

## Maps, Trespassing and the Periphery: Reflections on the Location of Dance Studies in Canada

Seika Boye and Emma Doran

At the culmination of the recent symposium “The Other ‘D’: Locating ‘D’ance within Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies in Canada,” we decided it would be valuable to consolidate our responses in order to reflect on our experiences. These responses include readings, conversations, and reflections on the symposium (held January 2016, Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies, University of Toronto) and a subsequent roundtable held at the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Theatre Research (May 2016, Calgary). These two events we hosted (along with Nikki Cesare Schotzko, Heather Fitzsimmons Frey, and Evadne Kelly) were intended to examine ways dance studies connects to the academy, and the future of dance studies in Canada both within and beyond the scope of drama, theatre, and performance studies.

Considered in this reflection are the conversations generated during the symposium, but also the experiences of its incubation stages including soliciting proposals, implementing a selection process, hearing presentations, scheduling, writing, interviewing, grant writing, and website building, all of which form the foundation of any arts performance or conference. In particular, we have returned to some powerful statements: we invited specific scholars and artists to write personal reflections about their individual journeys in and through drama, theatre, dance, performance studies, and beyond, in practice, theory, and pedagogy. We also reflect on our collaboration in an e-interview with Rebecca Schneider. These statements and the e-interview can be found on [theotherd.ca](http://theotherd.ca) website under the drop-down menu “Statements.” Instead of a clear, neatly packaged message, here are some of our thoughts, which we offer as reflections, provocations, and invitations for future discussion and, we hope, debate.

While our part in this conversation about dance studies in the academy began in earnest as we decided which questions to ask Schneider in our e-interview, we (Boye and Doran) have actually been thinking together, connecting, and crossing paths in ways related to these issues for more than a decade. These intersections are worth noting as they shape the directions of our idea sharing. We first met as part of the 2004 cohort of the Masters in Dance at York University (then within the Faculty of Fine Arts). During our master’s studies, we were both focused on Canadian dance history for our research—Emma on Winnipeg’s Contemporary Dancers and Seika on women modern dance pioneers in Toronto. We were both trying to fill in gaps in the history of theatrical dance in Canada. Following this two-year program we met again while working at Dance Collection Danse (DCD), Canada’s only dedicated theatrical dance history archives and publisher. Seika updated the collection of over five hundred file fonds, and Emma was one of the first to begin digitizing the collection. We both also fulfilled many other roles, as is so often the case in a small, hardworking dance organization. Emma began her doctorate in Communication and Culture at Ryerson University in 2008, and her dissertation is titled “‘Feeling’ in Modern Dance Print Media: Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Maud Allan” (2014). Seika began her PhD in Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Toronto in 2010 and will soon be defending her

---

**Seika Boye** is a PhD candidate and Lecturer in the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Toronto, where she also serves as Director of the Centre for Dance Studies. **Emma Doran** specializes on performance studies, modern dance studies, media ecology, and phenomenology. She is a postdoctoral fellow in the Modern Literature and Culture Research Centre at Ryerson University.

dissertation, “Looking for Social Dance in Toronto’s Black Population at Mid-century: A Historiography.” In our dissertations, we not only do archival and historical work but also interrogate methods of documentation. We are critical of the record.

We both engage with dance studies in disciplines and departments less familiar with canonical questions of dancers and dance scholars. As we trespass into other disciplinary conversations in ways that we find evocative and defiant, we have found ourselves, at times, separate from the conversation. The sense of belonging nowhere in particular informed our strategic questions for Schneider and, in a broader sense, was the impetus of “The Other ‘D’” symposium. Being trained as dancers, who study dance and who now engage with performance studies, we wanted to ask her about what we perceive as a recent recognition of dance research by theatre programs across Canada. While this heralds an exciting new “rebranding” of many theatre and performance studies programs, we also wanted to address concerns regarding how dance and dance scholars might be left without resources or at the margins of discourse—a peripheral position we are accustomed to filling but of which we are particularly weary.

### **Maps and Boundaries**

The word “location” or rather the verb “locating” was a part of the naming of “The Other ‘D.’” The work we set out to do was to “locate” dance studies within the forest of drama, theatre, and performance. In turn, the question has been asked time and again in direct and indirect ways “What can dance locate?” If we push this a step further, the question becomes “What can dance locate that has not been located already/before/yet?” How does the pressing relevance of the inclusion of dance studies and its inherent questions about bodies moving in space and moving bodies in space become more obvious, more urgent?

The image of “a map” is a common and invaluable tool for inquiry and so it has been in these discussions. The question of boundaries has been pervasive, but not only in terms of disciplinary boundaries. It also entails interrogating our choices about whose dance we are talking about, who is doing the talking, and from where and what point(s) of view?

A topographical map looks down from above and draws lines, divisions, and borders but it cannot individuate, and it cannot document shifts in living earth or its inhabitants. This is problematic because maps chart “a moment”; they do not account for history or (an imagined better) future, nor do they account for our constant humanitarian and environmental degradation and invasion. If dance studies is going to evolve, it must do so with the intention of mapping what is not visible, and with an awareness that mapping may not be the way to locate something or someone without creating a new mapped stasis. If we are talking about locating dance within places other than the sparse outlay of dance studies, how will the exchange of new perspectives impact one and the other? (See Andrews, Smith, Dickinson, and Schneider).<sup>1</sup>

### **Exchanges**

While maps cannot mark the shifts and exchanges between people, one of the most invigorating aspects of “The Other ‘D’” was the multiple offerings of the histories of dance and performance studies in the United States and more specifically of dance studies in Canada (see Lindgren, Manning, Johnson). As it stands, the only dedicated PhD in Dance in Canada is offered through

York University. We think it is safe to say that the history of performance studies in Canada is being written right now and the role of dance is in constant negotiation. As identified in the call for papers for “The Other ‘D’,” in recent years numerous drama and theatre programs have changed their names to include performance studies, the evolution is happening now, the map is different than when we began our doctoral studies in 2008 and 2010. We want to contemplate and challenge where we as dance-focused scholars fit and we want to claim a space for ourselves as active participants in this shift. The discussion of exchange *between* the academic disciplines is one of inter/intra/trans-disciplinarity (see Daniel), intersectionality, and collaboration. Once again we raise the questions who is having these conversations and who are the privileged and underrepresented within these exchanges at every level (students, researchers, dancing individuals, classrooms, departments, faculties, universities, artistic institutions and public and private arts funders, municipalities, provinces, and the nation state of Canada)?

Thus, in considering maps and boundaries, we also acknowledge the magic that takes place in the slippery spaces between and in the overlaps of performance studies and dance studies, in the ambiguous places between the live and the archival, practice and study, as well as in the complexities relating to how different bodies are regulated and legislated within these contexts. Significantly, in our exchange with Schneider, we were surprised to note a rupture between the perceived outsider position of dance studies in Canada and its contrary, integral position in the formation of the performance studies canon in the United States. In the 1980s, performance studies was developing at New York University in response to, as Schneider articulates, “the necessity of thinking deeply about non-text based embodied actions, and the aspect of body-to-body transmission.” She rightfully points out that exchange was already a concern of dance scholars, who were certainly some of the main influencers in those early days at NYU. (The encompassing approach of the NYU Performance Studies Department in the ‘80s is also echoed in the symposium statements (see Johnson, Cesare Schotko).

One question is, then, if dance and dance studies was and continues to be so central to performance studies’ very foundation, why are emerging dance scholars still struggling for resources and subsequent employment? A case in point is how performance studies and drama departments still rely on theatrical-based texts as their main corpus, even for dance students. Noticeable too is that although tenure-track positions are sparse in all performance research disciplines, dance faculties seem to be the most reliant on precarious contract work to meet the needs of their undergraduate students. When the odd assistant professorship is advertised, it is often requesting of the applicant not only studio practice and teaching but also a prolific publication history and a particular niche research area. Henry Daniel, in this Forum, cites a recent call for “the position of Professor of the Practice”: A PhD or MFA candidate was required “to teach undergraduate and graduate courses in all levels of corporeal practice and theory, dance making, live art and/or dance technology,” with other responsibilities that contribute to “ongoing projects in dance as a researcher and administrator,” while maintaining “an international profile as an artist/researcher” and committing to “developing and directing a new, cutting-edge MFA program in Live Art and Embodied Practice alongside the current faculty” (Daniel). Are departments preparing graduate students to fill these criteria under the auspices of “dance-friendly” drama, theatre and performance studies departments?

As Susan Manning remarked in her keynote address at “The Other ‘D’,” the function and identity of dance departments in the academy continues to change. Early dance departments evolved between the world wars along with the physical culture movement and functioned as patrons for early modern dance artists. Elements of this model persist in Canadian universities and, as dance is

increasingly amalgamated under the umbrella of performance, dance educators, trainers, theorists, and historians need to reassess their goals. It is worth questioning for whom performance studies, theatre, and even anthropology departments are making space, and who is making that space (see Kelly). Where is exchange taking place and is it reciprocal?

At the same time, we need to address the anxiety we feel about dance scholarship's changing position and identity by identifying what we are afraid of losing. In response to this concern, Schneider suggests that, "just because you widen a lens doesn't mean you can never narrow it again." Theoretically speaking, this makes sense; in the context of one's own research a widening or closing in scope can be a revealing process. However, from a structural level, caution is needed if dance departments are to be amalgamated under others: once a change is made at the structural level it may be difficult to reverse, and hard-won resources could be lost. Undergraduate students, in particular, need space and attention from dance-specific faculty. As scholars who engage primarily with dance, we are wary of being objects of tokenism under the performance studies umbrella (we already observe that performance studies has become a buzzword for interdisciplinary collaboration or "liveness" in English and communications departments across Canada).

Perhaps, as dance scholars, we are particularly attuned to the complex nuances of loss. After all, a significant part of dance studies' narrative is, in fact, about loss itself—both sitting with the discomfort of ephemeral dance moments, of the vanishing point, of the profound challenges of archiving traces of performance, and of reconstructing dance history without the bodies it was written on. Widening and narrowing a lens suggests alternating between a detailed close-up view of a little space or a broad but less detailed view of a lot of space. If the lens belongs to a camera, it renders the image two-dimensional. But dance is always about four-dimensional movement, and therefore, four-dimensional ideas—action connected to thought through space and through time, leading us into the future and out of the present with every gesture. For this reasoning, widening and narrowing is too limited a metaphor in our context: we suggest a focus on the *quality* of interdisciplinary exchanges, whether they be expansive or micro-moments. Focus on *quality* may offer some protection, since interdisciplinary exchanges relating to dance seem particularly vulnerable to institutional shifts.

To push this idea even further, as dance-focused scholars we can continue to consider how interdisciplinary exchanges are distinctly national in character and, in turn, how the nature of cultural exchange in the United States and Canada has impacted dance artists and scholars at the institutional level in distinct and nationally specific ways in relation to land exchanges, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Black Lives Matter, for example.

## **Dance Studies in Canada and the United States**

In the moving statement she wrote for the symposium, Santee Smith emphasized that in order to transform we must first un-learn—"to de-construct and re-construct, to de-colonize and move away from neo-colonizing processes." The concept of unlearning is most relevant to dance studies' relationship to perceptions of what constitutes the history and legacy of North America. It is important to attend more closely to the relationship between Canada and the United States—to how these two nation-states are unique in their formation, their treatment of Indigenous peoples; treatment of slavery; legislation; immigration; the penal system; women's rights; reproductive rights; arts and culture; education—primary through post-graduate; and so on. It is incorrect to assume that

by Canada, we mean North America, and it is a dangerous assumption because the result is not only continued erasure and omission, but also continued ignorance of how the erasure happens and what these acts meant and mean. It is also revealing that Mexico is too often left out of the conversation of North American scholarship. We must question our methodologies and be critical of them at each step, adapting them so that they reveal instead of concealing the most marginalized people in our societies (See Miller, 2016). In other words, unlearning does not mean forgetting, but is rather a questioning of our collective, and always partial, memory and archive.

The unlearning has to happen at an institutional level as well, and dance offers us a way into this unlearning, but only if we recognize the ways that it can work to support colonial and state violence in so many regards. If we allow it, dance asks us, as VK Preston so beautifully articulates, “to look at bodies, openly, amid a political context that increasingly would rather control, contain, ignore, or imprison them.” Preston and Smith’s comments suggest ways that the presence of and connections with dance studies in interdisciplinary academic contexts have the potential to propel scholarship forward, in particularly body-focused, thoughtful, ethical, decolonizing, and unlearning ways. We welcome the idea that dance studies could move out of its position as a marginalized partner in performance-oriented departments and instead become a leader in ways these issues can be rethought and reimagined. As MJ Thompson writes, “perhaps the most invigorating aspect of dance . . . has been its ability to cross lines: disciplinary to be sure, but equally to transgress the lines of body politics, to help us *see* bodies, think bodies and respect bodies.”

In conclusion, it is also important to note that this conversation has focused on dance studies in relationship to drama, theatre, and performance studies. This exclusivity is responsive to only one moment. We do not address cognitive science, dance therapies, or dance and wellness directly. But the potential for us to make the leap toward expanded understandings of what dance can locate is directly tied to seeing more clearly that dance is, has, and can be integral to our wellbeing as individuals and as a society. Part of the acknowledgement of systemic exclusions of so many bodies will come through seeing the dancing body and dancing communities as vital, as energizing, as liberating and so essential to an understanding of ourselves in the spaces we inhabit alone and together.

## Note

1. All parenthetical citations refer to documents resulting from “The Other ‘D’” symposium. These documents can be found at <http://www.theotherd.ca/statements.html>.