctive camera movement and sensuous approach are noticeable. As Evans (*Evans* 2022: 143) describes: "her innovative use of 16 mm film and essays setting out her aesthetic philosophy explored various modernist concerns, including experiments in non-linear time (what she termed "vertical" as opposed to "horizontal" time) and disjointed space through experimental techniques such as the jump cut. Deren was particularly interested in how these experiments with time and space could allow the film to work together with dance in a way that exceeded the possibilities of the theatre stage.

Her participation, dance movements, and cinematic techniques are innovative and establish a new approach regarding embodiment and multiple experiences of subjects within a culture. Later in anthropological theory, this was called "embodiment", as a new paradigm in anthropological research introduced by Csordas (1990). Maya Deren combines myth and ritual in dance and film, capturing the fluid and spontaneous movement of the Haitian ritual

[1] Ukranian spelling.

by tracing the process of possession. In this way, she created the most innovative representation method with the use of art in ethnography (*Hurd* 2007: 58).

Another contribution I derive from Deren's ethnography is towards an epistemology of the body, understanding the body as a carrier of knowledge. As DeBouzek summarizes, "Deren's description is evocative and sensual; above all, it emphasizes the importance of the human body as a transmitter of cultural knowledge" (*DeBouzek* 1992: 17). However, unfortunately, from the disciplinary field of Anthropology, Maya Deren was never recognized as an anthropologist. Indeed, her contribution was often denied. Interestingly, Alfred Metraux dismissed her work as "pseudoscientific", but later, in his research on Haiti (*Metraux* 1959), he repeatedly cites Maya Deren's data (see *DeBouzek* 1992: 9).

Fig. 5. Maya Deren. Still from the experimental short film "Meshes of the Afternoon", 1943.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository

Finally, her work was characterized by a humanistic approach through a gradual process of introspection. Deren (*Deren* 1983: 247–262) describes in detail her personal encounter and participation in a voodoo ritual in the chapter "White Darkness". Her human sensitivity made her understand not only the spiritual relationships but also the extensive empirical knowledge of Haitians about their "cosmo-vision", which she captures in movements, images, and ethnographic writing.

Perspectives of Visionary Women for Dance Analysis in Anthropology

Revising their diverse academic and artistic productions, these women anticipated three key concepts of postmodern anthropology (embodiment, reflexivity, auto-ethnography), which are helpful for transdisciplinary dance studies and general anthropological approaches. I want to point out the visionary approach to thinking bodily, considering emotion, movement, and sensorial issues to develop research methodologies from the body, thus including self-observation (auto-ethnography) and performative work to enhance ethnographic data.

These female anthropologists developed diverse narrative forms beyond what is called "objective" ethnography; they applied humanist ethics and aesthetics and recognized the ethnographer as a subject, therefore, as participants, i.e., all of us can be considered as textual and kinetic ethnographic bodies. One important finding is the development of visual methods and techniques to reveal ethnographic data, particularly by Maya Deren. However, all of them were performers who were actively involved in society and all social classes, which helped to disseminate anthropological research beyond the academy. Their engagement in education for professional and non-professional dancers and the general public is remarkable. Katherine Dunham, for example, opened a museum in East St. Louis, IL, in 1977, which not only exposes cultural objects but also includes a Community Service Program with diverse cultural activities. All women promoted initiatives and active participation in art, education, and society, which can be interpreted as diverse (black) feminism due to their heterogeneous education and experience and their social condition.

After studying their oeuvre, I started implementing their approaches in my research, which is not easy considering the boundaries of "traditional" anthropological research. However, I experimented with visual methods, montage, and bodily approaches in several instances. I will briefly give two examples.

Firstly, in 2019, during a research visit for archival work in New York, I took classes on the Dunham Technique, which involves polyrhythmic dance styles in continual motion, to understand the practical vision of Katherine Dunham. Katherine Dunham developed this specific technique, combining dance movements of Caribbean and African cultures with European-style ballet; however, during lessons, there is no other music than live drums. Dunham's disciple, Ned Williams Jr., was still teaching at 89 when I met him. Getting in contact and learning from him was a unique experience. Even though I have danced my whole life, and as far as I remember from my childhood onwards, I have also taken lessons in different dance styles, including classical ballet; I do not have professional dance preparation. Before starting the classes with Ned, I had mentioned this. However, he applied strict rules and accuracy with everybody. When he started drumming and giving instructions, I concentrated on following the lesson, which was challenging. When I saw myself in the mirror, I knew I was not a teenager anymore, and I wished I could have been more trained to enjoy this situation more. It had been a long time ago when I last stood in such a dance studio. From my late twenties onwards, I just enjoyed dancing without any pressure of becoming perfect, mainly focusing on Brazilian dances. In Ned's class, committing even a tiny mistake made him criticize me and repeat the exercise over and over again. Sometimes, he was rude and kind at the same time. I remember him shouting at me: "You are pretty and have a good presence, but your leg muscles must be stronger". There I was, a 46-year-old woman experiencing a new technique and teaching method, making me travel back in time, but also reflecting on different issues. His bodily presence somehow made me connect with this past period when Afro-American dancers tried to be recognized within a racist society, a fact that also hardens people. I read about Katherine Dunham's strict teaching style; she wanted her students to achieve the best results. As a dancer and for my research, I took this experience to observe my own body and dancing differently, particularly my muscles and how they also construct a language interacting with other bodies (see *Figures 6 and 7*). After returning home from New York, I started focusing on strengthening my leg muscles with specific exercises. The muscles are our rhetoric and emotional tools to reveal our interior existence.

The second aspect I want to mention is the visual work with a camera, considering Maya Deren's contributions and aesthetics. I experimented with slow motion and self-recording my movements, (see *Figures 6 and 7*), often randomly taken, not posing. I use an ordinary Xiaomi cell phone to take videos and photos. In the piece "Human and non-human dancing bodies"[1] I explored my movements and connection with my dogs, who always join me when improvising at home. These exercises are essential beyond intellectual work, as they help us recognize that we cannot escape from specific subjectivities and that we all have some embodied lenses. Furthermore, I was inspired by Deren's "Meshes of the Afternoon" and the work with shadows as an example of expressing mental uncertainty through pictures and unpacking emotions as valid as written narratives. The pictures are a microscope of time observing the most casual activities "to reveal in them a texture of emotional and psychological complexes" (*Deren* 1946: 47). These observations help me to understand the profound human complexity of expression.

Fig. 6 and 7. My muscles, my expression, my memory. Kinesthetic practice at home. Photos: Grit K. Koeltzsch, 2023

[1] See https://vimeo.com/user113027045

Conclusion

The overview of these five female pioneers in Anthropology gives insight into their approaches and shows that they stood out for developing diverse fieldwork methodologies and self-reflexive approaches. They made significant contributions to the sub-discipline Anthropology of Dance because they understood dance and movement as transformative forces beyond muscular and gravitational limitations and the importance of the human body as a transmitter of cultural and embodied knowledge.

Furthermore, there is also a personal issue. These women strengthened me in difficult moments in my career when I had doubts about choosing the proper discipline when I was criticized or ignored for sometimes not doing mainstream Anthropology, and when I felt misunderstood. Reading their work and watching their dance made me recognize my embodied knowledge, which was an impulse to continue and follow my road inspired by these role models who provided me with their knowledge and are women who reflect me.

Partly to answer my initial question, the discipline of Anthropology may still have a problem with alternative and art-based methods, especially transdisciplinary approaches, but also recognizing diverse feminisms and different femininities. We all bring our backgrounds and experiences to our research, including a different understanding of feminism. Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Zora Neale Hurston, Franziska Boas, and Maya Deren were strong personalities, following their visions and leaving a legacy we should recognize and honor.

Archives

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Visual sources

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Maya Deren. Meshes of the Afternoon (1943) — Maya Deren (Original Music by Feona Lee Jones): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoETYvwI7I0

Pearl Primus, African American Dancer and Anthropologist: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwzRe7sZa0A

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