She explores with new eyes the contours and importance of the black dancing body and exposes perceptions, images, and assumptions past and present.

Dixon Gottschild acknowledges early on that “using race as a marker for dance endeavour has been interpreted as a defensive stance” (9). However, the book’s value lies in the author’s curiosity and enthusiastic determination to go all the way there; let’s talk about what we’re really thinking when we watch a performer of another race or what we might say to someone of our own race but hesitate to reveal in public. The work, she says, is largely motivated by the Buddhist saying, “the only way out is through” (10). She grapples with (without preaching about) the history of race in America. And ultimately she reminds the reader that race complicates African Americans’ (and non-African Americans’) professional prospects and working relationships within the dance world. It’s telling that some black dance artists expressed caution about discussing some of the topics Dixon Gottschild broaches in her interviews. Their economic vulnerability—as dancers, as artists, as people of color in a society whose institutions privilege the affluent and the white—cannot be underestimated.

Brenda Dixon Gottschild gives voice to artists who want to remind their peers, their audiences, and the critics and scholars who write about them that the dance community still has a race issue to examine and that we, like America, are not (and perhaps cannot be) colorblind when examining the artistry and contributions of African American artists. She quotes historian James McPherson when she says that this book is ultimately “the story of human beings (not abstract ‘forces’) making choices . . . coping with consequences” (9). She invites readers into a dialogue, marked by honesty, courage, and soul, capable of moving our bodies and our spirits. The book helps us understand once again why our culture is such a painful and exhilarating mixture of black and white elements, and why, in the midst of celebrating the mixture, we must never forget the African American contribution. Anyone interested in dance, cultural studies, performance studies, or identity politics will find much to ponder here.

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The Licensing Act of 1737 instituted a system of censorship in Great Britain demanding that all plays be reviewed by the Lord Chamberlain before they could be licensed for public performance. The initial reading of a submitted play was left to an Examiner of Plays; the Lord Chamberlain himself only became involved if the Examiner detected some objectionable content requiring review and opinion (after 1910 an advisory panel was established to weigh in on sensitive subjects). Steve Nicholson’s impressive two-volume work, The Censorship of British Drama 1900–1968, which examines the archives of the Lord Chamberlain for a comprehensive look at the operations of this office, is a major new contribution to twentieth-century British theatre history. Nicholson is not the first writer to tackle the workings of censorship in Britain, but his work is the first thorough survey of the Lord Chamberlain’s Correspondence Files, which became available in the 1990s. As such, it promises to become the standard reference and should inspire new research in this area. Volume I covers the period from 1900 to 1932, although the book really starts with the 1909 Joint Select Committee inquiry into censorship that, while ultimately reinforcing the status quo, provoked debate that never entirely died away. It spiked again in the early 1960s, leading to more parliamentary hearings and finally to censorship’s demise in 1968.

Although Nicholson’s first volume covers only a thirty-year period, the Lord Chamberlain’s archives clearly contain a mountain of material (some of it still uncatalogued), and occasionally Nicholson seems a bit overwhelmed by the sheer volume. To cover this wealth of information, Nicholson wisely adopts a twofold approach to his history, with alternating chapters. The first approach is a chronological account that tells the story of the office itself and of its changing personnel. He balances this with thematic chapters covering the censorship of war plays, horror plays, domestic politics, “the woman question,” etc. This dual structure is occasionally repetitious, but from it the culture of British censorship clearly emerges.
The chief pleasure of Nicholson’s book is his generous quoting from the interior communications of the office, affording a glimpse of the individual personalities behind the bureaucracy. The guidelines for censorship were deliberately vague, and some Examiners and Lord Chamberlains were more conservative than others. Official censorship could be fairly arbitrary and inconsistent, as playwrights and managers knew to their continual frustration. A frequent complaint was that serious, socially responsible dramas treating sexual morality or politics met with resistance, while comic treatments of similar issues passed without comment. Additionally, burlesque and music hall performances were not policed by the Lord Chamberlain, thus permitting risqué material in those venues that would have been banned from straight drama. Not surprisingly, class emerges as an unconscious factor in British censorship. Criminal or at least unethical behavior in working-class characters was excused because it was expected, but playwrights could run into trouble if they depicted their betters behaving badly. In refusing Noel Coward’s *This Was a Man*, the Lord Chamberlain wrote in 1926: “Every character . . . presumably ladies and gentlemen, leads an adulterous life and glories in doing so. The only exceptions are two servants who are kept busy mixing cocktails. At a time like this what better propaganda could the Soviet instigate and finance?” (260). Nicholson mines the archives for the many absurdities of censorship. Finding that he was not permitted to use the word “God” in a play, producer Terence Gray, a vocal critic of censorship, found a unique substitute, leading to the official response: “The Lord Chamberlain has no objection to his official title being substituted for the word God” (149).

The British form of pre-emptive censorship was vulnerable to a devious actor or manager reinserting banned material after opening, as the lightly-staffed censorship offices had very limited capacity to police actual performances. It is impossible to know how often such violations might have occurred, although Nicholson provides what evidence he can that it surely did happen. But owing to the steep penalties a theatre manager could face—and apparently to the general complacency of the British theatre community—it seems not to have been a common practice. It is well known that private-club theatres were exempt from official censorship; the Lord Chamberlain was frequently confronted by moral reformers about the supposed hypocrisy of this arrangement. Successful Lord Chamberlains, however, recognized that the club theatre network acted to mitigate charges of oppressive censorship and so they remained, less a genuinely alternative theatre than a kind of safety valve.

Another strength of Nicholson’s book is his balanced approach to the Lord Chamberlain’s office. It is easy to criticize the narrow-mindedness of censorship, but Nicholson is not entirely dismissive of the office’s function. During the 1909 Parliament Joint Select Committee inquiry into censorship, theatre managers argued—much as they would again in the 1968 hearings that abolished censorship—that the Lord Chamberlain’s stamp of approval safeguarded them against private lawsuits after their show had opened, and that without the centralized authority of the Lord Chamberlain, touring shows would be subject to the whims of local authorities with discrepant community standards. Nicholson also points out that the Lord Chamberlain could often be more liberal and open-minded than the various agitational moral reform societies that might have had more power in his absence.

The force of these arguments becomes clear as we turn to John Houchin’s *Censorship of the American Theatre in the Twentieth Century*, which is almost entirely concerned with lawsuits, virulent moral watchdog groups, and the different community standards in and outside of New York City (especially Boston). The story of all this is very lively since, unlike in England where the Lord Chamberlain could strangle a play before opening night, in America plays were generally subject to censorship only after they had opened. With the enormous power wielded by a small cadre of unelected bureaucrats over British theatre, debate was extremely limited and there was no appeal process in England. The American system, on the other hand, yields much public debate over censorship since, for every protest of an “immoral” play, there tends to be someone ready to leap to its defense publicly (although the degree to which the moral crusaders set the terms of the debate is depressingly familiar).

If Houchin’s book is less satisfying than Nicholson’s, it is largely due to the different systems of censorship in each country since, unlike Great Britain, America never had a centralized official censor. Thus, in many ways, Houchin has the more difficult task. While Nicholson can examine the systematic workings of a single office, Houchin must account for the haphazard censorship activities of groups with varying degrees of authority in multiple locales; the amount of material he synthesizes is impressive. He organizes this cornucopia by writing a series of case studies of controversial plays, such as Olga Nethersole’s *Sapho*, Mae West’s *Sex*, Marc Blitzstein’s *The Cradle Will Rock*, the
As one of the oldest performing arts in Japan, the noh theatre has a history of constructed mythologies that have become accepted as fact for the majority of Western theatre scholars. In addition, much of the Western scholarship done on noh has primarily focused on the play texts and dramatic analysis, while ignoring the social contexts which have enveloped the actors for centuries. Fortunately, Eric Rath’s new book sheds light on many of the invented traditions of the noh theatre and illustrates the actors’ adaptations to different social institutions. Rath shows how these traditions, many of which have been absorbed into both the culture and the historical record, also created a professional class of actor, simultaneously legitimating the traditional five schools of noh while restricting those performers who lacked affiliation.

The book is structured both thematically and chronologically, following the development and invention of various traditions and illustrating how these traditions were responses to a variety of new technologies and social movements. Rath begins his work by looking at the creation of myths surrounding noh masks and examining how these myths then served to enhance the reputations of various noh leaders and troupes. The second and third chapters focus on the spread of literacy and print media and its influence upon the noh. Specifically, in these chapters Rath looks at the secret manuscripts used by noh practitioners and illustrates how the writing of treatises and other documents established a hegemonic structure for the noh.

These chapters are especially fascinating because Rath examines Zeami’s treatises not only for their aesthetic ideas, but also for how the new notion of printed knowledge pushed the construction of mythology onto these so-called sacred texts. As he writes, “The adoption of writing was the most important innovation in the history of the noh theater, and Zeami deserves recognition as the innovator behind that introduction” (47). Writing allowed for the exchange of ideas to be recorded; while traditional knowledge was still often passed from teacher to disciple, the manuscript now served as a concrete resource and as a form of ever-constant verification for the performance troupes.

The act of writing also allowed Zeami to determine those performers and performance forms he considered legitimate and to exclude others, pushing them to the periphery (and, Rath argues, ultimately to extinction). One of the most interesting examples of cultural legitimation provided by Zeami’s manuscripts involves the omission of the shōmonji troupes from Zeami’s listings of noh performers. As Rath explains, shōmonji troupes were groups of performers associated with Buddhist rituals as well as noh performance. However, Zeami’s exclusion of the shōmonji in his writings changed the perception of their role, thus forwarding the artistic/cultural elimination of those companies from the world of noh performance.

Rath also notes the development of noh’s official genealogy and its connection to the culture through the ideas of print media, genealogy, and the development of the iemoto (family-head) system. In one example, he links the idea of a genealogical legitimation within noh to the Tokugawa government’s