

complicated topics from the outset; he also offers a historical method by which to trace a discursive absence and recognize the crystallization of a category. If readers still want to know what Latin American music is they must look to Palomino's own words: "Latin American music is the history of a musical conversation about Latin America" (p. 12). Consequently, to be a Latin American music scholar is not a self-identifying label; it is in fact a very conscious strategic position.

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*Dancing Revolution: Bodies, Space and Sound in American Cultural History*, by Christopher J. Smith. Music in American Life. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019. xii, 255 pp.

Christopher J. Smith's *Dancing Revolution: Bodies, Space and Sound in American Cultural History* examines the historical and political dimensions of publicly performed dance. Across the book's nine chapters, a range of historical moments and dance practices take center stage. Popular musical forms have been more widely engaged by cultural theorists and scholars of expressive culture, Smith contends, while popular dance has yet to receive equivalent critical attention. He writes, "Less commonly remarked or explored has been the role of vernacular dance. Yet from the colonial period onward, participatory ways of moving the body in relation to musical sound have often been experienced as confrontational, subversive, immoral, or even revolutionary" (p. 1).

The capacity of dance to be critical, if not insurgent and transformational, is *Dancing Revolution's* guiding thesis. Using a case study approach, the author considers moments of resistive dance in histories of American public life in order to explore "the ways bodies moving in public space were intended or perceived to contest social and political hierarchies" (p. 47). The book's subjects and sites include street dancing, marches, open-air revival meetings, theaters, dance halls, and nightclubs. Rather than focus on the politics of one single community, historical moment, or dance context, Smith draws on a number of different examples to argue that public dance has been revolutionary—a means through which marginalized communities resist normative ideological control and articulate their own ways of seeing and being. Throughout the book, attention is also given to the ways in which subaltern movement practices have elicited both anxiety and a desire to appropriate (often through parody) by colonizing, white, and/or hegemonic groups.

A trained historian and multifaceted musician, Smith relies on a vast methodological toolkit that includes, but is not limited to, ethnomusicology, cultural geography, iconography, historical performance practice, and what the author describes as "kinesics and the psychology of group performance" (p. 8) in order

to consider public dance “as a form of subaltern resistance” (p. 153). The interdisciplinary aspirations of *Dancing Revolution*—which deploys these approaches in nine chapters covering three centuries—make tidy descriptions elusive. Although the book’s unifying end point is dance’s revolutionary potential, the avenues that lead toward it are multiple and diverse.

“Sacred Bodies in the Great Awakenings,” the first chapter, explores “transgressive body vocabularies associated with Pentecostal Protestantism” (p. 14) and evangelical Great Awakening preachers in the late eighteenth century. Dance and movement were part and parcel of ecstatic evangelical preaching. Smith charts how, over time, a “creole synthesis” emerged through Afro-Caribbean and Anglo-Celtic/North European contact.

The second chapter, “A Tale of Two Cities I: Akimbo Bodies and the English Caribbean,” considers Jamaica, New York City, England, and the shaping of creole cultures formed in part through maritime circuits of travel and migration. Smith analyzes the manifestation of “creolization’s revolutionary impulse through theatricalized performances of Afro-Caribbean street ritual” (p. 10), including Jamaican Obi and Afro-Dutch Pinkster. He examines the creole syncretisms that are indexed in the period’s iconography. He also writes thoughtfully about the career of Ira F. Aldridge, a Black American actor, singer, dancer, comedian, and playwright whose professional trajectory crossed Britain, Ireland, Russia, and Europe. “Aldridge’s career, experience, and reception,” Smith asserts, “are rich sources of insight regarding the complex performativity of African American identity in nineteenth-century Atlantic culture” (p. 44).

In chapter 3, “Spaces, Whistles, Tags, and Drums: Irruptive Noise,” the author reflects on the concept of “noise” as a hegemonizing category and as subaltern resistance practice, exploring how the term “has been a metric of power in the Americas for four centuries” (p. 49) and how public sound has been resistive for just as long. The fourth chapter, “A Tale of Two Cities II: Festival and Spectacle in the French Caribbean,” turns to social and street dance—spectacular public group movement—in Haiti and Louisiana. Other case studies include dance as a means toward group unity as embodied by Shakers and Ghost Dancers (chapter 5), and explorations of primitivism through images of and performances by Josephine Baker and the Marx Brothers (chapter 6).

The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Spike Lee’s *Bamboozled* are given critical attention in chapter 7, “Blackface Transformations II: Voyeurism, Identity, and Double-Consciousness.” Here, Smith thinks through the relationship between Black vernacular dance, white interest in Black performance, and white unease about social proximity to Black people. He argues that these vernacular dance contexts index the complexity of Black public dance. They “[force] us to confront the joy and discomfort, hatred and admiration that racially coded performance arts have always elicited in American popular culture” (p. 117).

The eighth chapter is loaded with themes relating to independently robust areas of study—the women’s rights movement, the gay rights movement, punk rock, and hip hop. “Body and Spirit in a Post-1960s World: Hippies, Queens, Punks, and B-Boys” situates a number of vernacular dance contexts “within political landscapes of liberation” (p. 118). Smith considers 1960s hippie culture, drag, and b-boying/girling, asserting that these “historical cases” index the potential of dance to provide “a fundamental means by which humans embod[y] the shared physical experience of freedom” (p. 139).

More contemporary examples of resistive participatory dance are offered in chapter 9, “Street Dance and the Dream of Freedom.” These include tango dancers set in motion in the midst of a 2013 protest encampment in Taksim Gezi Park (Istanbul) and Sir Mix-a-Lot’s 1992 song and accompanying music video “Baby Got Back.”

While *Dancing Revolution* is, in some ways, a geographical hopscotch, the book moves more or less chronologically, each chapter exploring “patterns of intention and reception emerging through occurrences of participatory public dance” (p. 8). Smith creatively strings together an array of diverse performance contexts to plot particular coordinates of impactful movement practice and performance. The multiplicity of cases in *Dancing Revolution* is no doubt ambitiously curated: by the end of the book we are equipped with a number of examples of dance’s radical potential. It is also true that the high number of examples necessarily limits space for depth; consequently, *Dancing Revolution* might also leave readers with a desire for more detail. The third chapter, for instance, which considers irruptive noise, spans eleven pages. In discussing “watershed shifts in the contestation of American public soundscapes” (p. 49), the author moves from the Great Awakening, to the misinterpretation of Black diasporic sonic expression (via Pinkster and festival traditions), to noise ordinances, to early twentieth-century labor activism, to the Civil Rights Movement, to graffiti taggers. While his ultimate point that “[s]ubaltern noise(s) . . . manifest the capacity to wrest agency, however temporarily, from the hands of the autocracy” (p. 57) is valuable, the number of examples strung together in such limited space compromises deep engagement.

*Dancing Revolution* is a text about subaltern movement practices and unregulated group dance. It is also one that spends a great deal of its analytical energy on Black diasporic dance. (Nearly all of the nine chapters examine African American and/or Afro-diasporic movement histories, syncretisms, and embodied innovations.) “While I do not approach this topic as a dance specialist,” Smith writes in a footnote, “my perspective, grounded more widely in the history of American popular and vernacular expressive culture, may provide fresh insights” (p. 159, n. 17). While the author is clear about his disciplinary training as a cultural historian, a deeper engagement with the well-established interdisciplines of dance and performance studies—both of

which have explored the potential, limits, and historical contexts of dance and minoritarian performance in great detail—would have only deepened the book’s central arguments. To be sure, some scholars of these interdisciplinary fields are cited, but the fields themselves are not fully reckoned with as discrete literatures, nor are they identified as foundational in the way cultural geography and iconography are, for instance. And although “subaltern” is a term used with regularity, subaltern studies—with its origins in postcolonial and postimperial theory—is quietly present but not amply engaged.

Relatedly, I wondered how a more explicit engagement with the field of dance studies (not only dance as a subject but dance as a dynamic discipline)—given the book’s focus on “the semiotic meanings of participatory street dance” (p. 4)—might have buttressed *Dancing Revolution*’s core arguments. Explaining how the book diverges from what he identifies as two trends in writings on dance, Smith writes,

My fundamental premise is that participatory vernacular dance in the United States, especially dance occurring in public or quasi-public contexts, has been a tool for contesting, constructing, and reinventing social orders. Much dance scholarship has tended toward the descriptive-historical, in the case of vernacular styles, or the analytical-critical, in the case of concert idioms. The current text, however, seeks to locate deep currents and recurrent tropes in the visible behaviors and imputed meanings of “ordinary” people transforming public space through movement. (p. 2)

Leaving aside the arguable porousness of these two approaches, in *Dancing Revolution* dance studies seems to be engaged as a departure, rather than as a footing. Smith’s accompanying footnote helpfully signals that there is indeed dance scholarship that belies these currents and to which the author’s work is indebted. He writes that “there is a small but growing literature consisting of ethnographic investigations of dance and identity, especially in Latin American and Caribbean culture” (p. 157, n. 7), going on to list authors including Cindy García, Barbara Browning, and Elizabeth A. McAlister. While reading Smith’s curatorially inventive work, I wondered whether the book’s already considerable complexity might have been increased if a longer genealogy of critical scholarship relating to minoritarian dance had been enlisted throughout.

*Dancing Revolution* will be of interest to those teaching or writing about American cultural history, sound, and the politics of public embodiment. One of Smith’s many strengths is his ability to contemplate the sonic and the embodied simultaneously. As he writes, “music and dance historiography . . . have too often operated beyond one another’s horizons” (p. 143). Smith shows us the importance of scholarship that understands their inextricability. *Dancing Revolution* is an ambitious text that speaks to movement’s potential to be critical, resistive, and transformational.

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