

Editor's Note

This issue of *Dance Research Journal* has us examining dance in Ukraine, Greece, Israel, the United States (by way of Australia), Germany, and the Yugoslav region. In these pages, the very definition of “Western” dance is thrown open for debate, along with many of our investments in the value of geographic, national, and classed artistic labels in dance studies. In this conversation, we will look at ballet, arguably the most “Western” dance form, differently in the context of the current war in Ukraine as one school navigates their relationship to the past while the country is in the midst of current turmoil. We will consider the argument that “the West” neglects contemporary Greece (while romanticizing ancient Greek culture as Western) thereby leaving this culture under-theorized. We’ll look at the symbolic attempt to connect a fractured Jerusalem by choreographically rising above. We’ll reconsider the choreopolitics of a post-modern African American icon. Film studies provides a means of interrogating ways of reckoning with Germany’s terrorist past through embodied conjuring. And we will look at the impact and uses of choreographic traditions of local and national belonging in a changing post-Yugoslav region. Our notions of “high art,” spectacle, and embodied identity are troubled in each essay, particularly around “Western” dance definitions of “concert” vs. “folk” dance. All of the pieces take on the ways in which broader political forces shape our senses of national belonging through dance (dance for the people, dance for the elite, and dance for the state), especially at times of profound national shifts and crisis.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Ania Nikulina was already finishing “Ballet in Ukraine: From Uncertainty to Defiance and Independence.” As the war escalates, this research provides continually shifting insight into a particularly unstable part of the world at the nexus of art and politics. Even before war broke out, Nikulina found it necessary to craft an ethnographic methodology that carefully considered the politics at stake in her work in terms of not only *who* agreed to speak, but also, *what* her interviewees told her, *how* they spoke with her and *where* they talked. Of course, the *when* of the contemporary Ukrainian context was as much a part of this research as arguments about the history of ballet culture in Ukraine. By looking at the Kyiv State Choreographic College community, Nikulina details the choreopolitical negotiations of identity between the state and ballet artists. In the years leading up to and including the invasion, these dance makers negotiated new ways to form connections across many borders (creative, cultural, ideological, social, political, etc.). She examines the ways in which the training remains rooted in Soviet-era techniques while national ideologies modernize by slipping between concepts of the state, Ukraine, Russia, the Soviet Union, and imperial Russia. This is done by her careful observation of complex assumptions about body type, virtuosity, and innovation, recognizing both the move towards new directions for the training as well as holdovers from Soviet imperialism. Nikulina finds humor amidst rigor and humanizes the uniform bodies. Ultimately, she shows how the members of the school echo the resistance through solidarity with the broader Ukrainian national identity in crisis, some literally putting their bodies on the line.

In “Choreographing Proximity and Difference: Vassos Kanellos’s Performance of Greekness as an Embodied Negotiation with Western Dance Modernity,” Anna Leon has us rethinking dance modernity and the concept of Western dance history by focusing on modern Greek identity in

the work of dancemaker Vassos Kanellos. In the context of new modernist studies, Kanellos becomes a case study to better understand nuances of the “uneven playing field of modernity” and relationships between the center and the margins for dance artists expressing “Greekness” and strategizing how to choreograph the nation. Leon explains how Kanellos navigated aesthetic expectations through a proximity to Western/European forms moving between the national and the transnational. Kanellos’s embodied negotiation of the Hellenic and Romaic aspects of Greekness can be understood as symbolic of broader national questions. As we see with other examples in this issue, the artist is able to navigate seemingly opposite national ideologies (here an unbroken continuity of Western antiquity alongside de-westernizing Orientalized Byzantine, Orthodox Christian, and Ottoman popular cultures) in order to put forth a coherent narrative. And like in other examples, the artist is able to embody the aesthetic paradoxes of essentialized identity and constructed real-world challenges to create meaningful dance. Kanellos is able to proffer his reappropriation of “Greek” dance as simultaneously essentially Greek and universally true. Read against the “Great Idea” ideology, “Greece exceeded its territorial borders, reaching more international relevance, and remained bound to an essentialized ethnic-national identity unifying Greek-identifying communities across space.” Leon goes on to show how this ideology served to connect Greekness with whiteness (contemporaneously a category not automatically assigned to Greek identity) and the social currency that entails. By doing so, we see a critical function of cultural production at work to redistribute power by artificially constructing definitions of whiteness (of course by defining against Blackness) to solidify status, artistic and social. What remains fascinating is the ways in which Kanellos is able to absorb “Oriental” culture *within* Greek whiteness through his choreography claiming both dominant and victimized narratives.

Israel is a site rife for conversations about identity meaning-making through movement. In “Abyssal Choreography: The Ropedancer’s Unsettling Agency and Philippe Petit’s Walks,” Daphna Ben-Shaul analyzes the aesthetic, kinesthetic, and geopolitical impact of this ropedancer’s cultural role as he traverses the liminality of the Valley of Hinnom in 1987, connecting the Jerusalem’s east and west sides in a nation of contested sites. This event echoed his 1974 walk between New York’s Twin Towers—of course, now a deeply symbolic site. Ben-Shaul generates a discussion about the stakes of navigating these spaces in terms of the abyss. Challenging our notions of choreography and social choreography, Ben-Shaul unpacks the paradoxical body of the tightrope walker as at once disciplined and risky. This “abyssal gap” complicates the “border” and the bridging of spaces in sociopolitical hotbeds. Does this act truly constitute a space-between without the taking of sides? Is it a challenge to stability and an embodiment of transcendence? Or is it a benign spectacle? How does the event frame a national zeitgeist of crossing and expose the mechanisms of crisis? How does the threat of the abyss threaten control? How is this subversive trickster entangled in critical manipulation? What is the ropedancer’s agency? What is the difference between transgressive and invited bodies in a nation trying to control the ideological narrative of its own unity? Speaking of socio-economic and geopolitical fictionalizations, Ben-Shaul exposes how this unsettling movement “can also empower as well as expose these narratives” to be as unresolved as Israel itself.

The special section “An Artist Speaks” provides space for scholarly interventions that privilege artists’ voices and perspectives. “‘The intellect travels in many different Directions’: Talkin’ with Eleo Pomare (1937-2008)” is an interview between Rachel Fensham and Eleo Pomare conducted a few months before his passing. It is a significant contribution to the legacy of this legend of modern/postmodern dance, and it is important that *Dance Research Journal* can provide space for this type of writing. It represents the field’s commitment to valuing knowledge production beyond the scholarly article, particularly by artists of color. This platform allows us insight into an aspect of Pomare’s work that we might not otherwise access because the interview doesn’t fit into our typical categories of academic contribution. Ironically, Pomare is known for not fitting into our “known” categories as a twentieth-century African American choreographer. True to form, this conversation about his work was prompted by his under-studied relationship with indigenous and settler dance practices in Australia but focuses on his artistic navigations more broadly. We learn more about

American identity, the global influence of Black Diaspora aesthetics, Pomare's choreopolitics, the class-based struggles of indoor and outdoor spaces, his trickster sensibility, and much more, complicating the life and work of this under-considered artist. We are challenged about how we identify the aesthetically cerebral vs. emotional, how we "train," how we break the rules, and how we archive the past. We learn more about his relationship to text (especially poetry), emotion in his work, the influence of religiosity, his diasporic experiences, his frustrations with white critics, and the space between the performer and the witness. We see how he pushed people on the polite "evening-out" experience of seeing a dance performance. He also talks about the practicalities of making work (especially solo work when others wouldn't take the risks demanded of his vision), and inspiration vs. cultural appropriation. In an informal setting, this conversation with Pomare is a small but important gem added to the treasure chest of what we know about Pomare from his early years until his last months.

Our sensibilities about the experience of concert dance are further shaken in the next piece. West Berlin during the German Autumn of 1977 is the setting for the 2018 remake of the film *Suspiria*. Again, we see an interrogation of the contradictions of "high" and "low" art, a look to "the people" for definitions of national identity, and a complication of "Western" dance. In the film, the Markos Dance Studio houses a coven of witches who use expressionist choreography to wreak havoc in order to sustain the matriarch's control of the coven. In "Breathing Back the History of German Modern Dance through the Horror Film Genre in Luca Guadagnino's *Suspiria* (2018)," Wesley Lim provides an analysis of the film that moves beyond a cult-classic appreciation and allows us to connect the filmmakers' use of dance to comment on the uses of "folk" dance to abuse social power. Lim focuses on the breath as the conduit for Mater Suspiriorum's elemental return. The choreographic use of breath allows the characters/audiences to "take in" and attempt to come to terms with the past, especially the Holocaust for post-1945 West Germany, as a form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Ultimately, Lim shows the potential for deep critical engagement through this historical breathing but the eventual repetition of the cycle of violence and destructive abuse of power. The dance of the film aestheticizes the legacy of fascism, Nazi tactics, Red Army Faction (RAF) attacks, and the weaponizing of gender through the spectacularization of the movement of the people, the *volk*. It is a complicated and failed reckoning with the transference of one history into the next through active remembering and forgetting. Through the body of the young dancer rising to prominence in the company, the next generation finds its own power, but it is no less vicious than the old regime.

In "Choreography as Ideology: Dance Heritage, Performance Politics, and the Former Yugoslavia," Filip Petkovski provides a rare English-language analysis of dance in the Yugoslav region. He asks us to reconsider tradition, culture, and ideology at the site of "heritage choreography" by looking closely at what happens when local traditions of social practice are transmitted for the proscenium stage. Ideologies around choreography collide with ideologies around nationality, ethnicity, class, the folk, high art, education, and community to make meaning through the moving body. From the beginning of this essay, we are instructed to pay attention to the definitions of "dance," "staging," and "choreography" in distinctly local contexts. Ultimately, from this research we gain further insight into the ways in which the nation-state uses dance heritage as a cultural marker-cum-marketing brand in order to influence nationalist ideologies in the name of cultural diplomacy as new post-Yugoslav countries navigate shifts from socialist to capitalist identities. Rather than abandoning tradition, Petkovski shows, choreographers are able to shift the meaning and purpose of movement through aesthetic choices that maintain identity and belonging as well as strengthen fealty to ethnicity and nationality while nations reimagine themselves. What does it mean when the same dances can be redeployed to support an inclusive, classless society as well as an economically consumerist popular culture? What does it mean when the same dances are used by the dominant elite as well as "the people"? Spectacle that maintains a sense of continuity through the form of "high art" becomes key to this mission and a model for (re)education through choreography, Petkovski argues. He parses shifts in cultural and ideological significance as dances shift from

participatory practice to memorized, rehearsed, and set products. He traces the history of these hegemonic processes and locates meaning in the presentational relationship to the audience as performance boundaries harden and canons are created. In all, Petkovski shows us the aesthetics of local and national belonging. In many ways, this piece touches on conversations throughout the issue and returns us to the debates brought forth by Nikulina in the first essay about the ways in which artists navigate tradition, high culture, belonging, class, hierarchy, aesthetic nostalgia, and social change, all during extreme political transitions.

Moving forward, looking back. . .

NGG

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