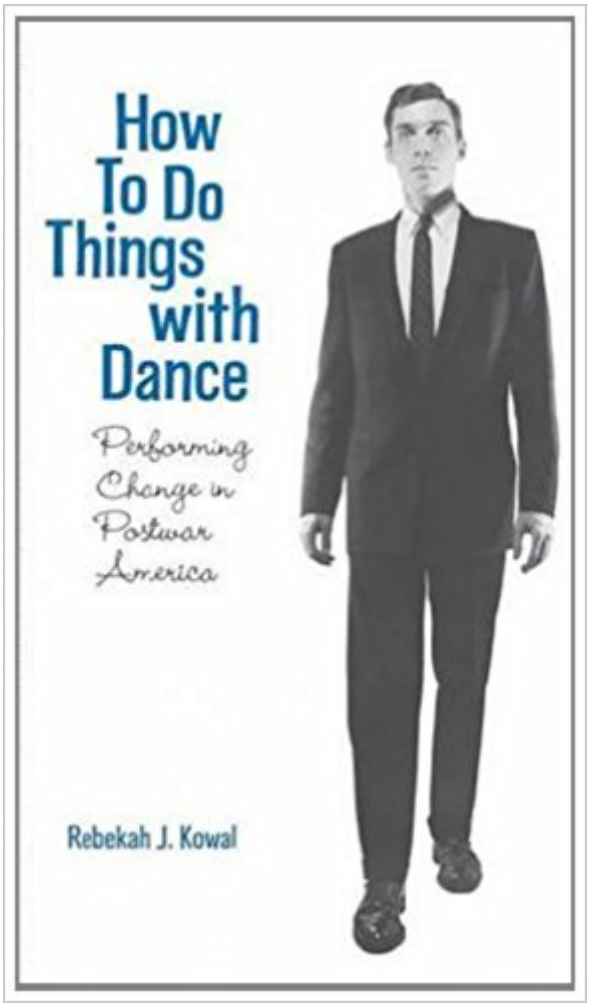
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How To Do Things With Dance: Performing Change In Postwar America



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Synopsis

Winner of the CORD Outstanding Publication Award (2012)In postwar America, any assertion of difference from the mainstream anticommunist culture carried professional and personal risks. For this reason, modern dance artists left much of what they thought unsaid. Instead they expressed themselves in movement. How To Do Things with Dance positions modern dance as a vital critical discourse, and suggests that dances of the late 1940s and the 1950s can be seen as compelling agents of social change. Concentrating on choreographers whose artistic work conceived dance in terms of action, Rebekah J. Kowal shows how specific choreographic projects demonstrated increasing awareness of the stage as a penetrable space, one on which socially suspect or marginalized modes of being could be performed with relative impunity and exerted in the real world. Artists covered include Martha Graham, JosÃƒÂ© LimÃƒÂ n, Anna Sokolow, Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Donald McKayle, Talley Beatty, and Anna Halprin.

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Ã¢â ¬Å“It is exemplary in its scholarship, historical method, and originality. Above all, it speaks of a historical period and, in the way that it considers the period, exemplifies dance history research at its best. Ã¢â ¬Â¦ Kowal's daring scholarship illuminates a period now a half century distant, and, in doing so, she says much about the continuing possibilities that dance offers.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Michael Huxley, Dance Research JournalÃ¢â ¬Å“A stimulating scholarly book blending U.S. history and an engaged active arts practiceÃ¢â ¬Â¦Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Philip

Szporer, Montreal HourÃ¢â ¬Å“The premise of the book is fascinating. ... It would be a shame if this book were only seen as a contribution to the field of Dance Studies and not also within American Studies.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Kate Elswit, The Drama Review"Kowal's claim that dance did not simply represent change taking place elsewhere but actually enacted change is a compelling argument that choreographers and dance scholars will want to invoke when challenging the marginalization of dance."Ã¢â ¬â •Claire Croft, Theatre Journal"(T)his book is an important read for the dance community at large."Ã¢â ¬â •Gernadine Jennings, Attitude: The Dancer's MagazineÃ¢â ¬Å“...Kowal nails it: she discusses Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Anna Sokolow, and others in intriguing art/social/political/sexual contexts. Highly recommended.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •T.K. Hagood, ChoiceÃ¢â ¬Å“As a vibrant blend of dance history and cultural context, this study offers precisely the sort of deep yet broad analysis I hope my students will emulate."Ã¢â ¬â •Jessica Van Oort, Dance Chronicle

Ã¢â ¬Å“Integrating dance into U.S. social and political life, KowalÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book demonstrates persuasively that mid-century dance initiatives contributed crucial innovations to modern dance while also vitally engaging with the tensions within the American body politic that would lead to the fights for racial and gender equality in the 1960s. Her research combines meticulous scholarship with a broad and insightful command of U.S. history.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Susan Leigh Foster, professor, UCLA)Ã¢â ¬Å“Kowal convincingly argues that the most salient point of postwar American dance was not the insularity of objectivism but the engagement of action. By questioning the normative movement practices inscribed on our bodies, choreographers like Sokolow, Cunningham, and Halprin bridged method acting and the sit-ins.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Daniel Belgrad, author of Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America)

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