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.

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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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> retrograde? Shouldn't I be studying something *important*? (x–xi)

Taking these comments as an intellectual call to arms, Kodat redoubled her efforts to prove ballet's scholarly and political relevance within a Marxist schema, and especially with respect to issues of artistic and aesthetic autonomy from capital and dominant cultural production. Asserting that dance often does not receive its due in considerations of the politics of the period, Kodat's book makes a worthy case that the study of select modernist choreographic practices, and their production and reception at home and abroad, will yield original and valuable information about U.S. cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. Putting into play Jacques Rancière's concept of metapolitics, a theory that illuminates the politics of artistic strategies of distancing, Kodat endeavors to limn the significance of an eclectic mix of cultural samples, including concert dance.

While her enthusiasm for taking up this cause is commendable, Kodat places herself in a precarious position by taking on a research project anchored in an unfamiliar scholarly field. With noticeably limited knowledge of past and current research on dance and politics, and of the historiography of twentieth-century ballet and modern dance, Kodat devotes considerable verbiage to arguing the question of whether or not concert dance has a politics at all (a question long settled in the affirmative among dance scholars) and, if so, determining the relevance this politics has to an understanding of the cultural Cold War.

Chapter 1, entitled "Combat Cultural" (after a poem published by Marianne Moore in 1959), situates Kodat's research within Cold War cultural and diplomatic studies and as an intervention within Marxist and post-Marxist debates over autonomy. Here Kodat presents an array of precedent views explaining the artist's relationship to dominant ideology, dividing scholars into four camps: (1) "triumphalists," whose treatment of domestic and international artistic production serves an agenda of rationalizing the U.S. Cold War victory as a foregone conclusion—to cite the examples Kodat provides, "the defection of Soviet ballet dancers" to America or "the jamming of Voice of America transmissions of jazz music" (p. 11); (2) those who see the relationship in terms of "complicity," who believe that all art produced during the period served the purpose of government or dominant cultural "propaganda" (p. 11); (3) "formalists," who sanctify art and the creative process as transcendent realms existing outside of and apart from dominant cultural production; and (4) "contextualists," who operate with an assumption that art is a reflection of the world, and who seek to illuminate resonances between art and life.

Finding herself in a methodological middle ground somewhere between the formalists and the contextualists, Kodat looks to Rancière's formulation of metapolitics to stake out new scholarly territory through case studies of Cold War concert dance viewed alongside contemporaneous examples of literature and film. Through Rancière's metapolitical lens, Kodat seeks to reveal a dialectic space of artistic political engagement by illuminating the significance of aesthetic strategies of distancing as deployed in each of the samples she brings to light. Kodat quotes Rancière (2009) at length on this point:

> [A]rt is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very *distance* it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space. (emphasis mine, p. 13)

For Kodat, Rancière's theory helps to explain how the very strategies some Cold War artists, including choreographers, adopted to insulate themselves from the political realm, in fact, can be considered political. In one of the clearest articulations of the book's argument, which are in short supply throughout the text, Kodat explains: "[M]y aim here is . . . to explore how the forms and effects of a certain cool, quintessentially modernist aesthetic distance might themselves constitute an important, if

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heretofore largely overlooked, political characteristic of Cold War cultural production" (13).

While likely illuminating within the contexts of Cold War diplomatic and cultural studies, Kodat's formulation of her argument in these terms and applied to selected choreographic case studies is problematic when seen from the perspective of dance scholarship. In the first place, the argument is overly schematic both in its reduction of modernist choreographic production to a type—"cool" and "distancing"—and in its assumption that choreographic approaches to dance-making adhering to these strategies have been "largely overlooked." Drawn entirely from Anglo-European choreographic examples, Kodat's conception of coolness ignores its deep cultural roots in Africanist diasporic dance formations and their impact on the development of concert dance modernisms. Notably, Brenda Dixon Gottschild's pathbreaking research on George Balanchine's "Africanist" aesthetic, and his deployment of Africanisms to legitimate his ballets as "American," would have added perspective and dimension here.

In the second place, Kodat misses an important opportunity here and elsewhere to bring dance scholarship on the political and historical implications of the capacities of dance to embody ambivalence to bear on larger debates she seeks to prompt. Kodat introduces the concept of ambivalence through a discussion of how Balanchine's common exhortation to his dancers, "Don't Act, Just Dance," a catchphrase that also served as inspiration for the book's title, expresses a conundrum about the meanings of "action" in dance and for dancers. She reasons thus: "First dancing is not acting; the activities of the dance should never be confused with *action* of any kind, let alone political action. Second, dancing is the *quintessence* of human action; political to its very bones dance is most effective when it is most itself" (emphases original, xi). Kodat continues:

> Thus, "don't act, just dance," a phrase meant primarily to clear a path for the individual dancer's full, uninhibited engagement with the choreography, amounted, for many of Balanchine's dancers, to something like a dance ethics: a belief in the transformative power of dance itself in its capacity to signify *as dance* (and not as mimed story or gestured psychology), to be meaningful and revelatory solely in terms of the human body negotiating both its physical limitations and the constraints of its environment as it travels through space. This is a philosophy of the dance—and a politics—that stresses its most fundamental materiality: dance is about what it takes to move bodies forward, to make progress. (emphases original, 62)

Advocating strongly for the political potential of dance as action, as ethics, as agency, and as theory, Kodat's analysis of Balanchine's catchphrase is certainly in line with current research on dance and politics. And yet on this point she seems unaware of dance research concerning the meanings of action and the politics of distancing and their impact on questions of artistic autonomy during the Cold War period.[2] Additionally, Randy Martin's 1998 book, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*, would have been useful in this case in providing a methodological road map for study of the political aspects of dance that could proceed in two directions, "explor[ing] not simply the politics of dance but also what dance has to offer politics" (Martin 1998, 14). In other words, Martin underlined the importance of examining politics both *in* and *as* dance.

Without strong conceptual underpinnings that coordinate the theoretical thrust with the case studies both individually and as a whole, Kodat's book often reads as a disconnected documentation of her research process. Her approach combines extensive literature review with forays into dance, film, and literary analyses that are not well knitted into the argument about distancing and autonomy. Moreover the book as a whole lacks a strong sense of periodization, and so the Cold War operates as more of a thematic element than a historical one, thus minimizing its usefulness to historians.

The book is divided into two large sections, "Rethinking Cold War Culture" and "Rereading Cold War Culture." Chapters 2 ("History"), 3

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("Theory"), and 4 ("Dancing") synthesize and engage with existing arguments, respectively, about the history of U.S. government funding for the arts and attending federal attitudes, about theories concerning art's relation to dominant cultural production and ideology, and about dance as a manifestation of a "queerly feminine realm of experience," a characteristic of dance she is convinced manifests the validity of Ranciere's account of metapolitics (59). The syntheses in Chapters 2–4 are useful primers on past and current debates about the paradoxes of artistic autonomy within the realm of Cold War cultural diplomacy, and yet it is easy to lose the sense of significance of these discussions when considering their applications for understanding the politics of Cold War concert dance. Having ignored fundamental research in dance studies devoted both to examining relationships between dance and politics and to developing a critical methodology for doing so, Kodat has to make up a lot of ground. Making an existing case for the import of dance to knowledge production ("history" and "theory") sidetracks the first half of the book, stalling the momentum of the development of the larger argument.

That said, there are strong moments where Kodat's analyses suggest an awareness of the need to mine choreographic practices as approaches to political theory and practice, especially in two of the last three chapters devoted to extensive case studies. Most likely relevant for dance scholars are Chapters 5 and 6, on Balanchine and Merce Cunningham's performances of "Persia" in 1960 and 1972, respectively, and on the significance of the character Spartacus in Stanley Kubrick's 1960 film of the same name, Aram Khachaturian's and Yuri Grigorovich's 1968 ballet *Spartak*, and for the publication of the first *Spartacus International Gay Guide* in 1970. Chapter 7, a brief and unsatisfying conclusion, touches on the significance of the Chinese government's decision to perform *The Red Detachment of Women*, a ballet adapted from film, during Richard Nixon's 1972 state visit to China.

Chapter 5, on Balanchine and Cunningham, is especially promising both in its stated objective, to "pair readings of Balanchine and Cunningham's choreographic explorations of Iran" (77), and in its conclusion, that "an art form once abstract, gendered, and queerly sexualized [can] mak[e] progress through—not only within but also against and beyond—that hegemony" (62). Essentially Kodat argues that as individual artists and as a modernist pair Balanchine and Cunningham could be considered "candidate[s] for politically unsettling choreography" (76).

From a dance historic and historiographic perspective, however, the chapter struggles to connect these dots. Kodat offers little explanation for the pairing of these artists except for topical and logistical coincidence (Iran) and a passing gloss of Roger Copeland's argument in *Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance* regarding, in Kodat's words, Cunningham's "calculated grafting of ballet and modern techniques" (no. 44, p. 177). Moreover the chapter lacks a methodological rationale for handling two dance moments with limited visual/video record. Instead, Kodat provides historical and cultural accounts of Balanchine's *The Figure in the Carpet* (1960), a ballet treating the imperial Iranian court, and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company's performance of *Events* at the Shiraz Arts Festival in Persepolis (1972), based largely on artists' memoirs, reviews by dance critics, and U.S. State Department records, with only limited and selective engagement either with the substantial scholarship that exists on these artists or with research in performance studies regarding contending with embodied and archival lacunae. Finally, Kodat's careful yet sometimes overwhelming attention to detail leads to provocative insights but also to distracting digressions that draw focus away from her thesis.

The authority Kodat gives to primary materials is refreshing and illuminating, especially the accounts of performers such as Carolyn Brown (Cunningham) or writer Rosanne Klass (who advocated, through the historian Arthur Upham Pope and Lincoln Kirstein, for Balanchine to choreograph a ballet about Persia). Similarly, the information Kodat provides about *The Figure in the Carpet*, a much-neglected ballet from Balanchine's most productive period, is fascinating, as is her account of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company's appearance at the Shiraz Arts Festival as part of "a ten-city tour that included performances in Venice, Belgrade, Warsaw, London, Köln, Dusseldörf, Grenoble, Milan, and Paris" (116).

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Unfortunately it is difficult to appreciate Kodat's conclusions fully because they are drawn without consulting salient dance scholarship on the artists she is considering in her inquiry. Examining the political provenance of the "Balanchine–Kirstein" enterprise as a route to thinking about Kirstein's populism, for example, Lynn Garafola's 2005 article, "Lincoln Kirstein, Modern Dance, and the Left: The Genesis of an American Ballet," places the work of Ballet Caravan squarely within Depression-era leftist political ideology, emphasizing Kirstein's objective to distance American ballet from its aristocratic and European past. Garafola quotes Kirstein thus: "The ballet … is not an aristocratic form because of its associations with emperors, but because of its connections with the greatest poets, painters, musicians and dancers of the past and present. It is aristocratic in an artistic sense" (2005, 25). Garafola argues further that Kirstein and George Balanchine, and the ballet institutions they formed beginning in the 1930s, were some among many cultural forces championing the "belief in the redeeming power of art, modern forms of expression, and the uncoupling of elitism from social and economic privilege" (p. 30). Garafola's research sheds direct light on Kodat's question about whether or not art, or, in this case, dance, is necessarily complicit in upholding economic, social, and aesthetic hierarchies. Without this relevant and real political context, Kodat approaches the question through an analysis of implication, reading *The Figure in the Carpet* as "a work of immanent critique remarkable for its sly maneuvers in camp discourse" through the lenses of Christopher Isherwood's 1954 comments about "High Camp" and Lincoln Kirstein's homosexuality.

Kodat makes similarly awkward dance-historical moves in her examination of the meanings of the Cunningham Company's performance of *Events* at the Shiraz Arts Festival. Offering no information about how *Events* extended the kinds of experimentation with indeterminacy and chance-based compositional techniques that Cunningham had been using since the early 1950s at Black Mountain College, and that had underwritten his choreographic process thus far, Kodat treats the *Events* performed in Iran in 1972 as recent compositional developments. By contrast, David Vaughan's 1997 compendium, *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years*, foundational to understanding the history of Cunningham's creative process and choreographic oeuvre, documents that Cunningham performed what would become his first *Event*, entitled "Museum Event No. 1," on tour in Vienna in 1964 on a platform stage in the Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts (138). It was, he writes, "a continuous performance lasting about an hour and a half, without intermission, consisting of excerpts from the repertory—parts of dances or even complete works—put together in a new sequence. These could overlap or even be performed simultaneously in different parts of the space" (Vaughan 1997, 138–139). Vaughan explains that this *Event* and the ones that would follow "allow[ed] for a degree of indeterminacy in performance" (1997, 139).

The information Vaughan offers in his compendium is important when considering how Cunningham's continued investigation of his approach to his creative process was itself a move that both asserted his artistic autonomy and distanced him from dominant cultural production. Vaughan's account would suggest that Cunningham asserted the sovereignty of movement material through choosing to compose work by sampling from his own repertory for segments of choreography that he could de- and re-contextualize through the deployment of chance-based compositional techniques. Extrapolating in this vein, one could read Cunningham's approach as an idea with radical political implications, both in its challenge to traditional Western aesthetic hierarchies prioritizing artistic originality and in its decentering of the meaning of a work, vested not in the work itself but in the viewer's perception/experience of a given performance.

Such an argument would likely support Kodat's reading of Cunningham's *Events* as embodied extensions of Rancière's theory of metapolitics. And yet her bold argument to this effect, that "Cunningham's Events … should be understood as spectacles whose aim is not political anesthesia but social emancipation, works whose de- and refocusing of emphasis and attention strategically blur what had been taken to be the clear aesthetic, affective, formal, or psychological impact of movement" (107), reads as anemic because it is not well substantiated. It is based on one source, dance critic Jack Anderson's 1975 article, "Dances about Everything and Dances about Some Things,"

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which Kodat reads selectively and without a sense of the larger dance historical/cultural/artistic context.

There is an argument to be made, as Kodat does, that continued study of Cold War concert dance can contribute to knowledge both within and outside of dance studies about the period's body politic. However, too often in this case, versions of Rancière's theory become solutions to problems of coherence, often diverting promising lines of inquiry to answering the overarching question, was Cold War concert dance political or not?

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Notes

1. For more, see Croft (2015), Ezrahi (2012), Kowal (2010), Brown (2008), and Morris (2006).

2. Two existing books on modernist dance during the cold war period treat the question of choreographic autonomy. These are *A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years, 1945–1960* by Gay Morris (2006) and *How to Do Things with Dance: Performing Change in Postwar America* by Rebekah J. Kowal (2010).

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