

How We Got Here: A View from the US Academy

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The following was presented as an invited keynote address at The Other “D” Symposium, University of Toronto, Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, January 2016.



When the invitation arrived from the Drama Centre at the University of Toronto, I laughed aloud. Having spent my career pursuing “the other D”—the emergent field of dance studies—within the institutional configuration of drama, theatre, and performance studies, I was well aware of the perils and pleasures of masquerading as a theatre historian, even as an English professor. The symposium on “The Other ‘D’: Locating ‘D’ance in Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies in Canada” promised an opportunity to talk openly about the challenges of training and finding employment in one field while researching and publishing in another.

In the US academy and—as the invitation suggested—the Canadian academy as well, I am not alone. In fact, there is evidence that as many emerging dance scholars in the US have trained in theatre and performance studies departments as in dance departments, based on data collected by the Mellon-funded initiative “Dance Studies in/and the Humanities.” As Principal Investigator for the initiative over a six-year period from 2012 to 2018, I have evaluated applications from more than 225 young dance scholars, mostly from the US but also from Canada, Britain, and elsewhere. Strikingly, roughly one-quarter of the applicants has been trained in theatre and performance studies doctoral programs, the same proportion as applicants who trained in dance-specific doctoral programs. The remaining 50 percent came from a broad range of other fields within the humanities, including history, literature, musicology, anthropology, sociology, and area and ethnic studies.

In this essay, I first want to historicize the present moment—“the other D” in the US academy—and then to consider the implications of the past for the future. As I will argue, the US dance department was established in the years between the two world wars as an integral part of the patronage system for modern dance. Although the curriculum included historical, cultural, and theoretical topics as supplements to training in modern dance technique and composition, the dance department could not absorb the boom in dance studies that started in the 1970s and has continued into the present. Beginning in the 1980s, a significant number of aspiring dance scholars pursued advanced degrees in theatre and performance studies, drawn by the field’s new openness to research on nondramatic, unscripted genres of performance, including dance. This openness resulted from an internal critique within theatre studies that exploded the study of the Western dramatic canon in the name of performance studies. In other words, it was the dynamic tension between scripted drama and unscripted performance that enabled dance studies to cohabit departments of theatre and performance studies.

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In 1979, I decided to pursue a PhD in an interdisciplinary drama and theatre program at Columbia University as a way of doing research on modern dance in New York City. My hope was to convince a university to let me teach dance history alongside the history of drama and theatre, and that's eventually what happened at Northwestern when I first took a position in an English department in a line for modern drama and then took on courtesy appointments with Theatre and with Performance Studies, separate departments at my home institution. Thus I am triply appointed in drama (English), Theatre, and Performance Studies. (At Northwestern dance is a small major within a much larger theatre department.) My career path surely informs—some might say biases—the argument made here.

Historians of dance in US higher education typically distinguish between two models for departmental formation—the Wisconsin model and the Bennington model (Hagood 2000, 2008). In 1926, the University of Wisconsin-Madison established the first dance major at a US university, led by Margaret H'Doubler, a physical educator who turned to modern dance as the best method for nurturing the creative potential within each individual. Her vision was grounded in the educational philosophy of John Dewey, with whom she had studied at Columbia Teacher's College, particularly his emphasis on learning through doing. The Wisconsin model conceptualized dance and movement as a way for students to integrate their emotional, intellectual, and physical selves and as an approach to arts education that countered the overly rational emphasis of the academy (Ross 2000).

Eight years after H'Doubler started the dance major at Wisconsin, Martha Hill and Mary Jo Shelley founded the Bennington School of the Dance in 1934 (Kriegsman 1981). Over the next nine summers aspiring dancers and physical educators came together with working professionals—Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm—for intensive study and creation of new works. Although these four artists were all still early in their careers, influential dance critic John Martin immediately recognized them as leaders of the emergent American modern dance. In his 1936 survey of *America Dancing*, Martin noted that Bennington, “though still young, is already the most important dance institution in the country” (175–76). Bennington crafted an alternate model to Wisconsin, a model for the dance department as a training venue for modern dance where aspiring artists apprenticed with faculty who were professionals in the field (McPherson 2013). Martha Hill went on to found the Dance Department at Juilliard (Soares 2009). The model of Bennington continues today at the American Dance Festival on the Duke campus as well as in many of the larger and more prestigious US dance departments.

Although Wisconsin and Bennington are often seen as antithetical models, it is equally plausible to see them as endpoints of a continuum, for most US dance departments at midcentury trained aspiring professionals *and* promoted movement as part of a well-balanced life. In fact, Thomas Hagood makes a similar point in his histories of dance in the US academy (2000, 2008). What still requires emphasis, however, is how the US dance department at midcentury created audiences for modern dance. When I meet colleagues of my generation in other departments who are fans of modern dance, they almost always went to college or graduate school at an institution with a strong dance department.

Wherever a dance department fell on this continuum between Bennington and Wisconsin, it became an integral component of the patronage for modern dance, alongside companies and studios based in New York City led by, among others, Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, and Merce Cunningham. Faculty in higher education typically had performed in a company led by a New York-based choreographer and acquired expertise in the style and technique taught at the company's studio. The

most talented dance majors then replicated their faculty's career path, going to New York and joining an artist-led company, then later taking up a teaching position at a college or university.

From one perspective, this account is so familiar as to appear self-evident. However, it bears analysis for the way that US higher education became a crucial component of artistic patronage at midcentury. Although the US state has supported artists qua artists on a relatively small scale, the state has supported artists qua educators on a relatively large scale. This system contrasts with patronage systems in Canada, Britain, and Europe, where the state provides a relatively larger share of funding for artists qua artists and relatively smaller share for artists qua educators.

With practice and production as its core mission, the US dance department did not prioritize the publication of scholarship by its faculty. To be sure, there were MA and PhD programs in dance education (Pease 1964). Yet the studies curriculum often relied on scholarship penned by dance critics and advocates based in New York City—among others, John Martin, Lincoln Kirstein, Selma Jeanne Cohen, Marcia Siegel, and Deborah Jowitt. In other words, the modern dance patronage system at midcentury relied on a dynamic exchange between dance writers and choreographers based in New York City and faculty and students in colleges and universities across the country. These colleges and universities, in turn, provided a crucial audience for modern dancers as they toured what was known as the “gymnasium circuit” (Manning 2008).

In the US dance department, courses in dance studies supplemented the core courses in technique and composition. Most departments required a two-semester sequence in “dance history” and “world dance,” that is, a survey of Western theatrical dance from Renaissance court entertainments to the present, and a survey of non-Western dance forms. From our perspective now, it is easy to critique this division between “the West and the Rest,” but it's important to note that from the founders' perspective, modern dance was rebelling against the earlier history of Western theatrical dance in part by emulating the “functional” role that dance played in many non-Western cultures. Introducing a 1944 collection of dance ethnography, titled *The Function of Dance in Human Society*, Franziska Boas made this connection quite explicit, stating:

Modern dance in America must absorb characteristic material from the many peoples that have come here. . . . [These essays on dance among Northwest Coast Indians of North America and in French West Africa, Haiti, and Bali are] published in the hope that [they] may stimulate thought and better understanding of the wealth of sources there are to draw on, with and outside of the framework of our culture. (Boas 1972, 2–3)

Like Boas, pioneering dance ethnographers from Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus to Gertrud Kurath and Joann Keali'inohomoku all had modern dance training as well as training in anthropological field methods.

Although many aspects of the midcentury dance department are still in place, a number of departments have made significant changes over the last few decades. First, they have expanded the range of techniques taught, so that jazz and tap, social dance forms like salsa and tango, and African and Asian dance forms such as sabar and bharata natyam now are taught alongside modern and ballet. Second, the studies component of the curriculum has similarly expanded, so that the required sequence in “dance history” and “world dance” has been altered or replaced altogether by a broader array of thematic courses.

The best US dance departments, in my opinion, have innovated a new model that emphasizes a dynamic exchange between studies and studio courses, including courses that integrate studies and studio. The significance of Susan Foster to this new model cannot be emphasized enough: not only did she found the PhD program in Dance History and Theory (now Critical Dance Studies) at the University of California-Riverside in 1993 and then reform the Culture and Performance PhD program at UCLA along similar lines after 2001, but her writings have articulated the underlying assumptions of this new model, conceptualizing practice as a mode of theory and scholarship as a mode of practice (Foster 1995).

The integrated studies/studio model has precedents both in the US and in the anglophone world. When York University created the first degree-granting dance program in Canada in 1970, courses in dance history and analysis were integral to the curriculum (Anderson 2012). A similar interchange between studies and studio informed Janet Lansdale's founding of the Dance Department at the University of Surrey in 1981 (Giersdorf 2009). With robust funding for professional dance provided by the state in Canada and Great Britain, these departments could focus on the mission of aligning research and practice in exciting new ways.

The most audacious precedent for combining studies and studio, however, was the short-lived Katherine Dunham School for Arts and Research in New York City. In 1946, a school brochure announced classes in a range of dance forms, in acting and design, and in "cultural studies"—an umbrella term for classes in foreign languages, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and aesthetics (Clark and Johnson 2005, 472). Dunham envisioned cultural studies as a complement to practice-oriented courses, enabling students to pursue careers in professional performance, education, and/or research. After Dunham departed with her company in 1947 for an extended tour abroad, the school foundered and never fully realized its potential, eventually closing in 1954 (Das 2014). Yet Dunham's vision for a multidimensional and cross-cultural curriculum articulated an ideal that remains unrealized in the twenty-first century.

In US dance departments, what is not yet clear is whether the studies/studio model has supplanted or supplemented the continuum between the Bennington and Wisconsin models. On the one hand, US dance departments increasingly have hired PhD scholars with a background in practice in addition to MFA choreographers and former dancers from major companies. On the other hand, the studies curriculum remains oriented to the techniques taught in the department, rather than capturing the full range of possible topics in dance studies. And US dance departments cannot absorb all the dance scholarship currently produced—or employ all the dance scholars producing that scholarship.

I date the expansion of dance studies to the 1970s, when a dance boom in the US was accompanied by a boom in dance studies. As I have argued elsewhere (Manning 2008), the growth in dance studies cannot be separated from broader trends in the academy over the last few decades. Consider the decline of New Criticism and the rise of poststructural theories of reading and interpretation. From the perspective of New Criticism, dance and performance were nearly illegible, since readers could not precisely map the formal dimensions and internal connections of the action. But from the perspective of poststructuralism, dance and performance share with many other textual modes an openness that requires readers' interpretation for completion. Another larger trend that affected dance studies was a heightened interest in the body and performativity across disciplines. This interest surely reflected the impact of studies of gender and sexuality, but it also seems more than coincidental that attention to physicality intensified at a time of transition from print culture to

digital culture. And dance studies certainly has benefited from the rise of digital culture, with the Internet now serving as a repository for dance documentation that several decades ago was accessible only by a trip to specialized archives.

These shifts in the larger academic milieu affected drama, theatre, and performance studies as well as dance studies. It is my contention that at the same time that dance studies boomed in the US, the rise of performance studies radically altered studies of drama and theatre in a way that opened a space for dance studies.

Theatre studies entered the US academy as an extension of the Little Theatre movement, that is, the movement of independent non-profit theatre that emerged in the early twentieth century to contest the monopoly of commercial theatre on the US stage (Chansky 2004). Similar movements flourished across Britain and Europe, and the narrative of their success composes a standard theme in theatre history. In the US and elsewhere, the Little Theatre movement was focused on new playwrights like Ibsen, Chekhov, and Shaw and on new performance practices needed to stage their plays—ensemble acting rather than star performers, individually designed box-sets rather than generalized decors, a director rather than actor-manager as the controlling authority.

The first US university to institute a drama major was Carnegie Mellon in 1914. George Pierce Baker had attempted to do so at Harvard, where he established a playwriting class in 1905 and a workshop to stage the newly written plays in 1912, but despite his success in nurturing a generation of American playwrights—including Eugene O'Neill and Hallie Flanagan, later director of the Federal Theatre Project—Harvard was not interested in a separate department, so Baker went to Yale, where he founded the School in Drama in 1925.

Hence drama and theatre entered the US academy roughly a decade ahead of modern dance. Given the emphasis on new plays and new performance practices, it is not surprising that the curriculum of the US drama and theatre department came to emphasize dramatic literature and theatre history alongside the skills of acting, directing, design, and playwriting. This remains the curriculum of many US theatre departments until today, as in Northwestern's very large and flourishing department. The ideal graduate of such a program goes on to make a mark in the successor to the Little Theatre movement—variously called regional theatre, off-Broadway theatre, or in Chicago, off-Loop theatre.

When I studied drama and theatre at Columbia, this was the curriculum I was trained to teach—surveys of the Western dramatic canon from Aeschylus to Tom Stoppard, with special expertise in modern drama. My qualifying exam required reading nearly all of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Shaw, Brecht, Pirandello, O'Neill, and Beckett. This list of all-male, all-white authors stands in glaring contrast to curricula in theatre and drama today. Yet at the time I believed that my training in the canon was necessary for academic legitimacy and employability. As it turned out, I have taught texts from this canon, often paired with modern dance. So my courses might present Ibsen's *A Doll House*, comparing Nora's danced Tarantella to performances of early modern dance, or examine the parable structure of Brecht's *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* and Kurt Jooss' *The Green Table*, or look at the so-called jungle dance in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* in relation to Katherine Dunham's choreography.

Starting in the 1960s, the midcentury model for a theatre department came under challenge as experimental directors focused on devising original work and restaging Western classics, like Richard Schechner's *Dionysos in 69*, as much as on staging new plays. Of course, it was Schechner who

spurred the changes at New York University that led to a change in the graduate program from “Drama” to “Performance Studies.” The change in name came in 1980, and by then the curriculum had rejected the Western dramatic canon from Shakespeare to Ibsen, focusing instead on popular entertainments, festival performance, and avant-garde theatre. Within this milieu, graduate students interested in dance found a ready home, even before Marcia Siegel joined the faculty in 1983. Before Marcia’s arrival, Sally Banes, Sally Sommer, and Brenda Dixon-Gottschild all had pursued dance dissertations at NYU. During Marcia’s tenure, Ann Cooper Albright, Ann Daly, Thomas DeFrantz, and Ellen Graff, among many others, pursued dance research. Under Marcia’s successors Barbara Browning and André Lepecki, the Department of Performance Studies has continued as a crucial training ground for dance scholars.

As Shannon Jackson has demonstrated, Northwestern’s Department of Performance Studies had a different genealogy from NYU’s. Originally the Department of Oral Interpretation, the Northwestern department had focused on the performance of non-dramatic literature, poetry, and fiction—a practice usually housed alongside other subfields within communication and rhetoric, rather than in a department of its own (Jackson 2004). In the Northwestern story, Dwight Conquergood plays the role that Richard Schechner did at NYU, prompting a name change to Performance Studies in 1986 and reorienting the department toward performance adaptation, ethnography, and theory (Conquergood 2013). Perhaps because Northwestern has separate Theatre and Performance Studies departments, the tension between these two models continues to shape the curriculum—on the one hand, a canon-based model and, on the other hand, a methods-and-theories based model. Yet even on US campuses where the theatre department has absorbed the influence of performance studies, there still seems an ongoing negotiation between how to teach the dramatic canon and at the same time introduce the methods and theories of performance studies.

Dance studies did not come into Northwestern at the graduate level until after 1988 when Margaret Thompson Drewal and I joined the faculty. Margaret, an NYU graduate, was hired by Performance Studies as a specialist in African performance, with an emphasis in dance. At the same time, I was hired as a specialist in modern drama in the English Department, with a research focus on modern dance. Even though Northwestern had no intention to institutionalize graduate training in dance studies, Margaret and I drew interested graduate students—Anthea Kraut, Rebecca Rossen, Priya Srinivasan, among others. More recently, Margaret has retired, and Ramón Rivera-Servera has joined Performance Studies, appointed as a specialist in Latino and queer performance studies, but with expertise as well in dance ethnography and movement analysis. Hence graduate students with an interest in dance studies continue to enrol or find that it is possible to research dance once they do enrol. In this way, I have served as a reader on dance-focused dissertations in Anthropology, History, Musicology, Screen Cultures, and Sociology in addition to directing dissertations in Theatre, Performance Studies, and English.

There are other theatre and performance studies departments as well in the US where student and faculty interest has led to dance dissertations: Rebecca Rossen is now at Texas-Austin, following on the heels of Ann Daly, who mentored Clare Croft and Ramón Rivera-Servera before her early retirement; after Daly had left, feminist theatre scholar Jill Dolan advised Croft and Rivera-Servera. Janice Ross is at Stanford, where Drama was recently renamed TAPS for Theatre and Performance Studies, while SanSan Kwan is at Berkeley, where the department recently took the name Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies.

All these departments—and there are a few others as well—produced the 25 percent of the Mellon applicants who came from theatre and performance studies. As at Northwestern, none of these theatre departments set out to officially encompass dance studies. Rather, top-flight students showed up interested in dance studies, and the departments responded either by hiring dance faculty, as did NYU and Berkeley, or taking advantage of existing faculty, as did Northwestern, Stanford, and Texas.

So ends my history of the present, but questions remain about the future. Above all is the question of whether the pursuit of dance studies within theatre and performance studies is a short-term or long-term phenomenon in the US academy. Has theatre and performance studies simply served as a patron for dance scholars at a time when US dance departments are in transition from their founding distrust to the recent embrace of scholarly inquiry? Will there come a time when dance departments can absorb all the smart young dance scholars doing research today? Or are there inherent limitations to the topics and approaches to dance studies that dance departments can embrace? And if so, then shouldn't dance studies develop as an interdiscipline, as a subfield within a range of disciplines and departments, from area and ethnic studies to anthropology and sociology to musicology and visual culture?

Further questions arise: If “the other D” remains part of the mix of theatre and performance studies in the US, how might we reconfigure curriculum so that dance studies becomes integral to theatre and performance studies? In my experience, there's enormous potential in courses that bring together diverse genres of theatrical performance—drama, dance, and music theatre. As contemporary artists increasingly blur genres, shouldn't performance historians do as well? What might be the advantages of bringing together musicologists, dance historians, and theatre historians to teach and research Renaissance and Baroque court entertainments, Noh and Kabuki, the Paris Opera in the nineteenth century, or the Broadway stage in the twentieth century?

Allana Lindgren has asked similar questions about “the other D” in Canada. Will dance studies continue to find patronage within theatre and performance studies? What might dance studies bring to theatre and performance studies—articulated training in kinetic literacy, heightened attention to global circulation of performance practices, new strategies for building alliances within and without the academy? (Lindgren 2016)

Finally, it is not only in Canada and the US that theatre and performance studies has nurtured dance studies. Similar developments have happened in Germany and Japan and, I would guess, in other national contexts where I have less first-hand experience. There surely is a transnational story here that exceeds North America.

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