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The Choreographic

by Jenn Joy. 2014. Cambridge, MA: MIT press. 248 pp., 43 illustrations, bibliography, index. $24.95 paper.
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Choosing "The Choreographic" as a title for a book published in the field of Dance and Performance Studies is, nowadays, a very courageous decision as well as an ambitious commitment, especially when the book does not provide us with a more specific subtitle. Transforming an adjective into a noun always implies a series of complex conceptual operations, even when the linguistic part of the transformation remains very simple. In the context of contemporary choreographic creation, extracting a substantivized notion—"the choreographic"—out of the various uses of the adjective "choreographic" engages at least two questions: (1) What can be qualified as specifically "choreographic" inside the field of dance works and dance practices (the operation of writing, the creation processes, the spatialization of thought), being admitted that all that is dance is not necessarily "choreographic"? (2) Depending on the answer given to the previous question, what can be qualified as "choreographic" outside the dance field itself, for instance, in visual arts, music, or even literature? These questions are not merely logical or abstract; they are directly and urgently worked out through contemporary creation: what is "the choreographic" beyond, or even without, the dancing body? What could be recognizable in other fields than dance as belonging to "the choreographic"?

Let us say directly that Jenn Joy's book never addresses these kinds of questions and that, in this regard, her title is deceptive and misleading. Nevertheless, the author seems to sketch a similar conceptual program in her introduction: "Rather than attempt another dance history or read dance only in terms of the visual, I am interested in *extracting a concept* of the choreographic out of this larger discursive field that has come to be called choreography and to linger in [sic] its corporeal paradoxes and vibrations" (20, my emphasis). The reader can only agree with such a sensible program. Unfortunately, the *conceptual extraction* announced here never appears anywhere in the book. One insight or anticipation of this extraction, given at the end of the Introduction, is once again disappointing: "[I] argue that the choreographic is not only a critical discursive force, but always already explicitly social, historical and political" (24); does anyone ever have a doubt about that? More importantly, the Introduction itself, which should have been the place to construct the problems and to expose the concepts and the method, is nothing more than an erratic collage of some usual sacred cows of (more or less) contemporary continental philosophy: Didi-Huberman's critique of Panofsky, Badiou's "Dance as Metaphor for Thought," Derrida's dialogue with Christie McDonald, "Foucault's exquisite dramaturgies of flesh and intellect that chafe against techniques of body and of power" (20–21). After such a whirlpool of theoretical references (none of which, in my opinion, being really relevant to dance or choreography), the author concludes her Introduction with a very appropriate sentence: "Come. Dance with me. Let's get lost" (24); once slightly transformed, this sentence will become the leitmotiv of the first chapter: "Come. Walk with me. Let's get lost" (25, 29, 32, 39, 43, 46, 51, 61, 66). I am not sure that the reader at this point still wants to dance or to walk with Joy, but I am sure that she/he is already completely lost.

The four chapters of the book seem to be designed as subjective walks through artistic and theoretical works rather than as true conceptual and historical argumentations. The first one, entitled "Precarious Rapture. Lessons from the Landscape," is devoted to the place

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of history within our experience of the landscape; it associates (or rather has "dance together," 24) artists and theoreticians as various as Giorgio Agamben, Francis Alÿs, Pina Bausch, Walter Benjamin, Tacita Dean, James Foster, Kant, Rosalind Krauss Ursula LeGuin, Fionn Meade, Cormac McCarthy, W. G. Sebald, Robert Smithson, Meg Stuart, etc. I am not sure of being able to follow Joy on this vertiginous walk through landscape and history seen by a choreographic eye. Nevertheless, one passage struck me as exceeding the ethical limits of free association and theoretical flippancy: commenting on Pina Bausch's film *Die Klage der Kaiserin* (50–51), Joy moves slowly from the imagination of the devastated landscape of Wuppertal during World War II to its description by Alexander Kluge quoted by Sebald in *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 2003; but we are not provided with the reference to the original text by Kluge), and then to Didi-Huberman's book devoted to extermination camps photographs and more specifically to four photographs that are supposed to have been taken from within the gas chambers at Auschwitz (*Images malgré tout*, 2003; *Images in Spite of All*, 2008; definitively, one of Didi-Huberman's best books). What link is there between Pina Bausch's *Die Klage der Kaiserin* and these four heroic photographs from beyond the grave? None, except a quick quote of Didi-Huberman reminding us that "to remember one must imagine" (51). Nothing is said on the huge debate with Claude Lanzmann, opening new insights in the traditional issues of representation, trace, and figurability (the debate is resumed in *Images in Spite of All*, and also present in Lanzmann's *La Tombe du divin plongeur*). Nothing either on the notion of landscape, or rather the notion of "place" (*le lieu*), as the remaining and shareable part of past history (this notion of "place" being the very basis of Lanzmann's work as read by Didi-Huberman). Instead, these four photographs are apparently used as an ornamental and pathetical conclusion to the discussion of Pina Bausch's film. Joy seems to be conscious of the arbitrariness of her associations: "While, of course, Bausch's lament does not speak directly to these catastrophes, this is, I believe, *the power of a choreographic intimacy with ground as alchemic translation* of the violent impossibilities of experience, sensation, event, so that we must encounter the past in the present as so many trespassing, still fugitive acts accumulating historical force even as they speak to a distinct present context" (51, my emphasis). The concession then appears worse than the mere assertion. For a French reader who cannot forget Vichy's slogan "La terre ne ment pas" ("the earth doesn't lie"), the idea of "the power of a choreographic intimacy with ground as alchemic translation" is simply frightening.

The second chapter, which is by far the best, is entitled "Violent Desire. Writing Laughing." The section devoted to laughter in dance, and especially to La Ribot's piece, *Laughing Hole* (2006), is very illuminating and based upon philosophical references that are, for once, fully relevant (Bergson, Bataille, and Nancy). One can only regret that another great performance about laughter, *Rire* by Antonia Baehr (2008), maybe more complex in its relation to writing and to scores, is only mentioned in a brief footnote (82, no. 22). Moreover, I don't see the link with the second part of the chapter (90–115) devoted to DD Dorvillier, Heather Kravas, and luciana achugar.

The third chapter, entitled "Ecstatic Community," provides us with a description and an analysis of Miguel Gutierrez's and Jeremy Wade's performances. Joy's fascination with choreographic ecstasy, especially when she associates it with the political topics of community, is highly questionable. She does not seem to be aware that this very idea of "ecstatic community" was one of the ideological keys for the integration of modern dance with Third Reich cultural policy (Susan Manning's *Ecstasy and the Demon* [1993] is not even quoted). One can only be alarmed by this kind of naïve and unquestioned reprise, even in the liberal context of New York–based contemporary queer performances.

The final chapter, entitled "Outer Space. To Write, to Dance," remains a mystery to me, and I am not able to say precisely what it is about. Neither its presentation in the introduction nor its beginning are very enlightening: "Dancing into the outer spaces of desire and violence, Chapter 4 looks to the cosmologies of science fiction writers Samuel R. Delany and Kim Stanley Robinson as so many perceptual avatars to dance with Ralph Lemon, Meg Stuart, Marianne Vitali, Janet Cardiff and George

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Bures Miller, and Massimiliano Gioni, among others" (24); "And now we will dance—beyond the landscape of the precarious, through echoing laughter and shattering tears into strange labyrinthine cosmologies always imagined and always real. Dancing across these thresholds into outer spaces and other worlds, we invent new choreography as ciphers and scores, a becoming choreographic of shimmering violence and desire. It is time to get lost, to walk, to laugh, to write, to dance as tears move slowly behind my eyes" (157).

As a conclusion, one can say that *The Choreographic* by Jenn Joy, despite its title, its publication context in MIT Press, and its pervasive name-dropping of French philosophers, is not a theoretical book: if we regard it as theoretical, we have no option but to consider it as very weak. I prefer by far to regard it as a piece of experimental writing about contemporary creation in dance, mimicking in composition and writing some aspects of what it arbitrarily elects as "choreographic," a book generally very well written, albeit in a too narcissistic and self-indulgent way, which might be called "a desire for poetry." Some will like it, others will not, and I shall let the reader decide for him or herself.

Frédéric Pouillaude
Université Paris-Sorbonne Institut Universitaire de France Centre Victor Basch (recherches en esthétique et philosophie de l'art)

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Don't Act, Just Dance: The Metapolitics of Cold War Culture

by Catherine Gunther Kodat. 2015. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 228 pp., 12 photographs, bibliography, index. $90.00 cloth, $32.95 paper, $32.95 ebook.
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Questions about the politics of Cold War concert dance have produced a growing body of literature in dance studies over the past ten years.[1] Catherine Gunther Kodat's book *Don't Act, Just Dance: The Metapolitics of Cold War Culture*, which probes the politics of select examples of modernist concert dance during the period, participates in this ongoing discussion. Examining dance through the disciplinary lenses of American and literary studies, fields in which she has impressive records of publication, Kodat also writes the book as a defense against scholarly assumptions outside of dance studies that concert dance is irrelevant to the study of cultural politics.

The Preface begins with an informative anecdote. Kodat recalls a scene at the Toledo airport in 1996, when she ran into a "well-known Marxist scholar" who was returning home from the same conference she was, intended for historians and literary scholars studying Cold War U.S. politics and culture. Referring to a paper Kodat had presented on *The Nutcracker*, the scholar questioned the seriousness of ballet as a research interest because, as he put it, ballet was "fake" and "elitist" (x). Interpreting his comments as measure of both his leftist convictions and of his homophobia, Kodat contemplated the implications of his judgment thus:

> What he did say seemed plain enough: as a "fake" and "elitist" cultural discourse, ballet could hardly be said to have an aesthetics, let alone a politics, worthy of intellectual engagement. . . . The implication was clear: why was I bothering with something so frivolous and inconsequential—with a cultural practice whose politics, assuming it even had a politics, could only be

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