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Gestural Imaginaries: Dance and Cultural Theory in the Early Twentieth Century by Lucia Ruprecht (review)

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(Review)

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state-controlled news in Germany. While the Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro also catered to European audiences, *Transocean* continued to gather and spread news overseas, especially in Latin America and China.

Tworek draws on an impressive range of sources in multiple languages from state and business archives in Austria, France, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Unfortunately, the references to the secondary literature can only be consulted through the seventy pages of endnotes, which is a rather exasperating experience. This minor criticism aside, this beautifully written book is recommended to those interested in the history of news, communications, and propaganda. It raises awareness that news is not merely the product of journalists and editors, but is significantly shaped by powerful international news networks acting behind the scenes. News should therefore not be taken at its face value, warns Tworek: “Only by venturing behind the printed newspaper can we learn how information traveled the perilous journey from event to news. News was never neutral. And its production never uncontested” (7). This awareness is even more pressing in light of the ongoing digitization of newspaper archives, which has turned news and historical newspapers into an accessible and widely used source. Tworek’s book provides the necessary background information to question the creation of this historical source.

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Gestural Imaginaries: Dance and Cultural Theory in the Early Twentieth Century. By Lucia Ruprecht. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 333. Paper £25.99. ISBN 978-0190659387.

Throughout her research, the author Lucia Ruprecht has continually come across the term “gesture” in various written manifestations. Her steady inquiry drives her investigation in this fascinating study. She engages with Walter Benjamin’s essays on Brecht, “What Is Epic Theater I” (1931) and “What is Epic Theater II” (1939), which deal with an aesthetics of interruption. Ruprecht carries this perceptual mode throughout her readings of gestural thinkers and dancers from the early twentieth century who demonstrate an intermittency and vibration in their thought and movement. The author argues for a shift from Giorgio Agamben’s idea of gestural mediality from his “Notes on Gesture” (2000)—which requires fleshing out through specific, historically situated examples—and moves toward the multiplicity of singular gestures in Jacques Rancière’s *Aisthesis* (2013). Through this approach, Ruprecht argues that the intellectuals and artists in her study create a transnational and complex gestural imaginary, which she conceptualizes as “propelled by the cultural dimension of a collective, yet nevertheless multiple and heterogeneous energetic field” (37). The imaginary, being in perpetual relationship to reality, forms a second space and evokes

connotations of escapism and creative empowerment. Given the porous nature of gestures in social situations and the aesthetic realm, they inevitably seep into the political and ethical space, creating room for expression and reflection.

Ruprecht deals with a wide array of thinkers who engage with gestural meditations from the Weimar Republic and beyond, like Béla Balázs, Helmuth Plessner, Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, Aby Warburg, Theodor Adorno, and Jacques Rivière. Their philosophical thought is often read closely in juxtaposition to and in harmony with “postmedial” sources of dance pieces, practices, and representations based on discourse in literary texts, newspapers, reviews, photographs, and film. Some of the dancers in this study include Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman, Tilly Losch, Niddy Impehoven, Vaslav Nijinsky, Jo Mihaly, Alexander and Clotilde Sakharoff, and Harald Kreutzberg. Literary representations of gesture come from writers like Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Alfred Döblin.

Ruprecht’s lucid writing provides detailed and developed readings of both textual sources and images. When possible, she provides us with vital archival material and photographs, which brilliantly bring her adroit analysis to life. Her readings deal not only with the image as a moment in time but also convincingly conjecture about the important before and after possibilities of its staging, its potential effort qualities, and choreographic motivation. The amount of archival material related to dance, dancers, and gesture that she managed to unearth and succinctly provide is astounding. Painstaking engagement with and continual inquiry into the nuances of the movement then bring us to beautiful signposts that summarize the engaging ideas gleaned throughout the intense readings. Each chapter is well structured and of appropriate length, maintaining the reader’s focus. Her prose skillfully demarcates the arguments of other critics, which she builds on or critiques, while still maintaining her authorial voice. Ruprecht presents the theoretical ideas of her thinkers accessibly to a readership who might be less familiar with their philosophical thought and discourse by using clear explanations and vivid examples. The case studies often analyze juxtaposing ideas of intellectuals or dancers, which might seem questionable at first; however, by patiently reading further, one is rewarded to see similarities and productive dissonances, which create a richer reading. This book would attract a wide variety of scholars in critical dance and movement studies, German studies, literary studies, history, philosophy, and cultural studies.

For many of the readers who are new to and eager to learn more about these dancers, Ruprecht provides ample historical background, situating their oeuvre within the social and political environment of the early twentieth century. While she does write about more widely known performers such as Wigman and Laban, her focus remains on highlighting the lesser-known dancers by opening them up to an Anglophone readership. (The smaller amount of scholarship on these lesser-known dancers is mostly in German.) Ruprecht’s readings engage with theoretical trends in

current academic fields by using queer studies and postcolonial theory, both of which are vibrant disciplines for minority and identity discourses. While dance studies has been engaging with these two fields, or earlier manifestations of them, for a number of years, she importantly introduces them here in a German studies context.

In the epilogue, Ruprecht makes a strong case for the contributions that dance studies, which is inherently interdisciplinary, can make to an academic field, by examining singular examples with close readings. I wish, however, that the voice of supporting this discipline could have been more explicitly stated throughout the entire study. Since this book focuses on gestures from a dance and dancerly idiom, it seems to perpetually beg the reader to think about them in a social and not always aesthetic context. Ruprecht goes even further by relating these gestures to the political and ethical economy. This study makes a vigorous case for the continually growing analytical possibilities of dance studies and demonstrates the richness it can find in German studies.

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Recycling the Disabled: Army, Medicine, and Modernity in WWI Germany. By Heather R. Perry. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. Pp. xii + 228. Paper £24.99. ISBN 978-1526106773.

Military historians have studied the causes and consequences of World War I in great detail and in ways that often invoke a great deal of controversy, extending their reach into a broad range of topics, including those typically treated by the history of medicine or disability studies. Heather R. Perry's study examines the practice of orthopedic medicine during the years 1914–1918, and elucidates how three processes converged to render war-disabled men fit to return to German society.

First, specialization made orthopedic physicians uniquely capable of restoring, as fully as possible, the capacity of disabled soldiers, so that they could continue to contribute to the war effort. To accommodate and compensate for a variety of war-related functional impairments, for example, the development of prosthetics was revolutionized during this time, allowing for the creation of more effective artificial limbs. This skill, now much in demand, advanced orthopedic physicians' standing among fellow healthcare professionals. Second, since militarization put the German economy and society on a war footing, orthopedic physicians spearheaded efforts to establish and then enhance institutional structures for the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers and their reintegration into society; bodies were to be effectively "recycled" so that they might subsequently contribute to the war effort in civilian contexts. Finally, medicalization aimed at transforming individuals formerly considered "permanently crippled" into the "temporarily injured." This involved the reeducation of the population so