

Brenda Dixon Gottschild

WRITER ON DANCE AND CULTURE

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Brenda in her own words...



I am - Professor Emerita of dance studies, Temple University. I perform with choreographer Hellmut Gottschild (my husband) in a form of somatic and research-based collaboration for which we coined the term, “movement theater discourse.” In going about my work as a cultural scholar/researcher, I use performance—specifically, dance—as a measure and paradigm of society.

In my professional life I have journeyed from a career as artist-performer to writer-scholar, from practitioner to observer—and, lately, a combination of both. The two developments are driven by the same passion for the performing arts and my belief in performance as a highly charged, sociopolitical phenomenon. My résumé encompasses the practical and theoretical realms and reflects my background in and commitment to both. To this end I define myself as an artist-scholar and coined the phrase, “choreography for the page,” to describe my embodied, subjunctive approach to research writing. This perspective is shaped by the fact that I spent the early years of my career as a professional performer, first as a member of the Mary Anthony Dance Theater (New York: 1964-1966); then as an independent choreographer, teacher, and performer here and abroad (New York, Stockholm, Helsinki, and London: 1966-1968); and, later, as a member of the Open Theater (directed by Joseph Chaikin, New York and Europe: 1968-1971) and a member of the Frank Silvera Writers’ Workshop actor’s unit (New York: 1976-1980). My work during my years as a student in the Performance Studies Department of New York University (Ph.D., 1981, and full tuition scholarship, 1974-1979) crystallized my growing desire to find a theoretical foundation for my performance interests. In making the switch from performer to scholar, I managed to blur the divisions between these categories and play both ends against an interdisciplinary middle ground. Thus, in presenting my research I use my own dancing body to demonstrate various performative and kinesthetic principles as I attempt to fuse the categories of lecture, performance, and discourse.

Books - My most recent book, *The Black Dancing Body – A Geography From Coon to Cool*, (Palgrave Macmillan, hardcover 2003; paperback, 2005) can be regarded as the third installment in my ongoing quest to bring to the fore the African American quotient in the American cultural equation. It is a map of American history as told through the “topography” of the black dancing body.

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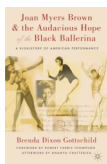
Chapters are named for body parts or expressive attributes: feet, buttocks, skin, hair/face, and soul/spirit. An introduction preceding these sections wrestles with the question, “What is black dance?” The book received the 2004 de la Torre Bueno Prize as the year’s most distinguished book of dance scholarship.

My previous book, *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era* (Palgrave Macmillan, hardcover 1999; paperback 2002), focuses on the social, racial, and artistic climate for African American performers from the late 1920s through the 1940s. For this work I received the 2001 CORD (Congress on Research in Dance) Award for Outstanding Scholarly Dance Publication.

My first solo book (I had previously co-authored a dance textbook), *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Praeger, hardcover 1996; paperback 1998), was the culmination of a circuitous journey in interdisciplinary research that began with the question, “What makes George Balanchine’s ballets different from European ballet?” I originated and continue to investigate a line of thought that had been ignored in previous socio-cultural and performance studies—namely, the Africanist presence in Europeanist concert dance culture.

Recent Awards – In 2009, I received a Leeway Foundation Transformation Award For Art and Social Change. In 2008, I was the recipient of the Congress on Research in Dance Award for Outstanding Leadership in Dance Research. In 2008, I was also granted an award from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage through Dance Advance to begin work on a book about Joan Myers Brown (JMB) and her legacy. And in February 2011, I received funding from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage through Dance Advance to complete researching and writing this book, now entitled *Joan Myers Brown & The Audacious Hope of The Black Ballerina - A Biohistory of American Performance*.

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Joan Myers Brown & The Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina

A BIOHISTORY OF AMERICAN PERFORMANCE

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