

Rethinking Dance History

The need to 'rethink' and question the nature of dance history has not diminished since the first edition of *Rethinking Dance History* (2004). This revised second edition addresses the needs of an ever-evolving field, with new contributions including, for example: new archival practices; the subtleties of gender and ethnic inclusivity in creating historical narratives; and the increasing importance of performing dances from the past as a route to historical knowledge.

A two-part structure divides the book's contributions into:

- Why Dance History? – the ideas, issues and key conversations that underpin the study of dance history.
- Researching and Writing – discussions of the methodologies and approaches behind successful research in this area.

Everyone involved with dance creates and carries with them a history, and this volume explores the ways in which these histories inform a sense of the past – from memories which establish identity to re-invention or preservation through shared and personal heritages. Considering the potential significance of studying dance history for scholars, philosophers, choreographers, dancers and students alike, *Rethinking Dance History* is an essential starting point for anyone intrigued by the rich history of dance.

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Rethinking Dance History

Issues and Methodologies

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Lorraine Nicholas

Second edition published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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First edition published by Routledge 2004

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Morris, Geraldine, author, compiler, editor. | Nicholas, Lorraine, author, compiler, editor.

Title: Rethinking dance history : issues and methodologies /
[compiled and edited by] Geraldine Morris and Lorraine Nicholas.

Description: Second edition. | Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY :
Routledge, 2017. | Revised edition of: Rethinking dance history :
a reader / edited by Alexandra Carter. 2004. | Includes
bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016057909 | ISBN 9781138682900 (Hardback) |
ISBN 9781138682917 (Paperback) | ISBN 9781315544854 (eBook)

Subjects: LCSH: Dance—History.

Classification: LCC GV1781 .R48 2017 | DDC 792.809—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016057909>

ISBN: 978-1-138-68290-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-68291-7 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-54485-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Bell Gothic and Perpetua
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Giannandrea Poesio (1959–2017), historian and teacher, colleague and friend.

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Preface to the second edition

THIS SECOND EDITION of *Rethinking Dance History* builds on the scholarship of the earlier volume (2004). Edited by Alexandra Carter, it set a benchmark for the study of dance history in the twenty-first century.

In considering the structure and contents of the new edition we have taken into account new research in the dance history field over the intervening decade, as well as the needs of students and scholars as we perceive them now. As with the first edition, this is a volume dedicated to the discipline of dance history and not a history of dance with what that implies in terms of 'landmarks' in the development of the art form. In revising, we have had in mind how new approaches to thinking about the past have influenced the way we investigate dance history and its continuing importance to the field of dance studies. That said, we acknowledge that theory from other disciplines is also a significant factor in historical investigation and to issues of time, continuity and change, which we consider to be the essence of dance history. As Carter remarked in the first edition, 'Almost everything we do carries an historical dimension. . . . History is, therefore, woven into all our studies' (2004: 1).

Our aim is to provide as broad a scope as possible in dance history's issues and methodologies. Newly commissioned essays have been added to ones retained from the first edition to display some of the rich innovative material that has developed since the publication of the first edition some twelve years ago, but we are adamant that all of those essays from the first edition retain their validity and should be sought out on library shelves. However, this is not a complete guide to the field; rather it is indicative of *some* of the 'rethinkings' that continue to enliven dance history and which must do so into the future. It would never be possible in such a volume as this to encompass historical issues in every dance genre, historical period or geographical area. All of our

contributors have something stimulating to contribute, which should lead the reader into thinking afresh about the histories of dance forms, times and locations in which they are most interested.

The original structure, which was arranged in one roughly chronological sequence, has been revised, so that this new edition has two sections: Part 1: *Why Dance History?* and Part 2: *Researching and Writing*. A new subtitle for the book indicates this focus: *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*. We have pedagogical reasons for this structure in encouraging students to read consecutive essays around linking historical issues, but we recognise how these categories are not hermetically sealed. For this reason, our editorial introductions to each part range over the whole volume, pulling together related ideas.

We thank Routledge for deciding to produce this second edition and acknowledge the guidance of Ben Piggott and Kate Edwards there, who have been helpful, considerate and efficient at responding to our queries. Managing our copyediting and typesetting, Autumn Spalding of Apex CoVantage has given us consistent and much appreciated support through the final complexities of getting into print. Our special thanks to our contributors, who have provided us with material that is both stimulating and controversial. Above all, we need to thank Alexandra Carter, who by declining Routledge's original call to re-edit the volume which so much bore her imprint has allowed us this very exciting opportunity. It has been difficult to follow in her footsteps and we do so aware of how far we need to go in emulating her vision.

Geraldine Morris
Lorraine Nicholas

Chapter 3

Beyond fixity

Akram Khan on the politics of dancing heritages

ROYONA MITRA

Introduction

THERE HAS BEEN a long-standing western tendency to view non-western performance traditions as fossilised and monolithic heritages that must be preserved. Furthermore, artists of colour who train in these non-western traditions are seen as bearers of these antiquated and ‘authentic’ pasts, incapable of speaking to and for the present.¹ The label ‘contemporary *kathak*’, which has often been applied by scholars and critics alike to the works of the influential British Bangladeshi dancer/choreographer Akram Khan, perpetuates such limited and limiting thinking.² Khan’s unique aesthetic arises out of his embodied negotiations between his training in multiple movement vocabularies and his complex identity politics as a London-based, second-generation British Bangladeshi, and a father to children of mixed racial and cultural heritages with his Japanese partner. Yet, despite these obvious multilayered complexities that catalyse Khan’s art-making, it is his training in the north Indian classical dance style of *kathak* that remains the primary lens through which his art is received and perceived within the British and global dance landscape.

Assuming that Khan’s *kathak* becomes contemporary only when it comes into contact with his western dance training, the label ‘contemporary *kathak*’ equates contemporisation with westernisation, and reinforces that therefore, in and of itself, *kathak* belongs to a culturally monolithic past. This is of course far from the truth. My monograph *Akram Khan: Dancing New Interculturalism* (2015) launches from this critical position, dismantling the problematic nature of the label itself, and arguing instead, that while Khan’s work is popularly believed to be contemporising *kathak*, it is in fact transforming the contemporary British and global dance landscape in fundamentally intercultural ways, through his dramaturgical interventions that derive

from his *kathak* training. Consequently, Khan is also starting to transform the ways in which *kathak*'s characteristic components, such as *abhinaya*, the expressive, emotive and codified modalities through which its storytelling occurs, are reinvented and made pertinent to a twenty-first-century British diasporic context. Khan's approach to dance making is therefore characterised by a continuous and oscillatory relationship between and across temporalities, while he weaves his embodied knowledge of the past into his multidimensional and ever-changing present, signalling his futures as both unpredictable and therefore full of unknown possibilities, waiting to be discovered.

In this interview with Akram Khan I challenge western ideas that continue to perpetuate non-western performance traditions, such as *kathak*, as fixed, ancient and monolithic. I seek ways to question and extend our understanding of Khan's embodiment of multiple and intercultural dance heritages. I ask Khan to speak of his relationships to multilayered temporalities that simultaneously signal and embody intercultural pasts, presents and futures. In doing so I argue for the dancing body as an ongoing and unfolding living history that can claim a plurality of heritages with equal prowess, and that can dismantle western ideas of non-western cultural heritages as contained and unchanging.

My intellectual framework unfolds in and through a set of interview questions that I formulated while watching Khan in rehearsal with the English National Ballet for his interpretation of *Giselle* on 19 May 2016 in London. Witnessing Khan and three English National Ballet dancers working trans-historically through multiple dance heritages in order to give birth to new embodied manifestations of movement and gestures in and through these ballet-codified bodies seemed like a fortuitous framing context for this interview. In his introductory chat with the dancers at the start of the rehearsal, Khan candidly admitted that for him, the making of *Giselle* is an open-ended process, full of unanswered questions. He made it clear that he was not coming in with predetermined answers, and that their participation through embodied research was crucial to discovering answers together. He shared how he is still in search of a codified gestural language for his *Giselle* that is distinct to both ballet's and *kathak*'s codified conventions, but one that will speak to his twenty-first-century retelling of the classical narrative. He explained the highly sophisticated nature of *kathak*'s gestural codes, describing its nuanced distinctions, for example, between the gestures for greeting one's mother, one's lover and one's teacher. He demonstrated the codified use of the *palta*, the pure movement prelude that consists of a stylised turn performed by a solo *kathak* dancer to signal her shift from one character or theme to another, and then encouraged one of the dancers to discover his own embodiment of the *palta*, so as to use it as a signpost to audiences of his intention to shift between different characterisations. Khan's approach with the ballet dancers was to allow them to discover their own ways to embody a movement or even a principle, giving them the agency to transform his material, in order to own the gestures as their

own. What was apparent from witnessing this corporeal translation process was Khan's emphasis on embracing errors, to foreground the spirit of experimentation before finding the gestures that felt most embodied, and exploiting the inevitable awkwardness that surfaced in the ballet bodies as part of these tricky processes of translations. It is in these very moments of exposing vulnerabilities and imperfections that a new aesthetic emerged, moving dance histories and heritages forward in dynamic and energising ways.

Interview

RM:

What does 'dancing heritages' mean to you in relation to your evolving artistic and aesthetic practices?

AK:

I think it is an embodied record of time, but it is not one-dimensional – instead it is the embodiment of past, present and future. It does not signal just the past and it does not belong just within one time frame. Heritage is like a museum, but one that keeps collecting, because its doors are always open. It is a living museum.

RM:

How would you distinguish between 'dance heritage' and 'dancing heritage'?

AK:

For me, 'dance heritage' is inheriting a body of information through training while 'dancing heritage' is knowledge. Knowledge that is inhabited, relived, transformed to become reflective of an artist's unique truth. Information is what we receive from the outside, we witness something, we experience it through our eyes and our five senses. This is data that we assimilate and then we absorb it. But knowledge is when we process this information from within and it becomes embedded within us.

RM:

You talked about truth – what do you mean by truth?

AK:

Yes, truth is a difficult concept to talk about because it is as ambiguous and slippery as spirituality. In Sufism the second you take God's name 'Allah', God disappears. It is in between the inhalation and the exhalation of the first syllable that God is believed to exist. It's the same with truth – it is never one thing, it is never concrete, you cannot pin it down, and the meaning of truth changes constantly even to oneself. So when I say truth, I suppose I refer to an artist's reality, which is constantly changing.

RM:

You have clearly described that you view 'dancing heritages' as a process of ongoing knowledge production. But as a dance artist of colour, how do you think other people view your relationship to 'dancing heritage'?

AK:

It depends on who is viewing me. If it is from a White perspective, I think they find my dancing of heritage fascinating and exotic. And if it is from a South Asian or a brown perspective, then they would feel that I have no heritage, until and unless I am doing pure classical work.

RM:

How do you feel about both these perceptions?

AK:

I feel nothing; it doesn't bother me. But it has taken me time to get to this mindset. It's only in recent times that I am all right with it, because I know my flaws and my strengths and I know what I am doing, because I am comfortable to not know what I am doing most of the time. And that means I know I am doing something right by not knowing what I am doing. And I know that I always turn to my classical heritages for inspiration in order to move forward.

RM:

I know your relationship to the label 'contemporary kathak' has changed over the years. Could you talk me through your journey vis-à-vis this label?

AK:

I was naïve. It is something Farooq termed with me . . . actually to be honest with you, people started to label my work as such and then we stuck with it.³ I don't know what it means actually – contemporary kathak. I haven't seen anybody do it yet. But then again, what Maharajji was doing thirty years back was moving kathak forward. Kumudini Lakhia moved kathak forward.⁴ They added things to it; repertoire, ways of thinking that nobody had done before them. Maybe that in its time was a contemporary moment for kathak. But where the definition dies, where is the edge of that definition of contemporary, where is the edge of kathak, I don't know. But that is how I would now perceive the label. And I also think it is too limiting. It is limiting because we are living in a cultural moment determined by technology and global economics – and this is both a good and bad thing. People have access to YouTube. We are able to borrow from every culture because we have easy access and because we want to learn – this open access is as exciting as it is problematic of course. My own key interest, however, is in the body, so I don't want to simply replicate and mimic a form, but want to use new information gathered from these sources as stimulus within bodies, in order to see how these bodies are transformed by it.

RM:

How do you feel when artists of colour who work between classical and contemporary languages, such as yourself, are viewed as fixed and antiquated bearers of particular traditions?

AK:

I think it's . . . erm . . . problematic. It's, erm, it's everything that I fight against. Erm, I, fought Pina Bausch on it. We had a huge debate, let's say. I have immense respect for her; she has been a huge influence in my life. She invited me to perform in a dance festival. And she wanted to programme me on the same evening with Malavika Sarukkai, the award-winning Indian bharatnatyam exponent. And I asked why. She said because there is something very specific about the aesthetic that belongs to a particular cultural context and time, and yours belongs to the present time and hers is fixed. It's history. It was a very personal dialogue that we had, just her and me, and it wasn't an argument but a real debate, because I was really resisting performing alongside Malavika. Firstly, because I love her as a dancer, but more importantly I didn't want to be put into that bracket, because I didn't like the way people generally think of Indian classical dance. Which is it's a bit like a dinosaur, preserved in a museum. But at the same time, I do feel we have an issue right now. Because unless we get people like Pandit Durgalal, Maharajji, Nahidji, Kumudini Lakhia, artists of that calibre but of today's generation, nobody is going to take kathak forward. It will start to dilute and die away. I feel that there are some artists like Aditi Mangaldas, who are pushing from within, but it has to be of that calibre. People like Aditi who know the form to break it from within. But I strongly resisted being put on in the same evening as Malavika, but Pina being Pina, I gave in ultimately because I have so much respect for her. But the point was I did not want to represent the present and the future and Malavika the past; it isn't as simplistic and black and white as that.

RM:

Do you think with hindsight, had she asked you now, would you have done it?

AK:

No, I wouldn't have.

RM:

You have already mentioned that your relationship to time in your art-making is complex and that you constantly negotiate past, present and future simultaneously in your works. That it is in this cross-temporal treatment of gestures that you invent new ones. Could you explain this further?

AK:

I would love to say I invent something. But I think the truth is I find them, I discover them by accident or by questioning and putting people into interesting situations. I believe that

everything is old, the present is already in the past, because the light that you and I see now and that enables us to see is already eight minutes old. So the present is the past. And for me the past is also connected to the future, because I think of everything cyclically. For example say with my daughter, the state I leave the earth in she will inherit. So her future is my present, but will also be my past. It is all interconnected. So personal histories and inheritances also form a crucial part of my work, because I play with memory a lot.

RM:

Could you talk about how memory and heritage interplay in your work?

AK:

Memory is something that is fascinating for me, because memory is a lie, a fabrication. And the older the memory, the more you have filled in the blanks. And I find that whole process fascinating. So, for example the story I say in the opening of Zero Degrees, not entirely all of it is true, and the reason I say this is because my cousin has pointed this out to me, saying that is not how it happened.⁵ But then even his memory of the event is not entirely true. Memory for me is a tremendous fuel and resource in my creative process, because it is stuff we have lived through and experienced and is highly charged with emotional triggers. So you see a woman wearing a yellow coat with brown shoes, and you suddenly connect with that. But what you are perhaps connecting with is the memory of maybe your mother, and she had a yellow bag and the brown shoes belonged to your father's sister who passed away, but the brain plays a trick and replaces details and fabricates a new association for you.

RM:

And then this instance can become the fuel for further deconstruction of memory in your work . . .

AK:

Yes, absolutely. We have to find ways to deal with memory of course, because they often come with trauma or even beautiful joy. And the way we survive and deal with those memories is to fabricate them.

RM:

Watching you rehearse today in the ballet world with ballet bodies, it was wonderful to see the vulnerability in you as you undertake this journey of absorbing new knowledge through this process. It made me wonder what it is like for you to work with and between multiple heritages, particularly two classical heritages of ballet and *kathak*. How are you negotiating between these worlds?

AK:

Until this point, I have never really worked with multiple heritages, but I have worked with multiple cultures. But the dancers I work with, even though they are contemporary

technique-trained, sometimes come to the process with their own cultural art forms. For example someone from Vietnam might bring to our process training in Vietnamese dance, so their embodied knowledge of these heritages will always bleed into the process. And of course their personal inheritance of memories will always inform my performance-making processes. But here, with English National Ballet, lies a significant shift because when working with ballet, it is clearly a very distinct and codified heritage. Even at a physical level, ballet is ethereal and anti-gravity, trying to reach the sky. Kathak is grounded through weighted contact between the ground and the feet. One is trying to defy gravity and the other is using gravity. Kathak works on a horizontal plane, ballet works on a vertical plane. When I decided to work with ballet bodies in collaboration with English National Ballet I told myself that I should not look back one day on the work and think, my dancers could have done this better, because then there is no point doing this in the first place, because I would not have tapped into their technique, their language. I will have both betrayed their language and learnt nothing in the process. All I will have learnt is just how badly my aesthetic can be delivered. And vice versa. So I knew I had to meet them halfway. It's interesting because if you had asked me this question ten years ago, my ego would have been in the way, because then I was predominantly a performer. But now, since I have already started to psychologically let that status go and accepted that my interest now lies in choreography, that involves learning new things and putting myself into vulnerable situations. And I feel that because of this, my work is getting richer. Because it is no longer about me, it's about the work. And it is no longer about me carrying an entire performance – it's about the dancers carrying the work. And that had always been challenging when I was in the company pieces. So with this process, I am deeply invested in learning about their ballet vocabulary, which I didn't even do with Sylvie.⁶ With the English National Ballet, I am working with so many of them that it has the danger of failing and looking like they are simply embodying somebody else's information if I don't tap into their own information. And I have worked with other bodies with other coded information. But what I am interested in here is I don't ask the question 'What do I do to them?', but I ask, 'What do they do to my language and where are they going to take my language?' And they are changing the language in unimaginable ways because my own body is not present, because my body is limited by flexibility. I have more legwork in ENB's work than ever before. I hardly jump in my performances – it is just not my strength. I can't point my feet, so I have never had a clear line, my upper half, yes, perhaps. But had my body been able to do these things, my own language would have been different. But because I couldn't, it is these ballet dancers that are taking my language elsewhere. And this is exciting.

RM:

How do you feel about the framing of your work as an evolving and living archive, instead of fixed and immovable?

AK:

It's interesting because talking about archives, we are archiving stuff, like say our costumes from previous performances at the Victoria & Albert Museum. So on the one hand, we are

starting to consider our legacy, so people can tap into it. But legacy is about the future. So it is a big contradiction for me because the pieces going into the museum belong to the past. The costumes I probably won't ever wear again; they have happened. But my perception of them is still changing and ongoing. So even though we decided to archive the items in agreement with me and the board of the company, I like to think of it in the same vein as Merce Cunningham did and I could be wrong, but I think he said that when he died his work should die with him . . .

RM:

And I believe the Indian choreographer Chandralekha said the same thing . . .

AK:

Ah, really? If someone were to ask me to hand over my past works to them as legacy, to be remade and reinterpreted in order for them to live as my repertoire after I die, I would have conflicting views on this issue of dance legacy. I think every moment is fleeting and the realities in which I make a certain work change, and so the contexts change. However, someone else fifty years from now, working with my material, will find their own reality in and through them. So my work could evolve in new ways through someone else's treatment of it. It's like Big Dance — it's not the choreography I have made, it's the pledge by the Bollywood group, the elderly group, the taxi drivers, the blind group — they have all made their own versions of this dance with the rules I have given them to the same music.⁷ And this is, in effect, a microcosmic example of a living legacy, panning out in the moment. So I have conflicting feelings about it.

RM:

How do you think your work differs from your peers who are other artists of colour?

AK:

I have a feeling that there has been a generational shift in the attitude towards performance making. I don't want to say this, but perhaps, I am guessing, that Sidi Larbi and I embraced and brought about a change for our generation and the ones that follow, by embracing collaboration. I think for earlier generations the hierarchies between choreographers, composers, performers was strictly observed, and the choreographer had the final say where they did not collaborate, but rather commissioned partners. From Kaash onwards, Nitin, Anish and myself were all equal and we all had opinions about the others' contributions and we each drove the creative process. So for example Nitin's perception of the set, Anish's perception of the dance and my perception of the music worked in a cyclical manner towards a holistic vision.⁸ So what I am trying to say is, the person who makes a cup, their perception of the cup is not as interesting as the person who pours tea into the cup. It is the latter person's perception of the cup that I am interested in. So hearing Anish or Sylvie's relationship to my kathak made me relearn my art form in ways I had never imagined.

I am interested, though, how would you as a scholar distinguish between the concepts of tradition and heritage?

RM:

From my scholarly perspective, a tradition doesn't just apply to an artistic practice; it is just a set of conventions or codes through which a particular act has been ritualised, which could be anything: the tradition of making tea, or the tradition of a Christian wedding, or any wedding ceremony.

AK:

It's a ritual. And heritage?

RM:

Erm, it's usually considered to stand for artistic practices handed down from the past, usually, though not exclusively, applied to non-western performance cultures/traditions. But actually to me heritage is embodied knowledge of the past. And that could be in terms of performance codes or it could be in terms of family histories.

AK:

The key word here is it's embodied.

RM:

Exactly.

As our interview draws to a close, I am left with several thoughts. In my capacity as a dance scholar who has been in close collaboration with Khan over the last decade, I have had the privilege to chart not only his artistic trajectory but also his growing allegiance to his art as fundamentally political. In an interview I conducted with him for the Indian *Seminar* magazine's special issue on the theme of 'Why Dance?', he had already started to recognise this shift in himself:

The older I get, the more political I am becoming, yes. And while my dancing is not about politics, it always is and will be political. It will always try to explore a position that represents a resistance to the dominant stance.

(Khan in Mitra 2015b: 4)

In this interview, though, he begins to articulate that what fuels the politics of his art is essentially his postcolonial response to being 'othered' as a British dance artist of colour. To this end he shows critical awareness that the racialisation of his identity, and in turn his art, varies, and is dependent upon the racialised identities

of those encountering it. He reveals a deeply rooted frustration against the western tendency to consider non-western performance traditions and artists as fixed and incapable of evolution. In sharing his memory of debating with Bausch the inappropriateness of labelling Sarukkai's *Bharatanatyam* performance as a fixed tradition from the past, and his own aesthetic as belonging to the present, Khan admits that even if he failed in that instance, these imagined dichotomies between non-western tradition as unchanging pasts and western contemporisation as evolving presents need to be persistently challenged.

Khan's observations on his relationship to time as cyclical and the interconnectedness between pasts, presents and futures are useful insights with which to complicate western notions of time as linear, which situates history as belonging to the past. Instead, if the past, present and future are indeed interconnected, then we might reconsider histories as living and dialogic cross-temporalities. This dialogic nature of Khan's relationship to time is further revealed in his contested relationship with the terms 'contemporary' and 'legacy', as he resists his work being categorised by any sense of time-boundedness. His discomfort with both the present and the future is articulated poignantly in his response to the hypothetical idea of someone carrying on his dance legacy. To entertain this possibility, Khan emphasises the need to consider the unique, interconnected bodily realities that trigger artists' works in their specific temporalities, while simultaneously acknowledging that while these same realities cannot be re-embodied, there does exist the possibility that these works might find resonance in the new and different realities of those who interact with them in the future. By emphasising the importance of embodiment within an artist's creative process, Khan complicates western dance history's preoccupation with legacies and reconstructions, and questions whether bodies of work should die with the artists who birthed them. Finally, and most crucially for me, Khan's last contribution to this anthology that is dedicated to rethinking dance histories is the distinction he draws between 'dance heritage' as a collection of objective and sealed data that can be acquired and 'dancing heritage' as a proactive processing of such data which becomes inhabited and transformed into lived knowledge, to reflect the realities of the artist herself. This shift from heritage as fixed and acquired to heritage as processual and lived is a crucial intervention to reframing dance artists of colour as agents of change.

Notes

- 1 For similar critiques of western romanticisation of non-western performance traditions and artists as fixed, see Chakravorty (2008) and Coorlawala (1999). Further, for championing of parallel non-western modernities, defined on their own cultural and temporal terms, see Chatterjea (2004) and Purkayastha (2014).

- 2 See Annalisa Piccirillo (2008) and Lorna Sanders (2004, 2008) for scholarly references to Khan's aesthetic as 'contemporary *kathak*'.
- 3 Farooq Chaudhry co-founded Akram Khan Company with Khan in 2000 and is the company's producer. A British Pakistani man, Chaudhry left his own dancer career to complete an MA in arts management from City University in London in 1999. He has been lauded internationally for his vision of cultural entrepreneurship and in 2013 also became producer to English National Ballet. Chaudhry's contribution to the growth and success of Akram Khan Company has been key. In this interview, Khan refers here to discussions between himself and Chaudhry in the early days of the company, as they navigated their way conceptually around how to describe the unique aesthetic that Khan was generating in his performances, such as *Loose in Flight* (1999). This is when and how they initially endorsed the label 'contemporary *kathak*', which was being used by critics to describe Khan's emerging practice, but which they have then consequently gone on to problematise themselves.
- 4 Khan here refers to iconic and internationally renowned Indian *kathak* exponents and gurus Pandit Birju Maharaja and Sreemati Kumudini Lakhia.
- 5 *Zero Degrees* (2005) is a critically acclaimed collaboration between Khan, the Belgian Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, the British Asian musician Nitin Sawhney and the British sculptor Antony Gormley. The piece functions as a confessional about a traumatic train journey undertaken by Khan and his cousin through the border checkpoint between Bangladesh and India. On this journey Khan witnessed a dead man in the arms of his wailing wife, whom no one helped or consoled for fear of being held responsible for the death. Khan's cousin categorically told him to not get involved in the situation, resulting in him carrying this memory and guilt since. *Zero Degrees* became Khan's artistic reflection on not only this guilt but also the liminal points between life and death, belonging and non-belonging and community and isolation.
- 6 Khan here refers to his duet *Sacred Monsters* (2006) with former ballerina Sylvie Guillem.
- 7 The *Big Dance Pledge* (2016) provided anyone in the world an opportunity to learn an original choreography for free, to transform it and take ownership of the piece and then to perform it anywhere in the world as part of a worldwide performance event. Khan created this three-minute choreography and a set of resources responding to the themes of identity, journey and migration and human rituals, and an especially composed music track by the British Asian musician Nitin Sawhney. Khan's choreography took into consideration a diverse range of people and levels of movement experience, placing emphasis not on technical aspects of the dance but on the communal and powerful experience of diverse groups of people dancing together. More information on the *Big Dance Pledge* is available on www.bigdance.org.uk.

- 8 *Kaash* (2002) was Khan's first full-length ensemble production in which he performed, made in collaboration with British Asian visual artist Anish Kapoor and musician Nitin Sawhney, who provided the visual and aural environment in which Khan's movement experiments unfolded. Using the starting points of Hindu gods, black holes, Indian time cycles, tabla, creation and destruction, *Kaash* started to explore Khan's unique performance aesthetic in and through the bodies of the ensemble of dancers who accompanied Khan in his experimentations. In 2014, *Kaash* was revived by the company on a new international cast of performers.

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