

performance practices and the intricate ways in which specific performances interact with history and society.

In this final section Shea Murphy explores the contemporary on-stage Native scene in the United States and in Canada. For the case of the United States, Shea Murphy looks at the pow-wow-based Native American stage dance troupes, the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers and the American Indian Dance Theater, and at the dance-based company Contemporary Dance-Drama of Indian America. For Canada she looks closely at the work produced by choreographers working at the Aboriginal Dance Program, established at the Banff Centre for the arts in Alberta. Through this comparison, Shea Murphy shows how the Canadian scene is more vibrant than its U.S. counterpart, even though the repeal of antidance regulations in Canada occurred nearly twenty years after it did in the U.S. (1934 in the United States and 1951 in Canada).

The author effectively links this flourishing field to strong Canadian governmental support of Aboriginal dance and to successful Native land claims. In Canada, aboriginal dance has also gained recognition as a performative archive that tribes have used to document their history and culture, therefore linking dance and politics in a more obvious or direct way. On the other hand, Native artists in the United States continue to struggle for their economic survival and to gain a recognized place in the stage performance world and society in general. This recognition would allow them to move beyond the stereotypical embodiment of Indianness that is expected from these Native artists within the dominant U.S. imaginary. Into the twenty-first century, the author affirms, Native dancers and choreographers are not only making a place for Native dancing in the history of modern dance, but they are also “articulat-

ing particular Indigenous understandings and ways of knowing, and in the process shifting understandings of the political and spiritual limits that staging has been seen to impose” (240).

Shea Murphy’s book is extremely readable while still theoretical and complex: a notable example for academic books in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. It is also a model of the kind of respectful and engaged scholarship that one wishes to see more often. The text is highly recommended not only for graduate and undergraduate courses in dance, performance, ethnic, and Native studies but also for a wide public interested in the history and contemporary reality of Native Americans and the place of performing arts in the social world.

Zoila Mendoza

University of California, Davis

NAVIGATING THE UNKNOWN: NOTES FROM A LONELY PLANET

edited by Christopher Bannerman, Joshua Sofer, and Jane Watt. 2006. London: Middlesex University Press. 304 pp., photographs, and illustrations. £25.00 paper.

A friend once suggested to me that there are two kinds of dancers: tourists and explorers. Tourists desire recreation, treating travel as a glorious distraction from everyday life, an avocation to be enjoyed for its salubrious qualities. Explorers seek meaning, embarking on journeys of discovery without guide or predetermined destination. In his view, dancer-explorers strive to learn the languages of dance; they dance as a vocation. Dancer-tourists, on the other hand, drop in and out of our world, accumulating movement vocabularies like frequent flyer miles but only skimming the surface of the culture, the art of dance. Dance-makers are no different, he opined;

it is rare to find one who bothers to step off the beaten path. After reading the collection of essays and statements in *Navigating the Unknown*, I can say with some certainty that the authors, artists, and editors of this volume are of the explorer variety. They know what it means to seek authentic experience, somewhere new. Reading it reminded me of my friend's advice: if one troubles to travel, one ought to make the most of it.

The particular approach to the phenomenon explored in *Navigating the Unknown*—that is, the various processes that practitioners in the performing arts employ in their creative work—has little precedent in the research literature. To be sure, a lot of ink has been spilled on creativity in the arts and sciences by academics and research scholars. But in large part, they have emphasized the creative habits of mind, unique tools and methods, and personal dispositions that presage novel work. The method of inquiry is usually an investigation of a big “C” creator's frames of mind and original product from a distance (Gardner 1993; Runco 2007). This present volume represents a very different approach. The original research project was formed in 1999 by Chris Bannerman, professor of dance at Middlesex University, United Kingdom, and directed under the aegis of ResCen, the Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts. Participants employed a range of investigatory methods, including making creative work, ongoing introspection and reflection, and what appears to be structured, in-depth group interviews as a means for (re) presenting the artists-participants together with the subjective, empathetic, and critical lens of the researchers-editors.

Navigating the Unknown summarizes the past several years' worth of work. The statements of the six participating artists, their notes and thoughts as well as transcripts of their group interviews, are coupled with edi-

tors' and guests' essays in three distinct sections: In/tuition, Navigating, and Making Manifest. It is highly unusual in academic work, even in the most sensitive of portraits, to get direct access to the artists themselves and to hear their voices as they struggle to articulate not only how to solve problems but also, more importantly, how to find new ones. As a result, the territory imagined here is more “lonely planet” than “road less traveled.” A “road less traveled” implies a “road to be traveled,” a discernible way forward, something more than a rough foot path. In contrast, this book successfully captures the often lonely and sometimes risky business of getting off the proverbial tour bus in a strange land with uncertain destination.

For me, the palpable sense of exploration and risk made for a pleasurable—if heady and metaphor-heavy—read. Think long road trip with some smart, opinionated, loquacious colleagues. This is not to say that this volume provides a straightforward portrait of artists at work or easy theoretical framings. There is no small requirement for writers, editors, and readers of a volume on creative process in the performing arts. For readers, the task is perhaps the most difficult of all: one must explore with the explorers. One must be comfortable delaying gratification, trusting one's instincts and intellectual compass to take you down some unfamiliar paths, even as one strives to make sense of the joint enterprise. For writers, especially artist-writers, they must balance a desire to unpack personal experience and present fresh ideas with the need to compose an identifiable “something.” Beyond that, they need to be honest if authenticity is to be gained. Here, I give the artists full marks. They make several attempts at self-definitions that are occasionally insightful, never vapid, sometimes contradictory, and often diametrically opposed to previous ideas and views of themselves.

With essays like “Expectant Waiting,” and “Geo-Choreographies: Self as Site,” they take chances unselfconsciously, and the results are often fruitful.

The editor of guest essays, on the other hand, proceed in a more recognizable fashion. Fortunately, they are devoid of the type of conventional thinking and writing that one has come to expect from commentators on creativity. While some of the essays are merely very good, others are quite excellent. I found Claxton’s “Creative Glide Space” especially illuminating. For all this, the editors of this volume are to be commended for suppressing the tendency to direct the reader’s attention toward big ideas in favor of a kind of weaving, or interlacing, of the warp and weft of ideas. At best, a traditional editorial focus on large “emergent themes” would invite readers to skim over the details of artists’ and theorists’ essays; at worst, it would trivialize them. Because of this sensible decision, the book does not require a linear reading. Though I ultimately benefited from reading it beginning to end, I also found that reading random passages created new, unexpected connections.

Besides the first-person, phenomenological, and nonlinear content, the book evinces some noteworthy structural and design aspects. If, as Antonio Damasio argues in *Descartes’ Error* (1994), the body can be understood as the architect of the mind, then it seems self-evident that the design of this book is the architect of its meaning. It is a colorful volume that reminded me of a visual artist’s diary: pages are printed both vertically and horizontally, in singular- and multiple-voiced passages with tabbed identifiers, including a lovely, entirely mirror-imaged essay. Indeed, as the graphic design ordered my reading as much as the text itself, I found myself wondering why the design and decision-making process was not given

its proper due, perhaps in an afterword describing how the book came into being as a creative design piece. Clearly, a tremendous amount of work went into visualizing each section and the artists’ essays in particular. I imagine the negotiations were intense. It is an unfortunate omission. All together, the title, structure, and design reflect the idiosyncratic, often contradictory, and ever paradoxical nature of creative process. It is a significant achievement.

Ultimately, it is standard practice for a reviewer to judge the quality of the work, its overall contribution to the field. But how does one evaluate a process, much less an eclectic, wide-ranging, carefully crafted volume on creative process in the performing arts? To avoid accusations of agnosticism, and by way of recommendation, I offer two final thoughts.

First, consider the topic. Art is the shaping of some material to provide aesthetic experience: a situation where one apprehends and in some sense enjoys meaning immediately embodied in “something.” In the performing arts, to compose is to create: to make something that, for each particular artist, has not existed before. Composition involves the molding together of compatible elements that—by their relationship and fusion—form that identifiable “something.” The final framing of the work represents the realization of an individual artistic process and intuitive inspiration. This volume represents both the individual and collective creativity necessary to achieve such a meaningful “something.” Whether one finds insight or indulgence in this book, I suggest that one must respect the intention behind the shaping. For me, the pure art/brain power reflected in the parts and the composition of the whole is noteworthy.

Secondly, by design or not, this volume represents the highest aspirations of art-making, research, and thinking available on

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.

Edward C. Warburton

University of California, Santa Cruz

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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