

Editor's Note

The articles in this issue have a strong historical theme, which may also be seen to advance a revisionist analysis (Keilson, Snow, Mollehauer, Oriol, and to some extent Huschka). As is increasingly common in current dance scholarship, political considerations are never very far away from these discussions.

The first article by Sabine Huschka, “Aesthetic Strategies of *Trance-gression*: The Politics of Bodily Scenes of Ecstasy,” examines the “perceptual politics of trance-like scenes” by contemporary European based choreographers and performers such as Doris Uhlich and Meg Stuart. Trance-like states involving out of body and out of mind experiences, as Huschka notes, are often associated with utopian ideas on the one hand (think of the Shakers, a religious sect that emerged from the Quaker movement), or with transgressing or crossing received borders or boundaries, on the other. The modern dance choreographer Mary Wigman, as the author notes, envisaged trance as a spell or an invocation that is set free from within its own internal source. Contemporary choreographers like Uhlich or Stuart on the other hand, as Huschka shows, “expose the body to powers that nearly disintegrate it.” The article deftly analyzes how these contemporary choreographers stage movement as a sensational occurrence that opens up both performers and audiences “to experiences of transgression.”

In “The Embodied Conservatism of Rudolf Laban, 1919–1926,” Ana Isabel Keilson focuses on Laban’s early work, which she contends can be defined as a mode of “positive liberty.” This in turn, Keilson argues, prepares the groundwork for what she identifies as Laban’s “embodied conservatism.” By paying close attention to dance history and the history of political thought in the period, Keilson argues persuasively that Laban’s theory of dance may be seen in terms of a theory of politics that constituted a reaction to the social and political upheaval during the Weimar period after the First World War.

The third article by K. Mitchell Snow, “Orientalized Aztecs: Observations on the Americanization of Theatrical Dance,” takes its starting point from the first decades the twentieth century in the American theater and vaudeville that witnessed a “fashion” for “Aztec” dancing. The Russian ballet dancers Theodore Kosloff and Mikhail Fokine drew on the orientalist interest evidenced in the Ballet Russe and embraced the notion of “the Aztec” as a characteristic “sign of Americanization.” The Russians, as Snow points out, were influenced by the Aztec based productions of Cecille B. DeMille and Ted Shawn. The representations of “the Aztec” in DeMille and Shawn’s productions were themselves heavily influenced by the orientalist framework, drawn from the writings of nineteenth-century American author William Prescott, among others, that promoted the pursuit of the Manifest Destiny (i.e., the expansion of superior American values across the continent). However, as Snow argues, a small group of Mexican dancers who were trained by Shawn and Kosloff’s Mexican students would come to present a very different perception of their tradition on the stage, one that was not founded on the mid-nineteenth-century idealized notion of “an expansionist America.”

In “Embodied Knowledge as Revolutionary Dance,” Rachel Oriol examines Alma Guillermoprieto’s language usage in her memoir, *Dancing with Cuba* (2004), which sets out her approach and struggle to teach and develop modern dance in Cuba. Through a detailed analysis of what Oriol describes as Guillermoprieto’s use of “embodied knowledge,” Oriol exposes the “struggle” she had in order to settle the principles of modern dance with that of Ernesto Guevara’s idealized notion of the “New Man.” Oriol draws on Lester Tomé’s (2017) analysis of the development of ballet in Cuba and its close connotations with the New Man ideal which was published in *DRJ*. She argues that Guillermoprieto solves her particular dilemma by “turning toward language” that promotes the “kinesthetic imagination,” which in turn provides an “archive of embodied experiences.”

The final article by Jeanette Mollenhauer, “A Changing Focus: The Evolution of Irish Step Dancing Competitions in Australia,” examines the differences between Irish step dancing competitions in the nineteenth century and the current practices today in Australia. While the earlier competitions were graded on the basis of what Mollenhauer calls “cultural representation” of step dancing, the shifts in the genre over time in Australia have been directed more toward the dancers’ “individual aesthetics.” Mollenhauer contends that the significant changes over time are a result of influences in the genre itself on the one hand, and on the other, the changes in the wider social standing of later Irish immigrants in Australia.

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Work Cited

Tomé, Lester. 2017. “Swans in Sugarcane Fields: Proletarian Ballet Dancers and the Cuban Revolution’s Industrious New Man.” *Dance Research Journal* 49 (2): 4–25.