

Introduction

Patrick Alcedo and Ruth Jordana Pison

The human body is dance's very instrument. The dancing body becomes one with music or purposely goes against it. Even in dances that are choreographed *sans* music, the body moves with props and costumes provided that such dances are so designed. The body, with the rhythm and sounds it produces, co-exists with time and space. For dances that are made for several bodies, dancers perform in relation to other performers and, at certain moments, are even intimate and tender with them. Dance is collaborative by nature. When dancing bodies coalesce, or oppose each other, they generate energies, stir sensations, spark a range of emotions, and create new or recall past memories striated in the bodies' muscles.

The authors in this publication re-posit that dance tells stories that are at once familiar and strange. Whether performed on stage or as part of a communal ritual and/or celebration, dance is embedded in a constellation of cultural forces. When individuals decide to dance, they commit to dancing with others, whether these "others" are dancers themselves or are non-corporeal elements like music, material objects, spatiality, temporality, narrativity, socio-cultural significance, and affect. Since the body in performance is imbued with meanings, these meanings and the bodies that realize them deserve to be written about. Reading the body as a system of signification could reveal not only movements that contour and are contoured by particular socio-historical contexts but also multi-valent narratives.

Dance articulates an intersection between history and nationalism and in many cases has been used by the nation-state, such as the Philippines, to embody stories via essentializing discourses of the nation state or of groups

considered peripheral to it. Building on his earlier essay in *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (1995), Mark Franko, in “Mimique,” published this time in *Migrations of Gesture* (2008), states that location affects the signification of gestures: “movement through space leaves the trace of place that would have made movement possible, architecturally inevitable” (p. 251). The idea that movement and space are one, or as embedded and welded into the other, is crucial in understanding how we read dance—in any form or type—and its embedded narratives. As Franko emphasizes, “movement both evokes and shapes a surviving social response as physical environment. Dance calls social space into being” (2008, p. 251).

But dance is not just movement that calls space into being. As Carrie Noland notes, “dance relocates a body within an architectonic space through acts of spacing, that is, inscription” (*Migrations*, 2008, p. xxiii). It is a somatic experience involving a body and subjectivity that could track national and transnational cultural identities and their embodied iterations. That Philippine dance embodies a kind of “Filipinoness” is problematized in all the articles in this issue. Given dance’s incredible capacity to choreograph nationalism—constructing snippets of nation as performances of dance groups unfold on stage—scholars have looked into dance as a tool for cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue. As seen in folk dance performances, for example, dance can never be fixed in one place, attached to a sessile notion of authenticity. It becomes a slice of culture, mobile and attuned to a fluid sense of what it means to represent a nation employing trained bodies, imbued with technique to meet the demands of theatre. Bodies on stage need to be expansive, torsos lifted, contracted on demand, feet fully flexed or pointed, jumps maximized to achieve *ballonné*, turns sharpened to precisely hit agreed-upon spots, hand movements synchronized to show prowess, and guile, anger, coyness, humor, and everything in between exaggerated, so that even the audience at the far end of a hall can experience affect. The body becomes a receptacle not only of a past culture but also of a people’s agentive response to take ownership of introduced foreign dances. Taking folk dances from

their autochthonous places to “global” stages and re-imagining them for contemporary times do not enervate them. Such choreographic acts point to dance’s political resonance and to the body as protean, quicksilver in its reaction to a planned, well-executed choreography and its attendant arbitrariness. In performing the nation, folk dances show the dialectical relations of “Western” forms with movement motifs from Philippine dances as the two meld and mesh, prompting a continuous deferral of readings and meanings.

Author Selection and Challenges

There is a dearth of scholars writing about dance in the Philippines and about Philippine dance beyond geographic borders. In the country today, there is a small but growing pool of historians, ethnographers, and critics who are dedicated to dance scholarship. The relatively few but landmark publications in dance studies and Philippine dance include: *Philippine National Dances* (1946) by Francisca Reyes Tolentino (later Aquino); *Philippine Dance: Mainstream and Crosscurrents* (1978) by Reynaldo Alejandro; *The Dances of the Emerald Isles* (1980) by Leonor Orosa-Goquingco; *Pangalay: Traditional Dances and Related Folk Artistic Expressions* (1983) by Ligaya Fernando Amilbangsa; *Bayanihan* (1987) by the Bayanihan Folk Arts Center; *Subli: One Dance in Four Voices* (1989) by Elena Mirano; *Body, Movement, and Culture: Kinesthetic and Visual Symbolism in a Philippine Community* (1992) by Sally Ann Ness; *Sayaw: Dances of the Philippine Islands* (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2010, 2014) by Larry Gabao and Franco Velas; *Defiant Daughters Dancing: Three Independent Women Dance* (2002) by Rina Angela Corpus; *Classics Collection of Philippine Folk Dances* (2006, 2007, 2008 in series) by the Folk Dance Society (PFDS); *Treading Through: 45 Years of Philippine Dance* (2006); the four-volume collection of essays *Walking Through Philippine Theater* (2012) by Basilio Esteban Villaruz; *The Day the Dancers Stayed: Performing in the Philippine /American Diaspora* (2010) by Theodore S. Gonzalves; *Philippine Neo-Ethnic Choreography: A Creative Process* (2012) by

Agnes Locsin; and the documentaries *Ati-Atihan Lives* (2013) and *Dancing Manilenyos* (2018) by Patrick Alcedo.

Thanks to two dance editions of the *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (1994 and 2018, edited by Basilio Esteban Villaruz) and the 2019 online and updated version (edited by Rosalie Matilac and Ruth Pison), practitioners and/or researchers who contribute to scholarship on various dance forms, historical developments, and major institutions and personalities in Philippine dance have increased in number. In this regard, this special issue of the Department of English and Comparative Literature (DECL) journal stands on and builds from publications along the lines of the encyclopedia.

The strength of the DECL has always been its faculty whose fields of interest and areas of expertise traverse various disciplines. The degree programs of the Department: Language Studies, Literature, and Creative Writing have changed their configurations over the years as a result of various developments in academe, both in the Philippines and abroad. Many of the scholarly works produced in the DECL bear witness to the rich interdisciplinary excursions of its scholars. While some of its faculty have made language and literature and creative writing their disciplinary base, some have moved to other fields yet retain critical conversations with the “mother” department. We, Patrick Alcedo and Ruth Jordana L. Pison, former students and, in the latter case, also a member of the faculty of the DECL, consider co-editing this issue as an act of collaboration, a way of choreographing a common interest, in dance.

The articles here underwent a double-blind review and selection process. Regina Salvaña Bautista, Myra Beltran, Monica Fides Amada Santos, and Bryan Levina Viray, like the editors, have connections with the University of the Philippines (UP). Bautista, a graduate of UP’s BA in Dance, a program Basilio Esteban Villaruz founded, finished her MA in Dance at York University under Alcedo’s supervisorship. Beltran completed her MA in Comparative Literature at the DECL and has worked closely with Pison. Before pursuing her PhD in Anthropology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Santos received training in the same

discipline in UP, where she took ballet classes in the University's Extension Program that Corazon C. Dioquino of the College of Music and her father Ramon Santos, the country's National Artist for Music and former Dean of the College, helped establish. Viray, who has joined the faculty of UP's Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts, was first trained in Theater Studies at the College of Arts and Letters before specializing in Dance Studies and Laban Movement Analysis in Europe.

Also contributing their expertise to this issue are film maker Sherad Sanchez, an alumnus of the Ateneo de Manila University, and Filipino-American J. Lorenzo Perillo, an assistant professor at the University of Illinois, Chicago. While conducting his fieldwork in Manila for a PhD in Culture and Performance at the University of California Los Angeles, Perillo had conversed with Pison and Villaruz on the development of folk dance and contemporary dance practices in the country.

The scholars and practitioners here examine the multiple narratives that inform movement, dance, and performance in relation to cultural, religious, and national identities. The four essays by Santos, Bautista, Viray, and Perillo demonstrate the ways in which dance is a narrative vehicle in which bodies in performance exhibit a complexly rich and plural nature and narrative of Filipino national identities within and beyond the Philippine archipelago.

In Santos' "Philippine Folk Dances: A Story of a Nation," folk dance is examined against the background of nation formation. By historicizing the role of folk dance in imagining the Philippine nation, Santos discusses the critical role dance plays in representing the different peoples of the Philippines. She problematizes how folk dances across the Philippines possess assumed and implied indigenous/authentic identities, an originary narrative of the nation. Locating folk dance in the crux of colonial politics, she theorizes on the reason behind folk dance's sense of authenticity—it is generally linked to "social functions," as manifested in how it is categorized: "ritual dances," "the life-cycle dances," and "occupational dances." She is critical of the way folk/ethnic dances are generally presented as static

cultural forms, as sourced from indigenous communities belonging only to the past in the narrative of the nation.

For Santos, it is important to consider the dynamic nature of cultural and dance forms, all of them having particular historical trajectories that may or may not intersect with one another. She focuses on the contributions of Francisca Reyes-Aquino and Agnes Locsin in understanding Philippine dance. Reyes-Aquino's research on folkdance and Locsin's Neo-ethnic ballet that combines indigenous movements with ballet's vocabulary have paved the way for a clearer understanding of the Filipinos' hybrid identity. These works prompt the unpacking of what is called "Philippine dance" and encourage further exploration on various dance traditions in the country as a way of discovering other ways of narrativizing identities.

Also investigating the hybrid nature of Filipino identity and movement traditions, Bautista's "Syncretic Choreography in Philippine Dance Theater: Dance Narratives of Interstitiality and *Kapwa*" argues on the side of the syncretic nature of works by three Filipino choreographers: National Artist for Dance Alice Reyes, multi-awarded choreographer Agnes Locsin, and folk dancer Al Garcia. Bautista takes Reyes' *Amada* (1970), Locsin's *Encantada* (1992), and Garcia's *Tau-Luwa* (2016) as examples of 'syncretic choreography' which combines conventions of American modern dance with Philippine folk dance. As performative articulations of interstitiality, syncretic choreographies are constructed through difference and, in the Philippine context, relational similarity. Her discussion brings to light how the "Filipino-ness" of the choreographic works emerges as narratives not just of identity but also of the choreographers' sense of *Kapwa*, the concept of relationship or relating to one another. In the works of Reyes, Locsin, and Garcia, Bautista shows how the combination of Philippine folk dances and American modern dance codes of theatrical performance paves the way for the generation of a variety of meanings, characterized by tensions and intertextualities. Furthermore, the works are significant not only as articulations of movement combinations but also as emanations of in-betweenness. The works emerge from spaces occupied and traversed

by choreographers whose personal narratives are characterized by either short-term migrations or internal migrations. From these interstitial spaces, they interrogate notions of what it means to be Filipino and what Philippine dance is.

In “The Figure of Mary as Choreographic Basis,” Viray discusses the dancerly attitude—the quality of movement, the orientation of the body, gestures, sound, verbal articulations, and other performative elements—in the *bati* (greeting), a dance performed during the Holy Week procession of the *salubong* as it re-enacts the first encounter of Jesus Christ and the Mater Dolorosa upon the former’s resurrection. Having participated in the procession as an angel and later as a choreographer of the dance, Viray describes the various narratives surrounding the figure of the Virgin Mary and how narratives of Marian devotion inform not only the elements and choreography of the *bati* but also configure the dancerly attitude of its performers.

In contrast to other performances during the Lenten Season, in which the figure of Jesus Christ takes center stage, in the *salubong* which takes place on the last day of the Holy Week, the Virgin Mary is the central figure. Focusing on the *bati* in the Southern Tagalog towns of Angono in Rizal and Boac in Marinduque, Viray studies the particular ways in which community members execute the *bati*. To him, the dancerly attitude is enriched by complementing the narratives of the Virgin Mary surrounding the *bati* with an examination of place, space, and time. For Viray, four dimensions constitute the performance of the *bati*: bodily attitude, spatial attitude, the physical attitude, and the affective attitude. These dimensions coexist within the context of religious and social narratives.

Perillo’s “‘This is the Filipino Scene for Me’: Ethnicity, Gender, and Hip-Hop Dance in Hawai’i” looks into the complex formation of identity of the Filipino youth in Hawai’i through the local O’ahu Hip-Hop scene. Perillo elaborates on the discourse of spatiality in b-boying and b-girling vis-à-vis the New York Hip-Hop definitions of authenticity. Clarifying the usage of b-boying and b-girling as counter-terms to the more popular term

“breakdance,” he teases out the cultural significance of the former within social and political contexts of postcolonial narrativity, ethnicity, and gender in Hawai’i. His space-based framework works through the nuances of Hawai’i’s breaking culture, comparing and contrasting local practices to those in New York, assumed to be the place of authentic Hip-Hop dance culture.

Perillo’s fieldwork in numerous Hip-Hop performance sites in O’ahu, Hawai’i and elsewhere in the US between 2005 and 2007 brings to light the entanglement of ethnicity with Hip-Hop. Although the dynamics between gender and Hip-hop reinforces gender binarism, elements in the dance form, like battle design and movements, nonetheless bring to the surface counter narratives of diasporic Filipino identities. Perillo’s particular subject-position as a dancer and choreographer born in Hawai’I but raised in the mainland US has provided him with a sense of kinship with Filipino communities. His own positionality is as complex as the Hip-hop dance scene in Honolulu, particularly manifested in the Monarchy dance competition (2007) which presented new ways of using space in “constructing, affirming, and challenging” the “ambiguous” position of Filipinos not only in O’ahu but also in the context of Philippine-American relations.

In the conversation between Beltran and Sanchez, and introduced by Pison, the semiotic and phenomenological nature of movement and dance in film are explored. Based on their collaborative projects, Beltran and Sanchez thresh out and process their concepts of time, space, movement, and narrativity. Their exchange of ideas “trouble” the potential of dance film to narrate through the platform of screen.

Coming Home, Together

Editing this special issue is a “coming home” of sorts to its editors Alcedo and Pison—all the more in this period of interdisciplinarity when

the themes of “language”, “dance”, “the body”, and “narrativity”, which in the past may have taken residence in other disciplinary provinces, are now intentionally made to travel through each other to create pathways towards the formation of what could be the field of Philippine Dance Studies. This journal is also a coming together of friends, scholars, and teachers of dance. Although the contributors take off from diverse fields of expertise, they have wedded particular disciplinary frameworks and methods to a common object of study—Philippine dance. As a group, they provide various contrapuntal voices in the world of dance. It is in the telling of Philippine dance, of narrativizing Filipino bodies that choreograph it, that they, too, come to terms with the plurality of Filipino culture and the deft responsiveness of Filipinos in locating and shaping identity.

Finally, in this introduction, the editors give due recognition to dancer, choreographer, scholar, and teacher, and ardent champion of researcher Esteban Basilio Villaruz—“Tatay Steve”—who continues to be an influential figure in the world of Philippine dance. His Preface to this issue is also a coming home. He was a faculty member of the DECL—from 1966 to 1968—before he decided to dedicate his life to dance. In the 1980s, he helped establish a four-year dance diploma degree at the UP College of Music where he still teaches. Villaruz’s publications on dance and performance, commencing in the 1950s, has helped provide the intellectual stimulus and energy to inspire the current generation of dance historians and critics to further research on Philippine dance such as those found in this special issue.

Alcedo and Pison, together with the scholars and dance artists here, intend to encourage others to continue pushing the boundaries of Philippine dance towards critical thinking through ethnography, historiography, and textual and movement analysis. This publication hopes to create an ecosystem around Philippine dance where elements such as narrativity can thrive and where lives can take on specificity and attunement, choreographically co-existing with a flourish.

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