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Editor's Note

The offerings in this issue of *Dance Research Journal* exemplify approaches to dance scholarship on theatrical dance that yield new knowledge through the applications of critical frameworks including post-colonial theory, post-humanism and animal studies, horror studies, and trickster historiography. They all offer correctives to previous methodological approaches to handling such works, as well as new political interpretations.

Our first article refocuses our gaze on what our authors consider most salient in contending with the legacies of canonical works of concert dance. Afreen Sen Chatterji's "Dancing Refractions, Dancing Disjunctions: Indian *Devadāsīs* in Marius Petipa's *La Bayadère* (1877)," for example, applies novel approaches to understanding this vexed canonical work and considers what it would mean to perform it responsibly. Accordingly, she investigates the backstory of its titular figure, the bayadère, a character derived from the "Orientalized figure of the devadādsī," or temple dancer, and her legacy within the classical dance forms, ballet and Bharatanatyam (224). Chatterji builds a "close reading" of the dance from its libretto with the goal of "understanding the original for its merits and slippages," and as a basis for "imagin[ing] alternate possibilities" (224). Through her intertextual analysis, we see how the bayadère was a creation of Petipa's "imperial vision," in her words: "Petipa was Czarist Russia's opportune foreign-born son, a prize diplomat whose luscious ballets became powerful media tools for the colonial ambitions of the Russian oligarchs" (225). Chatterji also shows how the "scripted history" of the devadādsī was key to the formation of classical dance in pre- and post-colonial India, what she calls "the 'pan-Indian-transhistorical' devadādsī" (224). In both cases, she argues, the devadādsī's dance was extracted and her material labor erased, a situation she feels must be redressed if the ballet is to be performed today. The article ends with an excerpted conversation between the author and Phil Chan, co-founder of *Final Bow for Yellowface*, about "*what else [La Bayadère] could be*," in light of what was achieved with the production of *La Bayadère* at Indiana University in 2025. The production, which reimagines the original tragedy as a romantic comedy, discovers a formula that "can still be *La Bayadère* without being a caricature of Indian culture … [and] presents a powerful mode of postcolonial performance with dance as the interface between history, ideology, and representation" (233). Ultimately, this re-interpretation suggests what's possible when treating vexed material.

Our next article centers the role of dance, literally and figuratively, within the workings of contemporary horror film. In "Embodied Hauntings: Monstrosity and Dance as Sites of Historical Reckoning and Agency in *Suspiria* (2018) and *Midsommar* (2019)," Natalie Zervou investigates dance as a site of ominous metamorphosis in these two horror films produced in the late 2010s. The communities these films depict are distinct both historically and culturally; however, the common denominator is the climax of the films, each of which is organized "around complex dance rituals, which herald the demise of many of the other characters" (241). Bringing choreographic analysis to bear on conversations in dance and horror studies, Zervou shows how the film's respective female protagonists become "*monstrous-femmes*" as they "negotiate their agency and the legacies of White supremacy in the respective communities they are navigating" (239). Within the Western concert

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dance oeuvre, it's not a stretch to see these characters as updates to their Romantic ballet sisters, the Wilis in *Giselle*.

Our last article deploys the figure of "the trickster" to offer a counternarrative of an event commemorating pioneers of postmodern American dance. Marisa Plasencia's "Ralph Lemon's Trickster Historiographies: Unsettling Nostalgia in Postmodern Dance through the Soul Train Line" begins with a moment of recognition. This occurs as she watches Lemon perform *Rant #6*, the closing event of his 2025 retrospective "Ceremonies Out of the Air" at MoMA PS1 in New York. Surrounded by the audience, "performers on various stages … danc[e] in continuous reference to Lemon's previous works," while Lemon "shouts into a microphone, sharing a speech on liberation" (255). For the author, the experience calls to mind another instance of immersion into Lemon's work, this time during a conference at UC Santa Barbara in 2017 honoring several "pioneers of postmodern dance of the 1960s," Simone Forti, Anna Halprin, and Yvonne Rainer, all of whom were in attendance (255). Lemon was invited to speak at the conference, as these were among his mentors, and the event included a screening of his ten-minute dance film, *Chorus* (*Oculus #2*). An attendee, Plascencia experienced alienation: "I found myself at a distance from exaltation as presentational formats on postmodern dance seemed to suppress the expression of doubt" (256). Lemon's film and turn at the podium, were significant because, as she interprets, they "express[ed] distrust … not through the absolute condemnation of a dominant narrative, but with the artistic craft of tricksters that center ambiguity in opposition to the certainty that these spaces facilitate" (256). Linking these experiences, Plascencia sees a throughline in what she calls Lemon's "trickster historiographies," rhetorical and creative tactics he uses "at the right moment to make the audience aware of their participation in unsettling practices" (256). Plascencia's article deploys "critical fabulation" (Saidiya Hartman) and speculation to tease out the significance of Lemon's subtle affront to the conference's celebration of nostalgia and the audience in its throes. She finds *Chorus* particularly emblematic, an ode to "five dancers … groov[ing] to Amy Winehouse's 'Back to Black' staring out at the audience gathered around their pop-up performance with deadpan expression" (255).

We hope you enjoy these stunning and insightful works of scholarship as much as we have working with our authors.

Rebekah J. Kowal

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