

the nature of the self in the creative process. For me, the individual artist statements and group discussions make significant, however unintended, contributions to a burgeoning psychology of performing arts practitioners. By locating the self in creative context, *Navigating the Unknown* reminds me of the famous “Powers of Ten” documentary film written and directed by Ray and Charles Eames in 1977. This film depicts the relative scale of the universe in factors of ten. It begins with an overhead image of a man reclining on a blanket on a picnic. The viewpoint slowly zooms out, moving ten times farther out every ten seconds, until our own galaxy is visible only as a speck of light. The camera then reverses, zooming back in until it reaches the man’s hand, which it then proceeds to go right through to views of negative powers of ten until the camera comes to quarks in a proton of a carbon atom. By zooming in and out of the nature of creativity, the artists, researchers, and scholars in this volume reveal more about the emotional makeup and psychological underpinnings of highly creative people than most empirical investigations in the past few decades. This fact alone makes *Navigating the Unknown* more than worth the trouble to travel. One ought to make the most of it.

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DANCING LIVES: FIVE FEMALE DANCERS FROM THE BALLET D’ACTION TO MERCE CUNNINGHAM

by Karen Eliot. 2007. *Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press*. 208 pp., 15 photographs. \$32.95 cloth.

Throughout the past several decades dance scholars have broadened the scope of the discipline so that today, few critical inquires examine dancing bodies without careful contextualization. Karen Eliot’s *Dancing Lives: Five Female Dancers from the Ballet d’Action to Merce Cunningham* acknowledges this in its effort to create an “embodied history” (2). Focusing on five distinct careers, this study puts forth a series of microcosmic analyses, allowing readers to learn about dancers who were “recognized in her own time” but “not necessarily the most famous of their eras”—with the hope that their stories will inform the larger project of ballet and modern dance histories (3). Yet instead of filling the “gap” left in dance history and situating these women within a larger matrix, Eliot’s methodological approach highlights the individual dance careers of each (5).

From the outset, readers are told that *Dancing Lives* is meant to centralize the “work” of the dancer (1). By employing this term, Eliot refers to the actual moments of dancing, years of training and rehearsing that fall out of historical narratives when eclipsed by accounts of final performances; applying Walter Benjamin’s notion of “erasure,” the author questions how the ephemerality of dance might be written into its history (4). Herself a former dancer with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC), it is clear

that Eliot now seeks to champion how dance is made. She writes, “Dancers are the stuff of which dance history is made, but there are few histories focusing on their lives as working professionals” (3). In this vein she writes *Dancing Lives*—a five-chapter book composed of brief entrees into the lives of four ballerinas and one modern dancer whom she considers to be in the historical shadows. Thus we learn about the life and work of the late-eighteenth-century ballerina Giovanna Baccelli (1753–1801) *not* Gaetan and Auguste Vestris or Jean-Georges Noverre; read about the experiences of French romantic ballerina Adèle Dumilâtre (1821–1909) *rather* than her non-French contemporaries like Taglioni and the other *Pas de Quatre* luminaries; are told that Imperial Theatre ballerina Tamara Karsavina (1885–1978) had a life *other* than the one frequently told in relation to Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. It is also in this way that we are treated to a retelling of how Scottish-born ballerina Moira Shearer’s (1926–2008) choice to be Vicky in *The Red Shoes* solidified her destiny to “follow Margot Fonteyn” (112, emphasis mine) and how it was former Cunningham dancer Catherine Kerr (1948) *instead* of Carolyn Brown who epitomized the MCDC aesthetic for many years. (Importantly, Eliot does not discount the dancers she compares these five to but rather makes plain that Baccelli, Dumilâtre, Karsavina, Shearer, and Kerr were each held to the standards of others.)

The careers of the women illustrated are “second-tier” (a description used from Alphonse Royer in regard to Dumilâtre on page 3 and by Eliot in relation to Shearer on page 105) and Eliot takes it upon herself to replace their careers as seminal. In so doing, she reminds us that forces other than dance technique often determined who ended up on the French and Russian ballet stages and how that affected dance historiography. She

tells how one of Dumilâtre’s patrons “offered the sum of 100,000 francs” to ensure Paris Opéra Ballet director Léon Pillet produced *Lady Henriette ou la servante de Greenwich* for her, and later how “Balanchine made the unprecedented gesture of asking de Valois to provide him with a special rehearsal with Shearer” contrary to Ninette de Valois’s rule that “only [Margot] Fonteyn was allowed to work with outside coaches and choreographers” (55, 116). These examples make the reader presume *Dancing Lives* will afford new insights about the kinds of forces that determined the course of dance history and provide an alternative. Relying on various methods ranging from author Toni Morrison’s “literary archeology” (5) to historian John Gaddis’s strategy of selecting certain territory upon which to construct maps, Eliot posits that hers is a book to “re-draw the landscape of dance history” (6). The work is poised to do just that, yet it remains solidly rooted in descriptive analyses.

Dancing Lives is intended for “general students of dance history and people who are interested in the lives of working women across two hundred years of Western history” (2). Eliot uses the introduction of her book to re-direct “dance specialists” who might be inclined to read her investigation toward “substantive works by Ivor Guest, Lynn Garafola, Sally Banes, David Vaughan, Marian Smith, John Chapman, and many others” (2). The decision to point these readers away contradicts the stated intention of the book, which is to look through a “microscope rather than a telescope” at dance history (2). I understand why Eliot makes these statements, and they are supported in part by digressions into familiar territory for dance scholars (that is, talk of the *petits rats*, patrons, the moment Vicky says “Why do you want to live?,” and the way Merce Cunningham used chance); nevertheless, it seems this position belies

the valuable information brought out in the study—historical tidbits that *only* the dance scholar would love. I know I was interested to read about Dumilâtre dancing the first Myrtha against Carlotta Grisi's Giselle for a captive Gautier (33), and about Pavel Gerdt's role as Karsavina's "most influential teacher" (65). However, after these detailed investigations, I was left to come up with my own connections to link these dancers together since Eliot had moved on to an exploration of the next dancing life. In the case of Karsavina, for instance, on the same page where Eliot begins to discuss her influence on Frederick Ashton (one of the key things she purports to uncover in the introduction) the chapter concludes with only one quote from Ashton attesting to "days of inspiration and absorption" that enabled him to find "the real meaning of dancing" while working with Karsavina (89). The Karsavina/Ashton example is one of many that is clearly supported with primary source material yet warrants a much more thorough unpacking for the dance historian.

Additionally, confusion surrounds why Eliot chose these particular female lives to promote in her work and why a more developed discussion of gender is conspicuously absent. Granted she does cite Garafola (39) and Banes (5) in various sections, particularly the former in discussion of the romantic ballet, yet again these are just mentions that seem perplexing in a book whose title announces it is a look at "female" dancing lives. Even though the five dancers outlined have several possible commonalities that could link their stories together in a historical continuum, Eliot does not make plain her connections. At the beginning she notes a correspondence between Barcelli and Dumilâtre stemming from visual renderings she has seen of the two dancers. She tells how Thomas Gainsborough's *Les amants surpris* (depict-

ing Baccelli) and a lithograph from 1843 (of Dumilâtre) both served as inspiration. This potentially fruitful artistic correlation rests here. Similarly, in chapter 4 Eliot stops just short of employing Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory (or any other analytical tool from film studies) when noting Shearer's career hinged upon being gazed upon in the film *The Red Shoes*.

Perhaps the most puzzling omission is the lack of transition from the investigation of four ballerinas to modern dancer Catherine Kerr. At this juncture the book seems to change in tone, genre, and emphasis. Because Eliot is a contemporary of Kerr's (they danced together in Cunningham's company) the study moves from a nostalgic, speculative inquest of lost ballerinas to a commentary on Kerr's technical facility and working relationship with Cunningham. Since Kerr began as a ballet dancer and Cunningham's company members seem to employ a general balletic sensibility, it is possible Eliot ends with this dancing life to suggest that the recent past has brought a more prevalent exchange between ballet and modern dancers. Nevertheless, making this transition with just twenty pages left of the book is confounding.

Eliot ends each chapter with a one-page (sometimes shorter) section about the legacy of the dancer she has just discussed and how her presence might be felt in dancers today. She hints that Dumilâtre might be invoked by Carmen Corella's "womanly" portrayal of Myrtha (59); she wonders if Nina Ananiashvili's Lise might also embody some part of Karsavina (90), and she contends that without Catherine Kerr we might know a very different Cunningham aesthetic. The suggestion of embodied connections like these indicates Eliot's intent is to truly reconceptualize how dancing bodies might be historicized. It is lamentable that such instances are far too brief.

In the epilogue, the five dancers' lives that have remained largely distinct are once again discussed. Though she notes "several commonalities" (for example, the women were each "physically attractive," "physically gifted," and "worked with extraordinary discipline"), Eliot continues to treat these careers as moments in a linear history (145).

From a critical dance studies perspective, it is this lack of interaction among the five female dancers that undermines the author's inspired hopes for a reimagined history, despite sound research and questions indisputably worthy of investigation.

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