

choreographers or events to *ausdruckstanz*, which informed a certain moment of nation building, enables the reader to see changes in scale. Whereas Keefe showcases individuals, Hardt shifts to masses and the communities that challenge national formation and the processes of mechanization associated with capital.

Many of the other pieces provide thick descriptions of movement vocabularies that construct masculinities in different contexts. In the contributions by dancers Fred Strickler and Rennie Harris, artists and teachers of different generations respectively from the Midwest and East Coast of the U.S., dance seems to have insinuated opposing masculinities within the communities in which each came of age. Such accounts of the diverse means by which movement registers and enacts larger social anxieties attendant to constructions of masculinity recur throughout the book. From Jennifer Fisher's and Jill Nunes Jensen's respective explorations of the hyperbolic imagination and expression of gendered relationships in classical ballet to Stephen Johnson's essay on transvestite acts in Juba's minstrel shows, this collection encourages both thinking through the body as scripted through matrices of gender but also the body as a sight of negotiation, perhaps even resistance, to the norms that obtain in a given time and place or through highly codified forms of corporeal expression. Here Juba's self-conscious play of gender might become the surprising antecedent to the choreography of Alonzo King. To be clear, my pairing of these two pieces does not gesture toward some imagined racial link but rather to an awareness of the constraints regulating people's expressive capacities at distinct moments in time.

For me, the collection produces its most substantive arguments in relation to how masculinity physically manifests under and as different regimes of power (e.g., Namus Zokhrabov's recounting of the politics within the Azerbaijan State Dance Ensemble). The invention of traditions, the propping up of national and international discourses on particular demonstrations of masculine power, the assertion of moving men as an exercise in modernity—these are the elements of the book that promise to advance dance and masculinity studies together. Along this line, the “legacies of colonialism” section furthers the steps begun by some of the earlier contributions. The emphasis here

on overlapping disciplinary mechanisms that inform the perception of moving bodies articulates why bodies matter in particular configurations, spaces, and times (Anthony Shay's essay, for example, includes a wide overview of these issues). The labor of dancers harnessed to imperialist and nationalist ideals, often simultaneously, is worth exploring because the processes of empire and nation-state formation have long been analyzed in gendered terms. But the work here insists that these sorts of analyses must not only function at the level of discursive abstraction. Enactments of power can be the subtle acts of bodies moving independently or together; perhaps this is the principal reason to study when men dance.

However, the Introduction emphasizes phobia; *When Men Dance* is situated as a response to strategies that have marginalized dancing males. In this vein, the project seems not so distant from that of institutions such as The Gold School (a dance education venue in Massachusetts), which recently premiered its anti-bullying piece “accept ME.” Perhaps the field of dance studies requires this intervention. The editors seem to think so, for the Appendix reveals questions posed to generate discussion of stereotypes faced in the course of men's dancing careers. Because the brief narratives continually return the reader to the potential difficulties in choosing to be a male dancer, the volume as a whole shades a bit too much toward the therapeutic, at least for me. On the other hand, a nice bit of therapy for \$29.95 is a good deal, and the reader will certainly learn something along the way.

Sean Metzger
Duke University

Choreographing Asian America

Choreographing Asian America by Yutian Wong.
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“Can you name an Asian American choreographer?” (1)—so begins Yutian Wong's groundbreaking study, *Choreographing Asian America*. This book carefully and critically fills the silence that would presumably follow this question. I suggest silence because the two sites the

question seeks—Asian America and dance—are both marginalized territories within the U.S. cultural landscape. To interpolate a subject who is both Asian American and a choreographer is to bring into being a heretofore invisible presence that nonetheless has much to tell us about the politics and aesthetics of identity in the United States.

To begin, the idea of an Asian American carries within it a history of Orientalism that would see such an identity as only ever a paradoxical impossibility. Over a hundred years of imperialism, war, anti-immigrant law, and global economic exploitation have produced and are produced by a logic of the East as absolute other to the West (Said 1979). As a result there is never such a thing as a truly “American” Asian. Asians are perceived as perpetual foreigners in the United States, regardless of how many generations we have been here (Takaki 1990). To call forth an Asian American choreographer, therefore, reveals the ways in which Asians in the United States have been made illegible.

Dance, as *DRJ* readers are already aware, is a marginalized field of study within the academy and a marginalized practice within the field of the arts more generally. Despite the then doubly obscured notion of an Asian American choreographer, however, there is in fact a strong historical link between Asian America and Western modern dance. As Wong cites in her book, dance scholars such as Sally Banes (1998), Jane Desmond (1991), Amy Koritz (1994), and Suzanne Shelton (1981) have revealed the deep legacy of Orientalism and Asian influence in the history of modern and postmodern dance—from Ruth St. Denis’ and Maud Allan’s appropriations of imagined Oriental dances to Martha Graham’s Asianist designs; from Steve Paxton’s interest in aikido and Deborah Hay’s Buddhism-inspired Circle Dances to Merce Cunningham’s use of the *I-Ching* and the latest interest in yoga and tai chi as mental and physical conditioning for dancers. Priya Srinivasan has taken this historical work a step further by thinking not just about the white choreographers who were inspired through their Orientalist imaginings of the East, but about the actual Asian bodies who may have inspired them. In one article, Srinivasan brings to life a group of women dancers from India who were brought to the U.S. to

perform in the 1880s, thereby excavating their contributions from out of obscurity (2009). In another essay, she considers the experiences of two Indian women who danced at Coney Island in 1904 and may have been the motivation for Ruth St. Denis’ exotic dances, as well as the three Indian men who provided a corporeal backdrop in some of these pieces. Srinivasan literally gives voice to these previously ignored individuals by creating a dialogue among them in her essay (2007). In this way, she brings actual Asian America into contact with the mythologized history of early modern dance, which has done little to acknowledge the presence and contribution of Asians to this history.

Choreographing Asian America moves from Srinivasan’s insertion of Asian bodies into a history of U.S. American dance to consider the effect of this legacy on contemporary Asian American dance makers. Wong writes:

The invisibility of Orientalism in American modern and postmodern dance history poses a problem for Asian American choreographers. Asian Americans are not viewed as abstract bodies engaging in artistic experiments. Instead, they are seen through an Orientalist double vision in which their bodily Asian-ness must remain distanced from the modern and postmodern dance vocabularies they are using... While white Western choreographers can mask appropriation through accounts of inspiration, Asian American performance aesthetics are stereotyped as attempts to fuse or blend incompatible Eastern and Western sensibilities. The fact that American modern and postmodern dance are *already* Asian American is denied... (51–2)

From this context, *Choreographing Asian America* analyzes several examples of Asian American choreography, not only for how they cause us to grasp U.S. American dance history in new ways, but for how they negotiate the politics of Asian American identity through choreographic performance.

Wong's book offers unique research at the intersection between dance studies and Asian American studies. In provocative ways, the author lays out the blind spots in both of these disciplines and demonstrates how juxtaposing them in a study of Asian American performance can lead to new understandings: for dance studies, an attention to the ways in which Asian America has historically shaped American dance and the ways that we have misrecognized Asian American choreography (as only either too exotic or not exotic enough); for Asian American studies, an attention to aesthetic form in addition to, or as constitutive of, the politics of representation. A small canon of books on Asian American theater has already made an impact in academia,¹ but this book is the first to really consider Asian American dance particularly.² The work Wong does in intersecting the two fields of Asian American studies and dance studies and the omissions she reveals in comparing them is important and new.

Wong's main site of study is Club O'Noodles, a Vietnamese American community theater group based in Southern California. She engages a blend of performance analysis and ethnography of two performance pieces by Club O'Noodles in order to argue for new approaches (performative auto/ethnography, a politically attuned attention to form, a historicization of Asian influences in the American dance tradition) and ask key questions (What is the relationship between aesthetics and the politics of identity? What is Asian American dance as a category? How does an artist/scholar do ethnography?). The book also investigates the work of two Asian American choreographers—Sue Li-Jue and Maura Nguyen Donohue—as a way of providing some context and juxtaposition. In addition, Wong does an extensive critique of the Broadway musical *Miss Saigon* from an Asian American performance perspective. Her conception of choreography is broad, utilizing the term to cover both motile bodies in rehearsal and performance and the more metaphoric ways in which identities and politics are negotiated and mobilized.

Wong is sensitive to the politics of ethnography. Drawing from work by Johannes Fabian and Dorinne Kondo (1997), she argues for performative auto/ethnography—a process-based, provisional, and positionally attuned methodology for examining Club O'Noodles

from the complicated perspective of someone who is as at once researcher/participant/audience member/(non-Vietnamese) performer.

Throughout her analysis and exposition, Wong levels piercing critiques of anti-Asian racism, sexist assumptions and stereotypes, and racist and sexist representations in text and in performance. The Introduction and Chapter One lay out the legacy of Orientalism in modern dance history (as I discuss above), as well as provide a survey of the history of anti-Asian racism in the United States by covering the anti-immigration laws of the early twentieth century and reviewing the politics behind some of the most prevalent stereotypes of Asians in America. These include the model minority myth, the Oriental dancing girl, the Madame Butterfly trope, and the me-so-horny Vietnamese prostitute (a product of the Vietnam war). In the subsequent chapters, she provides analysis of both performances and rehearsals by Club O'Noodles as a way to discuss how this community theater group sometimes challenges and sometimes is foiled by these stereotypes. Her penultimate chapter, dealing with *Miss Saigon*,³ builds on previous scholarship⁴ about this astoundingly successful Broadway musical by focusing attention on, among other aspects, the study guides and sundry documentary material that have emerged parasitic to the musical. These materials legitimize the musical's representation of what are in fact hackneyed and disturbing Asian stereotypes (modest-but-horny prostitutes who readily die for love of a white soldier, asexual/perverted men) as historical fact.

Wong closes her book with an interpretation of Maura Nguyen Donohue's dance piece, *Lotus Blossom Itch*, a choreographic parody of the Asian sex tourism industry (that, incidentally, included me as a performer). Here, she ties the strands of her book together by looking at how the piece satirizes the Orientalist legacy of modern and postmodern dance, as well as the elisions inherent in different manifestations of Orientalism: erotic/exotic, tourism/sexual exploitation, and anthropology/colonialism/war. In this way, Wong answers her opening question ("Can you name an Asian American choreographer?") by interpolating an Asian American choreographer who talks back to the misrepresentations and the Orientalist history that have preceded her.

So can you name an Asian American choreographer? Here is a brief list just to get us started: Michio Ito, Mel Wong, H. T. Chen, Eleanor Yung, Sun Ock Lee, Dana Tai Soon Burgess, Peggy Myo-Young Choy, Li Chiao-Ping, Minh Tran, Kristin Jackson, Angelia Leung, Nai-Ni Chen, and Shen Wei. Louis Althusser argues that the act of interpolation, hailing (“Hey, you there!”), recognizes a subject as s/he is constituted within a prevailing ideological structure (1971). The silence that follows Wong’s opening query suggests the blind spot in prevailing ideologies of race and representation. To name these Asian American choreographers, then—and this list represents just a few—is a challenge to the invisibility of these subjects and a hailing, or perhaps better said, a corporealization of, choreographic Asian America.

SanSan Kwan
University of California–Berkeley

Notes

1. In chronological order of publication: Moy (1993); Kondo (1997); J. Lee (1997); R. Lee (1999); Shimakawa (2002); Moon (2005); E. Lee (2006); Burns (forthcoming).
2. Priya Srinivasan’s recent book is the second to examine Asian American dance (2011).
3. *Miss Saigon* opened in London in 1989 and in New York in 1991.
4. See Kondo (1997); E. Lee (2006); J. Lee (1997); Pao (1992); Shimakawa (2002); Shimizu (2005).

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