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Review of Tree: belief/culture/balance (Ralph Lemon, 2004)

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is part and parcel of the Dadaist and Surrealist incarnations of "manifesto art." Yet, in this movement, Puchner wisely refuses a simple diffusionist model of the advanced or developed forms traveling to the world's hinterlands. In contrast, he considers the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro's global impact to observe the multidirectional feedback loop between Europe and the Americas (175). Rather than a simple displacement from center to periphery, Puchner considers that the most radical modernities appeared where the force of modernization violently confronted older forms of life. The (then) unexpected revolutions of Italy, Russia, and Latin America could open still-Eurocentric eyes to the emergent radicalism of China or India today.

Poetry of the Revolution also considers Artaud's manifestos that serve as ends in themselves, his anti-theatre as the mid-century expression of artistic and political avantgardes becoming unmoored. But he concludes his study with the manifesto movements of the 1960s, such as the Situationists and lastly this very journal, *TDR*, both sites where he sees the artistic and the political rejoined. For Puchner, theatre like revolution requires repetition (a persistent series of breaks) to enact its novelty. Ultimately, he sees performance studies' refusal of canonization as a resource to "make the new once more." Let us hope that the future, as we now find it, can repay his confidence.

—Randy Martin

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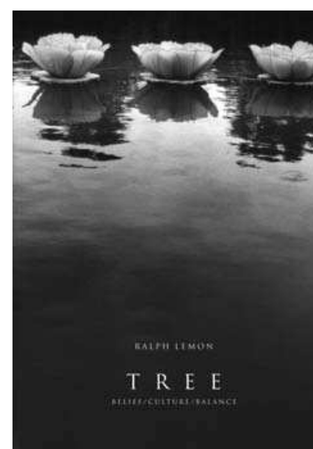
Tree: belief/culture/balance. By Ralph Lemon. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004; 288 pp. $34.95 paper.



My father calls, an excited voice. Leaves a message. He's never called me before, ever. I'm shocked and call him right back. "How did it go?" he asks.

—Ralph Lemon (258)

Ralph Lemon's manuscript takes the form of a documentary album about the making of the second installation of the Geography Trilogy, *Tree*, commissioned by Yale Repertory Theatre for its inaugural 2000 performance in New Haven.[1] Album is the choice term here, as the volume records Lemon's photographs, drawings, love letters, dreams, correspondences, journal entries, travel itineraries, weather reports, working notes, interviews, and poignant reflections on sound—focusing especially on

1. Lemon's collaborating *Tree* dancers: Bijaya Barik (India), Carlos Funn (USA), Djédjé Djédjé Gervais (Cote d'Ivoire), Wen Hui (China), Yeko Ladzekpo-Cole (Ghana/USA), Manoranjan Pradhan (India), Asako Takami (Japan), David Thomson (USA), Wang Liliang (Yunnan, China), Li Wenn Yi (Yunnan, China), Cheng-Chieh Yu (Taiwan/USA), "and all our teachers" (273). Lemon's other collaborators, especially Katherine Profeta (USA), also make appearances in the work.

the relationship between meditation's stillnesses and the relentless noise of everyday industrial and postindustrial life, a theme that is powerfully felt in the sonic performances of *Tree*. Lemon's album, then, is an elaborate travelogue, documenting as dance research select events and collaborative creative processes that launched the work. Tree emphasizes artistic production as an exercise of oral history: differently documentable, definitively informal, and made up of the everyday speaking voices of those working "from below," rather than the highbrow discourse of seamlessly institutionalized logos.

For readers, the book also levers dance scholarship at the tripartite borders of thinking globalization, national configurations of race and ethnic studies (sometimes multiculturalism, here "African American dance" [see Gottschild 2003]), and the enduring imprint of area studies methodologies. Whereas *Geography I* (1996) focused on ideas of Africa—"My body had not learned that much," he reflects (107)—*Tree* tours the fabled Easts of India, China, Japan, and Hong Kong in what could be seen as another, redoubling quest for what Brecht called "the Asiatic" in performance or modes of materialist thinking that might amplify an aesthetics of resistance to world conditions of capitalism, in what Lemon calls acts of everyday and especially spiritual "suspension" (197): "The search for race instead found spirit, and inscrutable prayers" (256). Here Lemon's astute Orientalism (a Marxian Tao?; see Jameson 1998) need not suffer from the suppression of the role of capital in cultural production, as theorists have charged the literariness of postcolonial studies after Edward Said (1978). Nor does it exactly repeat the constraints of area studies as a predetermined geography of cultural knowing because, as Lemon notes, to ask the question of where people "dance from" (105) is not quite the same as asking to know where people are from, on the map.

The "being there" of travel research and documentation defines the methods of area studies as well as ethnography, in what Rey Chow calls a "condemn[ation of] 'third world' cultural production [...] to a kind of realism with functions of authenticity, didacticism, and deep meaning" (1995:56). Lemon's approach slips oral history between the paradigms to study sites of pleasure and subjection in global/local spaces. His studious deferral of form is what makes the intimacy of the album both rewarding and difficult to follow, and with sometimes chilling arrest. Swatting a fat mosquito in his Indian bedroom, only to find himself unbitten by it ("it was not my blood," he says) Lemon meditates on the uncanny nearness and alienation of others in the everyday of global living (130). In swatting the thing, Lemon realizes that he has not only killed, but he has touched the blood of someone else, someone unknown to him. In an otherwise ordinary routine in the protection of one's own body and blood, Lemon finds himself splattered with the remains of another body, and with someone else's blood. Such banal, intimate, and variously intentional connections define the everyday life of the global.

"I'm working with found information," Lemon says (143), and because he is traveling, this is a recording of information for foreigners (Gambaro 1992) that is not fully curated either by the regulatory language of the state, nor by "art," but rather by Giorgio Agamben's *whatever* that is the everyday: the everything that matters (1993). Yet Lemon notices that recognition also doubles as deception and coercion. When an excited radio host suggests equivalency between a Mali string instrument and the American banjo, Lemon deadpans: "[T]his project brings out a certain betrayal in all of us all the time" (241), as if to reassert that the foreign is not to be rendered familiar—as well as the persistence of the traveler's burnout amidst the speed of global dissemination. "I've become passive to information around me. An interesting problem" (167).

Tree reverberates with an idea of location that is always defined by transit: a "split between body and presence," which André Lepecki persuades is the uncanny of dance performance (2004:3). "I left for India, in search of L's nightgown," Lemon writes from the beginning,

coding this album in the language of loss and theft (23). From Minneapolis to New York City's East Village, and from China to Chennai, India, it is tender reading to see how Lemon returns now and again to the regularity of baseball's gestures, to Sammy Sosa's and Mark McGwire's 1998 home-run chase, as if to anchor the routes of his unknowing movements around the world to an epistemological root of that game's movement. Route/root: this is the play of *Tree*, in which Lemon finds the incommensurability of difference. "There are five too many worlds in the space. No obvious links / There are moments in the drive where I can't decipher where I am / I cannot translate their sex / Today I don't want to be a tourist" (148).

It is in the insistent mapping of Frantz Fanon's "fact of blackness" (1967) that some of Lemon's most powerful language comes through in this album, as he remembers Jackie Robinson, dreams of Kobe Bryant, and witnesses the everyday life of hard labor, slavery, and ghettos for translation into globalizing and "Asiatic" suspensions in dance. Remembering Indian saltmakers, Lemon notes "I hear the sound, 'niggra!' I'm called that once. From one of the field hands. An ancient pronunciation" (138). The sounds of recognition, deception, coercion play out again in China, "a place where I could not possibly be from [...] But I think: I might know the Chinese that they are poor people, brilliant, could be 'niggers.' I have seen nappy hair. And menthol cigarettes are popular. I saw ghettos and inner inner inner cities" (66). Back in New Haven, Lemon records his decision to "put Mr. Wang and Li in blackface" (264), a performance technique that the Chinese and American dancers resisted in this work. Lemon prevailed, whereupon "Mr. Wang immediately runs next to David, black, black David, put his arm around David's shoulder and gleefully announces 'Now I'm an American'" (205). The dismemberments stun, demonstrating how language dis/members gesture and vice versa. In the performance, blues music follows, as if together sound and sight might further proletarianize an image of what it means to "dance from" China, the U.S., and ideas of African genealogies alike. This album of Lemon's keen global/local dance thinking asks the question: "what shall we call this new thing?" (106).

—Lara D. Nielsen

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Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance.
By Roger Copeland. Routledge: New York and London, 2004; 304 pp; 15 illustrations. $85.00 cloth. $34.95 paper.

From the outset, Roger Copeland contends that his book, *Merce Cunningham*, is not a conventional biography of the choreographer but rather more of "a cultural history of that moment when American art moved beyond the ethos of Abstract Expressionism" (11). Copeland describes his approach as "interpretive," as opposed to "descriptive" (19). The ostensible reason for not adopting a traditional dance criticism approach rests on the fact that Copeland wants his book to appeal to the "generalist reader" (21). At the same time, he does not offer a "close reading" of particular works and here, as in other aspects of the book, he is setting out his stall in relation to certain tendencies in recent dance criticism and scholarship. Copeland focuses on "an accumulation of precisely described moments" (21) from a variety of works over a 50-year period; from major early works based on chance operations designed to remove choreographic determination, to Cunningham's more recent technological interventions utilizing "life forms" and "motion capture." Copeland does not discuss Cunningham's personal life nor his sexual preferences, as he considers recent attempts to analyze how Cunningham and John Cage's long-term partnership impacted upon their respective work "woefully misguided" (19). Instead, Copeland begins from the position that for the most part, Cunningham's "life *is* his work" (257) and, in chapter 12, "Modernism, Postmodernism and Cunningham," he takes issue with the exponents of "identity politics" (artists and theorists) who would generally view Cunningham's and Cage's lack of direct engagement with the politics of difference as an escape from or a concealment of their homosexuality.

The scope and direction of Copeland's book are set out in his introduction. The 12 chapters that follow expand and explain Copeland's central thesis—how and why Merce Cunningham may be viewed as the modernizer of modern dance—by examining his work in relation to "composers and visual artists with whom he worked" (18). Thus, the author draws on a range of artistic practices and media to marshal his argument, and concludes that despite a number of correspondences between Cunningham's choreographic practices and the aesthetics of postmodernism, the artist's work is ultimately situated at the interface between postmodernism and modernism.

There are several key themes that run through the book, including the reconfiguring of the mind/body relation in dance. Copeland argues that the "ethos" that underpins Abstract