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mentor's introduction

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American universities, like universities in other parts of the western world, have long prided themselves on their attention to the development of theory. Theories are ideas about aspects of the universe that are believed to be true -- or nearly so. Theories represent in the views of most academics the ultimate intellectual achievement. They are products of the mind when the mind operates at its highest level. The values associated with the creation of theory and therefore the achievement of a rational understanding of the universe have provided the bedrock for building a climate within which learning at the university level can be fostered. this climate has not always been hospitable to the arts. the arts, if anything, have not been regarded as theoretical and have seldom been thought of as contributing real understanding to the human's search to know. As a result, the arts have occupied a less than central role on university campuses. The problem that Janice Ross addresses in her important dissertation is one of articulating the ways in which a climate oriented to me values of theory have influenced the way in which dance -- and by implication other art forms -- have been shaped when they have had to lead their lives on university campuses.

We seldom think about the ways in which the university as a social and intellectual institution impacts how problems are conceptualized, how intellectual priorities are established, and, indeed, how the culture in which we live is affected. The categories that are regarded as legitimate, the fields we regard as being disciplinary, the status we assign to science, the forms of apprenticeship that are made available to students, the selection of books and journals we ask our students to read, the criteria we apply in selecting students for admission, the prizes and positions we award to those who achieve in particular realms of human activity all contribute to the crafting of an environment. This environment, in turn, influences what will grow, what will languish, and what will die. In a sense, Janice Ross's dissertation is a story of the life, death, rebirth, and development of dance as it is had to make its way in an environment whose first priorities reside in the pursuit of theory that I described earlier.

Just what does a filed within the arts need to do to put down roots? What must its practitioners do to become academically legitimate? How does dance, and other arts for that matter, find a place at the academic table and how will its contributions be regarded by colleagues in other fields? Janice Ross's research addresses these and other questions. In doing so, her dissertation has the potential not only to illuminate the specific history of dance at the university level, but to teach what may very well be an even more important lesson. That lesson pertains to the forms of adaptation that disciplines must achieve in order to keep their place on the university's agenda.

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What we have in this study is a picture, historically couched, that helps us understand the non-neutrality of any environment. Its most important contribution may very well be making the lesson so clear that we can begin to ask not how universities affect, in this case, one of the arts, but we might begin to ask how the arts might reshape the university environment so that the culture of the university can enrich in a far broader way than it now does the wider culture in which it lives.