



Editor's Note

Un-disciplined Questioning

This special theme issue of *Dance Research Journal* explores inherent tensions between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity at multiple sites relevant to dance: choreographic, hermeneutic, curatorial (if this term may be used for the international networks of staged dance performance), intercultural, pedagogical, and historiographic, as well as institutional, programmatic, at the level of higher education, and, hence, curricular. One could say that these diverse sites together constitute the “discipline” (or “interdiscipline”) of dance, yet one might also want to reject any assumption of their inherent unity; no one author here takes them all on at the same time. The contributors to this special issue of *DRJ* enter intrepidly into a complex web of intersecting issues, and taken together their work will hopefully lead to further thinking on what a discipline and what an interdiscipline are, or can be, in and for dance.

Ramsay Burt, working within the context of the critical interpretation of Western theater dance, holds that the full acknowledgment of the interdisciplinarity of contemporary choreographic practices is a necessity for a choreographic public sphere conceived in a truly democratic spirit. For dance studies, this entails the methodological challenge to bridge the study of the verbal, visual, and acoustic with the study of movement itself. Burt further argues that only an embrace of interdisciplinary methodology can enable dance studies to move beyond identity politics and toward questions of agency.

Jens Richard Giersdorf constructs a genealogy of the discipline of dance studies through a Foucauldian archaeology of the discourses of three dance studies graduate programs—at universities in Leipzig, Surrey, and Riverside. Giersdorf brings new information to light on the East German program, which no longer exists, and about which little until now has been said. Within his analysis of the historical formation of dance as an academic discipline, Giersdorf also conceptualizes disciplinarity as a symptom of globalization and the corporatized university within which complex issues of colonizing the “object” dance, and multiple erasures of what dance enables, are always risks. His is at once an intellectual inquiry and an institutional critique as well as a genealogy of dance studies as a discipline.

Nicholas Rowe discusses the international scene of contemporary choreography from the perspective of Palestinian concert dance. The networks of distribution and dissemination of dance are regulated internationally by preconceived notions of modernist and postmodernist aesthetics that do not address the cultural inspiration of contemporary Palestinian choreographers in a satisfactory manner. Here, the discipline is conceived as the conceptual and oppressive terminology of the international network of “contempo-

rary” dance. It is also worth noting that Rowe’s methodology works at an interdisciplinary intersection of oral history, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and dance studies. The tension between modern and contemporary dance is illuminated from all of these angles. Malini Ranganathan and Monique Loquet provide an example of intercultural research in a French pedagogical context in which the intercultural project is conceived as interdisciplinary. That is, interdisciplinarity is conceived of as “an intercultural negotiation between disciplines,” theorized with the operative term “milieu.” One possible translation of “milieu” is the “environment” within which transmission and translation of movement occurs. Yet, this term seems too neutral. The French ethnographer and dance historian Jean-Michel Guilcher has used the term “milieu” in his work to signify the place where an historical dance tradition survives and the geographical locus of its oral transmission perdures. Although their research is also located geographically in France, the context for Ranganathan and Loquet is the transnational circulation of dance. They define the milieu as a fundamentally interdisciplinary space wherein the dominant culture (France) becomes acculturated to the minority culture (Indian). The pedagogical context of this common project is a French provincial community center. Here, interdisciplinary pedagogical technique is deployed to reaffirm and preserve the disciplinarity of the form being transmitted. Yet, traditional authorities may contest the validity of the interdisciplinary milieu, and the dynamic between discipline and interdiscipline is, nonetheless, controversial.

Gay Morris revisits a fundamental conception of interdisciplinarity in dance studies: the idea prevalent in the late 1980s and early 1990s that cultural studies is the touchstone for an interdisciplinary understanding of dance studies. Morris brings together the strands of interdisciplinary methodological practices, political practices within the scholarly community, and the perceived heritage of cultural studies within dance studies itself. By questioning the degree to which dance studies relies or should rely on a cultural studies model, Morris, like Rowe, opens the issue of interdisciplinarity to a political perspective. Morris effectively rethinks the “heritage” of cultural studies for dance studies and raises serious questions about received ideas of their intellectual mutuality.

For the contributions that deal historiographically with the issues of dance, the disciplines, and interdisciplinarity (Burt, Morris, and Giersdorf) the landmark dates are the 1970s through the 1990s, the decades in which three major dance studies graduate programs took shape, dance studies emerged as distinct from dance history, cultural studies established its ascendancy as a leftist intellectual project, and the idea of interdisciplinarity took fitful flight in the academy as well as in choreographic practices. For the contributions that engage with globalized practices (Rowe, Ranganathan, and Loquet), the time is now. In all cases the question of the inter versus the intra is paramount. Dance in its various manifestations as teaching, performance, and intellectual work seems to strain against the limitations of a narrowly defined disciplinary endeavor while still attempting to conserve what distinguishes dance from other disciplines—that is, what makes dance itself a discipline.

What was to be a guest-edited issue of *DRJ* has turned out to be my first issue as editor. It is a moment to look back with gratitude to the work of *DRJ*'s last two editors—Julie Malnig and Ann Dils (in co-editorship for some of her term with Jill Green)—who have done such an admirable job in developing *DRJ* to the place where it is now. I hope to make *DRJ* increasingly international in scope and to work with the editorial board to increase its distribution and dissemination internationally. I thank my colleagues of the Congress on Research in Dance executive board for entrusting me with this mission at this time.

Mark Franko
Editor, *Dance Research Journal*