

was reading Roof's book. In Wiegman is a suggestion that asking gender to 'do' anything tells us as much about the desires we invest in critique as it does anything about gender. Here, what gender 'is' might also then be a critical term that is invested with certain desires for political transformation, or, a paradigm that is invested with the desires to make certain lives more liveable. Roof's evisceration of the politics of gender performativity, in the end, falls flat. A book dedicated to describing and reworking gender is finally offered as a book that will take us back to sexual difference – yet what this might look like remains unclear. In a book that painstakingly describes, and yes, endlessly lists and taxonomises genders, Roof hopes that this 'better' description of gender will do the work of refocusing us back on sexual difference. But description, in the end, just feels like description, and the politics of this project seem to end here – leaving me thinking less about the problem of sexual difference and more about the ongoing desires we have for gender to do so much work.

Sam McBean

## Move it

Bojana Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). 280pp., £58.00 hb., £22.50 pb., 978 1 13743 738 9 hb., 978 1 34955 610 6 pb.

A generation of recent artists have shared the conviction that choreography and dance think. Bojana Cvejić's book seeks both to theorise and defend this conviction. Such artists could defy Susan Sontag's argument against 'assimilat[ing] Art to Thought' because the thinking that they wanted to see was very different from those clichés that Sontag had declared herself sick of in the 1960s ('Phallus', 'Oedipus', 'Decline of the West', and so on). While, however, the Deleuzian critique of 'recognition' provided, for instance, one influential way to escape Sontag's false alternative between thought and feeling, it could only provide a negative criterion for the kind of

thinking that art can do. The frustration of recognition is not in itself thoughtful. As Cvejić rightly notes, we need other concepts, positive concepts, therefore, if we are going to understand what is going on in contemporary choreography. Elaborating one such concept is Cvejić's primary achievement in *Choreographing Problems*: what she calls 'problem-posing'.

Take, for example, Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema's *Weak Dance Strong Questions* (2001). The germ of the piece was a line of poetry: 'neither movement from nor towards'. The first problem is then: how to imagine such a movement. As an initial approach, let us say we're trying to imagine a movement without spatial or temporal structure; or, again, to imagine 'a movement that internalises "the still point"', as Cvejić puts it. This first line of experimentation is imaginative, and the fantasies that it produces constitute, in this way, the starting point for a new problem: how to actually move, work it out in dance. A third problem superposes itself, however, on the first and second. Here, the negated 'from' and 'towards' reveal another aspect of themselves, not as spatio-temporal but rather as syntactic operators. What kind of teleology is involved in the notion of a 'phrase'? Does a phrase go 'towards' punctuation? What kind of punctuation? Burrows and Ritsema ask themselves: If every movement is a statement, is it possible to ask a question by moving? What makes it possible to ask a question? They begin hollowing out the implicit enunciative dimension of their movements, making room for deviations from an assertoric mode.

The artists translate this third problem into two rules, both prohibitive: their movements will not be mere tasks to accomplish, and they will also not become statements. Because the artists are now focused on the refusal of aesthetic teleology in dance (with all of the accent given to the 'towards'), improvisational dance seems to become a crucial part of the 'solution'. But this solution creates the same problem: the dancers must resist their own tendencies 'towards' remembered forms and gestures while improvising. By this point, their research itself becomes problematic, as they resist the tendency to reuse the movements that they discover. So, again, this

new problem generates new rules for side-stepping the automatisms that keep turning their movements into tasks or statements. Burrows and Ritsema write rules *ad personam*, specific to the sorts of automatisms that each of them slip into. Starting from the initial citation, a series of new problems, questions and rules unfolds, progressively determining the conditions of the performance.

*Weak Dance Strong Questions* is an unusually simple case in one respect. A single, continuous process of problematisation seems to encompass both the making and the performing of the work. That the performers are the same people as the choreographers is irrelevant here. The point is that, under this unusual improvisational protocol, the performance is just further research (endless, progressless, amnesiac research) into the same problem that Burrows and Ritsema began with. But problem-posing doesn't always take the form of research or questioning.

Ezster Salamon's *Nvsbl* provides a good counterpoint in this respect. The performers of the piece are faced with the problem of producing a smooth movement that is too slow to be seen, and even too slow to be felt. At this duration, it's actually impossible to produce a continuous, smooth movement through a continuous, smooth effort. The performers learn to produce an appearance of continuity through a multiplicity of minute fragmented flashes of attention, by imagining sensations rather than by willing movement. At the same time, the audience members are faced with other problems. For one thing, they have to learn to perceive on a new time-scale (which means looking away, covering their eyes, and so on). But the more radical problem is that they are prevented from performing the function traditionally assigned to them (that of seeing) within the theatrical division of labour between display and spectatorship. As such, *Nvsbl* poses distinct problems for its audience and for its performers, and these problems are also distinct from those through which it was created. However, all three activities are processes of problem-posing.

This example allows us to see just what it means, for Cvejić, that a performance or choreography *thinks*. The point is not that the work ar-

ticulates a thought, or that it is thought-provoking, but rather that performing it or attending its performance involves posing specific problems, and that the creating it involved posed other problems. In homage to Spinoza, the author dubs the processes of making, performing and attending the 'modes' of the performance. The performance itself comes into being only through these three 'parallel' processes of problem-posing. Cvejić refuses to subordinate performing to making as copy to model, or attending to performing as perception to reality. Every performance emerges three times at once. Consequently, for Cvejić, thinking is a process. More specifically, it is a process of emerging (as opposed to decaying, disappearing). This is a book about art that thinks primarily about the way the art is made - not as a supplement, ancillary to more serious questions of meaning or form, but because art thinks, and because art only thinks through its emergence.

The genesis of a work has no place in aesthetics, which, as its name suggests, thinks art in terms of the perceptual encounter with a finished work. However, Cvejić is not concerned with the artwork as object of perception, judgment or thought. Instead, *Choreographing Problems* is a poetics, in the sense that it is a book about the process of *making* (*poïesis*). Still, it is an unusual poetics. In the western philosophical tradition, *poïesis* has most often been understood teleologically. Aristotle's *Poetics*, for example, subordinates the process of making to fixed genres (e.g. tragedy) and their proper functions (e.g. catharsis). Marx's architect, like an Aristotelian carpenter, starts from the idea of the chair. As he writes in *Capital*: 'What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement.' The teleological frame thus disjoins imagination and process: the architect imagines before the labour-process begins, and the bees labour without imagination. By contrast, to get an idea of the idea of *poïesis* at stake in *Choreographing Problems*, we would have to conceive of an artwork that thinks through its emergence.



Cvejić's book has two main ambitions. On the one hand, it is a poetics of problem-posing, and, on the other, it attempts to articulate the condition of contemporary choreography in general. This latter ambition goes, of course, beyond the seven pieces Cvejić analyses in detail in *Choreographing Problems* itself. Since the end of the 1990s (with, of course, some antecedents), choreography has been grappling with what the author calls the 'body-movement bind', or the 'organic regime in dance'. This regime is specific to the twentieth century, and determines two antithetical positions within it. The organic regime emerged when modernism reinvented dance as self-expression. This reinvention was so influential that in subsequent generations even non-dancers grew up with it. Even today, dance is a key ideological operator in popular culture and the construction of the self. That's why it is worth insisting on its originality with respect to the preceding centuries. On the surface, one could see some common ground between *Sturm und Drang* in theatre and modernism in dance, where, too, form broke with classical convention to become the organic expression of raw emotion. In *Sturm und Drang*, these emotions still belonged to

the characters presented – not necessarily to the author or the actor – whereas, for modern subjects, dance expresses the emotion of the dancer him- or herself. Indeed, more radically, it expresses the dancer's individuality, which is thus identified with his or her body.

Cvejić calls this the 'organic regime of dance' because movement is supposed to emerge spontaneously from the body as locus of individuality. Such an idea of self-expression allowed body and movement to be treated as one medium rather than two. The body expressed itself in movement, and movement expressed the self. The critique of this ideology leaves us with 'a new condition', Cvejić argues, a 'set of minor questions as to how, why, when and in which case the body should move, if it is to move at all - which is conspicuously at odds with the prolific dance culture of self-expression and auto-affection in entertainment and social media.' I move because I'm at work, because it's cold, because the bar is closing, or because I am taking care of somebody. In such cases, the unity of body and movement is compulsory. The heteronomy of bodies is beyond remedy.

A second form of the 'body-movement bind' manages to ground the autonomy of the artwork in the supposed autonomy of form. Thus, in 1960s and 1970s postmodern dance, the body becomes an instrument of a movement, rather than the other way around. The relationship between body and movement is reversed, but the unity of the two is re-established. As such, self-expression and formalism, modern and postmodern dance, are, for Cvejić, two ways of maintaining the same body-movement bind. Her crucial move is then to show that contemporary European choreography – not only in the seven pieces she analyses, but in an extended list including BADco, La Ribot, Antonia Baehr and others – breaks with both forms of the body-movement bind. Its medium is no longer the unity of body and movement, but their disjunction; the field of all possible disjunctions between them, all the delays, phasings, discordances, artifices, questions and experimental constructions that compose or disjoin them.

Every analysis in *Choreographing Problems* begins with a virtuosic description, which is addressed, like Diderot's *Salons*, to those who couldn't be there.

The same goes for the compact lessons provided on the history of choreography that punctuate it. In this way, the book functions simultaneously as a philosophical intervention and as a textbook. Among its other achievements, the book should be able to give readers in thirty years a sort of historical experience of the period in question. It is partly for this reason that, reading *Choreographing Problems*, one feels out of time. However, there are other reasons, too. Since this is a book about *European* contemporary dance, it is worth recalling that the subprime crisis, and the sovereign debt crises that followed it, developed over the time of this book's composition from 2007-2012. The funding cuts and wave of precarisation that ensued have changed the possibilities of artistic production in Europe, and will continue to do so. None of the performances analysed in the book were more than nine years old in 2007, when Cvejić began work on the project, and the most recent, Mette Ingvartsen's *It's in the Air*, had made its debut only a few months before. But today, they all belong to the near past, between ten and twenty years ago; not 'now' but 'just now'. This recent past saw the emergence of a new 'set of practices' and a new 'method of creating', which the author theorises and names 'problem-posing', and whose implications she pushes to the limit. But what is the relationship between these practices and this period? One might answer that problem-posing can never become 'dated' because it will always remain a possibility for choreography. In that case, it belongs to its period insofar as it originated there, but transcends it as a possibility. I wonder if we can be happy with this answer, however, which hitches the autonomy of art to the hot air balloon of possibility. At the very least, it provokes the following (productive) doubt: what if, since 2007, these practices have not had a future, or have not yet had a future? What if we have been unable to maintain the conditions that made them possible? What were those conditions?

Cvejić is a powerful thinker of the geneses of works of art, which are classically considered irrelevant to aesthetics, but, when it comes to endings, she is very oblique. Perhaps this is her Deleuzian side: to see more that is remarkable in the emergence of a thing than in its ending. The last chapter of the

book promises to inventory the legacy of problem-posing post-2007: 'As I write these lines, six years after this project began ...' The tendencies and works she goes on to mention continue to problematise live presence and the theatrical apparatus, but none of them, so far as I can tell, carry on with problem-posing as a method of creation. The crucial afterward that would explain and give the measure of this absence is missing.

Austin Gross

## Gridlock!

Rosie Warren, ed., *The Debate on Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2016). 304pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 1 78478 696 0 hb., 978 1 78478 695 3 pb.

'To leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality.' Attributed to Karl Marx, this dictum prefaced E.P. Thompson's infamous 1978 polemic against Louis Althusser, *The Poverty of Theory*, but it might equally have adorned the opening pages of Vivek Chibber's 2013 book *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (hereafter *PTSC*). The conceptual and empirical errors Chibber was out to refute belonged to a number of historians and political theorists gathered around the journal *Subaltern Studies*, which was formed in the early 1980s and initially dedicated to its own form of Gramscian-infused 'history from below' that aimed at displacing both colonialist and elitist historiographies of Indian nationalism. In *PTSC*, arguments made by Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee were consecutively reconstructed and dismissed as inadequate attempts to theorise the relation between power and capital in a global perspective that at times would tend toward cultural essentialism. With its focus on historiography and historical sociology, Chibber's intervention read both as an echo of and compliment to Aijaz Ahmad's 1992 *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, which explicitly challenged the forms of 'theory' that had prevailed, especially in comparative literature departments, in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Disciplines