Dance on its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies ed. by Melanie Bales and Karen Eliot (review)

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Theatre Journal, Volume 67, Number 3, October 2015, pp. 586-587 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/tj.2015.0087

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the result that they are less interesting overall than
the more focused thematic threads, such as Tian’s
preoccupation with the dangerous woman, his bo-
hemian activism, or his repeated demonstration that
poetry is central to revolution. In Ferrari’s case, the
problems are reversed, with the strength and clarity
of the central argument at times leading to oversim-
plification of historical issues. Her effort to establish
the importance of the post-Mao generation leads
her to reductive treatments of the earlier periods,
especially of Maoist theatre practices. Luo’s warn-
ing against viewing Mao-era culture as “a mono-
lithic, hegemonic system” (211) could be viewed as
a direct critique of Ferrari’s reading of that period.

Apart from their significant contributions to
scholarship, Luo’s and Ferrari’s books both offer
welcome additions to the existing material available
for teaching Chinese theatre and the global avant-
garde. Thanks to recently available English transla-
tions of works by Tian and Meng, instructors can
effectively use sections of these books together with
primary sources in their courses. For teaching Tian,
Luo’s epilogue “Endings, Happy and Otherwise:
Tian Han and Guan Hanqing” could be paired with
Tian’s 1958 play Guan Hanqing, now available in
English translation. This generates an excellent set
of discussions around the topic of politics, resistance,
and theatre as activism. For teaching Meng, Ferrari’s
chapter 7, “Intercultural Hybrids, Pop Strategies and
‘Meng-Style Delight’: Toward a New Concept of the
Avant-Garde,” could be paired with Rhinoceros in
Love, of which a subtitled performance video is
already available and an English translation is cur-
rently in progress. This offers an interesting set of
questions about the commercialization of romance
in contemporary China and its reflection in experi-
mental musical theatre. Alternatively, if one wishes
to introduce Chinese opera, one could assign Luo’s
chapter 5, “A White Snake in Beijing,” with a jingju
(Peking opera) production of White Snake, an Eng-
lish version of which has recently been produced.
Until now, Sinophone theatre has often been taught
through figures like Mei Lanfang, Gao Xingjian,
and Stan Lai, all of whom have established con-
nections to international avant-garde movements.
Now, thanks to Luo’s and Ferrari’s important work,
instructors can expand their teaching to include the
equally important, although previously less-intern-
ationallly-well-known figures of Tian and Meng.

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DANCE ON ITS OWN TERMS: HISTORIES
AND METHODOLOGIES. Edited by Melan-

Since the mid-1990s, dance studies has integrated
with other disciplines, including performance stud-
ies, visual studies, cultural studies, and others. The
1997 volume Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Stud-
ies of Dance set a standard for this kind of interdis-
ciplinary work, and others—Moving History/Danc-
ing Cultures: A Dance History Reader (2001) and The
Routledge Dance Studies Reader (2010)—have sprung
up in response to the field’s increased visibility in
academia. In their new collection, editors Melanie
Bales and Karen Eliot aim to re-center dance studies
onto dance itself: onto movement and its phenom-
enal and material qualities. They argue that dance
studies’ interdisciplinary forays, while rich and
provocative, have compromised the study of dance
on its own terms: “[I]n their eagerness to adopt
theoretical language from other disciplines, dance
scholars have lost fluency in their own language”
(4). This language emphasizes familiarity with par-
ticular schools of movement analysis and notation,
allowing for scholarship that springs from dancing
itself rather than beginning with external concerns
about the body as a site or sign. Dance on Its Own
Terms provides great depth in terms of modeling
strong, dance-centered scholarship, but represents
a fairly narrow range of dance itself.

The editors divide the volume’s sixteen chapters
into three sections that emphasize, respectively,
spectatorship and reconstruction, physical/kines-
thetic dance histories of particular figures, and meth-
ods of dance notation. Section 1 begins with Karen
Eliot’s analysis of canon formation in British ballet
circa World War II, including her timely reminder
that “the mechanics and politics of canon formation
... do not operate uniformly across the disciplines”
(13). Ann Dils’s reflective chapter on restaging the
challenging Jean Cocteau/Darius Milhaud farce Le
Boeuf sur le Toit (1920) for a contemporary college
audience provides a clear analysis of race and gen-
der issues within the work, and also a model for
imagining our pedagogical practices alongside our
artistic ones. Deborah Friedes Galili offers the highly
useful notion culture of reconstruction, terminology
that frames her investigation of the “institutional
structures and artistic and scholarly discourses”
that determine reconstruction practices across geo-
ographies (67). Betsy Cooper convincingly demon-
strates that the Production Code Administration’s
censorship assessments about the “decency” of a
dance in Golden Age Hollywood films were linked
to a high art/popular entertainment binary that rei-
fied balletic movement, even if those choreographies

In section 2, Catherine Turocy’s strong essay on how dancers (and scholars) in the present might enter into the spatial world of Baroque dance includes an invaluable series of exercises for readers and dancers that demonstrates the Baroque understanding of space, physicality, and aesthetics. Bales’s own excellent chapter in this section, a comparative movement analysis across three different interpretations of pas de deux (Marius Petipa, George Balanchine, and William Forsythe), connects movement itself across the three dances and to disciplinary questions in dance criticism and history in rich and compelling ways. Carrie Gaiser Casey examines the shape of maternal relationships between Anna Pavlova and her ballerinas through a feminist lens, arguing that we acknowledge the contradictions inherent in these relationships “as an integral part of dancer experience” (226). Geraldine Morris carefully parses the collaborative strands of Frederick Ashton’s 1937 ballet A Wedding Bouquet (music by Gerald Berners, text by Gertrude Stein) to argue for an integrated analysis of movement, music, and literature. In her Laban-based analysis of Anna Sokolov’s 1945 solo Kaddish, Hannah Kosstrin performs vital recovery work, tracing the evolution and adaptation of the choreography through several dancers, including Sokolov herself. Finally, Jessica Zeller focuses on the uniquely American pedagogy of ballerina Rochelle Zide-Booth to provide a useful overview of trends in American ballet during the twentieth century and advocate for a less “monolithic” understanding of classical ballet (300).

Potentially both revelatory and challenging for scholars new to dance notation, section 3 includes a rich diversity and depth of expertise in methods of translating dance. Sheila Marion historicizes the developing relationship of Vladimir Ivanovich Stepanov’s notation to musical scores and anatomy within nineteenth-century imperial ballet culture. Historically, and relative to musical notation’s stability, dance notation systems are reliably idiosyncratic (if used at all), and Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir convincingly argues in her chapter on August Bournonville’s 1836 ballet La Sylphide that “Musique dansante, which is music that suggests the bodily motion of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ballet dancing, has much to tell us about the history of classical ballet variation” (341–42). Bringing a visual studies approach to Labanotation, Victoria Watts asserts that dance notation systems “visually instantiate a complex of particular values,” analyzing several scores of Balanchine’s Serenade to show that deciphering notation scores necessarily engages the embodied subjectivity of the scholar (367). Rachael Riggs-Leyva examines Mark Morris’s 1995 adaptation of Henry Purcell’s 1689 opera Dido and Aeneas through music visualization analysis, wherein choreography physicalizes and makes visible musical changes. In this case, Morris’s choreographic and storytelling choices support the dualism of the Baroque score. Candace Feck closes the volume with a valuable exploration of her data on how students write about dance—what categories they use and how their writing process results in the pedagogical golden apple of knowledge transfer because “[t]he art form itself is so richly evocative, so full of information and so open to multiple points of entry” (429).

Bales and Eliot explicitly “make no claims to address all of” what they call “the richness and vibrancy of the dance field,” and further note that “[h]istorical and ethnographic methodologies encouraged a broader view of the field, challenging the practice that left non-Western dance out . . . and neglected the study of forms not typically considered high art” (4). However, the content of this anthology indicates the necessity of these non-dance-centered methodologies: of sixteen chapters, only Galili’s focuses on what might be considered non-Western dance, and only Cooper’s and Bench’s contributions focus on non-concert dance. While most individual chapters are strong scholarship, the anthology as a whole represents a slimmer slice of dance studies than one might wish for in a work with such large ambitions. Dance on Its Own Terms represents a range of scholarly approaches; however, the diversity of dancing represented in previous collections remains critical to the field.

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“As a visual language that increasingly bridged theatrical stages and everyday landscapes, design emerged as a significant presence and influence in American culture,” writes Christin Essin (12). In this book, Essin breaks with traditional style-based approaches to design in favor of a cultural histori-