Dancing with Knives: American Cold War Ideology in the Dances of West Side Story

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Abstract

In cultural studies today, there is emerging an interpretive revolution "from below" – that is, a radical reassessment of the politics of cultural forms, based on a recovery of the embodied and affective subject as the center of meaning-making. Making sense of dance performances is therefore methodologically important because of their particular ability to offer insight into these two aspects of subjectivity. As an artifact of Cold War American culture, Jerome Robbins' choreography in the film West Side Story (1961) enforces an ideological distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of violence, through its portrayals of "cool" affect as a necessary disposition, and organized violence as a necessary evil. Our close analysis of the dances "Rumble" and "Cool" offers new insights into the affective "map" that provided the ideological foundation for American political theorists and policy makers in formulating their Cold War attitudes.

Keywords

Dance studies; affect; militarism; Jerome Robbins; choreography; ideology

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References


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