Lydia Platón Lázaro

Defiant Itineraries: Caribbean Paradigms in American Dance and Film.

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Defiant Itineraries is a brilliant assessment of Caribbean dance and film that reflects a keen understanding of Caribbean aesthetics. Using insights on the arts and modernism by Paul Gilroy, Antonio Benítez-Rojas, Juan Flores, and others, Lydia Platón Lázaro provides a distinct addition to the literature by and about dancer/choreographer/anthropologist Katherine Dunham and filmmaker/ethnographer Maya Deren. Her deconstruction of Caribbean aesthetics produces a reading of them that displays respectfully reconstituted and creatively performed Caribbean models. Creations by Dunham and Deren were based in their bodily experiences with Haitian Vodou rituals, and through Platón Lázaro's deciphering of their ethnographies, the Caribbean elements that yield American performance surface for thorough discussion: identification and representation, liberation and freedom, and performance itself.

The introduction relays the complex politicohistorical positions of the two artists and their relationships to Haiti and, ultimately, the Caribbean. It proposes that through their use of Caribbean models, Dunham and Deren were defying conventional North American artistic images and derogatory marginalization of African heritage and identity. Both artists not only challenged the racial prejudice that reigned from the 1930s through the 1950s, but also addressed the characteristics and boundaries of modernism. Platón Lázaro aligns herself with the search for wholeness and representation of Self/Other associated with cultural theories of modern art and the Caribbean modern. For her, both artists consciously countered the fixed representations and tendency to exploit Otherness of their era. Additionally, she draws attention to the focus Dunham and Deren gave to the dancing body and features their understanding of embodied knowledge within Caribbean forms.

Platón Lázaro concentrates next on Dunham's *Island Possessed* (1969), engaging critiques since her death. (See, for example, Elizabeth Chin's edited book, *Katherine Dunham: Recovering an Anthropological Legacy*, 2014.) It is gratifying to see that Dunham's technique is now being praised beyond the black dance world and even outside of the dance world. Platón Lázaro discusses Zora Neale Hurston and Pearl Primus in terms of their parallel use of Caribbean models. She publicizes the documented research of all three and leaves no doubt about Dunham's contributions to understandings of identity and representation, memory and tradition, as well as artistic creativity and social activism. Platón Lázaro's hypothesis that the Caribbean contains paradigms for American performance is forcefully persuasive.

Whereas the Dunham chapter (I think wisely) does not discuss Deren, the Deren chapter is less crisp as a comparison because it intermittently includes Dunham, and it involves Europe! An intriguing interpretation of Deren's *Divine Horsemen* (1953) and augmented understanding of her theories on film and art-making are provided. In rendering the hypothesis, the chapter on Deren anchors her film explorations of real and imagined time and space within her intimate Haitian Vodou experiences. However, it also leaves lingering questions. For example, is the Caribbean paradigm for American performance fulfilled in films and writings on film beyond Deren? And is literature a satisfactory substitute for performance, film, or dance? I wanted to learn about American filmmakers in order to see Deren's model reflected or refashioned. I appreciated the influential perspectives of Barbadian George Lamming, but both he and Britisher Issac Julien (examples in the chapter on Deren) are aligned with Europe, despite their influence in the Americas. Platón Lázaro's hypothesis was not lost with Deren, however; her American approach simply shifted to a diaspora view, leaving the Dunham legacy as a more complete American example.

Platón Lázaro is in dialogue with two specific audiences—one composed of comparative literature and cultural theory specialists and the other the Puerto Rican artistic community. With the former, she connects her conclusions to her theoretical influences and reiterates her previously uncharted view of Dunham's and Deren's more well-known sociocultural impact. With the latter audience, she encourages closer connections to her articulated paradigms, which involve a balance between artistry and political activism.

Platón Lázaro's study presents a new slant on both Dunham and Deren, fortifying the platform on which contemporary Caribbean artists perform and scholars of Caribbean culture investigate. It attends continuously to complex interactions that comprise Caribbean (and diaspora) communities in terms of identities, artistic representations, memory, and embodied knowledge in performance. Unfortunately, it ignores the diverse audiences that these two artists addressed and caters mainly to the literary and theoretical elite. Additionally, it is hampered throughout by problems that an editor should have caught—ambiguous grammar, missing words, and inaccuracies in both punctuation and facts (e.g., that Dunham's death was in 2002 [p. 12] instead of 2006). Shame on the publisher for not caring sufficiently to present these significant analyses at their very best.

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