

## Editor's Note

# Hybridities: Dance, Writing, and the Voice in Transatlantic Perspectives

In 1939 Martha Graham gave a rare talk whose title, “A Dancer Speaks,” underscored a shift in her view of the dancer’s public function. To speak out against Nazism Graham had to breach her stage silence by talking in public.<sup>1</sup> Since it is not uncommon for dance to include the spoken word, and the dancer speaking out is no longer exceptional, to what end would the dancer write? This issue of *Dance Research Journal* introduces a new feature—“A Dancer Writes.” Pat Catterson’s unique perspective on Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A* yields historical insights into the choreography and its reception at different historical locations.<sup>2</sup> Catterson explores her forty years of experience performing, teaching, and devising the retrograde version. She gives us new insight into Rainer’s signature piece. Rainer herself has illustrated throughout her career most compellingly the purposes of the dancer/choreographer as writer/theorist. We are pleased to publish, alongside Catterson’s essay, Rainer’s own text on *Trio A*, revised for this occasion.<sup>3</sup> Rainer outlines the complex performance history of *Trio A* and her evolving attitude toward its preservation and continuation. These writings by both artists inspired in turn Jens Richard Giersdorf and Ramsay Burt to reflect on *Trio A* as a noncanonical dance become canonical and on its meanings and uses when performed in Europe.

In her article “At the still point’: T. S. Eliot, Dance, and Modernism,” Susan Jones presents an analysis of historically significant interactions between dance and writing. She examines the diverse ways in which Eliot’s poetry and twentieth-century dance have influenced one another. Jones shows that Eliot’s thought on dance, time, and timelessness summed up in the phrase “at the still point” were influenced by ballets he saw in London in the 1930s choreographed by Leonide Massine and Antony Tudor. From the transatlantic perspective, Jones then analyzes the uses to which Martha Graham put Eliot’s poetry in her *Episodes* (1959). Here, the influence is not from dance to writing but from writing to dance. Further, Jones points to a more general influence of Eliot in American modern dance of the 1940s and 1950s. Her subject is transgenre transactions in which the historically innovative ballet choreography of Massine and Tudor plays a role in the formation of Eliot’s poetics, just as Eliot’s writings circulate at the matrix of Graham’s inspiration, as confirmed by her *Notebooks*.

Joellen A. Meglin discusses the unusual partnership and collaboration of American ballerina Ruth Page and German modern dancer Harald Kreutzberg between 1932 and

1936. The Page-Kreutzberg team crossed boundaries of gender, genre, and geopolitics, as Meglin's title indicates, at a volatile moment of world history. Her account of this joint venture raises issues of transnational identity and circulation prior to globalization and expatiates on pre-World War II cosmopolitanism and its hybrid subjectivities. Meglin's dense historical research unpacks the biographies, psychologies, and repertoires of these two artists as well as retrieves gems of dance history placed in critical perspective.

Emily Plumb explores how the dancer's use of the voice can epitomize qualities usually attributed to movement, and so often theorized as disappearance. As Walter J. Ong has written. "Sound exists only when it is going out of existence" (2002, 32). The same has often been said of movement and/or performance. Here it is not a question of the written text per se in its relationship to choreography but of the oral utterance in its relation to danced performance. The studio performance Plumb evokes throughout her essay, *Relay*, is a collaborative student work at the Free University Berlin (Freie Universiteit Berlin) in which the voice becomes a danced material, another form of corporeality. Interestingly, Plumb theorizes the action of the voice as a kind of inscription, thus integrating vocality into Mallarmé's metaphor of the dance as an unwritten body writing. This writing is vocal.

Bringing thoughts on dance and writing to bear on the pedagogical and professional context—and also writing from perspectives bridging the Atlantic—Julie Malnig, Ann Nugent, and Leslie Satin dialogue on the teaching of dance criticism in higher education. "Writing Dance" marks the return of the "Dialogues" feature to *DRJ*. Malnig asks how retooling the functions of criticism can inform the teaching of criticism; Nugent recounts her classroom experiments with autobiographical dance writing; Satin reflects on the function of writing in her ongoing dance career. Their theme in the broadest sense is the language of reaction to dance and the capture of ideas in and of dance by language. The issues of hybrid connections between dance, writing, and voice are summed up in this dialogue even as they are redirected toward a pedagogical project whose moment, like that of the Berlin workshop, pertains to the evolving present.

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## Notes

1. "A Dancer Speaks" was transcribed from an extemporaneous talk given at the Professional's Conference Against Nazi Persecution and published in *TAC* (January 1939): 23.
2. This essay and its responses came about in relation to Catterson's performances of *Trio A* on March 7 and 8, 2009, in New York City as part of MOMA's Performance Exhibition Series occurring inside the Innovation in Contemporary Art exhibition.
3. An earlier version of Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation" was published in *Dance Theatre Journal* 20, no. 4 (2005). We thank *Dance Theatre Journal* for permission to republish this essay.

## Work Cited

Ong, Walter J. 2002. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Routledge.