
H-France Review Vol. 14 (April 2014), No. 66

Felicia McCarren, *French Moves: the Cultural Politics of le Hip Hop*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. ix + 202 pp. \$29.95 U.S. (pb). U.S. ISBN-13: 978-0199939978.

Review by Julie Townsend, University of Redlands.

In *French Moves: the Cultural Politics of le Hip Hop*, Felicia McCarren dispels the oft-cited misconception that the popularity of hip hop globally and specifically in France is a mere imitation of commercial American hip hop. Her analysis draws on political, community, sociological, philosophical and performance studies to present a narrative of *le hip hop* in France over the last thirty years. For McCarren, the state funding provided for hip hop classes, companies, and performances has opened up a space for the professionalization of hip hop dancers and facilitated a performed dialogue about Republican universalism in relation to post-colonial and immigrant populations who have historically been excluded from many of the benefits of citizenship. McCarren cites her guiding questions as: “what does it mean to signify with one’s body? What does dance’s particular bodily and nonverbal expressivity bring to discussions of art’s role in the reconsiderations of a cultural identity? How is this particular expressivity mobilized by a cultural (national) political program, and how does it exceed programmatic limits? What does it mean to define identity through appearance, through corporeality, or to define citizenship linked to place and presence in a climate in France in which an idealized republican universalism ignoring particulars of ethnicity, religion, and cultural practices is shifting to one drawing on those differences?” (p. 9).

Part one of McCarren’s book, “Politics and Poetics,” lays the groundwork for a kaleidoscopic argument about the negotiation of the particular and the universal in French hip hop. Hip hop performers, McCarren proposes, “enact their own integration into the political system, ironically by pointing out their nonintegration” (p. 40). That being said, McCarren proposes that certain aspects of this dance/performance movement might be categorized as an example of *la francophonie* disseminating French culture globally; and other examples might be better read as francophone insofar as they express the complex situations of post-colonial subjects. Thus, the practices and performances of French hip hop speak to the often contradictory national debates on universalism, racism, and exclusion while simultaneously integrating aspects from a global post-colonial community within French terms.

Part two, “Techniques and Technologies,” analyzes the roles of social media, digital archives, and pedagogical techniques in the development of French hip hop dissemination and concert dance. This section ends with a discussion of how the work of Leroi-Gourhan, de Certeau, and Bourdieu have participated in the intellectual foundations of France’s acceptance of and support of hip hop as a specifically French cultural practice.

Although this book focuses primarily on cultural and political contexts, McCarren does discuss several concert performances, including Farid Berki’s *Invisible Armada* and *Exodust*, Franck II Louise’s *Drop It!*, Compagnie Choream’s *Epsilon*, and a somewhat unexpected, but very compelling pairing of Cixous’s *L’histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, Roi du Cambodge* and Yiphun Chiem’s *Aspara*. Chiem, McCarren argues, uses archived images, classical Cambodian dance, and hip hop forms to “elaborate a new form...intimately linked to technologies, a dissolution of the categories of local and

global forms, traditional and new forms...In this way, imaging technologies, like the French language, somewhat ironically facilitate the survival of ‘francophone’ cultural forms” (pp. 136-7). Equally compelling are McCarren’s discussions of the Chorean dance classes in Montreuil, which are structured on a master class model at all levels and which facilitate a class community among participants.

The strengths of McCarren’s research lay both in the cross-disciplinary structural analysis of national ideology and state funding of the arts (and research on the arts) insofar as they relate to particular communities and individuals in complex national, social, and cultural situations. Likewise, McCarren’s introduction to works that might not be widely known to scholars bring new perspectives on French concert dance and the ways in which dance might be read as part of debates on national and global politics. Where the volume is sometimes challenging is in the repetition of some of her main points. While McCarren is right to remind the reader that multiple levels must always be in play when analyzing this dance practice, the arguments sometimes bordered on repetitive, rather than progressive. That being said, McCarren, like the artists and practitioners she studies, is setting the terms of a multi-layered conversation with strands from myriad sources, and the resulting methodological challenges are sometimes apparent in the text.

McCarren’s conclusion, that despite the temptation to see hip hop—as it often presents itself—as a universal or global form, “there remain significant local differences” (p. 166) and that we might read, optimistically with sociologist Isabelle Kaufman, French hip hop as offering “a way out” as well as “a way forward” for suburban youth in France (p. 167).

Julie Townsend
University of Redlands
Julie_townsend@redlands.edu

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ISSN 1553-9172