

coherent and well-supported way that fits the fine art model as it has been conceived by analytic aesthetics. Even if one chooses to approach dance in another way, it is certainly of some value to consider how dance might belong not just in our social lives, our tribes, our temples, and our communities, but as a fine art of the eighteenth-century, Western European sort. There should be room in dance theory for an analysis like this of dance as part of high culture that can be analyzed in cognitive, abstract, and intellectual ways as well as felt and experienced in our blood, bones, sinews, nerves, and hearts.

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## Notes

1. By “analytic aesthetics” I mean the methodological tradition that is practiced in Western philosophy departments that focuses on dividing broad areas of inquiry into discrete categories that allow for focused, specific, and in-depth analysis within and between these categories. Others who can be credited with bringing a discussion of dance to the notice of analytic aesthetics include (and this list is by no means exhaustive) Susanne K. Langer, Monroe C. Beardsley, Nelson Goodman, Adina Armelagos with Mary Sirridge, Joseph Margolis, Francis Sparshott, Arnold Berleant, David Best, David Carr, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Noël Carroll, Julie Van Camp, Renee Conroy, David Davies, and Anna Pakes. Other dance philosophers, historians, and anthropologists, most notably Selma Jean Cohen, Sondra Horton Fraleigh, Alfred Gell, Judith Hanna, Sally Banes, and Susan Leigh Foster, have also influenced how analytic aesthetics views dance, as have many prominent dance critics.

2. Francis Sparshott followed this with an extensive and comprehensive attempt to exhaust the field of analytic dance aesthetics in his giant tome, *A Measured Pace*, published in 1995. No similar attempts have been made since then to provide a dance text for use by analytic aestheticians.

3. McFee does not address Davies’s account here, but he is not to be faulted for that given that Davies’s book was published in the same year as *The Philosophical Aesthetics of*

*Dance* (2011), and we cannot presume that McFee had access to his argument.

4. The “studio point of view” is the term used by Susanne Langer in Chapter 2 of *Feeling and Form* (see 15) to characterize the point of view of the artist making the artwork—a view that is often opposed to or in conflict with the critic’s point of view.

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## Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out

by Nadine George-Graves. 2010. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press. vii + 230 pp., photographs, notes, index. \$29.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S0149767713000089

In 1984, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar founded the Urban Bush Women, which has since become an important part of the American dance landscape. For Zollar, dance is a powerful means of

working toward social justice. Thus, in addition to performing on concert dance stages across the globe, her company has become a model for arts activism through its Community Engagement Projects, Summer Dance Institute, and other efforts. The Urban Bush Women's performances and workshops reach a broad and diverse audience, though they mostly focus on issues of importance to black women. In *Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out*, Nadine George-Graves analyzes Zollar's unusual approach to dance through the concepts of "work" and "working it out" (3). She argues that the repertoire offers a way to "work through" issues of "race, gender, spirituality, social relations, political power, aesthetics, and community life" and thus leads performers, audiences, and community members to a place of healing (3–4). The Urban Bush Women therefore offer not just a commentary on broader issues, but also an opportunity to engage in the process of creating social change. Through workshop and class participation, interviews, performance analysis, archival research, and the judicious application of critical theory, George-Graves succeeds in proving her argument, and in the process, has written a book that is an important contribution to dance studies.

In the preface, George-Graves explains her embodied methodology. She notes that her highly involved, participatory approach "risks reducing critical analysis to personal impressions that fail to speak to larger issues" (xi). She manages to avoid that pitfall, for her analytic text consistently connects Zollar's choreography to important social and political questions. George-Graves also hopes her book will "negotiate the interstices of academic and public intellectualism in a way similar to Urban Bush Women's negotiation of the spaces between concert dance and community-based work" (xi). Her success in this effort is more uncertain. By using the word "interstices," she is already employing academic language, pointing to the difficulties that lie ahead for general readers when she invokes Foucauldian subjectivity and Judith Butler's concept of performativity. This is not to say that George-Graves fails to bridge the scholar-general public divide, but rather to acknowledge the difficulty in doing so when

one does not want to relinquish the important theoretical tools of analysis that lead to a deeper understanding of dance performance and practice.

Regardless, for dance scholars the book is a valuable contribution for several reasons. Existing scholarship on the Urban Bush Women often focuses on one dance or on a few major themes of the work.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, George-Graves provides a comprehensive and much-needed analysis of Zollar's process. The first chapter identifies the choreography's "core values," which include having female energy at the center, drawing upon African Diasporic ancestral memory, validating different individuals' bodies and approaches, and offering an aesthetic that is "not about selling" while still retaining an expressive quality and honest engagement with sexuality (12–6). One tension obliquely mentioned in the discussion of the piece "Self-Portrait" would be interesting to investigate further: the fact that so much of this company's identity is entwined with Zollar's personality and vision. George-Graves describes the Urban Bush Women's rehearsal process as collaborative and supportive, but to what extent can the company be a model for community-building and horizontal collaboration when so much is predicated upon one individual?

George-Graves' analysis is quite rich in this section because she does not shy away from exploring tensions about race, gender, power, artistic freedom, and other issues that emerge in Zollar's work. One of the choreographer's predominant themes is strength, particularly the strength of African American women. The company's dancers all have different body types, but they "all look very strong and they all move from a strong core" (25). While not every piece portrays strong black women, "enough of them play into the narrative that it becomes a hallmark of the choreography" (26). George-Graves notes that an unremitting message of strength can feed into the stereotype of muscular black dancers, a stereotype that historically has been used to disparage or discredit black dancers' grace, elegance, softness, or balletic abilities. While in other arenas Zollar insists on facing contradictions or complex issues, in this case, the author argues, "The manifestation of uplift is perhaps more valuable than more complicated messages" (26).

The book's middle chapters address four major aspects of Zollar's choreography separately. One chapter focuses on women's bodies, another on the use of storytelling and narrative, a third on the importance of transnational or African Diasporic connections, and a fourth on the repertoire's spirituality. Because most of Zollar's choreography weaves together all of these themes, however, George-Graves' examples in each chapter can become a bit redundant. For example, her discussion of *Shadow's Child* appears in the chapter about storytelling, but she also discusses the dance's diasporic connections and its spiritual messages (95–103). Such overlap makes the middle chapters drag at times, but the well-written analysis of almost twenty dances is an important archival accomplishment that helps ensure that Zollar's work will not disappear.

The book also contributes to existing scholarship by focusing on the Urban Bush Women's community activism, not just Zollar's choreography. In Chapter Six, George-Graves draws upon political theorist Benedict Anderson to argue that while all communities are "imagined," a community imagined into being creates the unity necessary to undo oppression (169–70). Through "hair parties" and children's workshops, Zollar and the Urban Bush Women create communities that talk about issues of race and gender, explore cultural heritage, and exercise creativity. In the Summer Dance Institute, Zollar trains dancers and choreographers to "maximize the possibilities of the arts as a vehicle for social activism and civic engagement" (176). The strongest part of the chapter is the analysis of the Urban Bush Women's Community Engagement Project with the Dixwell neighborhood of New Haven, CT, in which dancers worked with community members to choreograph a piece based on the neighborhood's "living cultural heritage" (183). The dance opened up a space to "work through" issues, but left it to the Dixwell residents to take the next step and apply the conversations to actual problems of gentrification and displacement that they faced. After praising the Urban Bush Women for their reciprocal, thoughtful approach to community work, George-Graves raises a question: "Is jump-starting the conversation enough?" (192). In other words, do artists have the responsibility to offer solutions to social and political

problems? She leaves the question unanswered, mirroring Zollar's own approach of asking questions rather than providing answers.

This last point leads to another of George-Graves' major accomplishments: like the subject of her book, she rarely shies away from complexity or contradiction. Her monograph "works through" the same difficult issues that the Urban Bush Women address through dance. Much as Zollar forces audiences to grapple with questions that are not always resolved harmoniously—or resolved at all—George-Graves invites readers to ponder both the power and limitations of dance as a mode of social justice activism. As such, her book is an invaluable text not only for learning about the Urban Bush Women, but also for expanding our understanding of what dance can do outside the confines of the proscenium stage.

Just as importantly, George-Graves does not allow complexity to lead to muddled confusion. She does have a specific and clear argument: Zollar's message of strength and unity is an important part of what dance can offer the world. The Coda explores the Urban Bush Women's joyous twentieth anniversary season at the Joyce Theater in New York and concludes that the "spirit of celebration and empowerment is valuable and not to be taken lightly" (202). Overall, George-Graves succeeds in honoring the Urban Bush Women without ignoring tensions that can arise during the company's engagement with difficult questions about race, gender, and power. Her carefully researched and well-written book is an important addition to the field for anyone interested in politics and performance, modern/postmodern dance, African American dance, arts activism, community engagement, and a multitude of other areas.

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## Note

1. For scholarly publications on the Urban Bush Women, see Chatterjea (2001, 2003, 2004), Gonzalez (2004); and Aduonum (2011, published after this book came out).

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## Society Dancing: Fashionable Bodies in England, 1870–1920

by Theresa Jill Buckland. 2011. Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 264 pp., 19 illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$85.00 cloth.  
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As public fascination with televised ballroom dancing shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing* (UK) and *Dancing with the Stars* (US) show no signs of abating, Theresa Buckland's historical study of ballroom dancing in England provides a timely reminder of an earlier period when couple dancing attracted widespread public and media attention. Drawing on extensive archival research, Buckland traces the history of ballroom dancing in England from the regulated manners of the Victorian ballroom to the 1920s dance floor transformed by war, American influences, and modern conceptions of class, race, gender, and nationality. In doing so, she raises questions about popularity and modernity that should prompt productive discussion among both historians and dance scholars.

*Society Dancing* is a distinctive contribution to historical research on ballroom dancing, much of which has focused on the United

States (for example, Aldrich 1991; Malnig 1992), and, to a lesser extent, continental Europe (for example, Cordova 1999). However, as Buckland points out (3), it was the English style of ballroom dancing that was disseminated worldwide in the early twentieth century, producing the codified vocabulary that would form the core of the global competitive and social ballroom dancing industry in the later twentieth century. Nevertheless, the "English style" did not develop in isolation, and Buckland considers the influence of African-American social dances in the early twentieth century, putting her text into dialogue with existing research on ragtime (Cook 1999; Robinson 2009, 2010), tango (Savigliano 1995), and jazz dance (Stearns and Stearns 1968).

The intersection of English ballroom dancing with these imported dance forms raises questions of race and nationality, as well as gender and sexuality, that Buckland addresses in depth. Yet the book is not primarily driven by theoretical concerns; rather, rich archival details are foregrounded. The excesses and the blind spots of archival dance collections are, therefore, sometimes reflected in the text. In the first four chapters, for example, I grew increasingly hungry for physical dance description, notoriously absent from primary social dance sources. But as the book progressed, the discussion of repertoire and the numerous illustrations lent the archived bodies flesh and movement.

Issues of class loom large in social dance history in this period, and the book addresses these throughout, drawing on both archival research and Norbert Elias's (1978) and Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) seminal theoretical works on bodily constructions of class. The book's focus on the social dance practices of elite British "Society" raises provocative questions about the scope of popular dance research and the notion of the "popular" itself. Research into popular culture, particularly that influenced by the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, has been significantly shaped by the Marxist-inflected idea that popular culture is the culture of the working classes. Stuart Hall, for example, acknowledges that, "[t]he term 'popular' has very complex relations to the term 'class,'" but ultimately centers his definition of popular culture on "[t]he culture of the oppressed, the excluded classes: this is the area to which the term 'popular' refers us"