

## Dance Studies Colloquium Program 2024-25

### FALL 2024:

Thursday, September 12, 2024, 3-4:30pm (TPAC Chapel)

**Brenda Dixon-Gottschild** (emerita, Temple University)

“Challenges, Chances, Changes — My Object Lesson in Reclaiming my Time”

This biographical reflection is based on a decades-long career as performer, professor, scholar, writer. Diversity, inclusion, and the peculiar career trajectory of an elder African-American woman are implicit in this herstory that unfolds as a powerpoint-performance-lecture-conversation. My perspective is personal—thus, the “my object lesson” in the title. Integral to this event is audience participation at the close of my staged presentation. Rather than the usual “talk-back” format, I will facilitate a post-presentation “reflexive reflection,” utilizing an original approach that I developed over many years and several iterations.

**Brenda Dixon Gottschild** is the author of *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*; *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era* (winner of the 2001 Congress on Research in Dance Award for Outstanding Scholarly Dance Publication); *The Black Dancing Body—A Geography from Coon to Cool* (winner, 2004 de la Torre Bueno prize for scholarly excellence in dance publication); and *Joan Myers Brown and The Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina—A Biohistory of American Performance*.

Thursday, October 17, 2024, 3-4:30pm (TPAC Chapel)

**Lester Tome** (Smith College)”

Theory and Choreographies of Transculturation in Cuban Ballet”

The Ballet Nacional de Cuba’s choreographic output from the 1960s and 70s illustrates how anthropologist Fernando Ortiz’s influential theory of transculturation informed the Cuban Revolution’s cultural policy and institutional discourse on dance. Titles such as Alberto Alonso’s *Carmen* (1967) and Alberto Méndez’s *Ad libitum* (1978) integrated ballet, Africanisms and Spanish elements through choreographic strategies of fusion, juxtaposition and *contrapunteo*/counterpoint. This repertoire embodied key Ortizean theses—e.g., the tension between cultural synthesis and heterogeneity, the open-ended formulation of culture as a process rather than a product. However, the Ballet Nacional’s discourse on this choreographic production also reveals how the Ortizean premise that transculturation is perpetual and fueled by never-ending social conflict ultimately stood at odds with the state’s teleological proposition that the Revolution was the concluding chapter in Cuban history, a political regime in which the conflicts at the heart of nation had supposedly ended.

**Lester Tomé** is an associate professor at Smith College, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on dance theory. He studies the development of ballet in Cuba in the contexts of early twentieth-century avant-gardism, the Cuban Revolution, and contemporary migration and transnationalism. His research, supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Humanities Center and Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, has appeared in *Dance Research Journal*, *Dance Chronicle*, *Cuban Studies*, *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet* and *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, among other publications.

Thursday, November 21, 2024, 3-4:30pm (TPAC Chapel)

**Ananya Chatterjea** (University of Minnesota)

"On Dancing from Located Mobilities: Ruminations on Transnational Feminist Choreography."

In this talk, I will share reflections on my journey towards embracing a transnational portal into choreographic practice, and the complications that entails. What are the moral imperatives of this moment in dancing and dance-making? How do we invite artists, especially students, to move sensitively, with care, and an understanding of temporal and spatial "entanglement" as articulated by Achille Mbembe? Might dancing's presence-full practice enable us to cultivate a layered awareness and kinesthetic expressivity?

**Ananya Chatterjea's** work as choreographer, dancer, and thinker brings together Contemporary Dance, social justice choreography, and a commitment to healing justice. She is the Artistic Director of Ananya Dance Theatre (ADT), a professional ensemble company of Black and brown artists dancing social justice choreography. Ananya is a 2011 Guggenheim Choreography Fellow, a 2012 and 2021 McKnight Choreography Fellow, a 2016, Joyce Award recipient, a 2018 UBW Choreographic Center Fellow, a 2019 Dance/USA Artist Fellow, and the 2021 A. P. Andersen Award. As Professor of Dance at the University of Minnesota, Ananya teaches courses in Dance Studies, contemporary practice, and Choreographing Social Justice. Her second book, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (2020, Palgrave MacMillan), re-framing understandings of Contemporary Dance from the perspective of dance-makers from global south locations, was awarded the 2022 Brockett Book Prize by Dance Studies Association. Her most recent book, an edited anthology, *Dancing Transnational Feminisms: Ananya Dance Theatre and the Art of Social Justice*, was published by University of Washington Press in 2022.

## SPRING 2025:

Thursday, January 23, 2025, 3-4:30pm (TPAC Chapel)

**Janice Ross** (Stanford University):

"The Dancer's Home as A Hidden Archive: Anna Halprin's Dance Deck"

This talk theorizes domestic spaces and objects in a dancer's home as hidden archives of aesthetic invention. It posits four objects from the mid-century modern home of the dancer Anna Halprin and the Urban Designer Lawrence Halprin's Northern California residence - stairs, chairs, decks

and windows - as strong influences shaping both Halprins' movement invention and choreography. Through a close reading of one of these, the large redwood deck on the side of the Halprin property, known internationally as "The Dance Deck," this talk traces the confluence of nature, landscape and the body in performance. Designed collaboratively by theater and lighting designer Arch Lauterer, and Lawrence Halprin, this open-air laboratory was where Anna grew the dance works that defined her as a leading contemporary dance artist. The most famous feature of the Halprin property, this platform cantilevering off the hillside below the Halprin home, is where for 70 years thousands of dancers from around the world came to study, perform, and observe. Working in the midst of nature on this dance surface punctured by the trunks of Madrone trees, Halprin and her students stretched dance's boundaries. The result was a radical rethinking of scale, norms, and gestural repertoires of bodies as performing mediums. The material for this talk is drawn from Janice Ross's newest book; *The Choreography of Environments*, (Oxford University Press, Spring 2025).

Thursday, March 20, 2025, 3-4:30pm (TPAC Chapel)

**Joellen Meglin** (Temple University)

"Overcoming Invisibility: Ruth Page and the Intermedial Space"

In writing *Ruth Page: The Woman in the Work*, I discovered that Page evolved two essential strategies to overcome her disempowerment as a woman working in the ballet world, where men dominated (and continue to dominate today) as choreographers, directors of major ballet companies, and impresarios. First, she collaborated extensively with artists who worked in different arts media; and second—and as a direct consequence of the first strategy—she explored *intermediality*, or the process of imagining and synthesizing ideas across media. Both strategies contained built-in mechanisms to enhance her artistic output and further her development as a choreographic artist. In this presentation, I make my argument and offer extended examples of how Page practiced these strategies in different decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thriving in the intermedial space as she the generated "audio-kinetic [dance] art," "danced poetry," and "televised ballet noir."

Thursday, April 3, 2025, 3-4:30pm (TPAC Chapel).

**Susan Jones** (Oxford University)

"Gestural Remains: Confinement, Narrative, and Kinesthetics in Samuel Beckett's 'Residua'"

Mark Nixon identified the 'Residua' as a group of texts produced during a discrete period of experimentation in Samuel Beckett's prose writing, beginning in 1964 and continuing with a series of short texts "that concentrates on the workings of the imagination in order to construct geometrically defined 'closed spaces', in which human figures are placed or rather arranged" in apocalyptic habitats in a Dantean limbo. Movement in these spaces constitutes a mathematically calibrated form of action, executed with absolute precision of pace and rhythm. Beckett experiments radically with what might constitute the confinement by geometry of "the gestural". His apparently arbitrary turn to the choreographic here supports an (often unacknowledged)

political strain. When we consider Beckett's "borrowing" from classical geometries in these texts in relation to early modern dance theory we illuminate a common philosophical tension of authoritarian imposition of form and figure (on the social group), with the individual pathos of human expression. In a bizarre way, in spite of their obsessively mathematical utterances, Beckett's radical texts express through minute gestures, the very meaning of lyricism, and of the 'passion of humanity' that the eighteenth-century dance theorist, Noverre had demanded when he asked for a shift away from the stale ornamentation of balletic posing to the practice of narrative in *ballet d'action*.