CN D
CALL FOR PAPERS

Symposium

“Dance and power; the power(s) of dance”

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In 2001, the seminar entitled “Dance and politics,” organized by the CN D and Mas de la danse, attested to the need to tackle the political dimension that is present in dance[1]. Twenty-five years later, the conference “Dance and power; the power(s) of dance” wishes to revisit this issue and shed new light on it through the perspective of the question of power.

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This international conference will interrogate the many different ways in which dance can be connected to power in its various forms. We consider professional and non-professional dance practices through all their different facets – creation, performance, transmission or research. This conference will explore these relationships from the double perspective condensed in its title: by analyzing the ways in which dance is shaped and infused by power, as well as the kinds of power dance can also mobilize, invest or invent. By doing so, we interrogate the diversity of aesthetics that the term "dance" brings together, as well as the various artistic, social and political contexts in which these aesthetics unfold.

Interrogating the powers at work in dance supposes distancing oneself from a conception of power as something that some people would wield and of which others would be deprived, or power whose modes of action would be limited to the framework of state institutions. The use of the term "power" invites participants to consider it through the multifaceted power relations that inform – on different scales – all the relationships that structure our social life[2]. Beyond the most visible modes of exercising power, this relational conception of power induces more diffuse forms of regulation, control and normalization over bodies or targeting bodies. Similarly, it also allows participants to consider practices that – through bodies and gestures – seek to thwart these forms of power or transform the ways they are exerted[3].

One the one hand, power is understood as a force that is being exerted upon something or someone, and falls under the realm of relationships of domination. On the other, power can be understood as a generative force which is connected to our capacity to do and act, and is rather associated to emancipation and resistance processes. Confronting these two forms of power however carries the risk of making them appear as polar opposites: with forces that crush and exert constraint on the one hand, and others that liberate or emancipate.

One of the main issues at stake in this conference is precisely to dwell on these blurred lines from the point of view of dance-specific knowledge, and complexify this polarization by interrogating the points of friction and ambivalence at play. How can choreographic practices displace the norms that shape them without completely doing away with them? Which strategies are used to resist when their forms of protest are being recuperated or neutralized by institutional powers? More broadly, what are the conditions, positions and criteria according to which a dance can be considered as revolutionary, emancipatory or – on the contrary – reactionary?

At a time when nationalist and conservative discourses are gaining traction and social relationships are getting more brutal, as well as our relationship to the natural world, when the resources allocated to culture and research are constantly being reduced, these questions appear as particularly acute. This conference aims less at denouncing or celebrating the powers at work in the dance world than at examining the means through which these forces act and are opposed to each other, the conditions in which they become visible, as well as their effects and limitations.

Cette rencontre sera l'occasion de croiser une pluralité de regards, de savoirs et d'expériences permettant de saisir les formes historiques et contemporaines du pouvoir en danse selon différents degrés d'analyse : de l'échelle micrologique de ce qui se joue dans les corps et les gestes, à l'échelle macrologique des institutions et des politiques culturelles, en passant par les processus de création et de transmission, les modes d'organisation et de rapport au travail du milieu chorégraphique.

This conference will be an opportunity to confront multiple perspectives, forms of knowledge and experiences, to allow participants to grasp historical and contemporary forms of power in dance along several degrees of analysis: from the micrological scale of what is at stake with bodies and gestures to the macrological scale of institutions and cultural policies, as well as the creative and transmission processes, modes of organization and the relationship to work in the dance world.

1. Especially when considering the great times of turmoil in the 20th century, like the First World War, the Bolchevik revolution, the 1929 economic crisis, the Hiroshima bombings. See for example F. Pouillaude, D. Dupuy and C. Rabant (eds.), *Danse et politique. Démarche artistique et contexte historique* (2003). Le Mas de la danse (1997-2008) is a study and reseach center in contemporary dance created by choreographers Françoise and Dominique Dupuy, two major figures of modern dance in France.

2. The use of the notion of power is here inscribed in the wake of Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the notion. See for example Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir* (1975).

3. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité III. Le Souci de soi* (1997).

Since we are fully aware of what having this event in an institutional framework can mean, the scientific committee doesn't pretend to claim to be exempt of the power dynamics that inform its organization. We wish to address the points of friction we propose to examine within this conference. By doing so, we will pay particular attention to diversifying the points of view and having a horizontal circulation when it comes to discussions.

Our conference will be open to the diversity of geographical backgrounds, historical, economic, political and artistic contexts, as well as disciplinary approaches, including dance studies, movement analysis, history, anthropology, gender studies, decolonial studies, performance studies, practice-based research and sociology, among others.

In this respect, our CFP will be translated in several languages and we invite participants to send applications for academic papers and other modes of participation, including performative and dialogic modes.

Papers can be articulated along multiple perspectives, such as:

LINE OF INQUIRY n°1
Dance and action: sensory power

This first possible direction proposes to explore how dance can work, oppose or thwart power logics of "having power over[4]" someone or something through collective organizations, as well as their own ways of "doing with": with other bodies, with space, time, living beings. By paying particular attention to aesthetics, understood as sensory work, this first part is interested in gestures and protocols that can help collective sensory forms to emerge within dance practices, as well as modes of doing and acting. What type of capacity to act can dance specifically invent? How can dance participate in creating common modes of power?

Phenomena of circulation, contagion or the transmission of gestures, whether they are deployed in physical or digital spaces, can be considered as a first field of investigation. Under which conditions can the circulation, reinterpretation and reactivation of gestures transform our ways of perceiving the world and therefore contribute to creating collective power? How can situations of learning and passing on dance knowledge participate in the reproduction, negotiation or displacement of power dynamics?

Another possible direction for enquiry can be how dance works are made and how the knowledge of artists and teachers inflect the collective dimension of sensory experience. How can dance creation contribute to do away with individual power-seizing and invent other modes of community-making?

Particular attention could be granted to dance and physical practices developed with socially vulnerable groups in contexts of care, in prison facilities or in places that welcome and help people. Under which conditions do these practices open spaces of hospitality and solidarity? How do they facilitate or hinder a sense of belonging?

Finally, this first part invites participants to interrogate and acknowledge the limits of "what dance can do" in the face of how entrenched power dynamics are, and in the face of the situations of political emergency we are currently going through. What are the limitations, stumble blocks, and paradoxes that infuse these practices? How can we grasp and question what dance *can't* do?

LINE OF INQUIRY n°2
Dance and counter power: memory, history and narratives.

Dance memory is a place where narratives are built, shaped by power dynamics. While some of these memories have been preserved and consecrated by hegemonic historical narratives, others are deemed minor, marginalized or erased. This second possible direction of inquiry proposes to interrogate dance history as a place where power is being exerted, but also as a space where counter-powers arise: decentering dominant narratives allows the underlying categories that inform them to be revealed. How can dancers and dance scholars participate in making dance history an ever-evolving field of inquiry?

4. On the notion of "having power over", see Starhawk, *Rêver l'obscur. Femmes, magie et politique* (2015). The various modes of power of action developed by Starhawk have been studied through the analysis of dance pieces during the "Dance(s) and power of action" seminar organized by Isabelle Ginot and Isabelle Launay within the Dance MA program in Paris 8 University (2020-2022).

At the intersection of the personal and the social, dance artists turn bodies and gestures into spaces where collective memory can be passed on and reinvented. How can the protocols in place reactivate erased memories and help forgotten gestures reemerge in the present? How do these devices and schemes interrogate and displace the very notion of archive?

This second line of inquiry raises questions about the way colonial legacies and the logic of racial capitalism inflect the way dances circulate and are preserved. Who can claim a right to memory? Which dances, practices and traces are gathered in archives or acknowledged as being part of a cultural heritage? Which ones are excluded? What power dynamics shape these processes of legitimization and delegitimization?

We also invite participants to consider the ways in which some dance practices and aesthetics bear the traces of exclusion and the violence endured by the communities they were born in. For example, how do they mobilize violent gestures and the imagination and experience of violence to turn them into creative fuel? Or, more broadly, what do dance aesthetics teach us about the capacity that bodies have to replay, thwart or subvert the narratives and labels whose traces they still bear?

LINE OF INQUIRY n°3
Dance and empowerment: norms, repression and resistance

In France, the creation of the Royal Academy of Dance (Académie royale de danse) during the reign of king Louis the 14th is a major historical landmark which allows us to examine the modes of legitimation and visibility of power over dance, the relationship between dance and institutional power doesn't unfold along one single form nor a stable configuration. Considering the diversity of historical, social and political contexts in which this relationship unfolds, this third line of inquiry proposes to consider the mechanisms and systems that shape them. On the one hand, participants can interrogate the effects these have on corporealities and aesthetics, as well as on artists, practices, jobs and curricula. On the other hand, they can try to see dance as a place of continuous negotiation, where repertories of action and power dynamics are constantly reconfigured.

In that sense, economy is a structuring dimension for the relationships between dance and state powers: it invites us to examine the way funding, public policies and material work conditions determine and shape the aesthetics, practices and visibility of artists. Under which conditions can institutional powers protect artists, support creation and guarantee access to dance practices and curricula as well as the freedom to dance? If these powers also act through the normalization of bodies and the production of hierarchizing categories, how do laws, diplomas and institutions contribute to establishing what can be acknowledged as dance, as a job or as a training program, and to distributing recognition and legitimacy? How do social relationships shape the conditions of access to dance practices and training programs? What are the resulting forms of marginalization, exclusion and increasing precariousness?

In the authoritarian regimes of the past and of our time, power over dance can be exerted through censorship, banning certain things or repression. Which political or religious discourses underpin these forms of coercion over bodies? Under which forms are these discourses being reactualized? In contexts of dictatorship, war or genocide, what spaces, gestures and forms of engagement can people in the dance world invent to face these perils?

Finally, these power dynamics reveal tensions, friction, negotiations and resistance between people within the dance world and in the various instances of institutional power. Under which conditions can the recognition of a dance practice be recuperated, how can supporting a dance practice turn into instrumentalization and its symbolic valorization into cultural appropriation? What does dance become when it finds itself in a position of power through recognition and funding?

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– **Luar Maria Escobar**, scholar, professor and dance artist. Associate researcher with the "Danse, Geste et Corporéité" research unit in Université Paris 8

Communication and participation guidelines

Our CFP is addressed to artists, dance practitioners, researchers, PhD candidates and PhD graduates, as well as dance instructors and dance professionals, whatever their field.

The conference will be held in French but simultaneous translation can be provided for contributors in English or Spanish, please contact us for further information at: colloque2027@cnd.fr.

Several types of interventions are possible:
1. Academic paper (20 min presentation then 15 min. questions) ;
2. A performance-focused presentation: performance, audience participation, collective practice or other creative formats (35 min. max) ;
3. Group interdisciplinary panels: artists, instructors, dance practitioners, academics, etc. (between 1h and 1h30min for 3 to 6 participants) ;
4. Video creation (35 min. max) ;
5. 2-people dialogue around a performance with a discussion about experience and / or theory (1h).

Digital formats are also welcome, as well as innovative digital tools that echo these different modalities in a creative way.

Please send abstracts (in English or in French) via the **online form** before **March 6, 2027**.

Abstracts must feature
– full name, affiliation and email
– a provisional title
– the chosen format and the line of inquiry it is connected to
– a 3000-sign abstract (spacing included), or an audio file (mp3) max 5 min.
– a 1000-sign bio (spacing included), or an audio file (mp3) max 3 min.
– the language chosen by the participant (English or French).

Financial support will be allocated to participants that do not hold a permanent position or have a permanent contract. Financial help to cover travel and housing expenses can also be available depending on the participant's situation, and priority will be given to those without available institutional funding.

Notifications of acceptance will be sent on **April 6, 2027**.