

A full-bodied endeavor

José Rollin de la Torre Bueno, known as Bill Bueno, helped found the Wesleyan University Press in 1957 with a focus on the performance arts and a policy of letting the artist speak for herself. The significance of this cannot be overstated. At the time, there was little written on dance or by dancers beyond scattered concert reviews and the occasional important book like John Martins' *The Modern Dance* (1933) and Curt Sachs' *World History of the Dance* (originally published in German in 1933 and translated into English by Bessie Schonberg in 1937), and certainly nothing approaching the bounty of writing that exists today. Wesleyan University Press changed that, becoming the first press to dedicate sustained attention to developments in the fields of theater and dance. In doing so, Wesleyan Press garnered recognition and prestige within the arts. It also introduced dance and theater arts to a broader academic audience and helped to contextualize the significance of these arts within a broader philosophical and intellectual spectrum. The Wesleyan University Press, along with the artists and scholars who organized and established roots on campuses, triggered the emergence of a new scholarly discipline now called Dance Studies. This digital republication of some of the Press's earliest books offer an opportunity to reflect with the benefit of hindsight on Dance Studies, and the role that the Wesleyan University Press played in transforming scholarship from a pursuit of the mind to a fuller bodied endeavor.

The fine arts present a methodological intervention to academia: Where academicians ostensibly strive for objectivity, artistic research is unapologetically creative. The performance arts present additional epistemological interventions. Where scholarship privileges pursuits of the mind, dance and theater insist on bodily engagement, constituting theory through physical practices and sentient lived experience. Through body-based research they challenge Cartesian duality, reconcile theory and practice, and foreground subaltern voices. Creative methods crafted in studios offer concrete and visceral examples of the inextricable link between intellectual inquiry and physical practice. Faculty and students of dance and performance investigate topics spanning *time, space, environment* and *social politics* by engaging with them physically, individually or in a group. What better way to ask questions about self, identity, or social relations than through direct experience? What better way to examine terminologies that carry both physical and social political implications: such as *strength, weight, and touch*? What do we mean when we invoke concepts like *woman, culture, power or need*? Within studio settings, the slippages between experience and language become ripe territory for investigation. So do discrepancies between subject and object. A performer bears both roles simultaneously: The performer becomes the object of attention while also experiencing the performance from a first person subjective perspective. Performance practice regularly calls into question even the nature of knowledge itself: What does it mean, in the end, to 'know' something? Does knowledge reside within or outside our selves and our experiences? What is its relationship to practice? Finally, and significantly, by repositioning knowledge to within the subject Dance Studies empowers subaltern voices, engaging those that have traditionally and

systematically marginalized in academia and society, namely women, people of color, and lgbtq communities.

These physicalized interventions evolved gradually. Dance and theater were brought into academic curriculum in the early 20th century without much controversy, conceived as components of well-rounded education if somewhat outside of the main academic mission. The first dance program was developed at the University of Wisconsin by Margaret H'Doubler in the 1920s. H'Doubler, who had studied the progressive educational theories of John Dewey at Columbia University, developed the program based on the premise that creative physical engagement was fundamental to learning. Over the next few decades dance programs were established on college campuses typically as a component of physical education or the fine arts. These programs presented an alternative model for learning and thinking – through doing. Quietly but compellingly dance education subverted the more prevalent bias that the intellectual inquiry is the domain of a body-less mind. Practice based disciplines like dance and theater suggest the alternate possibility that knowledge is as physical as it is mental, presenting concrete challenges to academic separation of mind/body and theory/practice. In hindsight it is clear that the appearance and vitality of performance practices in academia both signaled and propelled massive social cultural shifts.

At the time that Wesleyan University Press began its work, dance and theater programs were establishing a stronger presence on college campuses. Feeling somewhat isolated in remote campus settings, faculty sought to connect with other colleagues and departments across the

country, and began seeking a collective voice. During the period between 1956 and 1973 a bevy of organizations formed that functioned as platforms for both intellectual dialogue and advocacy. These groups, including American Dance Guild (1956), the Congress on Research in Dance (1965), Council of Dance Administrators (1967), and the American College Dance Festival Association (1973), held conferences, printed newsletters and began to produce peer-reviewed written and performed scholarship.

Selma Jeanne Cohen, a dance scholar who was critical in establishing and advising the Wesleyan University Press, was also actively involved in the organization of the field at large. Cohen edited the early dance journal *Dance Perspectives*, helped to create the de la Torre Bueno Award for outstanding writing in dance in honor of Wesleyan Press' founding editor in 1973, and in that same year helped found the Society of Dance History Scholars (1973). These organizations, together with the Wesleyan University Press publications, cultivated a new level of academic inquiry and discourse in dance. In a reflection on de la Torre Bueno's legacy Cohen notes his policy of letting the dancers speak for themselves (Cohen. [José Rollin de la Torre Bueno \(1904–1980\)](#), *Dance Chronicle* Vol. 4:1,1980). In contrast to writing *about* dancers and about choreographers, books like *The Language of Dance* (1966) by Mary Wigman, *Doris Humphrey: An Artist First* (1972) by Doris Humphrey and Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Soaring: The Diary and Letters of a Denishawn Dancer in the Far East 1925-1926* (1976) by Jane Sherman, and *My Theater Life* (1979) by August Bournonville, were written *by* dancers and choreographers, presenting their views on their work in dance and on any number of other topics. These books prioritized the artist's point of view, valuing subjective and experiential

perspectives and insights. More than a stylistic choice, this move signified the culling of a potent intellectual voice. This 'voice' is characterized by a number of distinct and significant elements. First, their ideas tend to be grounded in physical contexts. Doris Humphrey's principles of life are integrally connected to her principles of movement, suspension and release, and in Cohen's seminal book *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief*, choreographers probed issues of meaning and purpose in the world through their choreography. Second, the majority of these voices identify as women. Modern dance is the first and only fine art form pioneered and dominated by women, yet this remarkable fact has yet to be given systematic attention. Early Wesleyan University Press publications reflected and facilitated the cultivation of this new, conceivably gendered, intellectual voice unabashedly challenging the most entrenched academic dichotomies privileging mind over body and theory over practice. This generative time marked the beginning of Dance Studies as an academic discipline and the Wesleyan Press was an integral component of this development.

The approach in these early books mirrored what was happening on campuses. In addition to grounding research in the mindful body and giving voice to scholars previously marginalized in academia, performing artist-scholars were early also innovators of cross-disciplinary methodologies for reconciling theory with practice, which subsequently influenced academia in profound ways. In the 1930s, for example, choreographers and scholars Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham, delved into the performative nature of knowledge, explicitly grounding their cross-cultural research in dance and performance. Both conducted doctoral work in Anthropology, Primus at New York University and Dunham at University of Chicago. Their

experimentation with praxis foreshadowed and influenced methodological innovations that would rock academic institutions in the 1990s, and is considered radical in social research even today. Only in recent years have anthropologists credited Primus and Dunham as pioneers for bridging theory with performance, creative practice, and spirituality, and for embracing the performative nature of knowledge decades before it became the politically charged topic it is now. Dance Studies, rooted in physical research and expression, was a natural site for this continual invention and experimentation of methodology and academic form.

The increased attention across disciplines to bodies and performance may be attributed to the fact that seemingly insurmountable systems of oppression are all tied to classifications of the body - such as *race*, *gender*, *ethnicity*, and *sexuality*. It may have to do with the realization that intellectual inquiry ultimately must address living sentient bodies and needs. The need to assert that Black Lives Matter, or the imminent threat of climate change make this strikingly clear as both pertain to our basic survival. In conversation with post-structuralist theory, performance offers an equally constructivist epistemology – which integrates body and mind into somatic unity - that is accessible and convincing because it is based in the physical experience of the material world.

Increasingly, those who most directly research the conditions and possibilities of living experience are being valued, not only as topics of study, but as methodologists. The methods, practices, and perspectives cultivated in fields of performance have laid the groundwork for creative and practice-based scholarly inquiry. These methods, which address interdisciplinary

issues in physically engaged contexts, can and are being applied in departments across the campus. Dance Studies is more than just a point of view. It is a comprehensive methodological paradigm. It brings together bodies and minds, practices and theories, and the multitude of diverse voices and perspectives comprising our world. And it holds the promise of effecting real social change, in practice as well as in theory. The early writings of the field of dance gathered here and made more broadly available through digitization are invaluable as scholars and artists reassess and make meaning of dance, performance, and the promise of co-choreographing a deeper understanding of our world.

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