

# THE AMERICAN WAR-JOY CHOREOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

Luiz Felipe Guimarães Soares \*

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**Abstract:** I intend to analyze some cultural works that circulated in America in the time of World War II, and suggest that they were building the image of an American War-Joy Choreography, a supposedly cohesive (and joyful) movement that would be involving all Americans, who were foreseeing a better world, a world led by the Americans and the American Values.

**Resumo:** Pretendo sugerir a existência, entre bens culturais que circularam nos Estados Unidos durante a segunda guerra, da imagem de uma Coreografia Americana da Alegria da Guerra, uma suposta união alegre e dançante de todo o país em torno do ideal de vencer a guerra e disseminar os Valores Americanos pelo mundo inteiro, um mundo que por isso se tornaria muito melhor para todos.

**Palavras-chave:** Coreografia; Segunda Guerra; Identidade Nacional; Valores Americanos

**Key-words:** Choreography; World War II; National Identity; American Values

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*A wonderful time — the War:  
when money rolled in  
and blood rolled out.  
But blood  
was far away  
from here —  
Money was near  
(Langston Hughes)*

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\* Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina

<sup>1</sup> From my Doctored Dissertation, *War-Joy and the Pride of Not Being Rich: American and Brazilian National Identities through the Discourse of Carmen Miranda*, defended at PGI (Pós Graduação em Inglês – Letras e Literaturas Correspondentes), UFSC (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina), September 2001.

On the eve of World War II, in September, 1939, the U.S. was still facing some consequences of the Depression, with about 10 million unemployed — more than 17% of the labor force. In August 14, 1945, after the announcement of Japan's unconditional rendition, millions of euphoric people invaded the streets of most American cities to celebrate not only the end of the war, but also the country's position as the world's strongest economy. "We had saved the world from an evil that was unspeakable. We had something no other country had. We were a God-sanctioned invincible holy power, and it was our destiny to prove that we were the children of God and that our way was the right way for the world. . . . Good times were going to go on and on; everything was going to get better. It was just a wonderful happy ending."<sup>2</sup>

Specially after September 11, 2001, it might be weird to propose the image of a great happiness taking over the whole United States of America *because* of a horrendous war, But that is what I want to propose in this essay. Actually such an image may be all but weird, since it was quite clear in a surprisingly large amount of texts and films that circulated in America during WWII. More precisely, I argue for the image of an *American war-joy choreography*, characterized by a joyful choreographic movement taking over the country, supported by the hope for a shining future of wealth, freedom and happiness, in a new world led by the U.S.. A set of great expectations that could not include great demonstrations of hatred against the most probable world's savior and new democratic leader.

In order to argue in favor of such an image, I first point out some historical reasons why such movement of people can be seen as a joyful one. Secondly, I explore some aspects of an interchange of people, ideas and methods among the arts and literature, the armed forces, and the defense industry, a process that could be clearly noticeable in the war time all over the country, and suggest the choreographic character that appeared in representations of the country at the time. Then, I show this joyful national choreography as cohesive and national. I do all this by analyzing some common representations of America, proposed by some Americans, and coming from three different cultural fields: (1) reports on the war and military actions at war time, including drawings, graphs, cartoons, and illustrations in general; (2) reports on the defense industry, also including visual elements in the press; and (3) artistic and literary productions of the time involved in a definition of American national identity regarding the war or the defense industry.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Laura Briggs of Jerome, Idaho. Cited in Harris et al. 255.

## War-joy

How could there be joy about World War II, the most terrible war of all? In the war time, many in the U.S. had great expectations of a world much better than before the Depression in the case of the Allies' victory. Even before Pearl Harbor, more and more Americans started to see that they could benefit from the war. In 1939, Congress approved a budget of \$1,5 billion for defense — which in 1943 would reach \$81 billion — and allowed Americans to sell armaments to the British. The defense industry promoted then an explosion of employment, creating a boom that started to affect many regions. At the same time, American farmers benefited from good weather and new agricultural policies. An intense optimism was growing, together with the notion of Americans as the people who could overcome the Nazi threat and lead the world, while disseminating the “American values”. Internationalist (anti-isolationist) discourse got more and more space in the press, with an intensely patriotic appeal, as Henry Luce, director of the powerful Time-Life group exemplified:

Once we cease to distract ourselves with lifeless arguments about isolationism, we shall be amazed to discover that there is already an immense American internationalism. American jazz, Hollywood movies, American slang, American machines and patented products, are in fact the only things that every community in the world, from Zanzibar to Hamburg, recognizes in common. . . . America is already the intellectual, scientific and artistic capital of the world. . . . We must undertake now to be the Good Samaritan of the entire world (Luce).

After Pearl Harbor, when even the most adamant isolationists like Henry Ford abandoned that position, optimism regarding an American future through victory at war met with no resistance at all. The feeling of a good war, of the war-joy itself, appears particularly clear in an issue of *Time* Magazine released in January 2, 1942, i.e., only four weeks after Pearl Harbor. An exultant editorial was already giving Pearl Harbor a mythical dimension: that “sunny December” had put an end to what *Time* called “*the long nightmare of the undeclared war*” (my italics). Headed by Luce, *Time* changed its critical attitude towards Roosevelt and portrayed him on its cover as “Man of the Year,” giving a surplus of reasons for its choice:

Never before had a U. S. President faced so great a task in unifying the country that had made him President, of summoning up the spirit that would make the factories produce on a scale equal to the needs of the world's worst war. . . . His smiling courage in the face of panic, his resourcefulness in meeting unprecedented threats to the nation's economy and morale, his sanguine will place him there. The intensity of his feeling for what America can be and therefore will be — a feeling that awakened the country to master its creeping paralysis — these qualities prepared the nation for its struggle in the

depth of depression (“Man of the year”).

There was sometimes even euphoria about the war, as it is shown in the very textual structure of a report: one of its paragraphs begins with “For America is building ships,” and ends with “America is building ships!”; between both clauses there come some impressive defense data on ship building. In several other paragraphs the author just replaces data and the keywords at the beginning and end, according to the subject — for “ships,” “planes,” “tanks,” “an Army;” or for “building ships,” “training pilots.” The opening of this paean to the defense industry sets up the excitement:

From coast to coast, from Galveston to Michigan, the face of America is changing. It is changing . . . as new ships slide gracefully into the changeless sea, changing as planes violate with noise the remotest recesses of our sovereign skies. The defense program, as yet in its gawky adolescence, has nevertheless made its mark upon a continent . . . New cities are growing — cities of men in uniform; and near mass production factories of the Middle West, in shipyard towns and aircraft centers new buildings rise to house the men behind the guns (Baldwin).<sup>3</sup>

After a tour of 60 plants in 21 cities and 13 states, a reporter was glorified by “American industry in action”; seeing all those frenetic factories, amazing equipment and excited workers he testified that they “make you feel better! They make you feel that you can stand up and cheer for your country, the country that is producing all this, and that you can wave the American flag, just as hard and as high as you please, without feeling in the least apologetic about it” (Shalett).

Many testified that the war effort opened their horizons, giving them great expectations for the near future. Due to full employment and the high wages of the defense industry, money was flowing as many people had never seen it do before. “Older men of the white-collar class are . . . earning much more money than they ever did when they sold dresses or kept books for a living” (Shalett). For many defense workers, in fact, “everything’s new and wonderful,” as John dos Passos defines it. “They can buy radios, they can go to the pictures, they can go to beer parlors, bowl, shoot craps, bet on the ponies. . . . Girls can go to beauty parlors, get their nails manicured, buy readymade dresses” (dos Passos 94). More than earning much money, however, the real wonder, capable of changing people’s definitions of themselves, was combining it with an overwhelming new horizon, open for great possibilities.

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<sup>3</sup> In the same edition which selected Roosevelt as Man of 1941, exalted Henry Ford’s thorough conversion from pacifism to war just after Pearl Harbor, declaring that he would deserve the title of “businessman of 1941”.

I had never seen a battleship or destroyer in my life. When I saw my first battleship I couldn't believe there was such a thing in the world. And to see the ocean too. . . . I felt like something had come down from heaven. I went from forty cents an hour to a dollar an hour. . . . I felt like at last I'm getting up in the world. I was able to buy some working clothes for a change, buy a suit—I didn't have to depend on somebody's hand-me-downs anytime. *It just made a different man out of me.*<sup>4</sup>

Brazilian musician Aloysio de Oliveira, leader of the Bando da Lua, the group that accompanied Carmen Miranda, who was working at Disney then, tells of an air-raid drill, reinforcing the notion of a good mood at the time:

I was driving one night on Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood, when the alarm whistled. I did exactly what I was told to do. I stopped the car, and the first door I could see was a bar's. Strange coincidence. The bar was crowded, not only with its customary patrons, but with those like me, who had just followed instructions. That night was one of the most sensational in my life. After closing the door, I got a merry greeting. Everybody was a little tipsy, and people seemed to be one big family. It was a brotherhood celebration fed by alcohol and by a feeling of imminent danger, like saying farewell to life (Oliveira 98-99).

## Grids and choreography

The image of a joyful interaction of people, ideas and methods among the arts, the armed forces, and the defense industry is also not challenging at all. The three kinds of activity—military, industrial, and artistic—may have much more affinity than is usually supposed, especially when collective artistic productions are taken into account. It is true that artistic production also relies heavily on emotion, impulse and intuition, whereas in the military and industrial fields these are secondary. However, it is hard to deny, in the artistic field, the demand for rational planning and organization of spectacles, and for efficient, rational training of artists.

The affinity between artistic productions and military and industrial activities is particularly clear in the case of choreography. One can think, paradigmatically, of military parades, with their choreographic movements to brass and drum music, but the affinity is at a deeper level. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Foucault points out, disciplinary

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with William Pefley of Greencastle, Pennsylvania. Cited in Harris et al. 39-40, my italics.

mechanisms spread over Europe. Models of organization specific to certain institutions became general formulas for each field of human activity. Decisively affecting educational systems, discipline was turned into a high social value, while a disciplined body, able to work smoothly with others in a collective organization, became an asset.

Choreography was reportedly born in France, precisely in this historical context. It was proposed in 1700, by Feuillet, as “l’art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs.”<sup>5</sup> Choreography, thus, may be seen as part of the same rationality, proper to modernity, which shaped many activities — military and industrial among them. Illustrating the interchange between military choreographic activities in the war time, a *New York Times* reporter, after a typical dance for soldiers, declared that American forces in WWII were “the dancingest Army and Navy ever.” Dancing was part of military life, as testified by a soldier: “The boys told me I had to dance to be a success” (Greenbaum).

It is possible to extend the concept to the affinity of industrial and military activities with spatial representations in general, and thus with several artistic fields, not only with choreography. Mechanisms of disciplinarization that spread in the classical age had in common the organization of spaces based on the idea of *grids*. Discipline is made possible by the “Principle of elementary location or *partitioning*. Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual.” In military action, as well as on shop floors (and in prison, at school, in hospitals, companies, or in sports etc), spaces are designed in such a way as to associate each individual with a section of a map, an intersection of a line and a column, avoiding the random formation of groups. “Discipline organizes an analytical space” (Foucault, 143).

Grids are also seen in drawings, in spatial representations in general, thus in several artistic fields, as the analytical organization of the surface for drawing. Rosalind Krauss recognizes in grids the property of dealing both with the concrete (rationality, logic, science, materiality) and the fictional (as an abstract, non-realist figure that, when pre-imposed on a figurative drawing, organizing the space for representation, indicates fiction, illusion.<sup>6</sup> When one sees military platoons, marching in a parade, as emblems of discipline and power, the grid they form helps emphasize their emblematic character, their dimension as a sign, their action on the level of representation. Movements of troops, tanks, planes and ships through European battlefields were reported at large in the American press. The very grid of platoons in particular, and the spatial organization of movements planned by strategists, hint at the idea of disciplinary methods having movements in common with choreography. Whenever a

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<sup>5</sup> Feuillet (1660-1710) is reputed inventor of the Feuillet dance notation; he is known by his work *Chorégraphie, ou l’art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs* (“The art of describing dance by means of characters, figures, and signs) (1700). Cited in Bremser.

troop movement is referred to, one can easily imagine the typical platoon marching as if choreographed, legs and arms moving simultaneously, and all boots hitting the ground in that unison binary beat, so that the whole platoon moves cohesively as a block. In a battle, such collective skills permit the “troops” to obey a specific plan of action. It is almost a dance by that “dancingest Army and Navy ever.”

By the same token, the huge (industrial) production of representations in literature, the arts and film may also be seen as a demonstration of the capacity for organization and discipline in the artistic field, as well as in the armed forces and in the defense industry.<sup>7</sup> The Disney Studio, usually referred to as a “fun factory,” and deeply involved in the war effort, is perhaps the best example of a synthesis between playful imagination and industrial efficiency, described as a place in which “a twentieth century miracle is achieved: by a system as truly of the machine age as Henry Ford’s plant at Dearborn, true art is produced.”<sup>8</sup>

In war time the presence of artists in the barracks was nearly as common as the presence of the military in studios and on stages. Fine war posters were distributed in barracks and defense plants,<sup>9</sup> songs on war were broadcast all over, spectacles and films on the war and the defense industry were released, Hollywood stars made national tours, either doing shows for soldiers or dedicating spectacles to improving war bonds sales. The “dancingest military ever” were directly involved with art productions: soldiers painted “nose art” on airplanes, military specialists closely supervised Walt Disney’s production of dozens of didactic films for training soldiers and “how to” films for new weapons.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Krauss stresses that treatises on physiological optics written on the nineteenth century were generally illustrated with grids. In modernist abstractionism grids themselves were thematized (she quotes Jasper Johns, Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, Mondrian, Joseph Cornell, Albers, Kelly, and LeWitt), and they may be seen in narratives and poetry, if one reads them, for instance, in a structuralist fashion, rearranging sequential features into a form of spatial organization.

<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising to find an increasing amount of behind-the-scene films, from the 1930’s on, showing demanding directors and people working under industrial modes of production. See, for instance, *Babies in Arms*, *42nd Street*, or Busby Berkeley’s *Gold Diggers of 1933* and *Gold Diggers of 1935*.

<sup>8</sup> Walt Disney, whose greatest hero was Henry Ford (“The Big Bad Wolf,” cited by Steven Watts, 167), showing a similar temperament and several affinities with him, was “childishly enchanted by factory methods” (idem, 169). In 1939 Mickey Mouse was considered by Eisenstein as America’s most original contribution to culture. In 1937 Hitler tried to ban Mickey Mouse as “the most miserable ideal ever revealed,” but “was forced by popular demand to rescind his order” (Shale, 11-13). Even before Pearl Harbor, “90% of Disney’s 550 employes [sic] [were] making films that bear directly on the war. At least six major branches of the Government have engaged Disney to reach the public. . . . The Navy is Disney’s best customer, having ordered more than 50 films on every war subject from bombing and gunnery to paratroop training” (“Walt Disney goes to war” 63). Disney artists also drew insignias for Army and Navy corps, and Disney puppets were on tanks, minesweepers, bombers and fighting planes” (“Speaking of pictures”). By May, 1941, the studio had produced over 200 designs, and was expecting to do at least 500 more.

The comic revue *This Is the Army* is emblematic of such interchange. It was performed by some 300 soldiers from Camp Upton, and was made into Broadway's number one hit in July, 1942, with proceeds earmarked for the Army Emergency Relief Fund.<sup>11</sup> It is a prototype of war-joy: "They can make the audience roll in the aisles as they do stuff in all sorts of outlandish get-ups — and look like a million dollars in their own regulation Summer khaki" (Hall).

The same good humor provided Hollywood with new opportunities of high box-office productions, chiefly through war comedies such as *Caught in the Draft* or *In the Army*, full of those gags provided by clumsy, maladroit soldiers — who were not seldom made into heroes, which also helped build the image of the ordinary man who was able to make a difference in the war. In June, 1941, *Life* chose a shot of one of these soldiers, thoroughly muddled — Bob Hope in *Caught in the Draft* — to illustrate "the U.S. cinema industry's newest approach to the war." One year after that, in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, James Cagney impersonated George M. Cohan, an American musician and dancer who proudly dedicates a large amount of his work to both world wars; the film combines war-joy with good humor, musical talent, tap dance and choreography, showing, in brief, an euphoric patriotism toward the war, combined with a super efficient artistic production.

In the same merry mood, Hollywood stars "hit the road" as part of the war effort. In addition to shows exclusively for soldiers, they made tours to general audiences whose (sometimes huge) takes were directed straight to the Army and Navy. In April, 1942, one of these tours, the two-week *Hollywood Victory Caravan*, with 22 movie stars (including Bing Crosby, Groucho Marx and James Cagney), 8 starlets and some 70 musicians and technical experts, performed for about 125,000 people in two weeks, travelling 8,000 miles from Boston to Houston, and accumulating \$600,000. In the White House the troupe was greeted

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<sup>9</sup> Poster-maker Jes Schlaikjer once said that his mission in the war was "to arouse in the heart of every soldier a feeling of pride in his particular branch of the service and a determination to represent its traditions worthily." He was employed by the War Department (at the Graphics Section of the Bureau of Public Relations), and found his models in camps near Washington, taking them to his studio in the Pentagon Building, "where generals and corporals watched them grow into these representations of young America at war" ("Young America at war").

<sup>10</sup> Such films combined cartoon and live footage. One of them, for which some artists of Disney's staff learned to fly, seeking to "simulate real flight," showed details of piloting under different conditions (fog, lightning, ice etc). Another one, on navigation rules, reproduced a real disaster (at Hallifax, 1917), which could be avoided by the observance of the rules. Another one was a kind of filmed moral fable, with the characters acting within a Nazi's head, arguing for the privilege of reason over emotion. See "Walt Disney goes to war." See also Shale.

<sup>11</sup> *This is the Army* had a Hollywood version, with Ronald Reagan, in 1943, directed by Michael Curtiz.



by the President with a tea party; in Boston, cheers were “so long and so loud that both Joan Blondell and Cary Grant dissolved in tears;” in Philadelphia, Bob Hope tossed cookies to the throngs.

Both life in the armed forces and the uninterrupted movement of people and machines in defense industrial plants were usually described by journalists in musical/choreographic terms, while artists in general (not only choreographers) used either to coordinate collective works through methods which resemble choreographic activities (as in a shop-floor) or to portray the war and defense industry, as reporters did, by means of musical/choreographic images.

Such common use of musical and choreographic metaphors in texts on the defense industry is quite understandable, since industrial efficiency depends strongly on the harmony among simple movements rhythmically repeated by individual bodies. One reporter described those “rat-a-tat-tat of endless rivets being driven home,” and the work of a girl at a Saint Louis ordnance plant, who turned out bullets singing to herself “in time with the clicking of the machine, ‘Kill-a-Jap, kill-a-Jap, kill-a-Jap’” (Shalett). Another reporter classified skilled workers as *virtuosos* who “play by ear,” who “can make the machinery and blueprints come alive as a Toscanini brings notes off paper” (“Battle of Detroit”). This choreographic industrial movement is joyfully portrayed as an astonishing, opera-like spectacle, with dramatic notes, in a *New York Times Magazine* story entitled “*Crescendo* in Detroit.”

When you see Detroit plants, . . . you do hear a rising *crescendo* that soon will burst in *violent music* on distant battlefronts. . . . A bomber section, the after part, is a beautiful, shining thing, prophetic of the *loveliness* that even an instrument of destruction can have. . . . The shells are painted in colors . . . and they are *paraded* in symmetrical rows, like *metallic soldiers* in strange armor. . . . You will have *many pictures, of machines and people*, and they will merge, until you see that this is a part of the greatest mechanized army that ever marched. Here are samples of power: *power of mind, power of hand and muscle, power of machine, power of the human will*. Power for war. Power for victory (Duffus, my italics).

It is noteworthy that “the greatest mechanized army that ever marched” is also the “dancingest ever.”

Poster production, too, resembled a joyfully coordinated movement of artists toward victory. “Inconceivable would be a war without posters. Like bands, parades, flags and patriotic speeches, they are designed to rouse peaceful citizens to deeds of daring and hard work. Already, in World War II, the U. S. has been bombarded with such poster art” (“These are defense posters”). In November, 1942, *The New York Times Magazine* reported: “Artists of every age and rank [from 43 states] responded to the number of 2,224 when a

nation-wide war poster competition was announced last Summer” (“Posters for victory,” my italics).<sup>12</sup> About 200 posters (10% of the total) were selected for the honor of being exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York. The collection then was to tour the country, and the prize-winners to be reproduced for national distribution by the Office of Civilian Defense.

One of the best metaphors for the national war-joy movement of music and choreography is given by one war poster by Cy Hungerford distributed throughout industrial plants. It shows a country boy representing what could be considered the “ordinary American,” happily singing and playing an organ with his huge hands and agile fingers. The organ itself is a defense plant, with its pipes as the factory chimneys, throwing out smoke and soot together with eighth notes. On the plant roof/organ body one reads “Defense Production;” among the notes, rises the song “God Bless America.” The “message” is complemented by the text: “And it will be ‘god help America’ if the organ breaks down!! You are a production soldier... America’s first line of defense is here” (“Defense posters by Cy Hungerford”).

#### “A nation in flux”

On the one hand, the press, writers and artists helped to establish a sense of war-joy suffused with *American values* and the sense of a grand historic opportunity; on the other hand, they also helped to divulge the miraculous results of the defense industry through choreographic means made possible by *American ingenuity*. The image of a war-joy choreography, thus, was being established as intrinsic to American culture. Moreover, the national character of this image, the sense of a cohesive movement throughout the nation, was also highlighted by frequent totalizing metaphors. A *New York Times Magazine* reporter said: “Men and machines [are] making over the face of America. Slowly the stream of khaki moving through our streets turns into a torrent; slowly the great ships grow and gather upon the seas; faster the lathes whirl and the drillers [sic] turn, and the planes take shape to darken the skies of America. *Here is a land in flux*; here is a nation in change, the architects of its destiny the brain and brawn of a people” (Baldwin, my italics). A *Time* reporter reinforced the idea: “The whole U. S. nation was going to roll up its sleeves and fix Armageddon” (“Battle of Detroit”).

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<sup>12</sup> “Eight categories were set — Production, War Bonds, *The Nature of the Enemy*, Sacrifice, People on the March, “Deliver us from Evil”, Slave world or free world, Loose talk — and nine prizes of \$300 each were offered, *two in the category of sacrifice*.”

Sometimes reports on military actions in the war were represented in terms of images of the coordinated military movements of a whole nation, as was the case of a two-page story in *Life*: “U.S. Sets its Sights for Victory,” issued in January, 1942. The story reported on forecasts for American war production in the next one or two years, with an intense visual appeal. The astonishing statistics were turned into neatly drawn graphs, all of them showing figures of giant grids of armaments taking over enormous geographic spaces. One of these figures encouraged the reader to imagine 185,000 planes in rows of 5, spaced 100 ft apart from nose to tail; such a flying platoon would cover 900 miles, almost the length of Japan. In another one, fighter planes deployed over bombers would form two flying “blankets,” in a flying military choreography capable of covering an area of 1 x 117 miles; another graph suggested a single line of 120,000 tanks, going from Salt Lake City to New York (“U.S. sets its sights for victory”). The very logic of grids, its very geometric monotony, allows one to imagine what is *not* in each frame, i.e., the way in which each grid of planes or tanks would go on and on, beyond the space of the picture. But there is also a black square, occupying almost a whole page, with 60,000 white dots, representing the 60,000 planes predicted to be produced in 1942. Here, with the whole grid actually drawn, imagination is asked to work differently, not extending the grid, but transforming dots into airplanes, also visualizing the whole grid of planes moving together — now to cover all of Manhattan Island.

Recalling that maps are also drawn upon grids, and that nations are usually represented by maps, those two pages of statistic graphs through grids proposed by *Life* magazine may be seen as a especially strong invitation to imagine a national choreography of the whole U.S. at war — and a joyful one, given the national pride in American values and the glorious goal mentioned above, which in turn could be achieved by the impressive output of the defense industry, portrayed by the statistics themselves.

There were, of course, millions of “exceptions” to this national enthusiasm, people who could not or did not want to join up or get aligned with the war effort. An example of this was a farmer from Jerome, Idaho, who moved with spouse and 3 children (including a newborn) to Long Beach, California, to work in a defense plant, but gave it up and went back home only 3 months later. Looking from his little square window at all those houses in a row with no space between them, he complained: “How in the heck can you go outside and even take a pee without some neighbor watching you?” (Harris et al. 35). Exceptions, however, were not really taken into account by reports, commentators and artists who encouraged the image of national cohesion, availing themselves of statistics on the majority.

And there was really a majority involved in the war. Of every war fought by the U.S., World War II was the one with the greatest popular support, which helped establish the image of a war-joy choreography as really *national*. Less than two months after Pearl Harbor,

sales of war bonds (in banks and post offices, through formal application) had already reached \$1.3 billion, while stamps, from 10¢ to \$5 each (sold at store counters, street corners, schools, offices, grocery stores, or by newsboys everywhere), brought in \$55 million. Besides bonds and stamps, the whole war cost, about \$200 billion (\$186 in federal expenditures for war production alone), was supported with capital coming from many popular sources. There were Victory Taxes, a novelty people did not quite complain about. Food was rationed — and “the majority of people ate better under rationing than they did during the Depression” (Harris et al. 64). Gas was also rationed: people were given A, B, C or E (emergency) priorities, and a national 35-mile-an-hour speed limit was established; yet, as a nostalgic witness recalled in the recession of the early 80s’, “nobody went into a gas station and hit each other with fists when we had gas rationing the way they did a few years ago when we had a gas shortage” (Harris et al. 64). Even fashion was creatively adapted to face metal demand; fabric laces and buttons proliferated, hats came without metal hat pins.

In addition to new agricultural policies, which, combined with good weather, occasioned an agricultural boom in the country, from almost every space available in urban settings — backyards, parking lots etc — the fashion of “Victory Gardens” exploded. “Then everybody grew a victory garden. . . . Our carrots never got bigger than an inch. Yet we all wanted to do our part for the war. You got caught up in the mesmerizing spirit of patriotism.”<sup>13</sup> By 1943, 20.5 million Victory Gardens were planted, producing about 1/3 of all vegetables eaten in the country the entire year. At the same time, people responded with the same enthusiasm to a Government campaign for scrap and fat — one old shovel could provide iron for four hand grenades, while one pound of fat would yield enough glycerin for one pound of black powder.

Such a powerful home front, with so many people “doing their bit”, made it feel as if the country had acquired a new technology, capable of providing “one people” with ubiquity. A reporter remarked of a girl who inspected airplane parts in a plant: “This girl is dangerous: she may save a pilot’s life and the pilot may shoot down an enemy. This is war, too” (Duffus). Working “over here,” Americans could take part in the war and feel as if they were “over there.” One worker at a new Monsanto plant in Tennessee explained: ““We just say to hell with everything and everybody except the United States and the United Nations”” (Shalett). If this shows an intense dedication and enthusiasm by unskilled workers, in plants hastily planned for dealing with absolutely new technology and processes, built on the metaphor of a battle field at home, the image carried over into the cost in casualties: industrial accidents were officially reported in January 1944 as more numerous than American injuries

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Sheril Jankovsky Cuning of Long Beach, Ca. Cited in Harris et al. 255.

in the battle fields.

In all, more than 15 million Americans served in the armed forces, and about 20 million others (15% of the population) moved for a wartime job.<sup>14</sup> Migration in America has seldom been that intense. Even though new jobs and higher wages were the principal stimuli for moving, those who moved generally had to consider the importance of what they were to do in order to cope with their new troubles. “Although hardships, shortages and crowded conditions were a fact of life throughout the war years, most people took them in stride and good humor. Complainers were met with the universal retort ‘Don’t you know there’s a war going on?’” (Harris et al. 32) As the defense industry geared up, female and black workers, for the first time, were seen as important in the labor force — inaugurating a new phase in their history of struggles for equal rights.

The idea of a nation on the move through the defense industry also appears in a John dos Passos’s report of March, 1943, describing a whole horizon in change, as part of the boom in Mobile, Alabama — a process common in small towns all over the country.

Startled by the roar of the bus, a white heron rises out of the dry reeds of the salt marsh and flies with slow wingflaps landward. Now, all along the horizon across the bay from out of a smudge of smoke begin to appear the tall derricks and the crossed arms of cranes and the hoists and the great steel cradles of the shipyards. Along the sandspit in front of the yards as far as you can see, parked cars sparkle endlessly in the sun. . . . In the outskirts in every direction you find acres and acres raw with new building. . . . Three long lines of small houses, some decently planned on the “American standard” model and some mere boxes with a square brick chimney on the center, miles of dormitories, great squares of temporary structures are knocked together from day to day by a mob of construction workers in a smell of paint and freshsawed pine lumber and tobacco juice and sweat. . . . Over it all the Gulf mist, heavy with smoke of soft coal, hangs in streaks, and glittering the training planes endlessly circle above the airfields (Dos Passos).<sup>15</sup>

As a conclusion, the military, the defense industry workers (from the most unskilled to industrialists), and artists of several trends, together with the home front, gave the impression of one single, well organized national community joyfully working together toward victory

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<sup>14</sup> If we were to refer each one of those 15 million who served to four close relatives, whose lives have been affected by such service, we would have 60 million people, almost half American whole population, mobilized or directly affected by the war, regardless those 20 million who moved for a job — who may also have had close relatives in the Army. Regardless, still, (1) the total number of people registered in armed forces, i.e., available for the service, which was not 15 but 31 million; (2) the unknown number of people who found new jobs and opportunities in their own towns, precisely because of those who moved in.

at what was considered a “good war,” like “a stream of khaki [that] grows into a mighty flood” (Baldwin).

A *Life* cover (June 5, 1944) provided the reader with another synthesis of national war choreography. The entire cover is taken up by a picture of soldiers on the march, seen from above, and at an angle to the grid of the platoon, so that spaces between soldiers do not appear. In addition, the rectangular frame of the magazine is not large enough to show the outer rows of the platoon. The photo also shows the soldiers’ faces, healthy and full of conviction. Once again, the very logic of the grid of soldiers suggests a hyperbolic, powerful group of men in uniform, compact, cohesive, well coordinated, and endless. The soldiers’ brand new uniforms, helmets and weapons, in turn, suggest that the defense program results have been so huge that no one could see the whole of it. The idea of choreography is made clear by the inevitable sense of simultaneity of the soldiers’ movements, keeping all moving arms and feet always parallel, the feet making that binary beat on the ground. The cohesion is reinforced by the sameness of clothes and by all those parallel rifles, at an angle to the cover rectangle. All soldiers are looking straight ahead, focusing on a point in the future, out of the frame, which can be easily associated with the country’s destiny. Finally, the *Life* logo, printed on the picture, together with the caption, “The U.S. Infantry,” implies not only the “American-ness” of the group, but also a kind of signature, suggesting the role of the American press (and one of its most powerful groups), aligned with that powerful national group on march toward victory.

All this happened *only* 60 years ago. At the time of that issue of *Life*, future was a good thing. World War II was felt as a good war, being interpreted all over in Manichean terms — the evil being “over there”. Not much importance was given to questions like “what the hell can other peoples have against America?” What is surprising by now is the melancholic way in which the same Manicheanism is still trying to get credibility.

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<sup>15</sup> In 1942 alone, 80 thousand new workers swarmed into Mobile. In Seneca, Illinois, the population grew from 1,235 to 6,500 within a few months, and reached 27,000 at the peak of production. In Virginia, at the Portsmouth navy yard, the number of inhabitants leaped from 4,500 to 48,000. Among the many problems these little towns had to face were the lack of sanitation, waste disposal, and sufficient doctors, and it was practically impossible for the Government to keep pace with the demand. Harris et al. 41.

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