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On the cover: Proxima Dance Company, *[action] 21* (2011). Choreography: Maria Koliopoulou.
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BOOK REVIEWS

SONDRA FRALEIGH (ed.) (2018) *Back to the Dance Itself: Phenomenologies of the Body in Performance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 280 pp. ISBN 970-0252050787. Paperback. \$28.00.

In her latest edited book, entitled *Back to the Dance Itself: Phenomenologies of the Body in Performance* (2018), Sondra Fraleigh integrates her philosophical knowledge with her long lived experiences in dance, performance and somatic studies to illuminate several phenomenological concepts that are activated through the dancing body. Fraleigh's self-reflective writing draws on various sources, including the philosophical theories of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who enabled her to conceptualize her somatic inquiry, but also on new insights in the phenomenological literature, introduced by post-structuralism, feminist theory, neurophenomenology and more, since the late 1980s. This collection of essays, written by Fraleigh and a number of scholars, philosophers, and dance artists, who explain and apply specific phenomenological views and interpretations of the lived body in performance, provides an empathetic space for recognizing the contribution of others in the embodied ways of knowing through movement and dance. On the issue of contribution, it is worth noting that *Back to the Dance Itself* is dedicated to Maxine Sheets-Johnstone for her initiation of the phenomenology of dance and her unwavering influence on studies of movement and the body.

Overall, this unique collection of essays contributes to a deeper understanding of the relations between phenomenologies and the lived body in dance performance, as well as the engagement of humans with the material world of nature, and other living beings in it.

The book begins with "Author Biographies and Places" (pp. xvii–xxiv) as background to the text. Here Fraleigh uses the beautiful image of pausing in an arabesque, to scroll (or fly) through landscapes, cities and several countries, in order to briefly describe each author's personal journey with lived experiences in movement and dance, including academic position, education, published writing, intellectual interests, artistic creations, place of birth, nationality, and so forth.

In the opening chapter, entitled "Back to the Dance Itself: An introduction" (pp. 1–8), Fraleigh outlines Husserl's work and goes on to situate the central implication of what he had called "Back to the Things Themselves" within the terms "dance" and "performance", which cover a wide range of phenomena. Then she summarizes the authors' contribution and specific approaches, having first provided "a thumbnail sketch of the phenomenologies that propel

them" (p. 3). Phenomenology, as a philosophy and qualitative method of inquiry, is not limited to one approach of knowing; instead, it has flourished in a plurality of methods and distinct but overlapping forms, from the early twentieth to the present century. As the text progresses, Fraleigh presents the key concepts of Philosophical Phenomenology, Transcendental Phenomenology, Heuristic Phenomenology, Ecological Phenomenology, Performative Phenomenology, and Neurophenomenology, which she further explains in a subsequent chapter.

The book is thematically organized into four parts. Part I, "World as Body", according to Fraleigh, "explores intersections of dance with varying worlds of experience, also demonstrating the convergence of phenomenology with contemporary environmental studies" (pp. 3–4). In Chapter 1, "Phenomenology and Lifeworld" (pp. 11–26), she develops ways of understanding the world through experience and environment, directly relating to the body in dance and performance. In phenomenological approaches, dancing and performing apply both reflective and pre-reflective awareness. In line with the above thought, Fraleigh explains that "[p]re-reflective awareness is 'being aware' of what it is like to feel a particular way. Dancing and performing have unique perceptual features in pre-reflective life [...]" (p. 12).

Fraleigh continues with Chapter 2, "Branching into Phenomenologies" (pp. 27–37), to further explain the multiple perspectives, distinct styles, and approaches of phenomenology she has introduced in previous pages. This chapter ends with an autobiographical narrative of the author's engagement with various strands of phenomenology, which she morphed in both her dancing and writing. In reference to writing, in her first book, *Dance and the Lived Body* (1987), Fraleigh examines dance through existential phenomenology, while in a later edited book, *Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformations through Dance, Yoga, and Touch* (2015), she illuminates "versions of body, earth, and dance in the potential of ecological phenomenology" (p. 37).

In Chapter 3, "Improvising Meaning in the Age of Humans" (pp. 38–56), Robert Bingham presents a phenomenological account of a three-week interview he conducted in 2015 with Sondra Fraleigh, engaging her as a dance scholar who articulates a connection between somatics and ecological consciousness: a research process grounded on heuristic phenomenology. The interview, combined with a narrative of vivid images of improvised dancing in a desert canyon in Utah, transformed the reader's role to that of a spectator. In addition, shared personal histories and theoretical reflections on dance and embodiment, expanded concepts that Fraleigh had developed in *Moving Consciously*, are attuned to ecological phenomenology.

Part II, "Performing Life and Languages" (pp. 59–79), begins with Vida Midgelow's essay "Improvisation as a Paradigm of Phenomenologies" (Ch. 4). Here Midgelow replaces the word *phenomenology* with that of *improvisation* while exploring the connection between these two practices. Focusing on improvisation based on Skinner Releasing Techniques, which are broadly somatic in approach, she grounds the discussion within a particular improvisatory form. In her inspirational writing, Midgelow goes beyond illuminating dance improvisation through

phenomenology to turn instead to a consideration of improvisation as a methodological paradigm for phenomenologies.

In Chapter 5, “Falling in Love with Language” (pp. 78–98), Amanda Williamson provides new insights for bridging dance and language. Based on experience, she remarks that “[i]n somatic movement dance studies, participants are often encouraged to write, speak, mark-make, or paint from a felt sense – sometimes prior to, or after moving, or both” (p. 78). Williamson draws upon transpersonal psychology and heuristic phenomenology in order to demonstrate how somatic dance experiences focus on the aesthetic appreciation of language. This chapter (re)assures the reader that “the embodied, poetic, and aesthetic hermeneutics established in movement-based somatics also listens into bodily experiences, preceding the language-formulation process” (p. 78).

Chapter 6, “Living Phenomenology” (pp. 99–120) – true to its intention to demonstrate that all phenomenology develops unpredictably, exactly as life and dance –, requires deep reflection on the part of the reader. For Fraleigh, “[t]his chapter invites such potential through *performative phenomenology*, witnessing how change in the unfinished body occurs through life itself as a performance” (p. 99). As the text progresses, she describes several techniques “to perform on purpose”, i.e. “to know how to orient actions and to complete them, or else to play with incompleteness” (p. 100). Moving from dance to life’s issues, her masterful first-person narrative – affective, emotional, spiritual, poetic, nostalgic – intertwines the phenomenologies of dance with her flowing lifeworld. Her subjective lived experiences show her reflective approach: “Our subtle step from existential phenomenology toward ‘living phenomenology’ [which] implicates ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ as both presence and survival” (p. 99).

Part III, “Body and Place”, begins with Chapter 7, “As the Earth Dances: A Philosophy of Bodily Becoming” (pp. 123–140) by Kimerer LaMothe. In her fascinating text, LaMothe describes a philosophy of bodily becoming that emerged from her life, after moving with her family from Boston to a farm in rural New York, where she moved through nature and was moved by nature. As she observes, in her life on the farm, dance appeared “as vital to the ability of humans, individually and collectively, to sustain the health and well-being of the earth matrix of which we are one moment. This philosophy might just as easily be named *ecokinetic phenomenology*” (p. 123). In her text, LaMothe illuminates the role of the dancing body in the understanding of ourselves, nature and other living beings. At the same time, she outlines the vast knowledge embedded in dance traditions across culture and throughout history.

In Chapter 8, “Filming Jitdance: Detroit Redux” (pp. 141–160), Joanna McNamara describes her lived experiences in the multilayered process of making a dance film in the city of Detroit, in collaboration with Haleem “Stringz” Rasul, Detroit-Jit dancer, choreographer, and company director of Hardcore Detroit, and other artists. McNamara’s chapter brings the city of Detroit into a wide circle of inquiry through a hermeneutic study of *Jitdance: Detroit Redux* (p. 142). In this fascinating project, the interplay of the participants’ personal narratives with images from the environmental/architectural urban landscape of Detroit shows that the flourishing Detroit Jit

(even if not yet fully recognized) along with several other public art projects give hope to Detroit's population for its future.

Chapter 9, "Being *Ma*: Moonlight Peeping through the Doorway" (pp. 161–182), shifts from the West toward the East, in particular, to the contemporary butoh dance philosophy, a dance form originating in post-WWII Japan, which has been adopted by a number of movement art practitioners outside of Japan. In her chapter on the concept of *ma* from the Japanese cosmology, Christine Bellerose describes "a conceptual space-time as experienced in its relationship with artistic intent in performance, with examples from butoh and durational performance practice" (p. 162). Bellerose, in her liminal *ma* journey, also draws upon her own performance experiences and philosophies of existential phenomenology. In her words, "Being *Ma*" resides at "the nexus of *ma* and the *lived body*" (p.162).

Part IV, "Questions of Self-knowing", according to Fraleigh, "asks how we come to know ourselves through dance and performance and how meaning is embodied in the life-world at various stages of life and in contexts of gender" (p. 7). Chapter 10, "'What if...': A question of Transcendence" (pp. 183–204), is a collaborative text between the philosopher Hiller Braude and the dancer/choreographer Ami Shulman, both of whom are also Feldenkrais practitioners. For the two authors, "[t]he central pivot of this chapter's analysis of the phenomenology of dance and performance is the relation between the invited sense of possibility in *Free Fantasy Variations* (FFV) and Husserl's concept of '*I can*'" (p. 183). Braude and Shulman discuss possibilities of transcendence in dance and performance, through the Husserlian concept of "*I can*", and the phenomenon of *Free Fantasy Variations*, re-reflecting on the phenomenological analysis of dance and performance. In doing so, they draw on various philosophical writings, including those by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and Sondra Fraleigh, as well as on their embodied experiences during dance improvisation and/or their teaching approaches.

In Chapter 11, "'Me, a Tree': Young Children as Natural Phenomenologists" (pp. 205–232), Karen Bond expands questions of self-knowing, following Husserl's call to go "back to the things themselves". Bond attempts to explain dance and dancing to adults through children's captioned drawings in dialogue with scholarly autobiographical reflection and selected phenomenologies. All children's drawings, she notes, were created in response to a phenomenological prompt immediately after sessions of improvisational, or creative, movement dance – for example, "What did you do in dance today?" (p. 206). Bond follows Merleau-Ponty's notion that the child is a "natural phenomenologist" deeply connected to experience, who does not need a theoretical analysis (p. 207). In this heuristic study, Bond offers poetic descriptions of pleasure, agency, capability, and delight as depicted in young children's spontaneous dance drawings and their pre-reflective thinking.

In Chapter 12, "Dancing Epistemology, Situating Feminist Analysis" (pp. 234–246), Karen Barbour traces the intersection of philosophical and feminist engagements in phenomenology that have inspired dance scholarship and embodied epistemology. Under this focus, Barbour

acknowledges that “[p]hilosophically and methodologically, feminist phenomenology provides a clear rationale for investigating embodied ways of knowing specific to dancers – who understand themselves, their relations to others, and their relationship to the planet – through moving” (p. 233). She draws mainly on feminists who have extended phenomenological work, including Simone de Beauvoir, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Iris Marion Young, Ann Cooper Albright, and Sondra Fraleigh. Throughout this chapter, Barbour reflects on the lessons that breath and movement offer, juxtaposing descriptions of somatic phenomena with epistemological foundations of the text, where she is feeling and knowing that merge.

All the voices assembled in *Back to the Dance Itself* enhance and expand the philosophical study and embodied practices of dance. Thus, the book is valuable for scholars and movement practitioners across the dance and somatics spectrum, and even for philosophers, who wish to deepen their understanding of phenomenological concepts and methods.

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KAREN BARBOUR, VICTORIA HUNTER, and MELANIE KLOETZEL (2019) *(Re)Positioning Site Dance: Local Acts, Global Perspectives*. Bristol, UK, and Chicago, USA: Intellect. 300 pp. ISBN 978-1783209989. Hardback. £74.00.

(Re)Positioning Site Dance: Local Acts, Global Perspectives, written by Karen Barbour, Victoria Hunter, and Melanie Kloetzel, is an ambitious international collaboration that offers a rather comprehensive insight into site dance practices. Drawing on the authors' personal practices and previous site-work productions, it offers a balanced mix of subjective prose and acute theoretical analysis. Each of the authors draws on examples from their own geographical region – from Europe (Hunter), to North America (Kloetzel), to the South Pacific (Barbour) –, thus successfully enmeshing local with global perspectives. In their own words, the authors aim to explore “what might be termed ‘local acts’ – site interventions and interactions that take place in our immediate locales or surrounding geographical, social, professional, or domestic habitats – purposefully considering how such acts negotiate with larger global themes and discourses” (p. 13). The primary means for exploring these interactions draws on a practice-as-research methodological framework proposing a phenomenological analytical scope that strongly prioritizes embodied ways of knowing and interacting with the world. Feminist perspectives strongly inform and support the site-based processes the authors explore in their individual essays, and allow for an insightful examination of the intersections between power, privilege, gender, and access.

The structure of the book is divided into three sections, each comprising an essay by each author. The sections gradually evolve through space and time, starting with a historical analysis of the roots of site-dance through essays that are focused on specific locations, in Section One; delving into the multilayered negotiations that take place when creating site work, in Section Two; and, finally, widening the scope to consider the global imprint of such practices in an era of increased mobility (including both migration as a choice, and refugee flows) and the impending environmental crisis, in Section Three.

In Section One, titled “Historical lineages and contemporary concerns: tactics, encounters and contexts”, the authors draw on examples from each of their geographical locations and trace the history of the practice alongside potential links to activism and community engagement that site-practices may offer. Kloetzel’s essay “From recontextualization to protest: 50 years of site dance practice in North America” traces the lineage of site, and site-specific, practices by honing in on examples from both modern and post-modern dance and performance activism in the US across 50 years. She discusses the political and social agendas of these practices, as well as their potential to alter perceptions of the body through experimentations with integrating performing bodies at various sites. She highlights the importance of such

initiatives in the context of “participatory democracy” and suggests that “[b]y opening the channels of communication between people and place [...] site practitioners can create a degree of meaningful change for both individuals and communities. It is this change [...] that (re)configures site dance practice as one with activist potential” (p. 48). Continuing to explore the lineage of site practice as activism, Barbour, in her essay “Activism, land contestation, and place responsiveness”, offers a brief history of issues of land contestation and the struggles of indigenous peoples’ traditions and rights in New Zealand in relation to colonialism. Central to her discussion is the concept of “topophilia”, which refers to “a deeply rooted sense of belonging to place experienced through dwelling over many years” (p. 53). Through attention to the specific locale, the author’s personal identity and a discussion of how it affects her positionality, Barbour employs an ecological feminist perspective and initiates the discussion – that is continued in other essays in the volume – concerning how site dance “may offer multiple affective and kinaesthetic opportunities for dancers and audience members to engage in place and potentially foster responsive relationships that prioritize ethical, aesthetic, and socio-ecological ways of being in place” (p. 75). Hunter’s essay, contrary to the two preceding essays, which focused on contemporary dance practices, explores “Sited English folk dance as a form of site dance: Heritage, tradition, and resistance”. Considering folk dancing as site performance offers a fresh perspective, since sited English folk dance is largely omitted from United Kingdom Dance Studies in favor of more contemporary forms of public performance. As such, through three case studies Hunter unpacks these hierarchical tensions in existing scholarship and discusses issues of nationalism and conservative politics that may be inherent in folk dance performances thus inviting the reader to consider the ethics of “consuming” folk dances.

Section Two, “Practice into theory: Materials, dialogues and affect”, is much more subjective as it looks closely at the authors’ own work and the insights they have gained through engaging in practice-as-research methodologies and privileging the body as a site of knowledge and of research. Even though each of the essays offers a different methodological approach to engaging with space and the various sites the authors have explored in their work, the underlying notion connecting them is the sense of belonging to a place and to a community and the sense of fostering a shared experience between performers and audiences. The section opens with Barbour’s “Dancing gardens: Phenomenology and affective practices”, detailing three works she created in a selection of public gardens in Aotearoa, New Zealand. As the title of the essay attests, the process was based on phenomenology and the notion of “spiraling” (borrowed from Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999), which in the context of this approach entails a turning inwards to experiences and affective responses to the site. As Barbour posits, “[t]hrough offering up this experience, we dancers and audience members were sharing embodied insights that might present alternate modes of engaging with community sites and alternative and sustainable practices to enrich our contemporary lives” (p. 130). The second essay by Hunter,

"Material touchstones: Weaving histories through site-specific dance performance" revisits the concept of topophilia to explore "how material histories, embodied memories and the materials of 'home' informed the development and production" (p. 135) of her site-specific dance work created and performed at a 400-year-old hospital in her home town of Guildford, Surrey, UK. Extending the ongoing discussion of phenomenology, Hunter utilizes the framework of "new materialism" as a perspective that "assert[s] a less bounded and more potentially permeable relationship between human and non-human materials" (p. 147); one that focuses on the relationships produced through attentive acts. The last essay in this section, Kloetzel's "Lend me an ear: Dialogism and the vocalizing site", focuses on ways of being in dialogue with a site and ways of tuning in to the polyspatiality and the polyphony of sites. Acknowledging the significant role that information technology plays in researching and accessing sites, Kloetzel discusses the ways that it facilitates a dialogue between the local and the global and proposes that site-specific processes can cultivate alternate methods for polyspatial engagement while highlighting the importance of making space to *listen* to the multiple voices that may be speaking from a place in order to be able to enter into a dialogic relationship.

The essays included in the last section of the book, "Moving towards the global: Ethics, mobility and marginalization", focus on projects problematizing mobility, civic and ethical engagement, as well as concepts of marginalization and foreignness. The aim of this section is to explore the ways in which the body is enmeshed "with the political, ecological, cultural, and social issues on a global scale" (p. 185). Each essay included in this section is an extension of the theories the authors have introduced in the sections prior and proposes new questions about site engagement that apply across works performed internationally. Such questions include the commodification of the spaces where site dance occurs and the ways those spaces are marketed (Hunter); a reconsideration of discourses of agency as moving away from an anthropocentric approach toward a privileging of the site, especially in works that engage with problematizing environmental ethics (Kloetzel); and an inquiry of "foreignness" particularly as it applies to non-urban sites such as rural spaces, or the wilderness (Barbour). All essays in this section engage with discourses of access and (forced) mobility, as these notions relate to the recent refugee crisis and "negotiat[e] the flow of ideas through embodied awareness, civic engagement, and environmental ethics" (p. 186).

Structurally, the book is very clearly laid out, with a comprehensive introductory chapter to the volume and a short, two-page introduction prefacing each section, which makes it very easy for the reader to navigate the work. One drawback of this approach is that the section introductions may be regarded as repetitive when followed by a close reading of the Introduction; yet they are very useful if the reader is interested in reading only selections of the text. In a similar vein, the volume offers rich conversations between the authors as well as their past written and choreographic works, which can at times veer into repetitiveness and self-referentiality to its detriment. However, this intentional limitation of scope also highlights the

expertise of the authors in the field of site performance and documents discursive shifts in the authors' own work as well as in dialogue with other scholarship in the field.

What I found to be the most captivating trait of this publication – ultimately, a volume discussing site practices, written by scholars who are also active practitioners – is the way in which the authors chose to bridge theory with practice and how they successfully extended an invitation to the reader to do the same. At the opening of the book, a passage printed in a font that mimics handwriting prompts readers to “look around and situate [themselves], here in this place, at this time, in front of the computer screen, in the studio, at the table with the book in hand” and invites them to ponder: “where and how are you situated, in relation to whom, and what, to where and when?” (p. 3). Similar passages raising questions about space and place, the readers' positionality, and association with the environment around them occur in every chapter, sometimes inviting the readers to experiment with an exercise akin to the methodologies discussed in each chapter, or challenging them through posing questions that invite direct dialogue with the authors. I particularly enjoyed this aspect of the book as it suggests exercises to engage with the theories discussed in corporeal ways, thus making a strong case for the importance of bodies engaging space through movement and movement-based research. These snippets that prompt readers to reflect on their own practices and to consider themselves in the midst of social, political, gendered, environmental and, above all, movement discourses make this volume a strong addition to the existing literature on site dance practices.

References

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