

Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry

Dance research has undergone a significant evolution in recent decades, with scholars moving beyond traditional approaches to embrace more diverse and innovative methodologies. This shift has been driven by a number of factors, including the increasing recognition of the embodied nature of dance, the growing interdisciplinary nature of the field, and the desire to engage with social and political issues.



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by Sondra Horton Fraleigh

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Traditional Approaches to Dance Research

Traditional approaches to dance research have typically relied on qualitative methods, such as ethnography, observation, and interviews. These methods have been used to document and analyze dance practices, from their historical origins to their contemporary manifestations. While these methods have yielded valuable insights into the world of dance, they have also been criticized for their reliance on the researcher's own

perspective and for their limited ability to capture the embodied experience of dance.

Evolving Modes of Inquiry

In recent years, dance researchers have begun to explore a wider range of methodologies, including quantitative research, mixed methods, and participatory research. These methodologies have allowed researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of dance, from its physical and technical aspects to its social and cultural significance.

Quantitative research methods, such as surveys and experiments, have been used to collect data on the physical and technical aspects of dance. These methods have provided insights into the relationship between dance training and performance, the effects of dance on the body, and the development of dance skills.

Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of dance. For example, a researcher might use qualitative methods to explore the experiences of dancers in a particular dance company, and then use quantitative methods to analyze the company's performance data. This approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between the dancer's experience and the company's artistic output.

Participatory research involves dancers and dance communities in the research process. This approach recognizes the importance of the dancer's voice and allows researchers to gain a more nuanced understanding of dance from the inside out. Participatory research methods have been used to explore a variety of topics, including the development of new dance

works, the preservation of traditional dance practices, and the use of dance for social change.

The Embodied Nature of Dance

A key factor in the evolution of dance research has been the increasing recognition of the embodied nature of dance. Dance is not simply a set of movements; it is a way of knowing and experiencing the world. This embodied nature of dance has implications for the way that dance is researched. Researchers must be able to capture not only the physical and technical aspects of dance, but also the dancer's subjective experience.

There are a number of ways to capture the embodied nature of dance. One approach is to use **embodied research methods**, such as autoethnography and dance ethnography. These methods allow researchers to draw on their own experiences as dancers to gain insights into the world of dance. Another approach is to use **sensory ethnography**, which involves using the senses to experience and document dance. This approach can provide researchers with a more holistic understanding of dance, including its sensory, affective, and social dimensions.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The increasing interdisciplinary nature of dance research has also led to the development of new modes of inquiry. Dance researchers are now working with scholars from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, and neuroscience. This interdisciplinary collaboration has allowed researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of dance, from its historical and cultural origins to its physiological and cognitive effects.

For example, dance researchers have worked with anthropologists to study the role of dance in different cultures, with sociologists to examine the social and political dimensions of dance, and with psychologists to investigate the cognitive and emotional effects of dance. This interdisciplinary collaboration has led to a number of new insights into the world of dance.

Social Engagement

In recent years, dance researchers have become increasingly engaged with social and political issues. This engagement has been driven by a desire to use dance as a tool for social change. Dance researchers are now working with community organizations and activists to use dance to address issues such as poverty, racism, and environmental degradation.

For example, dance researchers have worked with community organizations to use dance to empower youth, to promote health and well-being, and to build community. Dance researchers have also worked with activists to use dance to raise awareness of social and political issues, and to mobilize people for action.

The evolution of dance research has been marked by a shift from traditional approaches to more diverse and innovative methodologies. This shift has been driven by a number of factors, including the increasing recognition of the embodied nature of dance, the growing interdisciplinary nature of the field, and the desire to engage with social and political issues. As dance research continues to evolve, it is likely that new and innovative modes of inquiry will continue to emerge.

These new modes of inquiry will allow dance researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the world of dance, and to use dance as a tool for social change. By embracing these new modes of inquiry, dance researchers can help to ensure that dance remains a vibrant and relevant art form for generations to come.



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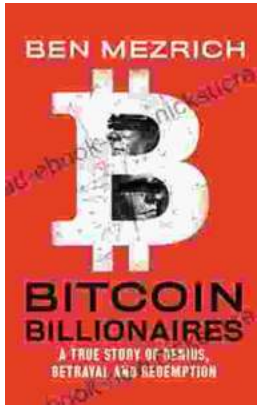
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