

black feminist critique and revision of (Latin/US-) American modern dance history.

Forced to contend with precarious institutional support, ever contingent upon competing geo-political interests, innovative cultural/knowledge production in and about Cuba is accompanied by many frustrations and disappointment. In a sense, Schwall's offering exemplifies what artists/scholars on both sides of the Florida Strait continue to struggle for: space to push forward the kinds of conversations across difference that are not openly had in other mediums. At the same time, the struggles with state partnerships chronicled therein might incite more curiosity about dancing communities outside its scope. Particularly, those dance makers whose innovations can be credited to the extent that they have remained circumspect about the state as a reliable partner. General dance studies readers and Latin American dance studies readers, specifically, will certainly gain a deeper appreciation for the art of continuing to dance with state partners as they change over time, and what careful comparisons can glean about the unequal footings within revolution.

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Dancing on Violent Ground: Utopia as Dispossession in Euro-American Theater Dance

by Arabella Stanger. 2021. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 248 pp., 12 b-w images. \$34.95 paper. ISBN 9780810144088 \$99.95 hardcover. ISBN 9780810144095.
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How have idealistic visions and descriptions of canonical, Euro-American theater dance operated to conceal violence? Merging dance, critical race, critical geography, and Indigenous studies,

Arabella Stanger's *Dancing on Violent Ground: Utopia as Dispossession in Euro-American Theater Dance* powerfully considers this question. The book intervenes in academic and mainstream discourses by delineating how people in power have employed Euro-American theater dance on contested lands to serve and further dominant interests. Stanger demonstrates that utopian understandings of Euro-American theater dance exclude alternative perspectives that challenge these choreographed idealities by revealing "dance as dispossession" (6) and the material consequences that negatively impact human life. By focusing on theater dance performances that occur in Europe and the US, Stanger importantly illustrates how such eclipsing of violence operates in different contexts and beyond national borders. The book makes a much needed and timely intervention at a moment when the enduring injustices of imperialism and colonization—in Europe and the Americas—are acutely apparent, and many institutions and organizations are reckoning with how to ethically continue their work.

Stanger opens the book with an excerpt from Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Geographies of Racial Capitalism*: "Being a good geographer means going to look and see, and then to challenge oneself in the description of what one has seen" (Gilmore 2020). Building on Gilmore's words, Stanger effectively argues that a comprehensive understanding of canonical, Euro-American dance must account for the historical, political, and material contexts of the places where the dancing occurs. Stanger proposes the framework of "violent ground," which she defines as "the material conditions of struggle, conflict, and domination that make possible the utopianisms of these choreographic cultures but are dissimulated by them" (4). This concept is particularly useful given that dominant structures and discourses, including those pertaining to canonical scholarship and dance on stage, continue to construct Euro-American practices and even enduring colonization, as normative and positive. Descriptors often attached to Euro-American projects that hide this violence include: "benevolent," "democratic," "innocent," "pioneering," and "progressive."

The framework "violent ground" also highlights how land is frequently at the heart of these conflicts, or in the words of esteemed settler

colonial studies scholar Patrick Wolfe, “Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus, contests for land can indeed be—indeed, often are—contests for life” (2006). Stanger’s book notably clarifies how dance too can be complicit in such contests for life. Indeed, in spatially contextualizing Marius Petipa’s 1890 rendition of *The Sleeping Beauty*—which is the subject for the book’s first chapter—Stranger highlights that St. Petersburg, the place where the performance occurred, is well known as “the city built on bones” (35). As a whole, Stanger’s text underscores the material conditions of violence that underpin canonical, Euro-American choreography as a case study of dances done on bones. The term “violent ground” is also compelling when understood literally, because it conceals the source of violence. In other words, in the context of the book, it is *not* literally the land that is violent—again, in the words of Wolfe, land is linked to life (2006)—but human-made structures and their material consequences that are destructive. In this way, the title itself mirrors how Euro-American stage dance functions.

To reveal the often-observed violence that Euro-American theater dance enacts, Stanger employs an innovative methodology that foregrounds “a politics of location” (15), which historically and politically situates Euro-American theater dance practices and performances in relation to bodies, architectures, cities, lands, and institutions. By being attentive to the orientation of bodies in space, Stanger convincingly demonstrates how utopian visions danced on stage are unrealistic in their omissions of violence. In Chapter One, Stranger shows how dancers’ movements (and lack thereof) in Petipa’s *The Sleeping Beauty*, performed in St. Petersburg, attempted to assuage the anxieties of a “vulnerable ruling class . . . occluding the practices of violence and terror through which it enacts that rule” (53-54).

Chapter Two focuses on Martha Graham’s and George Balanchine’s “choreographies of land acquisition” in New York “which spatially figure ‘America’ as a place of ceaseless procurement while making invisible the territories, cultures, and peoples removed or displaced to secure the conditions for that procurement” (61). This chapter offers a strong contribution to dance, Native American, Indigenous, settler colonial, and visual studies by demonstrating

how European Americans perpetuate settler colonial logics and narratives through dance performances. Stanger identifies how in the opening to Graham’s *Frontier*, the White, female dancer’s “gaze lays claim to space” (55), and “the phantasmic child cradled in the pioneer woman’s arms” connotes settler colonial futurity at the expense of enduring Indigenous genocide (73). She also details how in *Agon*, Balanchine choreographed “a sense of extreme vertical space emblematic of [New York City’s] local urban skyline” (77), which required “social displacement, racialized population management, and cartographical erasure” (59). Stanger further intervenes in academic discourses by arguing that “the wobble” (85) characteristic of Balanchine’s work can be viewed through the lens of spatialized, social inequities in addition to its appropriation of Black dance practices (Dixon Gottschild 1998). She also brilliantly connects this movement quality to “a materialist study of dance—acknowledging dance as a wobbling, contested, unruly corporeal and politico-semantic practice *because* of the contingent conditions in and through which it materializes social relationships” (173).

In Chapter Three, Stranger delineates differences between Oskar Schlemmer’s and Rudolf von Laban’s spatial theories and describes how these conceptualizations of bodies as “natural” and “artificial” were both useful to and rejected by National Socialists in Germany. Chapter Four focuses on Black Mountain College, located “in rural North Carolina—the isolated site of a twenty-three-year experiment in liberal arts education” (131)—and exposes “the impossibility of [its] ideality as lived practice for black students and staff” (135) as well as the dispossession of Native peoples from the land on which the institution was founded. In doing so, Stanger challenges a widely held view of Merce Cunningham’s choreography in the early 1950s as politically progressive. This analysis illustrates how Cunningham’s events reify settler colonial tropes and understandings of space, “freedom,” and individuality. The book’s Coda conducts a close reading of Boris Charmatz’s 2015 intervention at the Tate Modern, which purports to create a counter-hegemonic space in the museum for “everyone.” In actuality, the intervention reinforces structures of

oppression and exclusion, omitting how the origins of the Tate are inextricable from the British slave trade. Charmatz is a ballet-trained choreographer, and throughout the book, Stanger reveals how modern and post-modern artists reference ballet, even as they depart from it.

Perhaps because of the ways that Stanger conceptualizes bodies as capable of choreographing space, the author does not explicitly discuss her use of choreographic analysis—meaning a close reading of bodies and their movements to reveal knowledge—which is a key methodology in dance studies. However, her readings of movement throughout the book are exceptional in terms of the detailed descriptions—including genealogies of dance techniques, how particular movements reference and depart from bodily principles in ballet, and the ways that choreography has attempted to reify and stabilize dominant authority. Stanger’s choreographic analyses are also a primary way that the text contributes to fields beyond dance studies: if scholars outside of dance studies often fail to recognize that movement can offer extraordinary insights, Stanger effectively challenges the Eurocentric construct of Cartesian dualism that overlooks valuable knowledge articulated by bodies and movements. More specifically, Stanger effectively illustrates how choreographic readings can contribute to academic fields outside of dance studies by illuminating how bodies and movements participate in the social construction/disruption of space.

Stanger’s methods are also in conversation with Indigenous methodologies, which frequently foreground place. However, whereas Indigenous studies often uncovers reciprocal, respectful, and communal relations among Indigenous humans and more-than-humans (such as land, air, water, nonhuman animals, and the cosmos), Stanger focuses on Euro-American humans asserting dominance and individual ownership over Indigenous land.

Dancing on Violent Ground challenges the assumption that identities can operate separately from material conditions. In doing so, Stanger exposes the myth of Euro-American theater dance as an apolitical space unless it expresses “resistance, resilience, or repair” (14), which are actions and/or gestures which confront or alleviate dominant structures. The assumption that a movement practice can be

apolitical arises at least in part because of the ways that dominant social structures construct Euro-American people and practices as normative/neutral and in opposition to a deviant/politicized Other. Instead, Stanger notably clarifies, “theater dance is already political by the way it . . . contributes to practices of domination, exploitation, and violence” (14). Although Stanger emphasizes that she “shifts from a politics of identity to a politics of location” (15), the case studies also illustrate how identity and space are often mutually constitutive. In other words, the material consequences of systemic structures are not random, but directed at particular peoples in ways that are inextricably related to identity, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Identity also deeply influences who has access to and even the ability to “own” space and to move through it uninhibited, without surveillance, or at all.

Specifically, Stanger calls for “a critical negativity in dance research: an analytical attitude attuned not to how dance improves experiences of living but to how dance’s exuberant modeling of forms of life might provide cover for life-negating practices” (14). This methodological orientation is particularly important in examining dominant dance forms and discourses, which have a stake in “seek[ing] to negate the contested ground on which they move” (14). Beyond the scope of this book, it is interesting to consider how “a critical negativity” might operate differently when applied to the peoples who have endured and continue to endure “life-negating practices” (14). For instance, because dominant discourses often associate Indigenous peoples and people of color with trauma and violence—which is often directly linked to the structural oppressions that they face—it can be powerful to highlight the life-sustaining tactics they employ through dance and beyond. At the same time, Indigenous peoples and people of color are complicit in “life-negating practices” (14), and this amplifies the urgency of nuanced studies of the politics of identity and dispossession.

When grappling with questions of the visibility/invisibility of violence, the question often emerges: visible/invisible to whom? For many Indigenous peoples and people of color—who have endured attempted genocide, land occupation, prohibition and/or appropriation of movement practices, exclusion from mainstream

narratives, and social and literal death—the structural violence of Whiteness is often apparent and felt. Yet, such oppressive conditions are rarely investigated as they manifest and transmute in space through the lens of Euro-American theater dance. This is why Stanger’s book is vital—it unsettles the ways that many people think, write, teach, and even create Euro-American theater dance. It unsettles the very understandings on which the Euro-American world exists, as humans know it, move through it, dance within it and attempt to move beyond it.

“Dances Done on Bones”

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FUNDING BODIES: FIVE DECADES OF DANCE MAKING AT THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

by Sarah Wilbur. 2021. Middletown: CT: Wesleyan University Press. 296 pp., 18 photos. \$26.95 paper. ISBN: 9780819580528. \$95.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780819580511. doi:10.1017/S0149767722000377

Do National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) procedures impact choreographic trends in the United States and how might an embodied, even choreographic, analysis of public policy help shift stagnant power dynamics? Dance studies scholars continue to expand the definition of choreography past its utilitarian origins, and Sarah Wilbur is no exception. Wilbur’s

2021 powerful book, *Funding Bodies: Five Decades of Dance Making at the National Endowment for the Arts*, is a timely release in the aftermath of the Trump administration’s plan to eviscerate the NEA. But, as Wilbur skillfully reveals through exceptional detail, the attempts to manipulate the federal agency and its relatively marginal appropriations are in fact the core choreographies that form the institution’s identity and influence “dance making” in the United States (3).

Funding Bodies deftly tackles fifty years of the agency’s activities in three fifteen-year sections from 1965 to 2016, filling a scholarly gap in dance history and arts policy research, as the first monograph about the NEA Dance Program. The publication adds to a series of recent, discipline-specific investigations into the NEA, including Michael Sy Uy’s *Ask the Experts: How Ford, Rockefeller, and the NEA Changed American Music* (2020), and Donna M. Binkiewicz’s, *Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980* (2004). Wilbur supports her readers through the administrative history of the NEA by deploying the three “hegemonic ‘verbs’ of dance authorization:” leveraging, touring, and incorporating (23). It allows her to frame and analyze each period from a theoretical perspective, but at the same time to build upon previous scholarship on the relationships between the body, dance, and politics, such as Randy Martin’s seminal text from 2003, *Critical Moves* (23). Wilbur’s book also aligns with and credits Edgar Villanueva’s work (2018) on decolonizing philanthropy that scrutinizes and intervenes in philanthropy’s historic enforcement of eurocentric aesthetics and imbalance of financial equity. Undoubtedly, *Funding Bodies’* presence in the dance history and theory canon will impact young dance makers’ understanding and interaction with the nonprofit dance ecology by providing insight into the political moves that continue to shape careers, a goal supported by the book’s availability for free via the Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem program and the Creative Commons.

The book’s focus on the NEA’s structural shifts is scaffolded by an empathetic, materialistic engagement with archival evidence and frank testimony from interlocutors; the author’s dynamic and embodied descriptions offer a fast-paced, sensorial, and humanist approach to her