

Editor's Note

All of the offerings in this issue are global in scope and complementary in the ways they contend with the resonances of and/or afterlives of embodied hegemonies. Contributions by Rainy Demerson, Elizabeth Schwall, Maho A. Ishiguro, and Casey Avaunt examine contemporary dance practices in South Africa, Cuba, Indonesia, and the US respectively, while the article by Idoia Murga Castro focuses on the aesthetic and cultural politics of early twentieth-century concert dance performance in the Philippines. Four articles investigate vexed colonial histories through the lens of dance practices (Demerson, Schwall, Murga Castro, and Ishiguro), while two focus on dance formations developed in community settings in which dance fosters practices of self-definition within gendered contexts of Asian-American (Avaunt) or Muslim (Ishiguro) frameworks or strictures. Four articles center around the politics of women's and/or femme dance practices (Demerson, Ishiguro, Murga Castro, and Avaunt). And three involve and theorize methodologies for ethnographic practitioner scholarship (Schwall, Ishiguro, and Avaunt) including insider-outsider dynamics of identity and identification.

Rainy Demerson's "Dada Masilo's *Giselle*: A Decolonial Love Story," leads off. Demerson's article applies critical race and decolonial theories to a cultural analysis of celebrated South African dance artist Dada Masilo's *Giselle* (2017), a choreographic re-making of the Romantic-Era prototype. Masilo's creation premiered at the National Arts Festival at Rhodes University Theatre in Makhanda, South Africa. The dance amplified the theme of "disruption," echoing campus-wide protests the prior year in support of a comprehensive decolonization of the national university system, and against a tuition increase that would have an outsized impact on students of color, and against rape culture and systemic gender violence (9–10). In the article, Demerson develops an "Africanist reading" of Masilo's *Giselle*, one that is "necessarily polycentric—observing how the choreography achieves many distinct but interrelated objectives at once" (8). Signaling the differences between Masilo's work and conventional treatments of both the ballet and the story ("this ain't your mama's *Giselle*"), Demerson argues that Masilo reimagines the ballet's titular character, Giselle, and storyline, "embodying Indigenous principles and practices of sociality, gender, and sexuality . . . to center Indigenous freedom and joy in a violently colonized world" (8). We come to learn how Masilo's Giselle, like her eponymous forebear, "die[s] of a broken heart when she discovers her suitor Albrecht's betrayal"; yet, "in the ancestral realm she becomes more powerful in life." According to Demerson, Masilo's "transformation" of Giselle, "from a frail victim of unconditional love to a powerful African ancestor," enacts what Maori activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith terms "decolonizing methodologies" (9). Thus, Masilo "revisits" the original ballet to "understand its foreignness as a colonized space," excavates "its troubled past and its radical potential as a set of narratives and movements that can be remixed," and, in so doing, critiques and counters South African cultural histories whereby "governments, presenters, and educators . . . used ballet in South Africa to culturally colonize dance artists and audiences" (9). Demerson demonstrates how Masilo's *Giselle* contributes to the choreographer's larger artistic project, that "transform[s] oppressive narratives into empowering ones and incorporat[es] Indigenous South African traditions and ideologies." Demerson also shows us how Masilo's *Giselle* deploys choreographic tactics of counter-appropriation and defamiliarization to decolonize the canonical ballet repertoire and advance South African cultural movements for racial and social justice.

Like Demerson, Elizabeth Schwall seeks to trouble the archive by investigating a vexed history of colonial corporeal remains. Schwall's article, "Contamination in Cuban Modern Dance Histories," activates the concept of "contamination" to investigate the phenomenon of "US contamination in Cuban modern dance." To theorize her keyword, Schwall draws on two main sources, first terminology developed by Cuban choreographer Marianela Boán to characterize what she called "*danza contaminada*" (contaminated dance) in her solo *Blanche Dubois* (1999), and second, anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's idea that "contamination happens because of 'histories of transformative ruin'" (Tsing quoted in 2015, 29). Schwall delimits the scope of her article to a concentration on "US influences," because, as she argues, "it allows me to wrestle with a paradox: Cuban modern dancers and their scholars cite, and continue to honor several white US dancers as forebears in their nationalistic, anti-imperialistic, and anti-racist dance tradition that emerged in the heady months after the 1959 Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement." Parsing this embodied history as a legacy of US involvement in Cuba, Schwall seeks to address two issues: "how the US contamination of Cuban modern dance happened," and "how, despite best intentions, Cuban modern dancers could not escape the racist underpinnings of the US modern dance they internalized." In doing so, Schwall reckons with the syncretic formation of what has become known as the "*técnica cubana de danza moderna*" (Cuban technique of modern dance). According to Schwall, this approach to modern dance training and movement vocabulary is meant to be, and is seen as, distinctly Cuban, what Schwall calls, embodying an ideal of "nationalistic purity." And yet, in Schwall's lights, the form is revealed to be deeply hybrid, in concept and form, and in culture and race. Schwall's methodology leans into complication. In her words: "Contamination is also useful because it connotes stink. I look beyond Cuban successes to the shadowy reaches of stylistic impurity, structural racism, historiographic neglect, revolutionary disaffection, and failure in Cuban modern dance history." Clear in its presentation of contradictions, the article promotes a generative irresolution—"result[ing] in more questions than answers" (40).

Idoia Murga Castro similarly investigates the embodied remains of a colonial presence, in this case, a stop the storied Spanish dancer Antonia Mercé Luque, known as "La Argentina," made in Manila, in 1929 while performing on a world tour. In "'La Argentina' in the Philippines: Spanish Dance and Colonial Gesture," Murga Castro examines what occurred during La Argentina's stay and its impact on her repertoire and reputation. She seeks to examine "the diffusion and perpetuation of the colonizing logics of the former Spanish colonies, especially through emerging cultural policies such as *Hispanidad*" (46). Specifically, Murga Castro is interested in La Argentina's "motivation" to learn *la cariñosa*, a couples' dance and the national dance of the Philippines, while in Manila. The result was a solo that La Argentina called *La Cariñosa*, adapted from the cultural original, which she performed throughout Western Europe in the five years that followed. This, according to Murga Castro, is the choreographer's "colonial gesture." Murga Castro's study draws on archival sources, such as film stills taken of La Argentina dancing the Filipino *cariñosa* with a partner in Manila, subsequent photos of the dancer performing the solo in Paris and Madrid, and theatrical reviews of her performances during this period. Through her analysis, Murga Castro develops a paradoxical conclusion that situates La Argentina as betwixt and between. La Argentina perpetuated "colonizing" cultural forces on Filipinos and Filipino dance practices by "draw[ing] on the concept of *Hispanidad* and recover[ing] Spanish colonial dance to recall an influence in these territories." Yet the dance artist occupied the position of the "colonized," evident in the ways she "applied strategies of westernization or modernization directed by European canons to Spanish dance itself and to the recovered Filipino dance" (58) in appealing to Western audiences and critical sensibilities.

The final two contributions in this issue pick up on themes present in Schwall's article in their careful consideration of ethical approaches to navigating cultural and personal boundaries with practitioner/informants and within spaces of movement practices, in these cases to support movement-based ethnographic research.

In “Dance as Cultural Practice vs. Religious Piety: Acehese Dance in Banda Aceh and Yogyakarta,” Maho A. Ishiguro brings our attention to the “contrasting meanings of Acehese music and dance to two different sets of practitioners in Indonesia” (68) within the contexts of ongoing sociocultural change, political conflict, and a “global Islamic revival” (69). Whereas the Acehese “emphasize the tradition and cultural aspects embedded in their practice,” the Yogyanese “view Acehese music and dance as a means to deepen their Islamic faith” (68). Ishiguro contends that this distinction is significant for what it reveals about “how dancers in the Yogyakarta and Aceh regions negotiate their practices under the changing regulations and authority of local Islamic organizations and their own religious morality” (69). Of particular interest to Ishiguro’s research is women’s participation in the performing arts amidst “a rise in conservative Islam in Indonesia” (69). Ishiguro’s study is based on fieldwork she conducted in Indonesia in 2014 and 2016, and is a strong example of practitioner scholarship. She conducted research in five cities in Indonesia including Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh province, a port city “swept away” by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, and Yogyakarta, “one of the Javanese court cities” whose culture, according to Ishiguro, “expresses syncretic notions of the relationship between people, Islam, and Javanese traditions” (71). Ishiguro’s work focuses on Acehese music and dance forms, which, she writes, “are much less well-known outside of Aceh” compared to “Central Javanese court dance and *gamelan* music” (72). Acehese dance involves group performances, body percussiveness, poly-rhythm, and gender-specific and gender-segregated repertoires, and it communicates religious themes and teachings of Islam. The article is illuminating in its attentiveness to the ways each group of practitioners navigates nuanced socio-cultural and religious relations. In the case of dancers in Yogyakarta, and especially in university settings, “an increased emphasis on Islamic living” has been a key driver in the shift among youth toward practices of “*shalawatan* and other song repertoires that do not come from Javanese music traditions or popular music scenes, but rather have Islamic elements in their instrumentation and lyrics” (86). Ishiguro offers that in these settings, dancing is a contested practice for its compatibility with Muslim values. By comparison, she shows that in Banda Aceh, “practitioners continue to exhibit resilience by creatively navigating through delicate socioreligious and political landscapes,” finding resonances between their dance practices and lives within Islam.

In “Sisterhood in the City: Creating Community through Lion Dance,” Casey Avaunt contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions in dance, performance, cultural, and feminist studies about the usefulness of concepts such as “sisterhood” and “community” as frameworks for understanding embodied practices within minoritized dance cultures. In this case, Avaunt’s fieldwork focused on Gund Kwok, “an all-women’s lion dance company” (91) based in Boston between 2017 and 2020. Using methods such as “one-on-one interviews, in-person observations at rehearsals and induction ceremonies, attending live performances, and assisting in company performances,” Avaunt “investigate[s] how Gund Kwok’s sisterhood develops through the company’s performance practices, technical training processes, group discussions, and shared goals of mobilizing political and social agendas within Chinatown” (92). Throughout the article, Avaunt attends both to the problems and advantages of her key analytic terms, drawing on relevant dance studies scholarship, including Hamera 2007, Kwan 2013, Wong 2016, and Candelario 2016, in addressing the politics of forming and maintaining intercultural and/or gender-identified coalitions for affirming identity and “expressing culture in a self-directed manner” (94). As she argues: “sharing the common language of the lion dance technique helps to establish networks throughout the city, fostering shared philosophies and missions for civic engagement and social activism” (94). Additionally, Avaunt contends that femme practice of the lion’s dance, which is traditionally seen as a men’s dance form, “cultivat[es] a sense of physical power and strength” and “opportunity for women to develop a sense of agency,” allowing members of the group to define themselves outside of traditional gender roles and cultural stereotypes that “frame” Asian American women as “hypersexual, submissive, and exotic” (94). By contrast, in Avaunt’s words, “sisterhood created by Gund Kwok challenges gendered and racial oppression, allowing Asian American women performers to stand up against the forces of racism and patriarchy that are inherent in their experiences as women of color in the United States” (104). Throughout the article, Avaunt models an ethics of care in conducting

her participation-based research. She shares that while her “appearance as a woman granted me access to certain shared affiliations denied to others,” “my whiteness prohibited my accessing other aspects of Gund Kwok’s community-based knowledge and participation at most company rehearsals,” and, “perhaps . . . restricted information that members were willing to share with me in one-on-one interviews” (99–100).

In conclusion, thinking about all of the articles in this issue and how they contribute together to furthering our understanding, we might see a common thread in the ways authors mobilize aspects of positionality in meaningful ways: with respect to subject matter, their identities, and/or their relationships with their research subjects and/or informants. The research featured here addresses problems related to how we come to see and to know dance practices amidst troubled histories and paradoxes of colonial, racist, and sexist cultural legacies. In Elizabeth Schwal’s words: “Looking for the places where dancers flail and fail are a necessary addition to our stories of poise and excellence. Blanche [Dubois] is vulnerable, so very human. In some ways, we are all Blanche; dancing histories could dwell more on this shared damage and destructibility” (40).

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