

Workshop 46

Meaning in Motion: Advancing the Anthropology of Dance

Convenors:

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Starting out by focussing on ritual dance in 'non-Western' societies, the anthropology of dance now also includes many different dance forms in 'the West' such as ethnic and folk dance, dance theatre, modern dance and ballet, dance shows, and social dance ranging from rave and hip hop to salsa, swing and jive, not to mention ballroom dancing. Popular dance in music videos, dance installations (in galleries and on the Internet), and world dance are other dance phenomena for anthropological study. One line of inquiry discusses how dance forms are connected socially and aesthetically, sometimes across the globe, through steps, sound and set as well as networks of people who are involved with more than one dance form, sometimes over time. Increasingly, audiences are taken into serious account, which points to questions of reception. Dance is often a zone for negotiations of emotional and erotic energies both in national and transnational contexts. Political and religious attempts at controlling dance tend to produce dance as resistance. This workshop aims to bring together critical papers on dance in relation to cultural production and consumption, socialisation, ritual, performance, new media and the visual. Contributors are also invited to address issues on place and power, and identity and imagination evoked by dance – as well as the process of researching and writing about dance.

An Uneasy Duet: "High Arts" and the Market in the Transnational World of Ballet

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In the ballet world, the market tends to be regarded with ambivalence. Ballet people are disturbed by the belief that the market wants to buy other 'commodities' than they are prepared to sell i.e. mesmerising experiences of ballet art. But for the audience the milieu of gilded opera foyers and the opportunity to rub shoulders with famous people in the intermission may be what matters. This paper discusses the market in the ballet world by applying a transnational perspective which uncovers both homogenising and heterogenising cultural processes produced by similarities in work practices and differences in funding systems. One centre and periphery structure in the ballet world follows transnational economic domination patterns through American

corporate sponsoring, but there is also a separate structure of old and new ballet centres, which negates much rhetoric about globalisation in terms of an American domination. Ballet came about in Europe, and Paris and London are still influential ballet centres, among other European cities.

World politics, financial patrons and impresarios who were driven by a passion for ballet, and artistic mentors and choreographers who tend to be forceful individuals, have built ballet. Many of the influential figures in the ballet world have been foreigners working abroad, sometimes in political exile, a circumstance which seems to have released a creative energy, which they probably would not have had the opportunity to cultivate in their native countries.

Tango Transformations: Moving with Fear and Fantasy

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In this paper I hope to illuminate transformations in tango styles from two different perspectives: the change that tango has undergone in specific cultural and historical contexts, and the role that tango itself can play in negotiations of identity. During the 130 odd years of its history, tango has been adopted by and adapted to many different social and historical contexts, metamorphosed by diverse intentions, fears, and desires of individuals and groups. On stage in Paris, tango became a spectacle of passion while in the afternoon tea salons in England, it became a dance of restrained elegance. These choreographic adaptations and aesthetic ideals reflect issues of race, class, and sexuality. The debate over who is allowed to do what where, the mundane negotiations of technique, style, and authenticity of the dance can be conceptualised as a multi-levelled discourse and practice of gender, sexuality, and nationality. The communicative act of dancing constantly accentuates explorations of subjectivity through movement and is a negotiation and re-negotiation of identity through embodied spatial interaction. In this negotiation partners agree or disagree on the respective roles of leader and follower. What happens on the dance floor is a product of social and historical processes, as indeed, it takes more than two to tango.

(De)Constructing Authenticity in Mexican Folklórico Dance: Theorising Folklórico as a Genre

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Mexican folklórico dance is a cultural phenomenon that surged during the 20th century throughout Greater Mexico. Despite its widespread popularity across both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, folklórico dance has often not received adequate scholarly attention because it is often associated with the commercialisation of folklore for tourist consumption. As a result,

folklórico dance has been severely ensnared over the question of “authenticity” generating great debate, and even confusion, among the participants and spectators.

In this paper, I explore the meaning of “authenticity” within the realm of folklórico dance. I ask, what does it mean to label a folklórico dance as “authentic?” How does one measure “authenticity?” And, what degree of creativity should the dance instructor or choreographer enjoy? After reviewing several approaches that have emerged among practitioners of folklórico dance regarding how to resolve this dilemma, I provide an interpretative framework for the range of goals, intentions and aesthetic principles among dancers who participate in the folklórico dance phenomenon. This paper is informed by my involvement (as a dancer and as a scholar) in folklórico dance on both sides of the U.S. -Mexico border for the past 30 years.

“We’ve Got this Rhythm in Our Blood” – Dancing Identities in Southern Italy

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The idea that dance skills are inscribed in one’s DNA is passionately and light-heartedly proclaimed wherever the pizzica is danced. This dance form, with its historic roots in the healing cult of the tarantula, has become a prided source of identity and a touristic banner for the Southern Italian region of the Salento. Whilst shunned in post-war years as a sign of backwardness, the pizzica boomed in the 1990s, as it was appropriated for ideological, economic and political purposes. Large scale concerts and festivals have become powerful platforms for voicing both deep conflicts on a local and global scale, as well as a sense of unity transgressing all boundaries through the common experience of the pizzica’s compelling rhythms. Naturalised as genetically inherited, the pizzica is a prime example of how dance both feeds off and nourishes the cultural construction of a need for identification and the enormous risks and creative potential inherent in this process.

Dancing Kinship and Sameness in Communities of Descendants of Slaves in Southern Somalia

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In southern Somalia the identity of descendants from ex-slaves of Bantu language origins (Zigula, Yao, Makua, etc.) living in communities of escaped and freed slaves has been strongly related to the inheritance of dances belonging to matri-kin groupings (*mviko*). Masked dances to which people were initiated were performed in nights without moon and belonging to secret societies organising them was considered a hidden guarantee of identity as opposed to the surrounding Somali speakers. Not only constituted such dances a network for people escaping from slavery at the end of the nineteenth century but were also, in the twentieth century, arenas where new meanings concerning the outsiders and the communities members were negotiated. For instance, dancing masks signifying the Somali man and woman from the „bush“ represented the ideas the community had of the surrounding nomads and masks representing an airplane codified the historical experience of British airplanes that bombed the Juba river area in the forties. Most

recently, in the 1990s, Somali Zigula migrants and refugees in Tanzania compared some of their traditional *mviko* dances with those of the Tanzanian Zigula in order to verify sameness and differences with their Tanzanian relatives.

Dance, Status and Power in Urban Senegal

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Despite having the region's highest level of urbanisation, contemporary Senegal remains highly stratified in terms of "caste", age and gender. Often the distinction between the lower status "castes" of artisans and performers, and descendants of the political or religious elite, remains relevant in many areas of social life. This is obvious, for example, in people's invocation and manipulation of genealogies and family histories. In this apparently rigid context, professional dance is often associated with the lower castes and for women, with "loose" sexual behaviour. Since the 1970s, however, the Senegalese performing industry has increasingly provided the less privileged social categories with an alternative route towards economic success, where formal education and the state have failed. Thus professional dancers and musicians have contributed to challenging the existing stratification.

Focusing on urban Senegal, this paper examines the multiple ways through which professional dance enables people to challenge status categories, and to negotiate the tension between their duty towards the community and their desires as individuals. This tension materialises in the experimentation with new dance styles such as "contemporary" Senegalese dance. I also discuss the apparent contradiction in the fact that people simultaneously invoke "tradition" and develop sophisticated migration strategies.

Signifying Self in Plural Cultural Contexts: Subjectivity, Power and Individual Agency in North-Western Greek Macedonia

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This paper draws upon the narratives, actions and interpretations of certain individuals involved in the practice of dance in the district of Florina, a border region in north-western Greek Macedonia, to examine the ways they construct and experience their identity. Its purpose is to give a sense of the more complex identities and affiliations of these individuals, which may shift over time. The paper explores the way they understand and position themselves in their social context and the ways they articulate these positions, as expressed in their stories about past experiences and statements on current events and political issues.

The articulation of alternative individual identities that escape the frameworks of both national and minority discourses developed

in the region, through various modes of processing personal experiences, has been a very frequent practice in response to the imposition of totalising national ideologies by various agents since the end of the 19th century. The specific perceptions of local social reality described in the paper represent examples that have been neglected by existing anthropological accounts or have not been sufficiently studied. They demonstrate that individuals are aware of, though not always willing and able to reflect on and respond to the public, polarised and dichotomous meanings that have developed around dancing. The examples also show that boundaries between the supposedly incompatible identities of local population categories are blurred and the notion of the naturalness of fixed, mutually exclusive identities, claimed by its promoters, is rejected.

Traditional Performance and Dance Tourism

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This paper will consider the changing contexts, audiences and students of dance. When dance forms lose their traditional patrons and venues, performers trained in these forms have to adapt in different ways to new cultural and political conditions. Examples will be drawn from performer experiences in Indonesia and Laos as they adapt to international audiences at different sorts of venue at home and abroad. The paper will also address the trend for outsiders to a tradition to actively experience 'other' forms of dance, and ask whether this particular form of dance phenomenology contributes to interculturalism in performance.