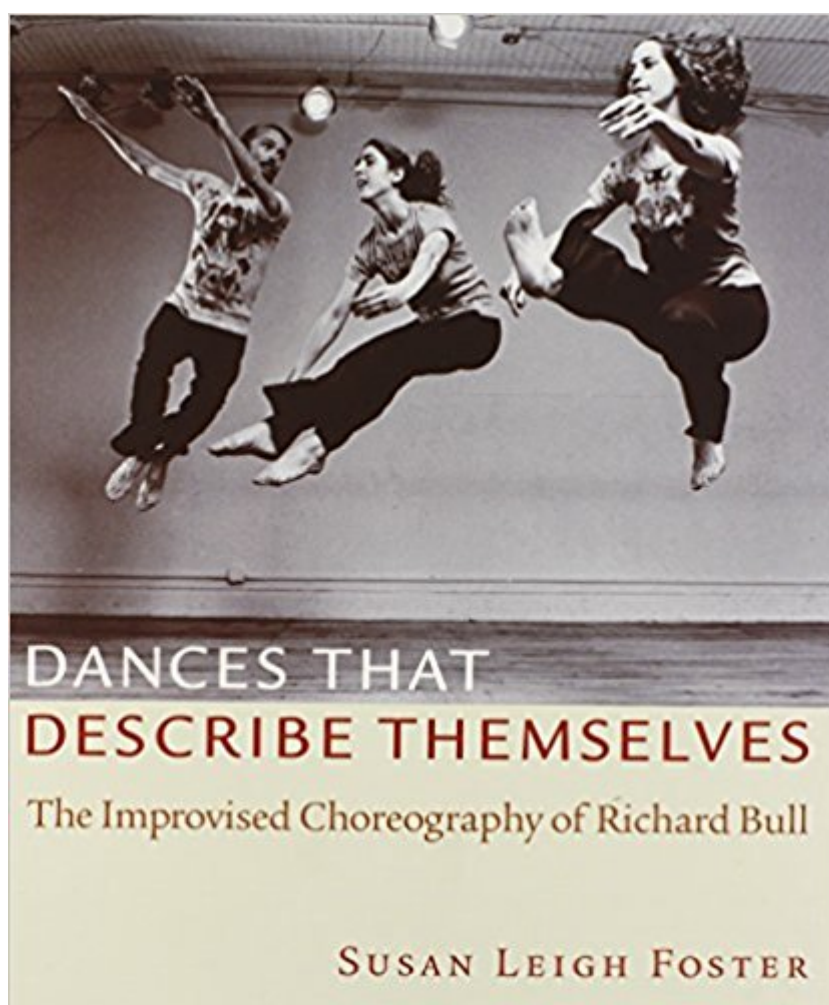


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Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography Of Richard Bull



Synopsis

During an improvised performance, both dancers and audience members reflect on how the dance is being made. They ask themselves: What will happen next? What choices will each dancer make? And how will these decisions contribute to the overall effect and significance of the performance? Trained as a jazz pianist, Richard Bull did not uphold the opposition often found in dance between improvisation and composition. Instead, he believed that dancers, like jazz musicians, could craft a piece spontaneously in performance. Analyzing performances by Bull and many of his contemporaries, Susan Foster argues that their diverse practices embody distinctive values representative of different artistic communities, yet they all share a capacity to reflect on their own making, in a sense, describing themselves.

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Customer Reviews

For some 30 years, Bull, described by Adriane Ruggerio in the International Dictionary of Modern Dance as "a dancer and stager of improvisational movement pieces," was part of the modern dance scene that thrived in the lofts and galleries of lower Manhattan. Trained as a jazz pianist, Bull explored the use of improvisation in dance and in his works made the creative process more transparent, allowing both the dancers and the audience to be surprised by "what comes next." Foster (dance, Univ. of California, Riverside) once worked with Bull and his wife, Cynthia Novack, and thus brings considerable insight to this study of the processes and procedures of the singular artist's creations. In addition to analyzing Bull's work, she also discusses the work of several of his

contemporaries (e.g., Trisha Brown, Bill T. Jones, and Ishmael Houston-Jones). The title refers to a work by Bull in which the dancers recite as they perform; his dances, although improvised, proceeded from written instructions to the dancers, which detailed how each piece was to unfold. A chronological listing of his works and some selections from his writings are included. Not for the casual reader, this book will be of particular interest to specialized collections in dance and the performing arts. Carolyn M. Mulac, Chicago P.L. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"Foster elegantly and seamlessly integrates the Africanist improvisational aesthetic into her lively, detailed picture of Bull's world, realigning a landscape that has too long suffered from ethnocentric skew." (Brenda Dixon Gottschild, author of *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*) "This is an extremely important book. By adopting Richard Bull's tactic of personifying 'the dance' as if it were a speaking, thinking person, Foster's book forces us to think about dance as a way of knowing, and about the ways of knowing that will be most useful for our understanding of dance as a social practice and a social force." (George Lipsitz, Professor of Ethnic Studies, University of California, San Diego)

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