

Dances with Darwin, 1875-1910



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Vernacular Modernity in France

RAE BETH GORDON



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Examining the extraordinary influence of Darwin's theory of evolution on French thought from 1875 to 1910, Rae Beth Gordon argues for a reconsideration of modernism both in time and in place that situates its beginnings in the French cafe-concert aesthetic. Gordon weaves the history of medical science, ethnology, and popular culture into a groundbreaking exploration of the cultural implications of gesture in dance performances at late-nineteenth-century Parisian cafe-concerts and music halls. While art historians have studied the ties between primitivism and modernism, their convergence in fin-de-siecle popular entertainment has been largely overlooked. Gordon argues that while the impact of Darwinism was unprecedented in science, it was no less present in popular culture through the popular press and popular entertainment, where it constituted a kind of "evolutionist aesthetic" on display in the cafe-concert, circus, and music-hall as well as in the spectator's reception of the representations on the stage. Modernity in these sites, Gordon contends, was composed by the convergence of contemporary medical theory with representations of the primitive, staged in entertainments that ranged from the "Can-Can", "Missing Links", and epileptic singers to the "Cake-Walk". Her anthropology of gesture uncovers in these dislocations of the human form an aesthetic of disorder a half century before the eruptions of Dada and Surrealism.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Dances with Darwin, 18751910_下载链接1_](#)

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现代性

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hysteric singer and hysteria/ decadence

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