

Editor's Note

The majority of the articles in this issue may be loosely defined as historical in terms of looking back to particular contexts involving dance, and analyzing these from the positionalities of today (articles 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6), with a close eye on the political and with article 5 contributing to and challenging ongoing discussions on “improvisation.”

The first article by Stacey Prickett, “‘Taking America’s Story to the World’: . . .,” focuses on the period between 1958 and 1961, when Jerome Robbins’s company, “Ballets: U.S.A.,” toured arts festivals in Europe with a stock of new and prevailing dances during the Cold War. This era was characterized by a lengthy period of political and artistic rivalry between the United States and Russia and their respective allies after the end of World War II. Data garnered from the funding process brings to light conversations relating to, on the one hand, Robbins’s accountability to the US government, and the import of the aesthetics on the other.

“Interpreting Zimbabwe’s Third Chimurenga Through Kongonya: . . .,” by Jairos Gonye, examines the different ways that two Zimbabwean writers, Catherine Buckle (European born) and Nyaradzo Mtizira (black Zimbabwean), reenvision the kongonya dance in their respective authored works and link it in different ways to the controversial Zimbabwe fast track reform program of 2000. Gonye’s analysis demonstrates how the differing representations of kongonya performances in these two books reflect the conflicting views of the reform program and are “colored and compromised by racial subjectivity.”

The third article by Serouj Aprahamian, “‘There Were Females that Danced Too’: . . .,” challenges the overriding narrative that the history of breaking was an entirely male manifestation of “inner-city ‘machismo.’” He does this by (1) providing evidence via listening to “neglected voices” of founding breakers and (2) contrasting those testimonies with standard representations of breaking. In so doing, the author shows that despite the fact that women have played a key role in the dance, they have been once again “hidden from history” (Rowbotham [1973] 1977). Moreover, Aprahamian demonstrates that this analysis “reframes prevailing conceptualizations” of the overriding male narrativization of the dance.

Ana Paula Höfling’s article, “Dancing Mestiçagem, Embodying Whiteness: . . .,” investigates the procedures of *branqueamento* (whitening) encompassed within the ideology of *mestiçagem* (racial miscegenation) through an examination of the work of Eros Volúcia (1914–2004), the Brazilian dancer, choreographer, and dance educator, in relation to “the myth of racial democracy in early twentieth-century Brazil.” The author argues that Volúcia was the embodiment of the supposed “harmonious racial mixture” in Brazil through her stylized “folk-dances.” Moreover, her Brazilian ballet (*bailado brasileiro*), Höfling contends, “choreographed Brazil’s modernity and aspirations of whiteness.” Höfling also considers Volúcia’s opportunity to become the next “Brazilian Bombshell” in US films following Carmen Maranda’s, which it seems was not entirely successful. Rather than stay in the United States, Volúcia returned to Brazil, where Höfling argues, she could “maintain her white privilege and her status as author and artist.”

The penultimate article, “Investigating Dance Improvisation—From Spontaneity to Agency,” by Susanne Ravn, takes the position that “any dance can be considered improvised.” While noting that the key features of improvisation are usually considered to necessitate “some degree of openness” and require “some degree of spontaneity,” Ravn’s article seeks to demonstrate that it is not the “facts of improvisation” such as novelty, etc., in themselves, that matter, but rather, the manner in which these qualities are brought into play when “enacting the dance in performance.” Drawing on “enactment,” and “agency” (our capability to perform acts) in phenomenology, Ravn’s discussion of the Danish choreographer Kitt Johnson’s approach to improvisation exemplifies diverse ways that “agency” is used when improvising.

The final article in this issue, “Dance as Radical Archaeology,” by Marie-Louise Crawley, explores a solo “durational” dance work titled *Likely Terpsichore? (Fragments)*, which the author created and performed at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in Oxford, UK, in 2018, as part of her role as Artist in Residence. Crawley’s solo, site-specific, masked dance performance was inspired by ancient pantomime. It centered on four female characters from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*—Galatea, Myrrha, Philomel, and Medusa. In this article, Crawley, a choreographer trained in both dance and the classics, considers how dance’s presence in the archaeological museum might facilitate “an alternative visibility for ancient female bodies previously rendered only partially visible by history.” She proposes that dance in the archaeological museum could constitute “a subversive act of radical archaeology,” that could disturb “how we view and understand ancient history.”

Work Cited

Rowbotham, Sheila. (1973) 1977. *Hidden from History: Four Hundred Years of Women’s Oppression*. London: Pluto Press.
