



Dance, Consumerism, and Spirituality

C. S. Walter (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

208 pages. Hardcover, E-Book. ISBN 9781137463524.

<http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/dance,-consumerism,-and-spirituality-c-s-walter/?sf1=barcode&st1=9781137460332>

Review by Anita Bahati, first published in

***The Independent Scholar* Volume 1 (December 2015): 53-4**

Dance is a powerful and dynamic expressive form that may be read through diverse lenses. Since ancient times, dance has evolved as aesthetic and participatory phenomena. Communities have evoked gods, venerated ancestors, and commemorated epic events through dance. Historians, social scientists, and theologians have contemplated the value of dance in various spheres. Contextualization of rhythmic movements and gestures associated with dance is informed by historical, cultural, and social functionality.

In *Dance, Consumerism, and Spirituality*, dancer and scholar C.S. Walter explains how dance rituals perpetuate mystical awareness, and fulfill human desire for self-actualization. This desire drives consumption of dance and dance-related products. Walter's proposed *womanist transmodern* (6) frame of reference demarginalizes dance rituals as mystical experiences and cultural commodities. Two prevalent constructs supporting her frame of reference are *theodanceology* and *cyberity*. *Theodanceology* refers to "the study of dance, its power, and its assets in spiritual/mystical and emotional service to humanity, over time" (8). *Cyberity* is "the place where consciousness is connected to brands and symbols, where marketing messages are conceived, received, and delivered and where the consumer buys into hegemonic memory structures of purchase to create identity" (8). Walter's approach also provides a refreshing exploration of dance and mysticism rooted

in human consciousness and cultural authenticity. Her analysis circumvents the tendency of ambitious scholars to sterilize the integrity of cultural artifacts in the process of excessive interpretation.

Throughout the text, Walter effectively analyzes various forms of qualitative and quantitative scholarship to concretize critical concepts supporting her perspective. In addition to referencing traditional research, the author relies on the strength of auto-ethnography to substantiate her claims. In the tradition of Isadora Duncan, Walter associates "deep levels of mystical connection" with repetitive dance practice (32). She acknowledges the manner in which dance allows her to remain emotionally and spiritually connected to her higher self and ideals (8). Like anthropologist, legendary choreographer, and dance scholar Katherine Dunham, she has the capacity to lift the spiritual and emotional elements of dance from the field. While Walter's shared experiences as participant observer are limited, they legitimize her procedure for writing about dance in the contexts of aesthetics, mysticism, and consumption.

Walter accomplishes the task of defining concepts and validating frames of reference in six chapters. Chapter 1 contains adequate definitions of religion and spirituality, with excellent justification for using mysticism as a more suitable concept relevant to discourse on the emotional and cultural significance of dance rituals. The author also establishes innovative correlations between the consumption of "spiritual

gifts" (24) and the business of spirituality. In chapter 2, Walter discusses the circulation and consumption of Black social dance through a womanist transmodern lens (43) to exemplify how dance is consumed in different cultures. Chapters 3 and 4 address the functionality of aesthetics, spirituality, and transmodern dance motifs in the creation of mystical identity. Chapter 5 examines dance consumption in cyberity and the impact of dance on the human experience in parasocial contexts. In chapter 6, the author urges spiritual empowerment through direct engagement of dance rituals that promote mystical awareness. She also encourages advancement of womanist transmodern discourses relevant to dance and consumer behavior.

Dance, Consumerism, and Spirituality will advance scholarship across multiple disciplines. Walter's

extensive discourse on dance rituals, mysticism, and consumption will appeal to scholars of dance, anthropology, cultural studies, gender studies, religious studies, sociology, and visual communication. The text would also be a suitable resource for advanced undergraduate or graduate courses emphasizing anthropological or spiritual approaches to dance.

ANITA H.W. BAHATI

Anita H. W. Bahati is an independent scholar, ethnographer, folklorist, interculturalist, and visual storyteller. Her areas of specialization are in cultural anthropology and Africana studies.