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Editor's Note

Greetings Readers, I wish you well!

As you may have noticed, this installment of *Dance Research Journal* is reaching you later than expected. A serious security breach last year affected our publisher, Cambridge University Press, and significantly delayed our production process. We have been assured by CUP that all *DRJ*-related data is secure. We apologize for keeping you and our authors waiting, and we offer you a double issue of ground-breaking research to get us back on track. This is also the last paper issue of *DRJ* you will receive, owing to a shift by the Dance Studies Association toward hosting an exclusively online, open-access publication of the journal.

> "I wrote a haiku
> Then danced it for a good friend
> She blessed me with hers." (Jackson, 15)

We open with Naomi M. Jackson's essay published as an "Artist Speaks" piece. Jackson's "Self-Reflexivity of a Dance Scholar: The Place of Structured Improvisation, Care, and Debate" is born of the inspiration of necessity. Living with a serious illness prompts Jackson's reflection on the central thematic threads of her life's work – writing, editing, curating, and teaching – and how they simultaneously diverge and braid together. In her words: "Driving this self-analysis is the cancer diagnosis I received in January 2023 and subsequent grueling treatments that interrupted my planned research agenda. Instead, what became urgent was making meaning of the strategies that have allowed me to navigate my academic career to date" (96). Jackson summons a "poetic voice … to more accurately convey the underlying creative life force that drives all areas of my life and is helping me to survive" (96) and employs a conceptual framework of structured improvisation to the task, counterposing the known, the unknown, and the unknowable. What she cares about most are an abiding ethics of care, commitment to holding spaces for expressions and exchanges of differing life experiences and opinions, and dedication to engaging people through a "shared responsibility" in productive discussion and debate. She is invested in "complexity, and places not only of harmony but also tension" (110). The essay illustrates situations where this ethos is in play. One particularly resonant example occurred during the "Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World" conference co-facilitated with her colleague dance maker Liz Lerman at Arizona State University. The meeting invited participants who identified across a spectrum of "shared heritage" of Jewishness and of Jewish dance to "engage with others … with respect, care and compassion, recognizing the plethora of backgrounds and experiences that [were] represented" (105). In Jackson's telling, the conference was a success because of how participants responded to her invitation, "recogniz[ing] themselves as part of the experience and contributors to the well-being of the group" (105). Jackson also recalls a moment that changed how she thought about resistance, when dancemaker Vic Marks asked, during a particularly sticky moment: "What if we look at 'resistance' as active participation?," explaining that this is "how one participates when no other options seem viable and where there are not yet words to explain what stands in the way" (106). Marks's words are prescient during this polarized cultural

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moment, and we extend gratitude to Naomi Jackson for sharing these stories of living in/with difference.

The next two articles intervene in embodied aesthetic, cultural, and social politics through danced transgressions. Najat Alsheridah's "Averting the Gaze: Censoring Women's Zar Dance Performances on Kuwaiti Television," for example, fills a critical gap in research on dance in the Arab world, in this case focusing on two resonant examples of how dancing women are represented on the Kuwaiti screen. The common denominator is the zar dance, "a complex and syncretic practice that incorporates elements from various cultural and religious traditions, including Islam, African spirituality, and Persian mysticism" (113) traditionally performed by women. According to Alsheridah: "Zar rituals are particularly meaningful to Kuwaiti women who use them as a way of gathering together and creating a communal space" (114). Alsheridah compares two on-screen stagings of the zar dance: a precedent-setting scene in the film *Alsamt* (The Silence) (1979), "one of the first representations of women performing the zar dance," and another in the television series *Mohammed Ali Road* (2020), a scene that was ultimately censored. Drawing on the literature of contemporary screendance studies for contexts and analytical methodologies, Alsheridah makes three significant interventions. The first affirms that screendance is a global phenomenon, and, as such, indicates how dance on-screen is a powerful cultural formation that informs what we know about specific cultural dance practices and their mediated representations. The second intervention deploys theories of gaze relations to expand our thinking about the "male gaze," not as singular or ubiquitous, but as "multiple," "reflect[ing] different and co-existing temporalities and Islamicate identities that are constitutive of Kuwaiti society" (116). In other words, Alsheridah contends that her examples illuminate what she calls, "multiple gazes that serve to create 'acceptable' representations of women's dance" in Kuwaiti media (113), the efficacy of which might "frame" or "censor" women's dancing bodies so as to "avoid capturing men's attention in ways that would be considered abject or otherwise implicate their weakness and religious impropriety" (118). Here we see how screen depictions of dance are in active conversation with cultural prescriptions about dance and ideologies concerning women's bodies. As Alsheridah puts it: With each "exemplar," "the analysis attends to the camera framing and motion to identify important elements of the Islamicate gaze that influence representations of the women's zar dance performances" (118). Yet not all gazing problems can be solved with cine-choreographic (E. Brannigan) techniques. Male consumption of dancing women, for example, poses challenges to convention and faith. These challenges amplify when images of dancing women appear in commercially distributed media, including television, that easily enters viewers' homes. Related questions lead Alsheridah to speculate on why the zar dance scene in the television show, *Mohammed Ali Road*, was ultimately censored (no spoilers here).

Similarly considering the gendered politics of dance, in "Queer/Tango/Theory: Gendered Semiosis, Dancing the Binary, and Dancing on Out," Luna Beller-Tadiar examines her "queer tanguero," yearslong in duration, grounded in fieldwork conducted in Buenos Aires in 2018, and expanding to include "circuits of exchange between Buenos Aires and the European and North American Global North" (129). In her words, the article "extend[s] in words a collective theorization of queer tango through and as its embodied practice" (126). Beller-Tadiar positions herself as a "situated thinker," someone who attends to praxis as research with an ethnographic mindset and attendant methodological and analytical lenses. At the same time, she perceives herself in relation to her compatriots "not as a researcher but as a friend, a dancer, a student, a performer, a translator, and, due to malleability of accent and idiom, an often quite incognito foreigner" (129). For her, the driving question is: "what's so queer about queer tango?" posed from the perspective of a "queer practitioner" (127). Probing an answer to this question, the author pushes beyond what the uninitiated might take as settled territory. We see this illustrated in Beller-Tadiar's anecdote about when she began teaching tango classes for "queer beginners" at the New York City Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center. Beller-Tadiar told students, (and then offers an aside to us): "*There are at least two ways to do queer tango. One is to take what is gendered about tango and… fuck with it. The other is to attempt to avoid gendering the dance. It doesn't make sense for me to teach you the gender norms just*

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to mess with them, so… (I don't add that Judith Butler says there is no subject before gender)" (italics original, 2). According to Beller-Tadiar, she now "skips this," moving toward a "queer tango vision" that "emphasiz[es] listening, mutual agency, dialogue; constantly switching roles; and giving a different imagination of what roles are, what it might mean to take on a role" (115). This change in the author's pedagogical approach indicates the discursive and epistemological territories the article seeks to bridge. This bridging is what the author means by the term, "dialogic tango semiosis," a theory of queer tango that has derived from "normative tango," while, at the same time, existing outside of its conventions. Whereas normative tango naturalizes obligatory, relational, and embodied gender norms – in a highly choreographed performance that nevertheless disavows its performance as a kind of drag: "Queer tango … avows this drag. Queer tango denaturalizes, but, for many of us, does not do away with gender" (136). What results in queer tango spaces is what the author calls "a collaborative 'gender laboratory'" (128), in which "interpretation is present in both roles; each partner listens, responds, and co-creates meaning with the movement of their body" (138).

Likewise investigating the implications for dance within a discursive framework, in "Why Were New Dances in the Early 20th Century So Often Described as Plastique?" Akiko Yuzurihara and Machiko Sato consider how modernist dance in Western Europe came to be recognized by artists, critics, and aficionados as "independent of other art genres, as its own medium" (146). They find answers in tracing the frequent use of the word "plastique" within modernist artistic circles at the turn of the 20th century and developing a theory about what this tells us about this historical moment in the genesis of modern dance. Historically Western concert dance artists had looked to adjacent expressive cultural forms, such as music, painting, and sculpture, "as models for art dance" (147). The authors argue, however, that an increased reference to dance practice as "plastique" indicates when and how "dance professionals were newly focusing on their dance medium, the human body, and exploring the myriad ways of using it" (147). According to the authors, this finding is significant because it illuminates a moment when dance artists "identified the unique characteristics of the body as a dance medium" (148). Moreover, conceptualizing their practice through the framework of "the plastique," "helped choreographers recognize the concept of spatial visual composition, encouraging them to develop objective methodologies for composing new dances" (148). In short, the circulation of the term plastique marked a pivotal moment for dance modernism asserting the body's primacy as a "medium of dance art," and the "choreographer's role in dance creation" (157).

Our last two articles examine the contradictions of and complications for the reception of dance performances in different contexts and their implication for how we understand what is at stake when dance criticism and popular opinion collide. Alissa Elegant's "Cold War Legacies: American Illiteracy of the Postcolonial Aesthetics of Spectacle in Chinese Dance Dramas," considers the aesthetic and cultural politics surrounding the performance and reception of the Chinese dance drama, *Dragon Boat Racing*, (Shawanwangshi 沙湾往事), by the Guang-dong Song and Dance Ensemble, in the U.S. in 2016, which a New York Times critic called a "kitschy spectacle" (161). Here, Western culturally elite dance critics serve as "proxy for the attitudes and values of U.S. based dance gatekeepers" (162). Thus, for the author, the critic's pronouncement belies an important matter. This is the culturally conditioned misunderstanding of Chinese dance dramas in the U.S. and among the critical classes, which Elegant sees as a function of the prevalence of the post-Cold War world order and attendant orientalist ideologies. These critics associate Chinese dance cultural formations with the "temporal past," and consequently fail to see and acknowledge the rich insight that Chinese dance can offer for understanding China's cultural contemporaneity. In response, "[She] ask[s] how the U.S.'s role as a hegemonic power atop an asymmetrical global system impacts the reception of aesthetics and kinesthetics developed in socialist spaces, in particular work not in dialogical relation with lineages of modern/post-modern dance" (162). Elegant suspects that the American critical devaluation of the Chinese dance drama is a result of "differing understandings of the maximalist deployment of spectacle, which is connected to fissures in the field of dance between supporters of classical ballet and modern dance" (161). Hung up on how to account critically for spectacle in Chinese dance forms, critics fail to see its "use" by dance artists and choreographers as "a celebration

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of China's economic development and an assertion of belonging in modernity (161). Elegant's article instead situates the Chinese dance drama in a new light, "as an aesthetic of modernity," Chinese artists embrace, "to strategically assert themselves in the temporal present on the global stage" (161).

In "Spectacular Suffering: Holocaust Representation in Competition Dance," Rebecca Rossen steps into the fray of an ongoing ethical debate over "Holocaust kitsch and spectacle" with far ranging implications for dance productions within competition and commercial spaces (194). She investigates the meanings of "competition dance participates in the Holocaust-heritage industry, drawing upon and further commercializing Holocaust representations through passionate routines that produce affective responses in dancers and spectators through the kinesthetic, choreographic, and narrative mechanics of moving people" (181). In the process, she raises important and vexing questions: Does the appropriation and capitalization of genocide, mass suffering, and Holocaust memory for the purposes of popular performance cross an unequivocal red line regarding what is ethically acceptable for dance? Is this clearly "unacceptable," as some would have it? Or are Holocaust dances among the arsenal of expressive cultural forms we might employ to "prevent forgetting," regardless of where they occur, who dances them, and for what purposes? (Huyssen, 1995, 150). Rossen's research affirms how, within the worlds of competitive dance and ice dancing, "these formulaic dance numbers universalize the Holocaust for mass audiences and spectacularize victimhood to increase competitors' chances of winning" (181). In these realms, routines adopt "recognizable tropes from film and other media" – the Anne Frank story, concentration camp uniforms, piles of discarded clothing, "wartime suffering due to the agonies of exile," (188), barbed wire fencing, dogs barking, lovers and families torn apart – "to make dance readily legible to mass audiences while generating embodied responses from both performers and spectators" (194). Moreover, according to Rossen, "Holocaust routines also translate historical trauma into votes and points that serve competition narratives of personal triumph," racking up dubious accolades the process (194). We see how maudlin representations of trauma accrue currency within the "global value system," where, according to dance researcher Sherril Dodds, "competition reigns" (quoted on p. 181). That said, Rossen argues a counterfactual whereby dance writ large expands its platform of impact, and audience familiarity with and empathy for Holocaust victims and stories, thus functionally authorizing dancers and choreographers adopting Shoah narratives to "express marginalized identities and addres[s] or educat[e] publics about social issues. In sum, "When circulated globally, Holocaust routines offer a lens through which we can understand the impact and usages of the Holocaust in distinct national contexts, as well as the complexities of transnational reception and the politics of the current moment" (194).

Here's to this superb offering of research investigating how dance tussles with and within cultural processes and politics. Happy reading!

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