


Honest Bodies



Revolutionary
Modernism
in the Dances of
Anna Sokolow

HANNAH KOSSTRIN

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For Bess and Brock

May you too go out and change the world.

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PREFACE

“You can’t have honest words from a dishonest body; you can’t have honest movement from a dishonest body.”¹ Ray Cook, who performed in Anna Sokolow’s dance company during the 1960s and notated many of her dances, told me this aphorism Sokolow used in rehearsal. Cook connected Sokolow’s desire for honesty, or emotional believability in performance, to her work with Moscow Art Theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky’s Method of Physical Action, which teaches actors to draw on their lived experiences as a kind of personal truth to deepen their performances. Theater and dance practitioners in Europe and the United States, especially those aligned with communist ideals in the early twentieth century, like Sokolow, employed Stanislavsky’s Method because it resonated with the imperatives of socialist realism.² Sokolow incorporated these Stanislavskian techniques by insisting dancers harness raw power through their vulnerability. In rehearsal she told dancers “I don’t believe you” when she felt that they did not fully embody what she asked them to do.³ As such, Sokolow trained dancers to be physically and emotionally receptive, available, and earnest. Sokolow’s “honest bodies” performed with sincerity and displayed the influence of their political and aesthetic milieu. I focus this book around the idea of honest bodies to highlight Sokolow’s emphasis on believable, raw vulnerability in performance; her own body as a political, Jewish, and gendered site of expression; and her complicated movement among

1. Ray Cook, in discussion with the author, October 18, 2009, New York City.

2. Valentina Litvinoff, *The Use of Stanislavsky Within Modern Dance* (New York: American Dance Guild, 1972), 4, 9, 32, 41; Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 70–72; and Larry Warren, *Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Company, Publishers, 1991), 116.

3. John Giffin (dancer, choreographer) in discussion with the author, May 30, 2007, Columbus, OH. Lorry May, a Sokolow dancer, trustee of her work, and Sokolow Dance Foundation director, calls for a truthful performance when coaching Sokolow’s dances. In a *Steps of Silence* (1968) rehearsal at The Ohio State University on January 29, 2008, May repeatedly told the dancers she did not believe their performance. She wanted the dancers to draw on their own experiences to make the work relevant to them, so that the dance would read as a real, instead of fabricated, experience. May’s assistant, Suellen Haag, gave similar directions in coaching *Rooms* rehearsals at Reed College in October, 2011. See also Graff, *Stepping Left*, 71–73; and Litvinoff, *Stanislavsky*, 13–17.

government agencies. When I articulate the function, implications, or specificity of Sokolow's and her dancers' embodiment in this book, I show how this honest bodies tenet is in play.

I argue that communist ideology is central to understanding how Sokolow's dances functioned within early twentieth- to mid-twentieth-century Jewish and modernist channels of the international Left, and I engage the idea of honest bodies to articulate the meeting of defiant vulnerability, Jewish impetus, formalist aesthetics, Marxist content, and feminist drive in Sokolow's work. Onstage, Sokolow's and her dancers' bodies were barometers for social and aesthetic currents. As a private citizen, Sokolow's communist associations entangled her in government surveillance systems. Sokolow understandably denied her communist allegiances under FBI surveillance and the specter of the Second Red Scare (1947–1957, an early defining moment of the Cold War in the United States). This book activates a discussion of how her 1930s–1940s communist coalitions underwrote her political personhood and changed American modern dance and its place on international stages.

The daughter of a garment worker mother and a fruit peddler father, both Russian Jewish immigrants, Sokolow (1910–2000) filled her seventy-year career fighting for workers' rights and underserved populations through her dances for social change. Born in Connecticut and reared in the working-class immigrant neighborhood of New York City's Lower East Side, Sokolow came of age in a proletarian environment. As a young person she accompanied her mother, a Socialist and organizer for the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, at rallies for workers' rights.⁴ Sokolow danced in settlement houses and became a principal dancer in the field-defining Martha Graham Dance Company from 1930 to 1939. She trained in Graham's movement vocabulary as it became codified, originated roles in Graham's dances including *Primitive Mysteries* (1931), *Celebration* (1933), and *Four Casual Developments* (1933),⁵ and was a member of Graham's first company, along with Anita Alvarez, Dorothy Bird, Bonnie Bird, Jane Dudley, Martha Hill, Pearl Lang, Sophie Maslow, May O'Donnell, Evelyn Sabin, Bessie Schönberg, and Gertrude Shurr.⁶ Sokolow concurrently founded the Workers (later New) Dance League, an umbrella organization for revolutionary, or workers', dance groups, in 1932 with Miriam Blecher and Nadia Chilkovsky.⁷ American communist ideology provided leftist dancers like Sokolow a political platform for their choreography.⁸

4. Warren, *Rebellious Spirit*, 4–7.

5. Dorothy Bird and Joyce Greenberg, *Bird's Eye View: Dancing with Martha Graham and on Broadway* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 96–97.

6. Agnes de Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (1956; reprinted New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 417.

7. Graff, *Stepping Left*, 7–8, 201n7; and Stacey Prickett, "Dance and the Workers' Struggle," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 8, no. 1 (1990): 52–54.

8. Jane Dudley, interview by Richard Wormser, 1981, transcript, 5, Oral History of the American Left, The Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

The value systems associated with Sokolow's Jewish working-class cultural environment undergirded her proletarian and anti-fascist choreographic challenges to the economic status quo, gender roles, and racism.

Sokolow's commitment to communism as a Jew reflected early twentieth- to mid-twentieth-century communist and Jewish cultural allegiances that circulated among the United States, Eastern and Western Europe, Mexico, and the socialist Zionist discourse of the Jewish community in British Mandate Palestine (1917–1948) and Israel (post-1948).⁹ In New York she was active with the International Workers Order (IWO), a Communist front group that was a fraternal society and insurance organization with a large membership of Jews and other ethnic immigrant minorities.¹⁰ During New York's 1936 general election Sokolow registered as a Communist, instead of a Socialist, Democrat, or Republican.¹¹ Sokolow remained involved in communist endeavors as the Dies Committee formed in the US House of Representatives in 1938 to exterminate suspected communist activity from the US government and its programs. She choreographed for Lenin rallies even after Josef Stalin's nonaggression alliance with Adolf Hitler in the 1939 Nazi–Soviet Pact betrayed Communists' ideals by aligning with Fascist leadership; she maintained her IWO membership through the 1946 reinstatement of the Dies Committee as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) at the beginning of the Red Scare, and she attended a populist American Continental Congress for World Peace in Mexico City in 1949, which HUAC dubbed the “Communist Peace Offensive.”¹²

9. See Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Nina Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 5–18; and Pinhas Ginossar, “From Zionism to Communism and Back: The Case of Moshe Sneh (1948–1967),” in *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 236–254.

10. FOIPA No. 1138496-000; and Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 38–40.

11. Board of Elections, City of New York, *List of Enrolled Voters: Tenth Assembly District, Borough of Manhattan* (New York, 1936), 56, SIBL, NYPL. “Communist” was not a registration option in 1944 and 1948; in these years Sokolow registered with the American Labor Party (with 1944 choices including American Labor, Democrat, or Republican, and in 1948, American Labor, Democrat, Liberal, or Republican). Board of Elections, City of New York, *List of Enrolled Voters for the Year 1944–45, Borough of Manhattan—Fifth Assembly District* (New York, 1944), 143, SIBL, NYPL; Board of Elections, City of New York, *List of Enrolled Voters for the Year 1948–1949, Borough of Manhattan—Fifth Assembly District* (New York, 1948), 128, SIBL, NYPL. No voting record surfaced for 1940. In 1952, Sokolow registered as a Democrat. Board of Elections, City of New York, *List of Enrolled Voters for the Year 1952–1953, Borough of Manhattan—Ninth Assembly District* (New York, 1952), 17, SIBL, NYPL. When Sokolow last registered in 1988, she requested that she not be associated with any party. Author in phone conversation with Board of Elections, Manhattan Borough Office, June 23, 2010.

12. “Minor at Lenin Rally in Hartford,” *Daily Worker*, February 3, 1943, 4, highlights Sokolow's dances as “a special feature of the evening” by “one of America's finest dance artists.” On

Sokolow's retention of communist-affiliated ideals like egalitarianism, workers' rights, and anti-discrimination after cutting her ties to Communist organizations in the 1950s¹³ reflected many Eastern European–descended Jews' social practices among the international Left.

A revolutionary spectatorship among audiences who shared proletarian sympathies across this international Left in countries including the USSR, the United States, Germany, Mexico, and Israel enabled the circulation of communist principles through choreography like Sokolow's.¹⁴ By revolutionary spectatorship, I mean the shared empathetic interaction of proletarian-aligned audiences viewing social justice concert dance works in theatrical settings. Sokolow's choreography ignited an activist discourse in the moment of performance, through the honest bodies that charged the space as they danced and their resonances in their audiences' emotions.¹⁵ Like the mid-nineteenth-century Communist "Internationale" that advocated uniting workers across national borders through a common ideological goal,¹⁶ revolutionary spectatorship enlivened disparately geographic audience members to fight injustice locally by gathering them into an imagined revolutionary community.¹⁷ Although the revolutionary movement diminished by the 1960s, transnational

November 8, 1948, Sokolow requested transfer from her IWO lodge in Manhattan to one in Brooklyn, effective January 1, 1949, signifying her continued IWO membership. Memorandum, September 21, 1951, regarding November 8, 1948, Application for Transfer from Lodge No. 478 to Lodge No. 467, FOIPA No. 1138496-000. For the Congress on World Peace, see Committee on Un-American Activities, US House of Representatives, *Report on the Communist "Peace" Offensive: A Campaign to Disarm and Defeat the United States*, 82d Cong., 1st sess., 1951, 23; and Lloyd L. Brown, "What I Saw in Mexico," *Masses and Mainstream* 2, no. 11 (1949): 7–15.

13. Dudley, interview by Wormser, 5.

14. My implementation of spectatorship as a model for understanding dances' meanings in their time is influenced by Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). For Marxist engagements with spectatorship, see Erin Trapp, "Arendt, Preference, and the Revolutionary Spectator," *Cultural Critique* 86 (2014): 31–64; and Jonathan L. Beller, "The Spectatorship of the Proletariat," *boundary 2* 22, no. 3 (1995): 171–228. See also Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–148; and Janet Lansdale, "A Tapestry of Intertexts: Dance Analysis for the Twenty-First Century," in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Alexandra Carter and Janet O'Shea (London: Routledge, 2010), 160–161.

15. Susan Leigh Foster demonstrated that participants' physicality and sense of agency is vital to political demonstrations. Randy Martin identified how this embodiment politically enlivens the space between the performers and the audience. Mark Franko argued that dance and politics are intertwined and are a matter of representation and interpretation within their historical context. See Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 395–412; Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 3, 39–46; and Franko, "Dance and the Political: States of Exception," in *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research*, eds. Susanne Franco and Marina Nordera (London: Routledge, 2007), 60.

16. <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm>. Accessed January 31, 2016.

17. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 1–7; and Alejandro L. Madrid, "Transnational Musical

revolutionary ideals formed the honest bodies in Sokolow's work throughout her career. This book traces the hybrid meanings of Sokolow's honest bodies, mostly on but also off the concert stage, in the northeastern United States, Mexico City, and Israel, to show how Sokolow's 1930s–1960s choreography was a conduit for communist ideology.

As a result of Sokolow's movement through global channels, her own honest body occupied liminal spaces of conventional/Other, established/rogue, and home/abroad. In Mexico and Israel, presenters reacting to interest in American modern dance sponsored Sokolow, and she attracted substantial attention. Sokolow carved out space for herself in those dance landscapes, working with but overtaking the existing dance scenes in each locale. When she did not stay permanently in either place, subsequent choreographic projects, such as Ana Mérida's Ballet of Mexico City or Bethsabée de Rothschild's Batsheva Dance Company in Tel Aviv, pushed aside popular interest in her work. Working half the year in New York and half in Mexico City during the 1940s, Sokolow was unable to achieve her goal of sustaining her own company in either place. This cycle repeated ten years later in Israel. She felt marginalized because she was not rooted in a group of dancers when the concert dance field valued established companies.¹⁸ Although in one sense Sokolow experienced diasporic unrootedness, more broadly her travel anchored her work within the mobility of international currents. This book shows the implications of this mobility.

Encounters at the U.S.-Mexico Border: An Introduction," in *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ed. Madrid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

18. Anna Sokolow to Bessie Schönberg, August 2, 1942, Box 11, Folder 417, Bessie Schönberg Papers, JRDD, NYPL.

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enhanced this book. I reference Sokolow's collection from May as the Sokolow Dance Foundation. Since I first saw Warren's materials, they have been transferred to the Music Division, Library of Congress. I reference them as the Larry Warren Collection on Anna Sokolow and Lester Horton, which is the title the Library of Congress has given this special collection.

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ABBREVIATIONS

92Y:	92nd Street Y Educational Department Records
Biblioteca, CENART:	Biblioteca de las Artes, Centro Nacional de las Artes, Mexico City
BICLM:	The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum
BPL Microtext:	Boston Public Library Microtext Department
CENIDID, CENART:	Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de la Danza “José Limón,” Biblioteca de las Artes, Centro Nacional de las Artes, Mexico City
DLI:	Collection of the Israeli Dance Archive at the Beit Ariela Library, Tel-Aviv
DD, OSU:	The Ohio State University Department of Dance
DNB:	Collection of Dance Notation Bureau, New York City
DNBX:	Dance Notation Bureau Extension Office, The Ohio State University
Dorot, NYPL:	Dorot Jewish Division, The New York Public Library
FOIPA No. 1138496-000:	U.S. Department of State, FOIPA No. 1138496-000, Sokolow, Anna. Obtained under Freedom of Information Act Exemptions (5 USC 552/552a).
HTC:	Harvard Theatre Collection
JRDD, NYPL:	The Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
Juilliard:	The Juilliard School Archives
LNA:	Lexis-Nexis Academic
MAD, NYPL:	New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division

MD, LOC:	Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC
MD, NYPL:	Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
Microforms, NYPL:	The Microforms Section of The New York Public Library
NRSV:	Coogan, Michael D., ed. <i>The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible</i> , 4th ed., 1965. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
PBA:	Acervo Histórico del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City
PQHN:	<i>ProQuest Historical Newspapers</i>
SDF:	Sokolow Dance Foundation, Attleboro, MA
SIBL, NYPL:	The New York Public Library Science, Industry, and Business Library

Introduction

In 1934, Anna Sokolow scraped together enough money to voyage 5,000 miles from Manhattan to Moscow. She went to perform and to visit her boyfriend and artistic collaborator Alex North, who was studying music composition at the Moscow Conservatory. Like other young American Communists, Sokolow wanted to experience the Soviet Communist experiment. In a letter home to her sister Rose Bank, she described the Red Army parading through Red Square alongside army tanks and workers waving red flags celebrating the return of Stratonauts, scientists who tested the earth's upper atmosphere in hot-air-balloon-powered metal capsules.¹ Sokolow's palpable excitement in her letter suggests that the communal mingling of workers, children, and the army presented the ideological system she admired.² Sokolow grew up with communist values in New York's immigrant

1. Anna Sokolow to Rose Bank, June 21, 1934, hand-transcribed from the original letter by Larry Warren, Larry Warren Collection on Anna Sokolow and Lester Horton, MD, LOC. Sokolow dedicated a section of her *Suite of Soviet Songs* (1936), called "Lullaby (a song about the Soviet stratosphere flight)," to this event. Program, *Anna Sokolow and Dance Unit*, 92nd Street Y, April 5, 1936, 92Y. Jewish excitement for the USSR predated what Janice Ross calls Stalin's "campaign to liquidate what remained of Soviet Jewish culture" from 1946 to 1953. Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Jakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 61. For Stratonauts, see "Russian Ascent to the Stratosphere," *Science* 78, no. 2024 (1933): 328; "Findings of Stratosphere Flyers Surprise Scientists," *The Science News-Letter* 25, no. 672 (1934): 116–117; "Analysis of Stratosphere Air Verifies Pre-Flight Estimates," *The Science News-Letter* 25, no. 679 (1934): 228; and "Radio Enabled Scientists to Aid Stratosphere Flyers," *The Science News-Letter* 28, no. 763 (1935): 325–326.

2. American Communism in New York contained factions relating to local politics that did not necessarily map onto Russian Bolshevik or Menshevik ideology. Sokolow's connections in the USSR, Mexico, and the United States suggest that her desire to marry art and politics in the service of revolution aligned with Bolshevism led by Vladimir Lenin as opposed to Menshevism led by Leon Trotsky. Sokolow choreographed pageantry for Lenin commemorative meetings in New York and was romantically involved with muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros's assistant Ignacio

Russian Jewish community. This trip to the USSR reinforced her idea of communist ways of being. At the time, Soviet Premier Josef Stalin's cult of personality was in full swing and his purges were not yet fully underway. The Soviet government mediated information about the famine and collectivization that claimed millions of Ukrainian lives and covertly sent citizens to the Gulag's network of prison camps.³ But for visiting Communists like Sokolow, the Park of Culture and Rest where she performed, the visitor food card that subsidized her meals, and the spectacle of the Red Army presented communist utopia in action.

In shared spirit with Soviet artists such as David Burliuk and Vladimir Mayakovsky, who made art in the service of revolution, Sokolow aimed to marry art and politics. Like many who flocked to Moscow, Sokolow did not stay. In New York, she translated the physical, emotional, and political power of her idealized Soviet Moscow into dances for social change to fuel a revolution that never came.⁴ This trip initiated transnational conversations in Sokolow's dances that underscored her choreographic beginnings in an American Jewish Communist context and expanded among international communist networks within the Jewish Diaspora.⁵

Honest Bodies: Revolutionary Modernism in the Dances of Anna Sokolow traces Sokolow's efforts for a social revolution in her choreography long after her 1934 Sovietophile romanticism faded. In this book, I argue that Sokolow's choreography and its revolutionary spectatorship enabled the international circulation of American dance modernism through communist and Jewish channels of the international Left in the early and mid-twentieth century. I consider Sokolow as a transnational artist in order to position her communist sympathies and Jewish identity in a global landscape, which further reveals the political function of her dances within historical moments of ideological struggle, ethnic definition, and nation formation. The porousness of how Sokolow's and her dancers' physicalities

Aguirre in Mexico. As an attempted Trotsky assassin, Siqueros was not a Menshevik; as a close associate of Siqueros and a frequenter of Lenin pageants, Sokolow was likely not a Menshevik either.

3. See Anne Applebaum, *The Gulag: A History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003); Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, eds., *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, trans. Carol A. Flath (New York: New Press, 1995); and Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia: Volume II, Since 1855* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997).

4. I base this comment on sentiments from American Communist Party leader Rose Chernin. Kim Chernin, *In My Mother's House: A Daughter's Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 154–155, 191.

5. Nadine George-Graves's term "diasporic spidering" helps explain the dynamic exchange of communist and socialist influence in the early twentieth-century Jewish Diaspora. Predicating this idea on black identity as a performative act and active process within the African Diaspora, George-Graves defines diasporic spidering as a lateral, interconnected circulation and recirculation of influence among a global diasporic web as opposed to a unidirectional flow between one point of origin and points in a diaspora. George-Graves, "Diasporic Spidering: Constructing Contemporary Black Identities," in *Black Performance Theory*, eds. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 33–44.

signified—their honest bodies—tracked the cultural residue of these influences through Sokolow’s dances.

Sokolow’s work evinced communist discourse in three ways: Her and her dancers’ physiques displayed aesthetic markers of their training practices that indicated links with social movements; her choreography manifested revolutionary tropes; and critical responses to her concerts shows how spectators engaged with these ideas. By following international communist discourse through Sokolow’s dances, we see how American dance similarly circulated its own catalog of aesthetic values. *Honest Bodies* reanimates this history to articulate Sokolow’s prominence in international leftist and Jewish circles, why her choreography resonated so widely, and how anticommunist quieting of these values affected her career during postwar American Jewish assimilation. In this Introduction I argue for Sokolow’s leftist transnationalism to position her choreography within it, I figure her dancing body from archival evidence to ground the book’s analysis, and I define Jewish cultural and aesthetic elements in Sokolow’s work to explain how her dances’ Jewish signifiers engendered their meaning-making processes.

The development of Sokolow’s choreography in international contexts redefined American modern dance. Approaching Sokolow’s work in light of political and artistic ideology circulated through the Americas, along with North American influence in Israel, complicates midcentury constructions of the category “American.” From Mexico, Sokolow understood that formalism and indigeneity exist on a continuum, and that modernism could thus include ethnic elements like Jewishness. Sokolow’s engagement within a 1930s–1940s Mexican leftist milieu expanded how she could be leftist, American, and modern when leftist affiliations in the United States called one’s “American” loyalties into question. Israel allowed Sokolow to be Jewish and communist when postwar assimilation and McCarthyism inhibited this position in the United States, and American Jews actively distanced themselves from their socialist pasts to avoid discrimination.⁶ These influences contributed to an American modernism that people at the time considered to be universal and unmarked by specific cultural or political designations.

By defining how Sokolow’s choreography worked through communist ideals, this book changes how we understand American modernism as a transnational phenomenon through dance. Sokolow’s spectatorship and actions demonstrate the circulation of communist ideologies through concert dance choreographies in the United States, USSR, Mexico, and Israel in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁷ Her leftist allegiances are no secret in the field of dance studies. Dance scholarship, including studies by Mark Franko, Lynn Garafola, Ellen Graff, and Stacey Prickett, have detailed Sokolow’s work with the revolutionary movement, and dance

6. Rona Sheramy, “‘Resistance and War’: The Holocaust in American Jewish Education, 1945–1960,” *American Jewish History* 91, no. 2 (2003): 301–303.

7. See Victoria Phillips Geduld, “Performing Communism in the American Dance: Culture, Politics and the New Dance Group,” *American Communist History* 7, no. 1 (2008): 43.

historians Gay Morris and Rebekah Kowal have shown how Sokolow grappled with restraints from communist-effacing postwar American modernism.⁸ In this book, I show how Sokolow's communist and Jewish allegiances enabled her mobility among the transnational Left and how international communist ideology traveled through her choreography. In doing so, I build on Mexican historical scholarship by Barry Carr, Friedrich Katz, and Daniela Spenser that details how communist dialogues circulated through American, Soviet, and Mexican intellectual and political discourses by bringing dance into this conversation as a mode of knowledge production.⁹ I expand the US–USSR–Mexico triangle to include Israel as a geographical point through which Sokolow's dances engaged revolutionary spectatorship to show its hemispheric, Jewish, and American political implications.

Honest Bodies locates Sokolow's activities within a global circulation of communist ideals that redefined what it meant to be American. In the 1920s–1930s, communist ideologies reinforced American egalitarianism and social programs in the face of economic strife, and political candidates embraced them in cities like New York. In the 1940s–1950s, Second Red Scare proponents deemed communism un-American. Sokolow's fellow artists found themselves on trial before HUAC for their revolutionary actions. Although the FBI and the CIA followed Sokolow closely from the 1930s to the 1970s, she was never called before HUAC.¹⁰ Public accusations of Communist ties had repercussions like blacklisting, passport revocation, and long-term unemployment, so Sokolow and her contemporaries understandably downplayed Sokolow's communist connections in the Red Scare's aftermath.¹¹ Sokolow's Cold War reframing of her own reputation by denying Communist affiliations, or narratives proffered by others that she merely reacted emotionally to the status quo,¹² do not diminish the role of communist principles in her work. I do not intend to further what Spenser calls the fetishization of communism and espionage

8. Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); *ibid.*, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002); Lynn Garafola, ed., *Of, By, and For the People: Dancing on the Left in the 1930s*, *Studies in Dance History* V, no. 1 (Society of Dance History Scholars, 1994); Graff, *Stepping Left* (see Preface, n2); Stacey Prickett, "From Workers' Dance to New Dance," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 7, no. 1 (1989): 47–64; *ibid.*, "Dance and the Workers' Struggle" (see Preface, n7); Gay Morris, *A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years, 1945–1960* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006); and Rebekah J. Kowal, *How To Do Things With Dance: Performing Change in Postwar America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

9. Carr, *Marxism and Communism* (see Preface, n9); Katz, *Secret War in Mexico* (see Preface, n9); and Spenser, *Impossible Triangle* (see Preface, n9).

10. FOIPA No. 1138496-000; Susan Viscuso, Information and Privacy Coordinator, Central Intelligence Agency, to Hannah Kosstrin, January 28, 2011, in the author's possession; and Viscuso to Kosstrin, July 28, 2011, in author's possession.

11. During this time, Larry Warren researched his *Rebellious Spirit* biography.

12. Warren, *Rebellious Spirit*, 37 (see Preface, n2); and Sanya Shoilevska Henderson, *Alex North, Film Composer* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003), 14–15.

within Cold War narratives¹³ or to oversimplify Sokolow's case by suggesting that all communist activity can be explained by whether a person was called to testify. Instead, I show how Sokolow's and her dancers' honest bodies determined their own political subjectivity through signifying their relationships to social, aesthetic, and legislative politics in her dances.

My work began with a fascination with Sokolow's choreography and Jewishness. I saw *Rooms* (1954) in college and was drawn to it for its defiant vulnerability. At the time I, a secular American Jew raised in the Reform movement, was thrilled to see a Jewish choreographer making any kind of work. Why did discussions of her choreography obscure her Jewishness and celebrate her modernist alienation, I wondered, when Jewish organizations celebrated Sokolow, seated in front of her chamseh-covered apartment wall in the documentary *Anna Sokolow: Choreographer*, as a Jewish cultural figure?¹⁴ Is there a distinction between Jewish work and choreographers making work while being Jewish? These categories shift, but these questions pose points of articulation for Jewishness in the United States, other points in the Diaspora, and Israel. Sokolow's hybridity of Jewishness and modernism came together in her technical practice and choreography. In the following section I explain how I flesh out these elements from archival evidence by incorporating Sokolow's movement training and critical response to her performances to render her dancing body within its time to analyze her work.

REVIVING SOKOLOW'S DANCING BODY

Sokolow's dancing body—a radical body, a Jewish body, a female body, a modern dance body—played a significant role in her ability to navigate critical, political, raced, and gendered boundaries with her revolutionary work. *Honest Bodies* shows how the choreography lived through Sokolow's and her dancers' bodies, how reaction to it was informed by contemporary sentiment, and how her teaching and dancing bod(y)(ies) generated a discursive legacy for a range of choreographic styles.¹⁵

13. Daniela Spenser, "Standing Conventional Cold War History on Its Head," in *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 382–383.

14. *Anna Sokolow: Choreographer*, VHS, produced and directed by Lucille Rhodes and Margaret Murphy (1980; Pennington, NJ: Dance Horizons Video, 1991).

15. I build on a Foucaultian framework of discourse analysis that assumes threads of discussion can exist and be historicized, furthered by Judith Butler's assertion that performance is a discourse of power that materializes through bodily actions, and Diana Taylor's argument that the lack of label for the kind of discourse that theatrical performance creates does not illegitimize its existence. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–138; Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 187, 224–230; and Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 6. I build on Manning's analysis in *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* (see Preface, n14) of how

Sokolow's dancing body was the only constant in her work as she traveled around the northeastern United States and Mexico City in the 1930s and 1940s, and her teaching body carried her kinesthetic knowledge to Europe, South America, Israel, and East Asia for the rest of her career. Sokolow developed a way of performing that relied on a sense of strong weight, diverse dynamic range, vulnerability, and open-endedness.

Critical commentary from the 1930s helps figure Sokolow's dancing body by describing her as a technical and compelling performer. Critics wrote high praise for Sokolow's "hex dance" duet with Anita Alvarez in the "Dedication" section of Graham's *Panorama* (1935), which critic Edna Ocko noted was Graham's first work based in social action that resonated with the leftist movement.¹⁶ Ocko highlighted this duet as "some of the finest dancing of the evening," as well as a *New Theatre* 1935 dance highlight.¹⁷ John Martin later noted in the *New York Times* that Sokolow performed Graham's *Four Casual Developments* "with delightful comedy and skill."¹⁸ The most exciting description of Sokolow's choreography comes from the 1930s leftist press. Owen Burke, a *New Masses* dance critic and one of Sokolow's biggest champions, provided evocative weekly reviews of Sokolow's work. Other critics and Sokolow's classmates and teachers commented on her technical dexterity and charismatic persona. One noted in *American Dancer* in 1937 that Sokolow "impresses one by her force and vigor and by her sincerity."¹⁹ That year, Margery Dana noted in the *Daily Worker* how Sokolow's petite frame could dominate the space: "On a sudden burst of music, something happens. The stage and auditorium both seem filled with portentous action and electric energy."²⁰ Sokolow moved, according to accounts, with an impressively broad dynamic range. Fellow Graham dancer Dorothy Bird remembered that Sokolow was "secure on her feet, so agile, so in balance, and so fast!"²¹ In 1932, Bird said, their Henry Street Settlement and Neighborhood Playhouse acting teacher Laura Elliot informed the class, "only she [Sokolow] possessed the knack of being sufficiently objective, while remaining in touch with her feelings."²² These comments spurred a reputation that drew broad spectatorship to Sokolow's work and provided credibility for her choreographic career.

the discourse of critical reviews from various publications determined how audiences and critics constructed the racial and social positions of the works and their choreographers.

16. Edna Ocko, "Martha Graham's 'Panorama,'" *New Theatre* (September 1935): 27.

17. Ocko, "Martha Graham's 'Panorama,'" 27; and *ibid.*, "Dancers, Take a Bow," *New Theatre* (February 1936): 24.

18. John Martin, "New Recital Given by Martha Graham: Dancer and Her Group Present Program of Wide Variety at Guild Theatre," *New York Times*, March 15, 1937, 16. PQHN.

19. "Anna Sokolow and Dance Unit, Y. M. H. A., February 28," *American Dancer*, no month, 1937, n.p., Anna Sokolow Clippings, JRDD, NYPL.

20. Margery Dana, "Dancing to the Tune of the Times: Young Anna Sokolow Among the Leading Modern Dancers of America," *Daily Worker*, November 10, 1937, 7.

21. Bird and Greenberg, *Bird's Eye View*, 67 (see Preface, n5).

22. *Ibid.*, 87.

A performance I saw demonstrated the charisma of Sokolow's stage persona in the absence of film of her performing in the 1930s, and served as an example of how contemporary performance dialogues with archival evidence. At the Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble's 100th Birthday Tribute Concert on February 14, 2010, at the 92nd Street Young Men's/Young Women's Hebrew Association (YM/YWHA, or "Y") on Manhattan's Upper East Side, Charis Haines's command of performance and clarity of movement in *Preludes* (1981), a solo Sokolow made for Haines's teacher Tonia Shimin,²³ recalled the power critics described so often in Sokolow's performances.²⁴ In her dancing, Haines was petite and muscular, tender yet fierce. She poured her weight with crisp clarity into different pools of support as if through a fiber-optic funnel. Her pristine tiny, quick footwork complemented a cross-body tension that played against swooping turns and deepening spins. She was strong but not tense, yielding into softness as she sank into wrapped shapes. Her shatteringly precise leg beats and arm threads preceded generous full-body *pliés*. Haines was charismatic and articulate, with her discerning focus encompassing a combination of joy and an understanding of worldly sorrow. Watching Haines gave me a new understanding for what it might have been like to see Sokolow dance. Haines's performance recalled Sokolow's embodiment, reinforcing the importance of recognizing how dancers' individual physicalities and performance qualities distinctly signify dances' meanings.

Engaging a work's full meaning necessitates specific language to describe how the bodies form the choreography in that space and time. My argument here is influenced by the limits of onstage colorblindness that dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster calls "simply(?) the doing of it" in the work of postmodern choreographers and life partners Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane. The materiality of Jones's black body and Zane's white, Italian-Jewish body together in their playful, poignant duets that referenced nothing outside themselves necessarily invoked the political importance of how "they are dancing together, *intimately* [original emphasis]" because of the way mainstream American culture trains audiences to read bodies as raced, gendered, and classed entities against an established norm.²⁵ When we look at photographic images of dancing, how do we read what we see? In a picture of *Case History No. —* (1937) (central photo of Figure 1.5 in Chapter 1) Sokolow lands a jump with her knee tracking over her toes, in a physical moment valued as "good technique"

23. Anna Sokolow, *Preludes*, restaged by Tonia Shimin, performed by Charis Haines, *Sokolow 100th Birthday Tribute*, presented by Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble, February 14, 2010, 92nd Street YM/YWHA, New York City.

24. Dancer and choreographer Ze'eva Cohen, who danced with Sokolow in Tel Aviv and New York and knew her since the early 1960s, and who also witnessed Haines's 2010 performance, agreed that Haines came close to embodying Sokolow's performance abilities and style. Cohen in phone conversation with the author, September 14, 2010.

25. Susan Leigh Foster, "Simply(?) the Doing of It, Like Two Arms Going Round and Round," in *Continuous Replay: The Photographs of Arnie Zane*, ed. Jonathan Green (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 114.

within the American modern dance tradition. These images contain a Jewish body aesthetically aligned with white modern dance during a time when Jews were targets of racialized language that “Othered” their bodies.²⁶ As Foster’s insistence that the viewer grapple with how Jones and Zane dancing intimately upset institutionalized racism and heteronormativity on American stages, we cannot ignore Sokolow’s Jewish body’s prominence during a time that American society marked working-class Jews as second-class citizens, even when discussions about choreography in abstract language highlighted Sokolow’s disciplined modern dance look.

To revive Sokolow’s dancing body, I flesh out her choreography from archival evidence to understand the political stakes of her work.²⁷ I aim to make dance descriptions I assemble from historical crumbs in still images, program notes, critical reviews, financial reports, or a sentiment scribbled on the back of a publicity photograph read as immediately as contemporary performance. I work to convey the movement I read in a Labanotation score, a twentieth-century movement notation system that shows where bodies go in space and time, as effortlessly as my description of a live or filmed dance.²⁸ I hope to invoke in my reader the palm-clammy excitement and empowered rage that Sokolow produced in her audiences to convey the implications of spectatorship amid the time’s political environment.

I analyze Sokolow’s dances to create a written record in dialogue with kinesthetic evidence to display how her dances were sites for Jewish and communist aesthetics. For this, I integrate what performance theorist Diana Taylor discerns as the archive and the repertoire with what dance theorist Priya Srinivasan calls the bodily archive to show how the residue of physical practice generates transnational discourse. In the archive, knowledge takes the form of written evidence, and in the repertoire, modes of bodily transmission evidence embodied knowledge.²⁹ Taylor argues that performance can remap the Americas into a complete hemisphere that rematerializes histories lost through colonization and a devaluation of knowledge production originating

26. See Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, ed., *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); and Rebecca Rossen, *Dancing Jewish: Jewish Identity in American Modern and Postmodern Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

27. I build on the methods Susan Manning, Ann Cooper Albright, and Nadine George-Graves introduce for assembling and analyzing dances from archival sources and for gaining a kinesthetic understanding of the work through ethnographic and practical means. Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: The Dances of Mary Wigman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Albright, *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loie Fuller* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007); and George-Graves, *Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010). I build on Melanie Bales and Karen Eliot’s assertion for a dance-focused methodology wherein theoretical and historical conclusions grow from the dance’s materiality. Bales and Eliot, eds., “Introduction,” in *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–7.

28. See Hannah Kosstrin, “Notation Score as Embodied Documentary Presence: A Response to Amelia Jones’ ‘Presence in Absentia,’” *The International Journal of Screendance* 2 (2012): 44–47.

29. Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*, xvii, 19–25.