

included, as Dunham did, a renewed aesthetics for her dance forms.

One of the main contributions that Durkin points out consistently is that both Baker and Dunham, although well-known and revered artists, continue to be overlooked as powerful authors of their dance aesthetic, innovators, and activists of anti-racism. Since I am from the Caribbean, and as we do our scholarly work in relative isolation from the capitals that circulate scholarly production, I couldn't help but notice that there is still a much needed conversation warranted in order to continue to place the radical contribution of these artists in the context of the geographies where much of their source material came from, and within the relationship between the United States, Europe, Africa, South America, and the Caribbean. This is explored in Dunham's work in my own book length study: *Defiant Itineraries: Caribbean Paradigms in American Dance and Film* (2015). Dunham is always conscious of this as she choreographs and features Caribbean dance in her film work, as is Baker, yet the geographical and artistic relationship between the work and the archive it also defies, merits many more studies like Durkin's and, eventually, mention of studies like mine that are conducted outside of the metropolitan academy.

Lydia Platón Lázaro

Independent scholar and University of Puerto Rico, Cayey Campus

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## THE CHOREOPOLITICS OF ALAIN PLATEL'S *LES BALLETS C DE LA B: EMOTIONS, GESTURES, POLITICS*

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For more than three decades, Flemish choreographer Alain Platel has been at the forefront of the European dance scene. Yet a major academic publication on his work and the company so closely associated with him, *les ballets C de la B* (standing for *Contemporains* and *Belgique*), is long overdue. Who is Alain Platel, what drives him, and what is his work's social, political, and dramaturgical significance? *The Choreopolitics of Alain Platel's les ballets C de la B: Emotions, Gestures, Politics* is a first in several regards. It is the first to assemble a multitude of knowledgeable writings about Platel and his company from diverse perspectives. It is also the first—and long anticipated—volume in Bloomsbury's new *Dance in Dialogue* series, supported by the British Society for Dance Research and Bloomsbury Academic. Series editors Anita Gonzalez, Katerina Paramana, and Victoria Thoms have devoted this series to the intersection (or “dialogue”) between dance, performance, and a wide array of other disciplines.

The volume is—notwithstanding its rather small font size—well presented, with a pleasing front cover and including more than thirty illustrations. Its essays, seventeen in all, are full of evocations of Platel's rich stage imagery and engage in lively discussion. Contrary to the subtitle's suggestion, the collection is grouped into four rather than three parts, each with a different emphasis: dramaturgies, emotions, gestures, and politics. In line with the Bloomsbury series' mission, the authors hail from different subject areas, including dance studies, theater, music, psychotherapy, performance art, and musicology. The chapters are preceded by a useful introduction penned by the three volume editors Christel Stalpaert, Guy Cools, and Hildegard de Vuyst, which provides a lucid overview of the four topic clusters and short synopses of each chapter. The editors are expertly acquainted with Platel's work as his dramaturg (De Vuyst), critic and coproducer (Cools), and Ghent-based scholar (Stalpaert). While acknowledging Platel's rootedness in the 1980s artistic movement of the Flemish Wave, they take issue with what they see as its “reductive identity politics” (3), resisting in particular the policing of movement as expounded in André Lepecki's 2013 article “Choreopolic and Choreopolitics: Or, the Task of the Dancer.”

The book's first section on multiple dramaturgies contains three contributions that provide insights into Platel's "collaborative and creative working methods" (4). The first chapter, Cool's main contribution to this volume (in addition to the cowritten introduction), is an apt opening, as it considers several key facets of Platel's work. These include his composition process, alterkinetic movements (a term borrowed from Gotman's piece in the same volume), and the individual versus the collective body. Katalin Trencsényi's second chapter digs deeper into Platel's "unruly" (34) and "decentred" (52) dramaturgy, which she argues transgresses disciplinary boundaries—comprising movements typically banned from theater stages (such as dyskinesia) and departing from conventional models of composition in which the choreographer exerts authorial control in favor of a more democratic, process-based way of working. Her contribution usefully outlines the four stages of Platel's working process and addresses the function of the dramaturg. The section's third contribution, by Hildegard de Vuyst, consists of a short, historical document from 2001: a speech delivered on the occasion of an awards ceremony, which sketches Platel's early beginnings and the special features of his choreographic style.

Part 2, on emotions, comprises five chapters. The first, entitled "Being Alone Together" by dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright, presents a kaleidoscopic reading of three of Platel's works, spanning three decades, from the vantage point of three notable theories: John Berger's "corporeal space," Hans-Thies Lehmann's "energetic theatre," and Jean-Luc Nancy's "disturbance of violent relatedness" (83). Adrian Kear's essay offers a strong, psychoanalytically influenced analysis of *Bernadetje* in the context of child abuse, pedophilia, and adult-adolescent relations. His discussion of the work's catwalk scene and its affect (and effect on the audience) is fascinating. Musicologist Francis Maes's excellent chapter gives a musical perspective on *C(H)ŒURS* by examining the relation between the work's accompaniment and movement repertoire. His investigation into questions such as whether the bodily movement in this work translates, or rather resists, the music in terms of melody, textural qualities, or emotional gesture (see 113) is detailed and illuminating. Claire Besuelle's

essay provides an in-depth perspective on "the skin as dramaturgic motif" (115) in *nicht schlafen*, which is praiseworthy for its powerful use of language. Although in parts rather descriptive, her analysis is nonetheless deep and comprehensive. The book section concludes with a second, short but pithy essay by de Vuyst, poignantly titled "Platel is a barbarian." Originally delivered as a speech in celebration of the artist's honorary doctorate at Artois University, it demonstrates how his associative style defies conventional forms of rationality and of notions of beauty.

Part 3, on gestures, also has five chapters. In the first, dramaturg Erwin Jans traces Pina Bausch's influence on Platel, drawing on Brecht and Artaud in seeking to illuminate his work *Bernadetje*. This essay would have benefited from setting out its main line of argument more clearly and proposing a more lucid working definition of the (admittedly rather fuzzy) notion of gesture. Kéline Gotman's chapter explores what she terms "choreic gesture" in Platel's *Out of Context—for Pina*: the testing and theatricalizing on stage of medicalized everyday gestures that are "characteristic of various neurological disorders" (160). In her nuanced and insightful account, Gotman interrogates how Platel—influenced by Pina Bausch's oeuvre—probes into and resists standardized and normative notions of beauty and gestural taxonomy, and how his approach differs from past and current choreographies by Judson and the "anti-dance paradigm" (167) of the likes of Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy. Drawing on Butler's essay collection "Precarious Life," Miriam Dreysse's chapter is concerned with nonnormative bodies, tackling aspects of sexual identities and ageing in Platel's staging of *Gardenia*, whose cast consists of elderly transvestites and transsexuals. This is lucidly written and makes a range of intriguing points, but has a slightly abrupt ending. Piet Defraeye's contribution on *tauberbach*—inspired by the story of a woman suffering from schizophrenia—presents an evocative description of the gestural repertoire of some key scenes and their Bach accompaniment. Yet his proposed "diagrammatical" reading of the work—starting from a linguistics analogy of "syntax and compositional grammar" (189) in the first paragraph—needed more theoretical elucidation, and statements such as

“*Tauberbach* displays a non-allergic world” (197) warranted further explanation. The part’s fifth and last chapter follows on smoothly with an alternate perspective on the same work from psychotherapist Jeroen Donckers. Not a conventional academic chapter this, but written in the form of a poeticized letter to Mr. Platel, Donckers’s response to *tauberbach* cites his own practice working with people with schizophrenia and psychosis.

Part 4 rounds off the book with just three contributions on politics. Theater scholar Lourdes Orozco delivers a reflective discussion of European and national identities and community (dis)integration in *En avant, marche!* (2015). While her reading of the London performance in the context of the 2016 Brexit referendum might be seen as a little tenuous (based as it is on a single off-script exclamation by the protagonist), this chapter foregrounds timely and interesting issues revolving around Europe at a time of crisis. Convincingly argued, it invites reflections on the central sociopolitical significance of brass band practices that are often denigrated as lowbrow. Christel Stalpaert’s essay on “Alain Platel’s Choreopolitics with the ballets C de la B” expounds a unique investigation into (post) colonial issues in *Coup Fatal* and *Badke*: the former a collaboration with artists from Kinshasa, the latter a production of Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg and les ballets C de la B with Palestinian dancers. Framed by Lepecki’s theories of choreopolitics and body-as-archive, this is an intriguing and incisive piece of scholarship, although I just wish the investigation of movement material (especially the interesting analysis of the hybridization of the Arab folk dance form of *dabke*) could have been extended a little further. De Vuyst’s final six-page “Offspring” essay sketches various stages of transformation of the les ballets C de la B: from a collective founded by a group of friends in the 1980s to what is now seen as the company of Alain Platel. She concludes with an overview

of Platel’s inspirations for the next generation of artists.

As a whole, this book pays effective tribute to Platel, and as I argue above, highlights important issues across ethics, everyday motifs, social marginalization, egalitarianism, democracy, multiculturalism, and nonnormative identities, together with many reflections on Platel’s compositional methods. While purportedly about gestures, some of part 3’s chapters show little or no engagement with key secondary sources on this topic published in the last decade or so (such as Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness’s *Migrations of Gesture*, 2008), which struck me as a curious omission. At times, the allusions to politics (more often than not with a small rather than a capital *p*) made throughout the volume remain rather imprecise, particularly some references to a neoliberal economy. However, this should not detract from the value of this important and stimulating volume, which, with its overall high standard and interdisciplinary spread of topics, will be essential reading for anyone with an interest in Platel. The cost might make it difficult for some potential readers to acquire this attractive and substantial book, but those who do will find it engages their imaginations, evoking through its fascinating multilayered analyses and thought-provoking discussions the manifold aspects of Platel’s work—and his unique world.

Alexandra Kolb  
University of Roehampton

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