

involved in running dance organizations learn more about the experiences and needs of their constituencies. As I read, I found myself substituting “dance artists” for “PhD students and adjuncts,” drawing parallels between the dance field and the conditions of academic life. Her discussion of dance artists’ willingness to self-exploit provoked reflection about my own experiences and motivations: Why exactly did I agree to write this (unpaid) review? Why have I been teaching as an adjunct for five years? In what ways do I neglect forms of collective struggle and cave to the gravitational pull of individualist careerism? Van Assche’s exploration of precarity can help us attune to the ways that self-exploitation and smarm show up within concert dance, academia, and our lives more broadly.

Olive Mckean
Smith College

Note

1. For more on this tradition, see Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

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SIDI LARBI CHERKAOUI: DRAMATURGY AND ENGAGED SPECTATORSHIP

by Lise Uytterhoeven. 2019. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 271 pp., 16 illustrations. £64.99 hardcover. ISBN: 9783030278151. £44.99 paper. £34.99 e-book. ISBN: 9783030278168. doi:10.1017/S0149767721000395

A rigorous, contextualized choreographic and dramaturgical analysis emerges in Lise Uytterhoeven’s *Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui: Dramaturgy and Engaged Spectatorship*. Since the Flemish-Moroccan choreographer’s first production in 1999, Cherkaoui has been blending genres, breaking down borders and definitions of what dance is and means in the twenty-first century. Uytterhoeven’s dramaturgical methodology emerged from her efforts to connect Cherkaoui’s nonlinear mix of movement, spoken word, music, and sets into a web of meaning. By situating his work within artistic practices and theories of transcolonial, transreligious, and trans-cultural perspectives, the book reveals challenges to Western hegemonic perspectives concerning who belongs, who needs to be translated, and whose story is told. Productions resonate with current issues surrounding migration, the rise of right-wing populism, religion in the sociopolitical sphere, and hybridity, challenging the viewer to reflect and engage with these issues in society and themselves.

The concept of engaged spectatorship invites the reader to become part of a conversation between choreographer, author, and the work. Tracing the evolution of Flemish dramaturgy (33) from a single place of authority to a democratized and decentered practice, the spirit of democracy encourages readers’ ongoing efforts to decipher their own meanings using Uytterhoeven’s methodology. Readers can experience the power she finds in Cherkaoui’s work by continually engaging through a dramaturgical lens with the choreography, extending past the performance in a process that entails research, writing, repeated viewings, investigating theories of language (specifically storytelling and translation studies), and conversation.

Viewers are not passive; they are active participants who do not simply consume, but who engage in the labor of digging and connecting the many layers into a patchwork of meaning. The initial seeds of her approach beginning in 1999 stand in stark contrast to the easily digestible wash of media that is ubiquitous in 2021.

The first chapter, “Kaleidoscopic Identity and Aesthetics,” analyzes Cherkaoui’s art installation *La -Zon-Mai* (2007), which teases apart culture from place and questions the idea of home and identity. Split screens on a house-shaped building flash images of dancers moving in their homes (reminiscent of watching dancers in their homes during COVID lockdowns), creating a *mise-en-scène* of shifting identities. Commissioned by the Cité National de l’Histoire de l’Immigration in Paris, it was “part of a project aiming to change the perception of, and prejudices towards, immigration” (2). Janet Adshead’s model of dance analysis informs the exploration of pieces from 2000 to 2010 in the following chapters, revealing complexities of geopolitics, transculturalism, and postcolonialism, using post-structural and intertextual approaches. Uytterhoeven’s dramaturgy is not interested in the choreographic process, but in performance and creative interactive meaning-making after viewing. Analysis of *Rien de Rien* (2000) identifies choreographic themes, including hand gestures, virtuosic movement bordering on contortion, storytelling, expressive popular and folk dance performance, circular movements, and inversion. The literal objectification of bodies was memorably depicted in *Babel* (2010), when a dancer becomes a transformer shooting missiles. Interwoven dramaturgical strategies explore postcolonial and “Other” subjectivities, often through a travel story. Performers speak and sing in untranslated languages, a postcolonial critique in which the “Other’s” language may be unintelligible to the dominant viewer. Religious iconography and layering of scenes without literal progression creates a shifting, disorienting experience. The performers and collaborators are from a myriad of disciplines spanning the globe: physicalizations of Cherkaoui’s search for diversity and multiplicity.

Uytterhoeven’s intertextual analysis opens doors to new meanings of the choreographer’s work. For example, the Hebrew song “Yerushalayim Shel Zahav,” sung (88) by

Cherkaoui (whose father was Muslim) in *zero degrees* (co-choreographed with Akram Khan in 2005), was written by Naomi Shemer in 1967 to celebrate Israel’s independence. Based on the melody of Basque lullaby “Pello Joxepe,” *zero degrees* reveals blending and borrowing between cultures and people. It premiered during the Second Intifada (2000–2005) in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Digging further into the song’s history, the author questions whether the power dynamic is exposed between what is orally transmitted (the Basque song) and what is written (the Hebrew song); we only hear the Hebrew song. For Uytterhoeven, only ongoing engagement with the choreographic work outside of the theater uncovers and constructs meanings inaccessible through the experience of watching the performance.

Cherkaoui’s work is perceived as constantly steering the viewer away from preconceived notions of culture, language, religion, geopolitics, gender, disability, dance history, and class. A decentering manifests itself in both the physical and metaphysical idea of a kaleidoscope, with different trajectories in thought and bodies on the stage that resemble medieval Flemish paintings by Pieter Bruegel or Hieronymus Bosch (154, 216). Multiple scenes challenge an uncomfortable spectator to link together disparate elements on the periphery into a matrix of meaning, in turn, questioning what they thought was center. Uytterhoeven does not tackle whether Cherkaoui’s choreography may frustrate and turn away spectators due to confusion and his refusal to edit. He asked, “What most directors do is ‘kill your darlings’; you have to cut, cut, cut, cut . . . and I thought, what if I don’t; what if I keep everything, what if everything gets a place, what if I don’t reject anything?” (156). Who identifies with an unedited choreographic piece specifically in the current virtual climate of quick digestible content?

Uytterhoeven imagines a spectator remembering *Myth* (2007), with its dreamlike qualities; images and scenes blur into one another in a nonlinear progression that escapes retelling. Jungian dream analysis offers a dramaturgical tool to decode meaning, and examines a person’s response to trauma and mythical stories embedded in the concept of religion. The Jungian concept of the circumambulation of symbols captures what the reader and viewer

are encouraged to do: “walk around” (172) the symbol and excavate connections on a micro and macro level to reveal all facets of the work. In *Myth*, an unstable image of the cross—from crutches, to a weapon, to a crucifix—emphasizes the overarching theme that nothing is fixed.

Cherkaoui’s productions offer fertile ground, porous enough to inject one’s own subjectivity into the meaning-making process, shifting between viewing and research. Those who have not seen his work may be inspired to see it live, and Uytterhoeven’s book may prompt a re-examination by those who have seen his productions. The reader is encouraged to contemplate the act of performance: What lives in the moment and what lives outside the body in mnemonic devices? How do they inform one another? Although Uytterhoeven does not speak often about her visceral experiences of watching, she reflected: “I realised that I had no means of accounting for the strong affective, physical responses I felt to the powerful sections of the performance” (114). Is there a power in live performance that resides in the body and cannot be translated?

Both writer and choreographer are utopian in their visions. For Uytterhoeven, the continued dramaturgy that happens after performance leads to cross-cultural conversations and possible shifts in perspective, engaging with Marianne Van Kerkhoven’s “Grote Dramaturgie” (69), whereas Cherkaoui perceives movement as a universal language that possesses the ability to bring people together literally and figuratively. Uytterhoeven perceives movement as embedded in a cultural point of view (147). Chapter 3 elucidates problems with the idea of the universality of movement and transculturality in *zero degrees* and *Sutra* (2008). In both pieces Cherkaoui choreographs the physicalization of difference even as he tries to dance like the “Other.” In *Babel* (co-choreographed with Damien Jalet in 2010), spoken languages separate people, while movement unites them. Uytterhoeven explains, “For Cherkaoui and Jalet, people from diverse cultures can be connected through dance and bodywork as a transcultural act, which they propose are an antidote to conflict and misunderstanding as a result of language confusion” (203). The reader is left to ponder the properties of movement through different perspectives.

Uytterhoeven focuses on one choreographer, but her scholarship expands outward into a myriad of directions. Her book inspires continued engagement, just as Cherkaoui’s work does. Can individual or social change be ignited after watching a performance? What ignites: the moment of watching or the analysis after viewing the performance? What are the tools of an artist in the twenty-first century? Cherkaoui’s large-scale theatrical productions, with sets and numerous performers and collaborators from all over the world, raise the question: What kind of work is possible, based on the financial support available?

Not everyone will immerse themselves in the kind of in-depth, engaged spectatorship that Uytterhoeven advocates, but her strategies can inspire the viewer to go deeper. Her analytic approach is not applicable to choreography, which is not as interdisciplinary, tied to language, or apt to probe territories of “identity, culture, nation, religion and language” (27). Different disciplines will see her scholarship through distinct lenses—the eye of a choreographer, dancer, anthropologist, or dance studies scholar. Uytterhoeven’s interdisciplinary effort mixes different ways of seeing and perceiving, mirroring Cherkaoui’s creativity. Many conversations and lines of inquiry are being birthed. Reading her book may take you down a new path that you did not foresee.

Heather Harrington
Independent Scholar

TANDEM DANCES: CHOREOGRAPHING IMMERSIVE PERFORMANCE

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The availability and development of advancing technologies have fostered a “participatory culture” in which individuals more actively engage with material by reshaping or contributing to content and sharing it (Jenkins 2006). Within the realm of live theatrical performance, one sees this trend most during