

Editor's Note

The first article in this issue, “It Matters How You Move: An Ethnographic Memoir on Collaboration Between Dance Studies and Neuroscience,” by Janet O’Shea, offers both an experientially reflective and a reflexive analytical account that emerged from a joint collaborative funded “transdisciplinary” pilot research project between the author and a neuropsychologist colleague at UCLA. The project sought to examine the potential benefits of Filipino martial arts (FMA), which O’Shea began studying in 2012, along with other martial arts. O’Shea explains that she experienced difficulties with synthesizing movement and retaining it in certain of her martial arts training, such as FMA, which ran counter to her former dance training and subsequent concert dance experience. This led her to reflect on the mental and physical trials she was experiencing in her martial arts training, which in turn directed her first toward phenomenological and then neuroplasticity theories, and to the collaborative project mentioned above. Methodologically, O’Shea makes use of the “ethnographic memoir” approach that leads to experiential reflection that opens up to “larger concerns,” that, in relation to the collaborative research under discussion here, center on “the differences between intellectual disciplines.” The article importantly draws on the “critical dance studies” that O’Shea has mobilized in her dance research to date, which includes close attention to movement because, as the title states, “it matters how you move.” While the methods of neuroscience on the one hand and the arts and humanities approaches on the other, may seem like two cultures (Snow [1959] 1964) that never the twain shall meet, there is sufficient evidence that collaboration is indeed happening. O’Shea argues cogently however, that her aim is *not* to synthesize the two approaches through collaboration, but rather to propose that, “in their representations, critical dialogue and debate continue” to ensue.

In her article, “The Reda Folkloric Dance Troupe and Egyptian State Support During the Nasser Period,” Anne Vermeyden examines the complex historical circumstances that contributed to the rapid success of the Egyptian dance company, The Reda Troupe, which was founded by Mahmoud Reda in 1958, two years after Gamal Nasser became President of Egypt, heading the nationalist, anti-colonialist, socialist Egyptian government. Along with Muhammad Naguib, Nasser led the “Free Officers” movement that spearheaded the overthrow of King Farouk of Egypt in 1952 and declared Egypt as a republic in 1953. In his fulsome, large group performances for stage, Vermeyden discusses how Mahmoud Reda presented and transformed elements of Egyptian folkloric dance, mixing it with other forms such as ballet and gymnastics (Reda was an Olympic gymnast champion), while distancing his staged performances from the “loved yet stigmatized Egyptian dance expression, *raqs sharqi* (Eastern dance or belly dance).” Vermeyden’s analysis draws on Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity and hybridization, coupled with the specific historic context (in this case, nationalist, socialist and anti-colonial context of the Nasser period), which is not evident in Bhabha’s early writings on hybridity. She argues that while Mahmoud Reda’s Troupe in part achieved success by tapping into the Nasserist anti-colonial, ideological spirit of the age, which encouraged the fostering of Egyptian national pride, and it also received financial support from the state from 1961, it would be a mistake to consider the Reda Troupe’s popularity to be down to these factors alone. Rather, she contends, such an approach denies Reda’s agency and “artistic vision” to realize Egyptian dance on stage.

The third article, “When Is Contemporary Dance?” by SanSan Kwan, brings into focus the thorny issues surrounding the range of meanings and interpretations of the term “contemporary” dance, not only in relation to the element of time or duration, but also to form and content, and space and place. Kwan surveys a range of understandings of the when, what and where of contemporary dance within the arenas of “concert, commercial (mostly United States focus) and world dance contexts.” In regard to the latter context, Kwan draws on her main research area, Asian dance. The article not only takes into consideration the “stylistic features” in these three contexts, but also aesthetic concerns, artistic impulses, socio-cultural settings and training regimes, which in turn, illuminate the varying ways that contemporary dance is used in practice and ethos across these three contexts, while noting that the “political” and “motivational” concerns are also at variance. Notwithstanding these differences, Kwan points out that the three dance contexts under consideration also “collide with and confront each other,” often in the way that they classify themselves “with or against each other.” The privileged space that Western concert dance holds in the academy, Kwan argues, means that we are apt to forget that other dance genres are also “contemporary.” One way of overcoming this amnesia is to recognize that popular dance genres, non-Western dance practices and concert dance are contemporary and progressively are “wrapped up with each other.” Kwan also points out that the demarcation of such dance forms from “high art” dance shines a light on the prejudices, “artistic, cultural and political, and economic” that underpins this view.

The penultimate article by Karima Borni, “Searching for the Soul: A Training Program for Moroccan Contemporary Dancers,” focuses on intensive contemporary dance workshops and courses in Morocco for “prospective” young dancers. The term “contemporary dance” in the Moroccan context is associated with the notion of contemporary dance in France (*danse contemporaine*) and Europe. Borni notes that contemporary dance has seen an increased rise in the participation of young people over the past several years in larger urban areas of the country. Contemporary dance in Morocco, only emerged in the first few years of this century, with the establishment of the first companies and contemporary dance training courses, to the present day where there are according to Borni, “many established artistic directors and dance companies,” along with annual dance festivals and dance studios that run contemporary classes and courses in the major cities. Notwithstanding the evidential growth of interest in dance, as Borni notes, “dance in Morocco remains a highly controversial issue,” with those involved “having to contend with social stigma,” particularly around the notion of the “Muslim body” and the idea of performing in a public arena. The article is based on eighteen months’ fieldwork in Marrakech and Casablanca, which included participant observation of classes and workshops, interviews and illuminating testimonies of the “master” teachers and the novice contemporary dancers, who had little or no prior experience of contemporary dance. Theoretically, Borni draws on Hobsbawm’s idea of “culture making” where she argues her case that the choreographers, teachers, dancers etc. are in the process of “making culture” that is “unique to their country.” She also turns her attention to the idea of “authenticity” which is used in workshops in several different ways to that in Western aesthetics. Through a careful analysis of this case study on the “discourse” in the workshops and the testimonies of the choreographers, teachers and novice dancers, Borni shows that “the exposure of the dancing body reflects important social and political dilemmas facing Moroccans today.”

The final article by Colleen Hooper, “Ballerinas on the Dole: Dance and the U.S. Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA 1974–1982),” examines the aims and objectives of the CETA program, which was instigated to alleviate the pressures resulting from the 1970s’ economic slump. Although it was designed as a training scheme for the unemployed, as Hooper shows, dancers, performers and artists were recipients of this federal funding scheme. The essay situates the establishment of the program in its socio-historical context, while indicating the links between CETA and the earlier Works Program Administration (WPA), which was instigated during the Great Depression of the 1930s, from which artists, performers (theater and dance) and writers, benefitted. The rationale behind dancers etc., benefitting from CETA funding lay in the fact that the program administrators across the country, considered the arts as “public service,” although the

funding was administered at the local level. The article turns attention to one such local level, the largest New York City CETA arts program, and uses a range of methods; archival, interviews with dancers and administrators' "lived experience" of the program, as well as secondary sources of information. From there, Hooper drills down to focus on particular dance performances at the Arthur Kill Correction Center, which were sponsored by the prison, and which in turn raised a number of issues, around race, gender and culture. While the focus on New York is not intended as microcosm of the whole CETA program, Hooper's analysis shows that the CETA arts program, while mainly deemed to be a failure, nevertheless intervened in the notion of "art as public service", and the dancers employed in the scheme benefitted from it financially and professionally in terms of their performance practice to different audiences. However, as Hooper argues, the tensions between art as public service and the communities the art is meant to serve, remain a significant issue.

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Work Cited

Snow, C. P. 1959, 1964. *The Two Cultures*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.