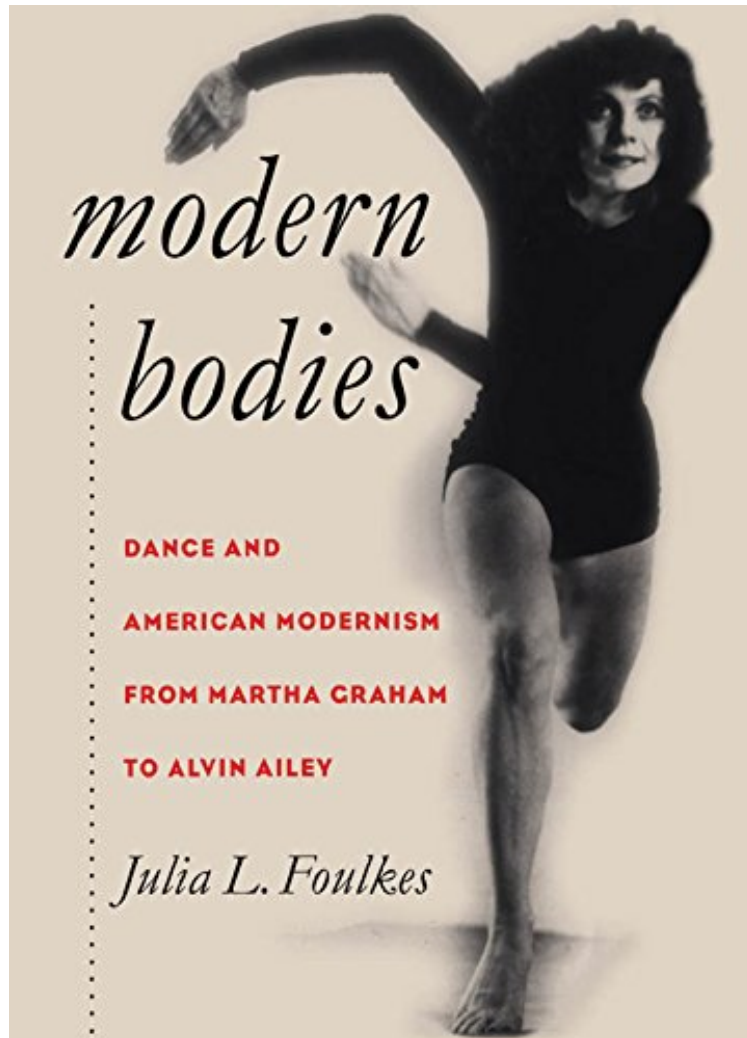


## Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey

*Julia L. Foulkes*

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In 1930, dancer and choreographer Martha Graham proclaimed the arrival of "dance as an art of and from America." Dancers such as Doris Humphrey, Ted Shawn, Katherine Dunham, and Helen Tamiris joined Graham in creating a new form of dance, and, like other modernists, they experimented with and argued over their aesthetic innovations, to which they assigned great meaning. Their innovations, however, went beyond aesthetics. While modern dancers devised new ways of moving bodies in accordance with many modernist principles, their artistry was indelibly shaped by their place in society. Modern dance was distinct from other artistic genres in terms of the people it attracted: white women (many of whom were Jewish), gay men, and African American men and women. Women held leading roles in the development of modern dance on stage and off; gay men recast the effeminacy often associated with dance into a hardened, heroic, American athleticism; and African Americans contributed elements of social, African, and Caribbean dance, even as their undervalued role defined the limits of modern dancers' communal visions. Through their art, modern dancers challenged conventional roles and images of gender, sexuality, race, class, and regionalism with a view of American democracy that was confrontational and participatory, authorial and populist. *Modern Bodies* exposes the social dynamics that shaped American modernism and moved modern dance to the edges of society, a place both provocative and perilous.

"Julia L. Foulkes' *Modern Bodies* sheds new light on the rise and fall of 'historic' modern dance. Some of her conclusions are bound to stir controversy. But her idea that modern dance of the 1930s and 1940s embodied the aspirations of a democratic polity that included African Americans, gay men, and self-styled 'revolutionary' dancers of the left adds complexity to a history too often defined solely in terms of heroines and artistic giants. (Lynn Garafola, Barnard College)" "Julia L. Foulkes' *Modern Bodies*" sheds new light on the rise and fall of 'historic' modern dance. Some of her conclusions are bound to stir controversy. But her idea that modern dance of the 1930s and 1940s embodied the aspirations of a democratic polity that included African Americans, gay men, and self-styled 'revolutionary' dancers of the left adds complexity to a history too often defined solely in terms of heroines and artistic giants. (Lynn Garafola, Barnard College)" [A] thoughtful exploration of American modern dance.--*Journal of American History* Julia L. Foulkes's *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* sheds new light on the rise and fall of 'historic' modern dance. Some of her conclusions are bound to stir controversy. But her idea that modern dance of the 1930s and 1940s embodied the aspirations of a democratic polity that included African Americans, gay men, and self-styled 'revolutionary' dancers of the left adds complexity to a history too often defined solely in terms of heroines and artistic giants.--Lynn Garafola, Barnard College A fascinating book--concise, provocative, informative, lively.--Choice [Foulkes] does a marvelous job of illuminating the way changes in society have affected modern dance. . . . Fluid, elegant writing. . . . *Modern Bodies* serves to contextualize dance's place in society. It's required reading--and not simply for dance fans.--*Time Out New York* This book is a compelling and significant contribution to the study of radical politics and modern American dance.--*American Historical* [Foulkes] places into the social and political context of the 1930s and 1940s the work of . . . choreographers [who] both shocked and titillated audiences with their perspectives on sexuality, gender, race, and class. . . . There are some wonderful black-and-white performance shots plus a few informal scenes.--*Dance Magazine* About the Author Julia Foulkes is a core faculty member of New School University in New York City, where she teaches history.