

Theory *(into)* Practice

The International Journal of **Screen**dance  
Fall 2014 / Volume Four



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# The International Journal of Screendance

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## From the Editors

*A personal note from Douglas Rosenberg*

This, the fourth issue of the *International Journal of Screendance*, marks a number of turning points. Claudia Kappenberg and I will be turning over the editorial duties to current editorial board members Harmony Bench and Simon Ellis. Harmony and Simon will bring a number of new and energetic ideas to the journal, and I am very excited about their stewardship. We received tremendous support for the first three issues from Parallel Press at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Now and for the foreseeable future, however, the journal will be an open source publication, hosted by The Ohio State University. The move to open source is a choice brought on by new models of scholarship and access, and discussions about how knowledge is commodified in academia. We will have more information about that in the future, but if you are reading this, you are probably accessing it in its new incarnation. It is my hope that we can continue to grow and inspire the conversation about screendance and that we will be able to bring new voices and ideas to these “pages.”

For any project to succeed, a number of things need to coalesce simultaneously and countless people have contributed many ideas and copious energy to every stage of this journal. I especially want to note the work of Nathan Jandl here. Nathan has been the editorial assistant for the journal since its inception. About the time we began the process of bringing the first issue to press, Nathan showed up at my house, sent by a neighbor to borrow a tool for his summer gardening job. I became aware that he was a PhD candidate in the English Department and it occurred to me that the young man standing in my driveway might be the perfect candidate to help with our fledgling journal. Luckily the idea piqued his interest. I cannot overstate his contribution to these first four issues. Nathan has quite literally read and edited every line of every essay or article on every page. He has communicated with writers and helped to shape the intellectual rigor of the publication. His probing intellect and keen editorial skills have made the journal possible for me, and he has enhanced every text he assisted with, all while pursuing his own PhD, which he will soon complete.

The process of building a journal from the ground up is daunting in retrospect. Somehow it has found traction and I could not be more proud of our collective efforts to this point. It has been a privilege to be a part of this process and I will continue to be involved, but very happy to watch Harmony and Simon steer us in new directions.

*A Personal Note from Claudia Kappenberg*

When the Screendance Network launched the journal in 2010, we wanted it to be an open platform for many different voices and perspectives, and to be experimental in how these dialogues would be curated and disseminated. Five years down the line it is my pleasure to find that the community of writers and readers has grown enormously and to be able to pass on the editorial lead.

As we migrate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison to Ohio, I would like to add my thanks for the amazing support from Parallel Press, who helped us get off the ground and create an international presence. I would also like to thank my own University of Brighton, who has backed the screendance project from its inception and through all the stages of development. I would like to thank Kyra Norman, who helped to manage the Screendance Network in its very first days, and Sam Cochrane who came on board to run the day-to-day business of the journal at the UK-base. And finally I would like to thank the team at The Ohio State University, who have welcomed us and have built a new site for the journal.

It is very satisfying to see such an energetic and engaged debate on these pages, gathered under the name of the *International Journal of Screendance*. This journal was a team effort, as Doug writes, and continues to be so. I intend to use my newly found freedom for one-off projects and special issues in order to further develop the critical discourse, forge new links and expand the parameters. And no doubt I will, occasionally, shout from the sidelines.

## From the Incoming Editors

*Harmony Bench and Simon Ellis*

It is with great pleasure that we assume the editorship of the International Journal of Screendance. Up until this time, the journal has been edited by Claudia Kappenberg and Douglas Rosenberg, and the first four volumes are a testament to their work and commitment to the process of publishing the journal. We would like to thank Claudia and Doug for their energy, enthusiasm, and artistic-scholarly vision. They will continue to be a guiding presence in the journal's future.

But what of that future? Publishing journals is becoming an increasingly difficult undertaking, with the uncertainty in the publishing industry in general and the tight fiscal conditions under which academic institutions are being asked to operate. With this in mind—and with the support of the Journal's Board—we have decided to adopt the online Open Journal System (OJS) in order to make the Journal openly accessible in various digital formats (HTML, PDF), and to increase its financial viability.

OJS will enable a completely online peer-review process (which minimizes administrative burden) and will help us get the journal to readers more quickly. The volume you are now reading—Volume 4—is the first edition of IJSD to be published on our OJS site at [screendancejournal.org](http://screendancejournal.org), hosted by The Ohio State University. Volume 5 will be completely submitted, reviewed, prepared, and published via OJS.

Volume 5 will also be our first edition as editors, and it is scheduled for publication in the (Northern) Spring of 2015. Its theme is screendance practices and community. Looking further forward, there will be an open call for papers for Volume 6 in May 2015, and we are currently looking into the various possibilities for print on demand for readers who prefer a little less screentime.

We are very much looking to continuing Claudia and Doug's work, and we are excited at how we might keep developing the journal for the screendance community: its artists, students, and scholars.



## Editorial

*Douglas Rosenberg and Claudia Kappenberg*

The art world of the twentieth century was driven by movements and manifestos. It was also a space in which artists generated copious amounts of texts: words on paper that described the nuanced progression of art practice and of new possibilities across the arts. In theory, it seemed as if any serious movement required manifestos, textual references to the existence of such a movement. In practice, such texts offer us a map of the new world that was constantly in the process of discovery throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. These textual spaces for contemplation were most often the product of group-think, of cooperative and shared responsibility, of vision, and of a passion for a particular approach to art-making, usually at the edge of the cultural moment. Such spaces mapped the overlaps and collisions of multiple and disparate media as the latter attempted to simultaneously occupy spaces previously the purview of mono-disciplinary practices.

Throughout the twentieth century, art took a number of turns both toward and away from the intermingling of disciplines. However, by the end of the century, artists working in film, video, and dance had reconnected in ways that mirrored a number of other previous significant historical moments. For example, the interdisciplinary turn manifested similarly in the early 1900s in Dada via the work of René Clair and his colleagues; later at The Bauhaus; and again in mid-century at Black Mountain College and in the Happenings and theatrical collaborations of Allan Kaprow, Carolee Schneeman, Eleanor Antin, as well as in the work of Argentine filmmaker Narcisa Hirsch and others. We saw it again in the 1970s and 80s in work by artists such as Mary Lucier and Nam Jun Paik in the United States and David Hall in England, as well as a host of other film and video artists. Later the thread continued in work by Merce Cunningham and Charles Atlas, followed by Elliot Caplan; or in Belgium in the work of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and Thierry de May. By the start of the new millennium, such co-mingling of disciplines became a normative practice rather than the exception and in dance this was evident in both live and mediated work.

Screendance, as often discussed in the pages of this journal, is decidedly interdisciplinary. It is also decidedly feminist; even a cursory indexing of the selections at international screendance festivals will reinforce this idea. Further, the pages of this journal and the editorial board also reflect a strong feminist voice, as does the gender breakout of scholars who have contributed books specifically honed toward establishing theories relating to dance on screen. Perhaps this is simply a post-modern condition, or perhaps it is something more.

Professor George Leonard, writing about the art historian Henry Sayre's ground-breaking book, *The Object of Performance*, notes that Sayre codes postmodernism itself as female. Leonard notes:

Sayre ... chronicles how, excluded from painting, women artists found, in the late 1960s, an outlet in performance art forms. Building outward from a foothold in expressive dance, such women as Yvonne Rainer, Eleanor Antin, Carolee Schneemann, Laurie Anderson and Cindy Sherman began incorporating poetry, music, narrative, film and still photography into ever more interdisciplinary and unclassifiable works.... [however] this "new feminist avant-garde" was institutionally invisible.<sup>1</sup>

As we know, Yvonne Rainer was instrumental in blurring boundaries between live and mediated dance in such early works as *Hand Movie* (1966), and other later cinematic projects. Art historian Sayre forcefully pulls Rainer into his narrative about postmodern feminist art practice and the prevailing art world, as Leonard explains:

One of the first of these performances, Sayre tells us, was Rainer's "Ordinary Dance," performed July 6, 1962, "a collage of pure dance movements and observed behavior." Instead of music, Rainer spoke "an autobiographical narrative" as she danced. Her "dance" was itself often a mimicking of everyday motions, even facial expressions that she'd observed in the subway.<sup>2</sup>

While in general, historians have elided dance as a part of the art historical canon, Sayre (along with such writers as RoseLee Goldberg) identifies dance as a significant force in eroding disciplinary boundaries. Such erosions lead ultimately to post-modernism, to interdisciplinary art practice, to the re-gendering of the art world, and to screendance.

Fast-forward to 2014, however, and the landscape of screendance looks quite different from Rainer's era. Of course the entire culture has remarkably changed, that is a given; dance and media have followed accordingly. This issue features a piece by Priscilla Guy, a choreographer/filmmaker and theorist from Montreal who offers a feminist reading of the recent project by director Mike Figgis, *The Co(te)lette Film*. The film, a cinematographic adaptation of a live performance by Dutch choreographer Ann Van den Broek, is perhaps the perfect catalyst for a discussion about the current state of the art form. Garnering much attention but little push back for its overt carnality, *The Co(te)lette Film* is either the coming of age of screendance or the end of the form, depending on the viewer's position vis-à-vis the politics of gender and the sexualisation of bodies on screen, or simply the proclivity of screendance to titillate its audience via the reproduction of clichéd representation. On the other end of the spectrum in current screendance productions is the collaboration between Siobhan Davies and David Hinton, *All this Can Happen*. Reviewed by Kyra Norman, the film

reaches back to the photographic experiments of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge and, as Norman articulates in her essay, provides a counterpoint to the glossy *surfacing* of bodies on screen that we have come to see at many festivals and elsewhere in mediated depictions of dance and performance in general. Both Guy and Norman theorize from a holistic notion of what dance on screen means as a practice: that as a practice it is to be held accountable for its own affairs, its images and its transgressions. Art, to be taken seriously, must also take responsibility for the wake it creates from its own gestures.

As we swerve from traditional notions of *separation* in the art world, of cognition and creation as individuated undertakings, we arrive at the overlap of theory and practice. Such overlaps are the focus of this decidedly eclectic issue, the title of which, "Theory into Practice," may also be read as "Practice into Theory." The intent here is to suggest that the two words are end points on either side of a spectrum of interdisciplinary work for the screen, and that each is a point of attraction for the other. Indeed, such attractions are foregrounded in this issue; the reader will see that there are conversations taking place across texts as writers approach similar problems from opposite ends of the spectrum. The often-oppositional encampments of theory and practice co-mingle across many of the texts herein and do so at times in very gestural ways. The reader should have the impression that the writers in this issue are looking very deeply at the films they are addressing, as well as the concepts and ideas they raise: indeed they are. Our field has the benefit of a community of participants who care deeply about the form. We hold each other accountable as any community should and especially as a community involved with such powerful tools as those that produce cultural tropes and icons focused on bodies on screen.

No longer tied to conversations about *techné*, apps, conveniently smarter hardware, and software programs have made the *doing* of technology much simpler. In a way, this phenomenon restates Walter Benjamin's ideas about how mechanical reproduction freed the art object from the domain of tradition, allowing issues of esthetics to become more sharply defined. When the maker is less encumbered by the mechanics of making, other aspects of creative practice rise to the surface, including those related to theory and conceptual rigor.

It has long been the practice of those involved with screendance to contribute ideas and observations about the field that go beyond the objectification of dance into the moving image. Makers of screendance have also been writers and theorists of screendance. This issue comes at a time when there is an increasing fluidity between theory and practice; when those who "make" are also those who think beyond the edges of practice, and whose contributions to the field are often sharply defined by language and by manifesto-like statements of purpose. This is an era in which technologies of representation and of communication have become one in the same. In other words, the tools that "makers" use are the same ones that theorists use; digital technologies collapse difference into pools of knowledge production and

contemporary culture encourages such fluidity. In other words, when we no longer need to know how to build an engine, we can turn our attention to the poetics of the automobile and the theater of its performance.

This issue is filled with conversations and provocation. In "Cutting Across the Century: An Investigation of the Close-Up and the Long-Shot in 'Cine-Choreography' Since the Invention of the Camera," Katy Pendlebury speaks across the page to Sherril Dodds and Colleen Hooper, who focus on the camera's proclivity for intimacy in "Krumping, Choreography and Close-Ups: A Deleuzian Critique of *So You Think You Can Dance*." Dianne Reid and Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt offer POV texts that bring the viewer into the internal dialog of the choreographer/performer/director, exposing the process of making as they go in "Fleshing the Interface" and "Paradigms of Movement Composition," respectively. Sophie Walon, in "Poetic Phenomenology in Thierry De May's Open Corporealities, Responsive Spaces and Carnal Experience," and Rosemary Candelario in "Bodies, Site, Screen: Eiko and Koma's Dances for Camera," focus on bodies and carnality, writing/theorizing sensuality on the page. Priscilla Guy, Kyra Norman, and Cristiane Bouger reflect on recent works for the screen from widely divergent methodologies, while, in an interview conducted by Douglas Rosenberg in 2007, Katrina McPherson speaks to the future of screendance and to her own ideas about theory and practice from the Open Source VideoDance Symposium. Marc Boucher asks us to consider where we *are* in relation to screendance: he challenges the reader with a densely packed and highly theoretical reading of proprioception and affect as generated by images of bodies on screens. Finally, to bring us back to the discussion of Yvonne Rainer and *Hand Dance*, Anna Heighway expands the reader's ideas about the nature of dance onscreen in "Understanding the 'Dance' in Radical Screendance."

The philosopher G.W.F. Hegel noted, "Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is."<sup>3</sup> The function of art is no longer mimesis, nor should screendance be mimetic. Invention, risk, and even failure are what drive an artform toward its potential. These essays and artist's pages, reviews and conversations, are intended to fulfill the function that Hegel posits: to incite curiosity and debate about the very nature of the art form.

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## Notes

1. George J. Leonard, "Why Postmodernism Is Female: THE OBJECT OF PERFORMANCE The American Avant-Garde Since 1970," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1989, [http://articles.latimes.com/1989-07-16/books/bk-5674\\_1\\_performance-art](http://articles.latimes.com/1989-07-16/books/bk-5674_1_performance-art).
2. Joshua Wolf Shenk, "The End of 'Genius,'" *New York Times*, July 19, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-genius.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-genius.html?_r=0).
3. Quoted in Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), xi.

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- Leonard, George J. "Why Postmodernism Is Female: THE OBJECT OF PERFORMANCE The American Avant-Garde Since 1970." *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1989. [http://articles.latimes.com/1989-07-16/books/bk-5674\\_1\\_performance-art](http://articles.latimes.com/1989-07-16/books/bk-5674_1_performance-art).
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## ARTICLES



## Cutting across the century: an investigation of the close-up and the long-shot in “cine-choreography” since the invention of the camera

*Katy Pendlebury*

### A “different nature”<sup>1</sup>

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.<sup>2</sup>

This quotation, from Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” alludes to two parallel themes in his essay. Firstly, the technology of the camera created, through its ability to capture and reproduce the world in a totally novel and previously unimaginable way, an altered reality, a “different nature.”<sup>3</sup> The second, parallel theme focuses on the coincidence of the creation of this technology with the changing nature of society and of art. Suddenly, “common place milieus,” “taverns and metropolitan streets, our offices and our furnished rooms,” become the subject of the work of art. Benjamin seems to be suggesting that film might bring about the democratization of art and of subject matter.<sup>4</sup>

The invention of the camera, with its ability to enlarge and make perceptible a small detail, as well as to slow down or speed up time, brings the spectator new information about the world in which she lives. Benjamin names this new ability to penetrate deeper into the structure of optical reality the “optical unconscious,” and writes about how the close-up and slow motion have brought about a new way of seeing: “With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear; it reveals entirely new structural formulations of the subject.”<sup>5</sup> The camera not only allowed the spectator to penetrate a previously inaccessible aspect of reality; it also altered that reality, offering a new different perception of objects and movement.

In Benjamin’s essay, the close-up draws the spectator in closer to the object of vision and opens up this new reality for the viewer. The following passage, from Jean Epstein’s *Magnification*, illustrates how the close-up can also draw attention to the frame around the shot, and in doing so, how it tends to abstract the “reality” within it, its subject matter becoming the composition of movement within the frame:

A head suddenly appears on screen and drama, now face to face, seems to address me personally and swells with an extraordinary intensity. I am hypnotized. Now the tragedy is anatomical. The décor of the fifth act is this corner of a cheek torn by a smile.... The orography of the face vacillates. Seismic shocks begin. Capillary wrinkles try to split the fault. A wave carries them away. Crescendo. A muscle bridles. The lip is laced with tics like a theatre curtain. Everything is movement, imbalance, crisis. Crack. The mouth gives way, like a ripe fruit splitting open. As if slit by a scalpel, a keyboard-like smile cuts laterally into the corner of the lips.<sup>6</sup>

The passage describes the landscape of the face, and a writing *with* that face in close-up within the frame. The subject here is not only an interior emotion translated by the features of the actor's face (cinema as window), but also the activity of those features themselves, their movement within the frame. In this instance, the close-up presents us with that contradiction which is so beguiling in screen practice, the screen both as depth and as surface, as both a window onto (ano)the(r) world and as a flat plastic surface, an object that offers the potential of ongoing motion, to be organized in compositional terms.

The close-up has preoccupied practitioners and thinkers since the camera was invented. Later philosophers and historians such as Gilles Deleuze, Mary Ann Doane, and Erin Brannigan have revisited and reflected on the work of earlier theorists and filmmakers who wrote about the close-up, such as Bela Balázs, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Epstein. This essay endeavors to reflect on the genre of moving image practice, or "dancefilm," using a variety of examples from different but related disciplines, and by analyzing these examples in relation to the wealth of thinking around the close-up. Examining the frequent deployment of the close-up in dancefilm, I seek to understand whether the capacity to focus in—to get close to objects and people—is unique to this type of shot. The first part of this essay explores the autonomous close-up, linking its suggested independence with abstraction and considering its implications when combined with the non-hierarchical attitude to the body found in dancefilm. The second part compares scale in the close-up and the long-shot and analyzes how the spectatorship of these two particular types of shot in a cine-choreography<sup>7</sup> might differ. Has Benjamin's "deepening of apperception" through the close-up enabled the viewer to use her imagination to focus in, to perform the close-up herself?

### **The Autonomous Close-up**

In her book *Dancefilm*, Erin Brannigan devotes an entire chapter to the close-up, its history, its prevalence in the dancefilm, and the effects of its deployment. She writes that the deployment of the close-up in dancefilm has "instituted new cine-choreographic terrain," a terrain of micro-movements that dance within the frame.<sup>8</sup> Proposing that in the Western contemporary dance tradition there is a non-hierarchical attitude to the expressive body, she writes, "choreographic strategies

generally work to develop corporeal modes of articulation or expression that involve any and every part of the body."<sup>9</sup> Combining this non-hierarchical attitude to the body with the use of the close-up, dancefilm-makers have, over recent decades, developed what Brannigan calls a "bodily, dancerly model of the close-up," which finds expression in a "particular mode of dancefilm ... which I call decentralised micro-choreographies."<sup>10</sup> These are moving image works that are also choreographies of a(ny) body part—for example a back, a navel, the toes—that happen within the frame, in close-up.<sup>11</sup>

Brannigan quotes Béla Balázs, who alludes to an emphasis on the facial close-up in the silent era:

In the first years of the movies the emphasis was mainly on movement ... With the subsequent development of the silent film the place of dialogue was taken by a detailed expressive play of features and gestures, shown in close-up.<sup>12</sup>

Although Balázs connected this "detailed expressive play" to the expression of the "inner drama" of the character through the face, this passage could equally be referring to other bodily sites where such "expressive play" might occur. Indeed, Brannigan goes on to describe just such a migration from the face in her discussion on the film *Hands* (1995, dir. Adam Roberts). In this short film, Jonathan Burrows performs a dance for a static camera that consists entirely of the movement of his hands and forearms.<sup>13</sup> The drama, as Roberts himself implies, remains; however, its location has migrated such that "the eventual framing is a close up of a lap—at once stage, proscenium arch and domestic interior."<sup>14</sup> In the dancefilm, Balázs's detailed expressive play meets the non-hierarchical de-centralizing attitude toward the body of the contemporary dance tradition.

According to Balázs, the close-up in the narrative cinema form also displays a power of transformation, an "ability to 'take us out of space,' distancing the image from the diegesis."<sup>15</sup> In the first volume of his philosophy and cinema project, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Gilles Deleuze devotes a chapter to the close-up and builds on Balázs model, asserting, as Balázs had written previously, that "the close-up does *not* tear away its object from a set of which it would form part, of which it would be a part, but on the contrary *it abstracts it from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates*, that is to say it raises it to the state of Entity."<sup>16</sup> He continues: "The close-up is not an enlargement, and, if it implies a change of dimension, this is an absolute change: a mutation of movement which ceases to be translation in order to become expression."<sup>17</sup> For Deleuze, the close-up is not a vehicle for expression through its juxtaposition with other shots; it exhibits an autonomy, an inherent ability to "express" of itself without reference to the preceding and succeeding images.

This, I would argue, is also how the close-up functions in a particular scene in the narrative feature film *Gerry*, by Gus Van Sant (2004). Stony ground appears, for an instant, before our eyes.<sup>18</sup> Almost immediately the faces of two men arrive in shot from the right hand side of the screen. Their faces are in profile; the face of Gerry (Casey

Affleck) fills the right hand half of the screen. That of Gerry (Matt Damon), partially obscured by Affleck, is slightly farther away. For the next three and a half minutes, we watch the faces of the two men as they walk together side by side. The camera, on a dolly, keeps the frame at the same level as it tracks smoothly alongside them. The tight framing causes their foreheads and chins to alternately “butt” the frame as they walk together, at the same pace. About one minute and thirty seconds into the scene, Gerry falls out of sync with Gerry and their steps, and faces, fall into a syncopated rhythm. For the remainder of the scene they fall in and out of sync and, by the end of the scene, back into sync. What the viewer sees is, in Epstein’s words, “the orography of the face[s] vacillat[ing].”<sup>19</sup> The action and content of this shot is the rhythm of the two faces moving up and down in relation to the frame and in relation to each other. The scene develops through subtle changes in rhythm between their walking patterns, tiny alterations in the inclination of the heads and minute changes of facial expression. What are tiny, subtle movements in “reality” create enormous changes in the rhythm and composition on screen. The scene does not further the plot—the men are walking in a landscape as they have mostly been doing since the beginning of the film. Nor does it provide further insight into the inner life of the characters. All we know is where the men are, and what they are doing, which suggests that the subject matter of this scene consists of a cine-choreography,<sup>20</sup> a dance of movement within the frame.

As described in this example, one way that the film or moving-image work moves towards abstraction is through focussing in, through the close-up. Jean-François Lyotard, in his essay “Acinema,” talks about the defining feature of abstraction in screen practice being works that create for the spectator the enjoyment of “sterile differences”: alterations, movements, and changes in light that have no productive consequence save that of the ocular enjoyment of the spectator.<sup>21</sup> He illustrates this idea by describing a child lighting a match,

But when a child strikes the match-head *to see* what happens—just for the fun of it—he enjoys the movement itself, the changing colours, the light flashing at the height of the blaze, the death of the tiny piece of wood, the hissing of the tiny flame. He enjoys these sterile differences leading nowhere, these uncompensated losses: what the physicist calls the dissipation of energy.<sup>22</sup>

What Lyotard is describing is an enjoyment of movement, of energy, in other words of form, for itself and with no further purpose. The match is lit in order to see the match light and not to light something else. This analogy is deployed in relation to his notion of a cinema of production in which all movements in the narrative film (camera movements, choices of shot, movements of the characters) coalesce in the imposition of an order that creates the film’s impression of a seamless reality.<sup>23</sup>

Through a deployment of the close-up, and a juxtaposition with the long-shot, I would argue that *Gerry*, ostensibly a narrative film in the Hollywood tradition, strains at the guy-ropes that attach it to this tradition and could almost equally be termed a

dancefilm. Its spectatorship demands a kind of attention that is similar to that required when watching a film of the dancefilm genre as defined by Brannigan.

In addition to the historical roots of the dancefilm as enumerated by Brannigan, one might also include the abstract art films of Yoko Ono. Ono, a Japanese-American artist working in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was central to the emergence of the Fluxus movement. The strategies of this diverse group coalesced around an opposition to the institutionalization and commodification of art, an emphasis on the everyday as both the site and the inspiration for art, and a commitment to creating new possibilities for art by working across and between media.<sup>24</sup> Ono's body of work at that time consisted of art objects, texts, performances, and music. In 1966, joining in the Fluxfilm enterprise of George Maciunas, she added a series of films to her oeuvre. Felicitously illustrating Lyotard's passage above, *One* (1966) is a film whose only action is the lighting of a match that is allowed to burn out, the spectacle of "sterile differences leading nowhere"<sup>25</sup> in a poetry of light.<sup>26</sup> Filmed on a high-speed camera, and projected at normal speed, the result combined a performative element and a filmic element to create a cine-choreography.

*Four* (Ono, 1967) is another film about walking. Or bottoms. Or the division of the screen into four parts. In close-up, and focused at the point at which the buttocks meet the top of the legs, the viewer watches as several bottoms in succession walk in front of the camera. The camera maintains the same distance from the subject as she walks. With only the patterns created by the legs and the buttocks and the shadows between them to watch, the viewer's attention is drawn to the "sterile differences" between the bottoms, to how each bottom reveals a different pattern of movement between the four parts of the screen. The film is not totally abstract—the viewer knows that she is watching a series of bottoms—yet there is a humorous tension between this knowledge and, through the tight framing of the shot, the mind's potential to focus simply on the patterns made by the four parts of the screen/body, to abstract from that knowledge. The enjoyment for the viewer stems precisely from this tension: from the possibility to switch between the window (I am watching a series of bottoms walking) and the frame (I am watching the relationship between four parts of the screen). In watching the scene from *Gerry* that I describe above, a similar switching of attention occurs, between the knowledge that we are watching two men walking through a landscape and the enjoyment of watching the dance between their two facial forms/ outlines in the frame. The close-up here functions as in Brannigan's model, as a "de-centralised micro-choreography."

Displaying the Fluxus trademarks of an irreverent and humorous anti-establishment ethos, *Four*, according to Ono, comments on the institutionalization of film and displays a social purpose: she writes, "this film proves that anybody can be a director."<sup>27</sup> She is reported to have labeled it a socially-engaged film for peace<sup>28</sup> and wrote "this film, in fact, is like an aimless petition signed by people with their anuses. Next time we wish to make an appeal, we should send this film as the signature list."<sup>29</sup> The taxonomical structure combined with the performative aspect of the piece creates

this message of democracy. Bottoms may vary in look from one to the next, but they all exhibit the same structure and function, and everybody has one.

This deployment of the body in close-up for the purposes of a democratic message in *Four*, resonates productively with Benjamin's prediction of the democratization of subject matter. In addition, it recalls Brannigan's non-hierarchical dancerly model of the body, deployed in the close-up in dancefilm. Benjamin wrote that the camera "burst this prison world asunder," turning the mundane everyday of the new industrialist capitalist world into "an immense and unexpected field of action," and in the process democratizing the subject matter of art.<sup>30</sup> A similar democratization occurs in dancefilm in the choice of bodily sites as subject matter for the film. Brannigan claims that the film *Dust* (1998, dir. Anthony Atanasio), for example, "creates new sites and spaces for dance."<sup>31</sup> She describes the action:

... hard sand cracks and a hand emerges. This begins a series of close-ups of performer Miriam King's body: her back, fingers crawling across the sand, her eyes covered by goggles.... The second half of the film features King's body parts submerged in black water and shot in close-up, the solid form of the figure dissolving in the dark liquid and play of light.<sup>32</sup>

Concerned with expressing a relationship between the body and the landscape, the first sequence of close-ups of different body parts in contact with a tactile surface creates a palate of empathy for the viewer, a kind of indexing of their own body in a mimetic relationship to the body of King. The plethora of bodily sites as loci of expression and experience in this film echoes the increasing interest over the last half century in the body as the site of experience and knowledge, a body that wrestles with the supremacy of the mind or head as the center of thought and expression. This raises the question of whether the close-up in a cine-choreography has a further democratizing effect. In the separation of bodily part from the individual as a whole, does not the deployment of the close-up go even further, implying a reversal of the traditional mind-body hierarchy? Might it not also suggest that experience is as much understood through a multiplicity of bodily sites and surfaces as it is organized and synthesized through the mind's cognitive capacity?

### Focusing In

Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, a chain of close-ups that seem to constitute the very revelation of the soul, is the epitome of the genre. It is barely possible to see a close-up of a face without asking: what is he/she thinking, feeling, suffering? What is happening beyond what I can see? Or, in Balázs's terms, the close-up of the face allows us to understand that "we can see that there is something there that we cannot see."<sup>33</sup>

Mary Ann Doane, in her historical essay on the close-up and early film theory, writes here of the role most usually associated with the close-up in classical cinema,

the emotional moment, the revelation of depth, the window onto the soul. *Joan of Arc* is a silent film about the martyr's trial, her pain and suffering detailed on her face which appears mainly in close-up. In Doane's treatise, she suggests that the two claims made for the close-up by early film theorists—its capacity to arrest the narrative, to "extract its object from all spatiotemporal coordinates,"<sup>34</sup> and its parallel capacity to bring us closer to the emotions of the character we are watching—are contradictory. Analyzing how the close-up functions in several films, Doane arrives at the conclusion that it is through the juxtaposition of the close-up with other shots that the viewer deduces the emotions of the characters. Describing a scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Sabotage* where a character called Sidney is resisting her urge to stab another character, Homolka, Doane asserts that the legibility of the close-up shots in this sequence "is intimately linked to their very *lack* of autonomy."<sup>35</sup> She writes:

... the struggle between Sidney's desire and her resistance to that desire is produced *between* the shots of her anxious face, the knife and potatoes, Homolka's face, and her brother's empty chair, all of which signify through a relay of gazes.<sup>36</sup>

It is precisely because the spectator sees the shots of the knife and the empty chair that she can infer the play of emotions or motivations suggested by the close-up shots of Sidney's face.

Through its use in silent films and early classical cinema, the facial close-up has historically been associated with the expression of emotion and the outward appearance of the interiority of the character. By both enlarging the object within the frame and bringing it closer to the viewer, however, the close-up also emphasizes the physical and appears tangible. The director of *Hands* (1995), Adam Roberts, observes: "I tend toward the view that the close-up in cinema offers a means to convey a sense of the sheer physicality of the human body, its solidity, plasticity, weight, individuality."<sup>37</sup> The close-up may bring us so close that, depending on the spectator's viewing situation (cinema, sofa, screen in a gallery), the image towers over the spectator, almost enveloping her. In tandem with its perceived status as the emotional moment, it is also partly in the scale of the cinematic close-up that its influence has been located.

This raises the question if there are other possibilities for creating emotional intensity, physicality, or abstraction. Has Benjamin's "different nature" that we are now so used to seeing impacted on our own imaginations? Has the suggestive force of the close-up produced a capacity to "zoom in" in the imagination, to engage the eyes to focus in and to produce a close-up in the mind?

In a scene in *Cost Of Living*, a short dancefilm by Lloyd Newson (DV8 Physical Theatre, 2004), a man and a woman meet on a pathway that slopes down to a beach. It is the second time they have met. The scene opens with a wide shot. The man repeatedly jumps through a hoop as he leaps down the slope towards the camera which reverses away from him. As he arrives at the foot of the slope the frame moves to the right to reveal the woman standing there, three hula-hoops spinning around

her waist. A duet ensues between the two of them. At first they remain separate, each spinning their own hoop(s), however part way into the duet all hoops except one are discarded and they dance together with this one hoop. The two characters flirt and the woman, who is more skilled, teases the man and evades his attempts to catch hold of the hoop. This sequence uses a variety of shots between a medium wide shot—in which the head, torso and hips are all in shot—and a medium close up, where the viewer sees just the heads and shoulders of the characters.

A second version of this scene was made for *Living Costs*, a site-specific adaptation of this production at the Tate Modern in London in 2003. The whole performance took place in different parts of the Tate, making use of the diverse spaces that the building affords. At times the audience found themselves on the floor of the Turbine Hall watching a scene that appeared at a window several floors above. At times they followed the protagonists around the building, wending their way through the works of art. When watching this duet, the audience is situated on one of the highest floors of the building, looking down into the Turbine Hall through a glass wall. It takes place at least twenty meters below (the height of the Turbine Hall is thirty-five meters) and the dancers appear almost ant-like in their dimensions. Whilst the scene in the film conveys a sense of flirtation and confidence on the part of the woman and bashfulness on the part of the man, the same scene transposed to the enormous space of the Turbine Hall created a very different viewing experience. The Lilliputian size of the two bodies at such a distance juxtaposed with the cavernous industrial space revealed a fragility and tenderness in their tentative duet that was not present in my experience of watching the film. Reviewer Jann Parry echoes this recollection in words she wrote at the time: “A Hula-Hoop couple—Kareena Oates and Rowan Thorpe—are achingly puny seen from a distance, their struggle for love receding into eternity.”<sup>38</sup> Despite being twenty meters distant, it felt as if I *felt* the intimacy of their tentative fragile conversation, a tentativeness emphasized by their own physical fragility in the huge space around them. Although I was viewing the scene in “long-shot,” my imagination focused in and brought the experience into metaphorical close-up. In a reversal of the traditional function assigned to the long-shot in narrative cinema—to provide information and to contextualize—it was precisely the distance from which the bodies were viewed and the scale of the environment in which they danced that created for me a moment of emotion, of intensity.

Returning to *Gerry*, the scene described above ends with the two faces walking out of shot. For the next three minutes, the landscape and the bodies of the two men appear together in a sequence of long-shots. There is no dialogue. In the first part of this sequence, the top two thirds of the frame is filled with sky, the bottom third is grassland, and the two tiny bodies trudge along the line of the horizon between them. The camera maintains the same relationship between the bodies and the frame, so that, although they are moving forwards, it almost appears as if they are getting nowhere. In the following shot the horizon is even lower, about one quarter of the way up from the bottom of the frame. The two Gerrys’ heads and bodies appear from below this horizon line as they slowly gain the slope. They walk into shot midway

across the frame (horizontally) and leave at the bottom left of the frame, their heads never breaking the line of the horizon. Subsequently, their bodies appear even smaller in the frame as they climb a steep slope in the middle distance (from the bottom right hand corner of the frame to the top left), in front of a mountain in the far distance. This climb takes forty seconds. In the final shot of this sequence, the men climb closer to the camera and we begin to hear their footfalls and their breathing. At the end of the shot, they are closer to the camera than they have been for some time, taking up approximately one third of the frame. This sequence of shots creates a similar viewing experience to the hula-hoop scene in *Living Costs*. The spectator witnesses, and indeed in *Gerry* it is one of the subjects of the film, the fragility of the tiny bodies in the enormous landscape that fills the frame in the long-shot. Again, it is the spectator's ability to focus in and to separate figure from ground, to evoke or invoke their own physical response to the characters' experience, that renders the image legible.

This sequence of long-shots arguably reflects a tendency that Brannigan identifies in the genre described as dancefilm, namely the transference of movement across people and things.<sup>39</sup> Walter Benjamin writes of this tendency, "The action of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is a familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal."<sup>40</sup> Brannigan, following Benjamin, associates this tendency with the close-up, with the capacity to get so close as to be able to see what "really goes on." She includes Amy Greenfield's *Element* (1973) in the category of dancefilm, and writes of Greenfield's body "struggling in thick black mud ... emerging and disappearing in a study almost entirely shot in close-up."<sup>41</sup> "The drama," she writes, "is spread across various surfaces, substances, and the body of the performer equally."<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, in *Gerry* this transference of movement across people and things occurs in the deployment of the long-shot. In the sequence I describe above, the landscape appears to be static and the bodies move over it. Constantly present, however, in its ominous scale, its wildness and its exposure to the elements is its potential for movement. The horizon is often at least halfway down the frame and the sky is as much the subject as the bodies and the earth. Indeed, in a later scene the action consists of the clouds scudding across the sky as night falls in one speeded-up long-shot that lasts sixty-three seconds. The movement, or potential for movement in the landscape, and the sheer amount of time that the viewer spends watching these two men walk and climb over this terrain recalls Brannigan's definition of a dancefilm, a film "characterised by a filmic performance dominated by choreographic strategies or effects."<sup>43</sup> It could be argued that in *Gerry*, a choreography of bodies and the landscape in the frame is as much the content as the story itself. Whilst the plot eventually resolves in a dramatic denouement, the cine-choreographic content of the film asks once more of the viewer a different kind of attention, an appreciation of Lyotard's "sterile differences"<sup>44</sup> in the frame of the camera as she watches the action unfold, often in long-shot.

## Conclusion

Prompted by lengthy consideration of how the close-up and the long-shot function in the dancefilm, writing this essay has proved a fruitful exercise; an attempt to investigate my experience of watching a particular type of film through the rich history of the close-up in film theory. I have written about works from a variety of genres and find myself grateful to Erin Brannigan for her insistence on the descriptor "cine-choreography," which identifies an approach to an interaction between movement and camera, rather than implying a given content as does the term "dancefilm". Brannigan's analysis of the close-up in the dancefilm has also recognized a set of strategies that are often seen in this genre: the "decentralised micro-choreography" and "a transference of movement across people and things,"<sup>45</sup> the performative element extending out from the body into the physical landscape that it encounters. I have found it useful to consider, when analyzing works that utilize many different types of shots, whether or not these strategies are present.

In *Gerry*, a feature-length film in the Hollywood narrative tradition, the transference of movement across people and things occurs in the deployment of the long-shot. The action and content consists of the men traversing the landscape, and the weather traversing the landscape and the men in lengthy sequences of long-shots. In addition, it is not only the scenes shot in close-up, but also these series of long-shots that recall Jean-François Lyotard's reflections on how the moving-image work approaches abstraction, through the deployment of "sterile differences in an audio-visual field."<sup>46</sup> To illustrate this idea, Lyotard uses the analogy of a child lighting a match to watch it burn. He writes: "... the changing colours, the light flashing at the height of the blaze, the death of the tiny piece of wood, the hissing of the tiny flame."<sup>47</sup> At the risk of drawing a tenuous parallel, but one I still recognize, Lyotard could arguably be describing both a high-speed version of the action of the weather on the barren desert landscape and on the men lost within it in *Gerry*, and also the optical effects of this action in terms of the composition of colors and light in the camera frame.

Rather than additional examples of Hollywood feature films, the combination of the performative elements of the body and the landscape in this film immediately bring to mind abstract art films in the tradition of Yoko Ono's *Four* and *One* and dancefilms like Amy Greenfield's *Element* and *Tides* (1982). Indeed, the approach to filmmaking in *Gerry* seems closer to filmmaking traditions that are informed by performative or performance-based practices. *Gerry* makes use of similar strategies to the dancefilm in order to hint at the cellular through the celluloid and displays a comparable intention of communicating about the body in the world through the expressivity of surface, substance and materiality in the camera frame.

To return to Walter Benjamin, whose words open this essay, is it not possible to recognize "hidden details of familiar objects,"<sup>48</sup> in the speeded up camera-work of the passage from day to night in *Gerry*, or in the shots of clouds slowly journeying over the landscape. Although examples of the long-shot, are these not simply further instances of the camera's ability to reveal "entirely new structural formulations of the subject"?<sup>49</sup>

## Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Marxists.org, last modified February 2005, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Jean Epstein, "Magnification and Other Writings", trans. Stuart Liebman, *October* 3 (1977): 9, quoted in Mary Ann Doane, "The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14 (2003): 90.
7. Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3. Brannigan first uses this term on page 3 of her book and continues to do so throughout the text.
8. Ibid, 39.
9. Ibid, 51.
10. Ibid, 43.
11. Ibid, 39.
12. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Arno Press, 1972): 25-26, quoted in Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 42.
13. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 43.
14. Adam Roberts, "Notes on Filming Dance," *International Journal of Screendance* 2 (Spring 2012): 112.
15. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 45.
16. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1992), 95-96, emphasis original.
17. Ibid, 96.
18. This scene starts at 45 minutes 28 seconds.
19. Epstein, "Magnification", 9, quoted in Doane, "Close-Up", 90.
20. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 41.

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21. Jean-François Lyotard and Andrew Benjamin, *The Lyotard Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 171.
  22. Ibid.
  23. Ibid, 170.
  24. Alexandra Munroe, "Spirit of YES: The Art and Life of Yoko Ono," in Yoko Ono, et al., *Yes Yoko Ono* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 13.
  25. Lyotard and Benjamin, *Lyotard Reader*, 171.
  26. Maeva Aubert, "fluxfilm #14" in Maeva Aubert, introduction and accompanying notes to *Flux Film Anthology*, trans. Pip Chodorov, DVD (Paris: Re:Voir, 2010), 34.
  27. Yoko Ono, "Yoko Ono on Yoko Ono", *Film Culture* 48-49 (Winter-Spring 1970): 32.
  28. Maeva Aubert, "fluxfilm #16" in Maeva Aubert, *Flux Film Anthology*, 34.
  29. Yoko Ono, "Yoko Ono on Yoko Ono," 32.
  30. Benjamin, "The Work of Art."
  31. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 43.
  32. Ibid.
  33. Doane, "Close-Up", 96.
  34. Ibid, 97.
  35. Ibid, 103, emphasis original.
  36. Ibid., emphasis original.
  37. Roberts, "Notes", 111.
  38. Jan Parry, "We should be so lucky", *Observer*, May 25, 2003, accessed May 28, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2003/may/25/features.review107>.
  39. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, vii.
  40. Benjamin, "The Work of Art."
  41. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 43.
  42. Ibid.
  43. Ibid, vii.
  44. Lyotard and Benjamin, *Lyotard Reader*, 171.
  45. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 43, vii.
  46. Lyotard and Benjamin, *Lyotard Reader*, 171.

47. Ibid., 171.

48. Benjamin, "The Work of Art".

49. Ibid.

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## Poetic Phenomenology in Thierry De Mey's Screendances: Open Corporealities, Responsive Spaces, and Embodied Experiences

*Sophie Walon*

Musician, composer, director of experimental dance films, creator of (video) installations, and collaborator of many contemporary choreographers, Belgian multidisciplinary artist Thierry De Mey likes crossing aesthetic boundaries. However, his diverse works also register a certain homogeneity: they are all permeated by his fascination with the plasticity of the body, the poetics of space, and the musicality of movement. These artistic touchstones are particularly evident in his dance films, as they all display malleable corporealities, rhythmic choreographic and cinematic movements, as well as poetic and responsive spaces. De Mey's screendances are often praised for the extreme precision of their composition and framing, their dazzling editing, and their highly musical qualities. This undeniable technical virtuosity largely explains why his films often bewitch and hypnotize their spectators. However, the critical emphasis on this particular facet of his screendances portrays them as only being concerned with artful creativity, (over)stylization, and aesthetic perfection: through this lens, his films are seen merely as an expression of brilliant formalism.

In this essay, I will try to point out another aspect of De Mey's films (including his collaborations with choreographers such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker) as constructing a poetic vision of the world in which bodies and spaces closely interact and entwine. Indeed, De Mey's screendances always pay close attention to how dancing bodies *inhabit* and are intimately related to the various environments in which the film medium allows them to be immersed and to evolve. This is one of the most fruitful possibilities that the site of screendance opens up to the choreographic art: a strategy of "deterritorialization"<sup>1</sup> that provides alternative settings to a stage, including complex milieus that can induce new kinesthetic qualities and original corporeal states. De Mey's films take maximum advantage of this possibility, which explains why the location is paramount in them. His film locations are always carefully chosen for their poetic and aesthetic characteristics that echo, or more often further or even renew, those of the dance by giving the movements a new universe and hence new qualities, significance, and connotations.

The natural environments or architectural sets in his films are not, therefore, shot as mere backgrounds. De Mey is concerned with capturing the relationship between locations and bodies, between spaces and beings: the environments he chooses often appear to alter dance movements and bodily states so much that they create unprecedented choreographic qualities that could not be achieved in the flat, geometrical stage context, which is at once spectacular and neutral (plain and

featureless). Reciprocally, dancing bodies in his screendances are shown to affect their environments in visual, haptic, and aural capacities, sometimes to such an extent that they modify or reshape them. These close, mutual interactions between dancing bodies and their spaces of perception and action evidently call for a phenomenological reading: more particularly, I will argue that De Mey's screendances represent poetic illustrations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of the body as open to the world (or to its environment), being both receptive and responsive to it, impacting on it and influenced by it. Ultimately, I will examine how this induces the highly sensory and embodied qualities of De Mey's cinema.

### **The Importance of Going Off Stage: Making an Autonomous Film by Decontextualizing, and Restaging Dance in Cinematic and Poetic Sites**

First of all, it is important to note how much going off stage—that is, deterritorializing the dances he films—is key for De Mey, a point underscored by Imbault's observation that space is paramount in De Mey's works: "*Genius loci*. The location first and foremost."<sup>2</sup> Relocating the dance to original and cinegenic spaces enables the director and the choreographers he works with to restage the dance specifically *for* the screendance medium, to re-place it in a new context, which, by generating new atmospheres, kinesthetic qualities, and bodily states, ultimately gives birth to a new creative work. The settings of De Mey's films are thus often chosen for their visually striking and poetic scenery, that is for their capacity to dramatically decontextualize theatrical choreographies and thereby distinguish his films.

Be it the industrial warehouse and the geometrical layout of tables in *One Flat Thing, Reproduced* (2006), the black coal heaps and the hills of broken tiles in *Love Sonnets* (1993), the stern school in *Rosas danst Rosas* (1996), the dried-out Aral Sea in *Prélude à la Mer* (2009), the eight-armed sandy crossroads in *Fase* (2002), the nightmarish forest in *Tippeke* (1996), the steep rocky mountain in *Dom Svobode* (2000), the bucolic clearing in *Counter Phrases* (2003), or the oneiric, fantastic forest in *Ma Mère l'Oye* (2004), spaces and environments in De Mey's films are always the bearers of a peculiar visual universe and a poetic charge that either enhance, renew, or contrast with the original choreographic works. Transferring the dance to scenic or singular sites thus appears as a crucial condition for creating an independent work, as De Mey often points out in interviews:

The choice of the location is a fundamental question. I cannot think of making a film if I don't know where I will shoot it. I never film dance on stage to avoid confusion with straightforward recordings. I have nothing against this but it's something that does not interest me: I conceive my films as autonomous works.<sup>3</sup>

To create original films that depart from the often pre-existing choreographic works created for theatrical contexts, De Mey brings new elements to them by employing a wide range of cinematic techniques such as specific shooting angles and (de)framings, original lighting that re-sculpts bodies and movements, elaborate montages, and

various visual and sound effects. Yet, the cinematic possibility of relocating theatrical works to original sites appears to be one of the most efficient ways of enabling screendance artists to make a creative dance film that is emancipated from being a mere dance recording. Not only does this strategy impose a restaging of the dance *for* the camera, but it also permeates the choreography with a new particular world which can only exist in the screendance medium.

De Mey loves both natural and urban environments, both wild and architectural spaces. In *Love Sonnets*, for instance, which features choreography by Michèle Anne De Mey, Thierry De Mey explores the relationship between the dancers and their various mineral environments:

For *Love Sonnets*, I did intense location scouting of quarries throughout Europe. I wanted to make a film in mineral environments devoid of vegetal elements. The idea was a negative choice: no green. I wanted a relation with matter, with something very raw, natural: from Charleroi's black slag heaps to Catalonia's white and salty ones, through red tile quarries.<sup>4</sup>

The result of this location choice is a highly poetic and terrestrial film in which bodies brush against sandy expanses, rub against rough, stony grounds, and hurtle down heaps of tiles that break loudly and collapse. In contrast, in *Ma Mère l'Oye*, De Mey's intention was to "focus specifically on the interactions between bodies and vegetal elements"<sup>5</sup>: the dancers, with their wild movements that seem directly inspired, induced by the fantastical atmosphere of the forest, appear to merge with the lush scenery so much that they alternatively evoke plants or animalistic creatures. Surprising associations, poetic metaphors, and metamorphoses spring from these encounters between the bodies and the natural environment: a female dancer seems caught in a process of hybridization with a branch of fern that visually constitutes her spine and ribs; an unfurling hand looks like a blossoming flower; two arms resemble the branches of a tree they are sliding along and entwined with, and so forth.



Figure 1:  
*Ma Mère l'Oye* (2004, dir. Thierry de Mey).  
Courtesy of Thierry De Mey.

De Mey films natural spaces as a composer and as an architect as well as a visual artist—that is, with a fascination for rhythmic structures and geometrical compositions. In *Counter Phrases*, for example, the camera often lingers on structured gardens and architectural landscapes in order to capture lines and curves which provide the film with striking compositional forms and rhythms. Also key in understanding De Mey's fascination for natural sites is his evident cinematic interest in colors: for example, his attention to the chromatic variations of the forest and its lighting according to the change of seasons in *Ma Mère l'Oye*. Similarly, the highly contrasting colors of the sites in *Counter Phrases* are visually echoed by the colorful costumes, and cinematographically heightened by the use of chromatic filters and specific lighting, especially in the "Green, Yellow and Blue" sequence. Therefore, natural locations provide De Mey's films with original, striking, and poetic visuals and atmospheres, which differentiate his films from the live works from which they are adapted.

De Mey's choices of location also reveal his fascination for architecture, as evidenced in *Rosas danst Rosas*, which features Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's choreography of the same title, and for which the director chose the modern Rito school constructed in 1936 in Leuven by the architect H. Van de Velde, one of the founders of Bauhaus. Beyond its highly structured appearance which furthers the choreography's aesthetics, De Mey also chose this building for its disciplinary ambiance which brings new elements of fiction to the choreography. Moreover, the location, with its succession of spacious, all-glass classrooms, allowed the camera to travel freely and track the dancers. The architecture here is both a cinematic and fictional frame: it is the bearer of striking visuals and a particular atmosphere (austere and rigid) which brings new snippets of stories and poetic elements to the dance.



Figure 2:  
*Rosas danst Rosas* (1997,  
dir. Thierry de Mey).  
Courtesy of Thierry De  
Mey.

Ultimately, De Mey's spaces, be they natural or architectural, always carry and reveal the dance and give it new qualities and significance, as their characteristics impact the bodies of the dancers, influence their movements, and create particular corporeal states. His films construct a complex dialectic between architecture and gesture, environments and movements, spaces and beings. His filming locations are not mere backdrops; they are *milieus* that form a matrix of original corporealities and

particular kinds of movements as the dancers are imbued with them, have to adapt to them, and insert themselves and unfold their movements in them. Indeed, the spaces the dancers are immersed in are an important part of the *mise-en-scène* and the dancing: they are a springboard for new meanings, connotations, kinesthetic qualities, body states, interactions, aesthetics, and poetics.

### Powerful Spaces, Receptive Bodies

If spaces generate so many new elements to De Mey's films, it is because they are shot as both active and sensitive—as phenomenological environments. Caught in the “flesh” of these spaces, the dancers are influenced and informed by it, but, as part of it, as flesh amidst the flesh of the world, they also impact it, imprinting on it the marks of their actions.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, if De Mey's films can be read through a phenomenological lens, it is because they pay close attention to these mutual interactions between spaces and bodies and because they show environments and beings as both receptive and responsive, sensitive and active.

I will now examine the first polarity of this reversible experience and influence displayed in De Mey's films, when spaces are shown as powerful and bodies as impressible. This particular interplay between environments and beings is particularly resonant in *Ma Mère l'Oye*, in which, as mentioned before, the forest seems to inspire the dancers with instances of vegetal and floral movements. Along these lines, in *Tippeke*, the dark, dense forest causes a state of disorientation and anguish—both physical and metaphysical—which takes over the dancer, De Keersmaeker. As she gets lost in the bleak forest, she seems to lose her mind as well as the control of her body: the environment induces her state of being, both physically and psychologically. Her chaotic, disordered movements are further altered by the uneven ground of the forest, which affects her stability; and the cold, as well as the frightening, almost threatening atmosphere of the forest, makes her shiver, exacerbating the convulsive aspect of her gestures.

In *Rosas danst Rosas*, the austere, disciplinary architecture of the Rito school appears to weigh down on the body of the young women and repress their leaning for rebellion and their evident sexual drive. The massive, almost menacing, architectural frame of the building seems to enforce discipline, and the transparency of the all-glass rooms as well as the inquisitiveness of long tracking shots function as a *panoptic system* that constantly surveils the girls, preventing them from having any independency or privacy. Indeed, this brings to mind the architectural model of the Panopticon, a type of institutional buildings analyzed by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* as a symbol for modern disciplinary societies and their insidious but pervasive strategies of surveilling, controlling, and normalizing people's behaviors.<sup>7</sup> Here, it is both the spatial characteristics and the filmic strategies they enable that work as a means of controlling the girls. Pillars, doors mounts, windows frames, the all-brick, metal and glass structure, the tiled floor—everything in the architecture of this gigantic, rectilinear building is squared, cold, rigid and, as such, participates in burdening the dancers. As the girls seem to incorporate and internalize the discipline

imposed on them by the architectural environment, the film evokes dystopian interactions between powerful contextual forces and impressionable bodies. This is evidenced by the highly structured, repetitive movements of the dancers and their tensed bodily states which seem to be directly inspired by the location. However, it is worth underlining that the dancers also try to escape this restraining, prison-like configuration: for instance, they are sometimes seen running in the corridors, hurtling down the stairs, or going up on the roof. As a result, in certain sequences, the impact of the location on the bodies is counter to what one might expect,<sup>8</sup> as it also seems to trigger movements of rebellion and attempts at emancipation.

In *One Flat Thing, Reproduced*, the layout of the tables forces the dancers to perform sinuous, devious movements: the dancers have to adapt to and compromise with the restrictive, obstructive spatial configuration at hand, which induces specific forms and qualities of movement. In *Dom Svobode*, the rocky cliff, on which the dancers move horizontally by means of cables, confronts the dancers with extreme gravitational conditions. This particular location imposes new ways of moving and thus original body states: for instance, certain ordinary movements become surprisingly difficult to be executed in this horizontal position. However, this specific condition also opens up new possibilities for movement, especially jumps which are given unprecedented aerial and spectacular qualities.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3:  
*Dom Svobode* (2000, dir. Thierry de Mey).  
Courtesy of Thierry De Mey.

De Mey also devises influential environments in his screendance installations in order to trigger particular bodily states for the "spect-actors."<sup>10</sup> For instance, the *Barbe Bleue* installation (2006), which combines images of people reading Perrault's tale with those of women representing Barble-Bleue's ex-wives, "should ideally be located in an enclosed, secluded space (a cellar, basement, the boiler room of a theatre or museum, an archives room, etc.)."<sup>11</sup> The suggestion that the installation be located in a dark, confined space is clearly intended to bring about feelings of claustrophobia and anxiety. This underscores the paramount importance of spaces in De Mey's works in generating particular bodily states for the dancers as well as the spectators. Space also powerfully impacts spectators' states in the installation mode of *Prélude à la Mer*, a triptych projection in a Kazakh yurt. The spatial configuration of the installation and the shooting location of the film projected in it cause the visitors to experience a

spatial shift or tension as they enter the intimate, confined space of the yurt, which then opens out onto the endless panoramas of the film, displaying the immense, desolate, sandy expanse relinquished by the dried-out Aral Sea.

In other words, De Mey's settings are not only visually striking and poetic, but they are also somatically powerful: they heavily influence the dancers and specta(c)tor's body states and they form a matrix of particular movements. Far from being a mere piece of scenery, they form complex milieus that the dancers confront, to which they must adapt, and, hence, by which they are informed in their very flesh.

### **Performative Movements, Sensitive Environments**

Bodies also influence their environments and have an impact on the interactive and sensitive spaces that De Mey stages. This is the second polarity, or reciprocal balance of power, in the reversible interactions between environments and bodies displayed in his films, where bodies are portrayed as more active and where environments seem less influential and more sensitive to the dancers' powerful movements. Indeed, dancers are often seen leaving the imprint of their movements on their space of action, hence modifying it. In *Love Sonnets*, the dancers act on the sequence of Mediterranean landscapes they go through: under their steps, the coal crunches, the tiles break in a musical clamor, the salt spins, dust is lifted and swirls. Their energetic movements transform the still masses of the black slag heaps, the desert quarry, the piles of shattered tiles, or the mountain of dust into moving, almost dancing, and musical elements. By activating movements as well as an entire musicality by their dance steps in the various milieus they pass through, the dancers are thus seen projecting and embedding their physical presence in the terrestrial elements that surround them. Their enthusiasm for doing so betrays the delight they feel in experiencing their transformative power over their environments, the responsiveness of the world to their actions: just as children enjoy skimming stones on water to express their impact over the world,<sup>12</sup> the dancers take pleasure in transforming their environment by unleashing an avalanche of tiles beneath their steps, by making the dust fly, etc. These reciprocal interactions between the dancers and their space of action are underscored, and often heightened, by various filmic strategies: De Mey frequently shoots the scenes in fixed, very wide shots in order to clearly show the interplay between the moving bodies and the diverse environments, but he also includes close-ups of the dancers' feet to emphasize the points of contact between the dancing bodies and the natural elements. Also, De Mey often positions the camera quite low to enhance the physical and terrestrial qualities of the film:

The position of the camera, especially the height from which you film, is crucial. I don't want to film from an overhanging eye perspective, which overlooks the carnality of the bodies, and intellectualises and rationalises what is shown. I want a bodily perspective that respects the centre of gravity of the dancers: that is why I usually shoot from a belly level.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of this camera height, the film focuses on bodies and earth (the sky is not shown very often), how they meet and mix, and how they act with, impact on, and react to each other. The soundtrack is also key in conveying the materiality of these interactions on screen: aural close-ups and emphases heighten the earthly sounds of the coal crunching, the tiles breaking loudly under the dancers' steps, and the sandy and stony grounds being rubbed and brushed by the dancers.



Figure 4:  
*Fase* (2002, dir. Thierry de Mey).  
Courtesy of Thierry De Mey.

In the “Violin Phase” sequence in *Fase*, the eight-way crossroads of Tervuren’s arboretum seems to inspire the rosette De Keersmaecker etches, which is also the symbol of her company. As she doggedly imprints the trail of her steps on the floor, she gradually converts the voluminous expanse of white sand and dark floor beneath into an enormous drawing traced by her movements. For this sequence, De Mey and De Keersmaecker devised a sensitive, interactive space—a dark stage covered with white sand—and thus a space that is literally impressible, on which one can leave an imprint. In a similar vein, in the *Rémanences* video (2010), dancers inscribe the mark of their body and movements on the floor with the help of a thermal camera which captures the traces left by their body warmth. Here again, the body becomes a writing device, capable of leaving a lingering imprint on its environment. In these sensitive spaces, the dancers’ movements become “performative,” to quote and adapt J.L. Austin’s concept to a screendance context. Austin demonstrated how some words are not mere linguistic statements but can also “perform” an act when they are said or written.<sup>14</sup> Similarly in De Mey’s dance films, the dancers’ movements often accomplish something: they inscribe their trace in space, alter, and even transform it. Dancing bodies are not usually destined to produce an effect on their milieu; movements are usually their own finality in theatrical dance. Yet in De Mey’s films, movements often become “performative” as they have a tangible impact on their environments. While they are not everyday, pragmatic actions that are bound to produce useful results, they nonetheless produce a concrete, albeit aesthetic effect. Indeed, it is a recurring feature of De Mey’s films, from *Fase* to *Rémanences*, that the trace of the dance lingers after the movements are performed: that is, the trail of the choreography becomes inscribed in the space the dancers reshape and (literally) redraw.<sup>15</sup>

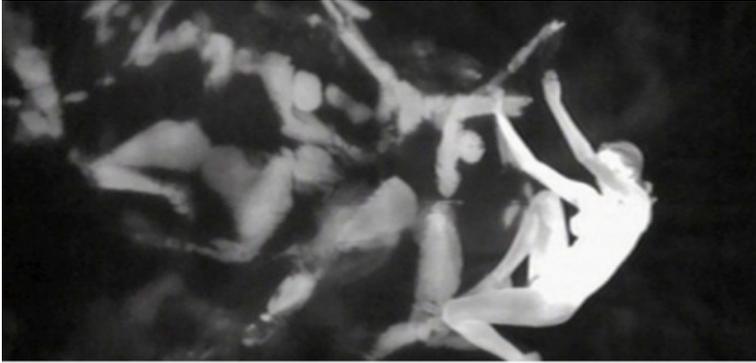


Figure 5:  
*Rémanences* (2010, dir.  
 Thierry de Mey).  
 Courtesy of Thierry De  
 Mey.

Examples of bodies impacting their environments are also found in De Mey's interactive video-installations, where participants make choices that alter the scenography or spatial configurations. In *Top Shot* (2002), for instance, participants are encouraged to imitate the movements of De Keersmaeker in *Fase's* "Violin Phase" sequence, described above. Following the dancer's example, visitors are led to engrave the trail of their dance in the sand. In so doing, they modify the appearance of the installation. In *From Inside* (2007), participants enter a black room where films are projected on the walls. Parallel to the screens, three bright areas detect visitors' movements; these sensitive areas enable participants to impact the projected images, the editing, and the soundtrack according to pre-determined patterns. The installation almost works like a juke-box as the visitors/actors, through their actions detected by systems akin to those used in video games, can choose to activate a given filmed scene, choreography, or musical sequence. They are thus given the capacity to select the visual and aural atmosphere they want to be immersed in. Space in De Mey's installations is always conceived as a plastic, malleable site that is sensitive and responsive to the dancers' movements.

### Poetical Phenomenology

From the previous analysis, it is clear that De Mey's films emphasize the phenomenological truth of bodies, demonstrating that bodies are both felt and feeling, that environments influence bodily states, and that, conversely, bodies have an impact on their environments. Therefore, it is particularly relevant to draw on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological conceptions in reading De Mey's dance films. The corporeal experience is at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's reflections: the philosopher does not focus on the objective body as studied in conventional medicine, for instance, but on the *lived* body, which, he emphasizes, is the condition and medium of all our experiences, of our constitutive and essential *openness* to the world. Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty, our bodies are not merely *in* space but *inhabit* space, especially through our movements and actions. As part of the *fabric* of the world, the body is open to the world; it is both a receptive and responsive *flesh* amidst the *flesh of the world*.<sup>16</sup>

This phenomenological conception of the body finds poetic expressions in De Mey's films, which, as well as staging bodies and environments that influence and impact one another, show bodies as part of the same *fabric* or *flesh* of the world. Indeed, in some of his films, bodies seem to expand or dilate themselves in space and, reciprocally, environments appear to pervade bodies. For instance, in *Counter Phrases*, in the "Green, Yellow and Blue" sequence, a dancer who wears a flower-printed fabric seems to merge with the blossoming garden she dances in; another, dancing in tall grass in a yellow dress, looks like a flower blown by the wind. In *Tippeke*, with her green dress, De Keersmaecker seems caught in the "flesh" of the forest. Similarly, in *Love Sonnets*, the dancers' costumes are often of the same tints as those of the landscapes they go through. In one of the early sequences, the dress of the girl who is entering the frame is of the same dark ochre hue as that of the heap of tiles she is walking on and, in the following sequence, when the dancers are evolving on a lighter, dusty landscape, they are all wearing stern, faded clothes. This erases, or at least renders porous, the boundaries between the dancers and their environments: again, spaces and bodies seem caught in the same "fabric" of the world. In the same vein, in another sequence, a man, addressing the audience directly, announces that someone is about to eat the broken pottery that is seen in the shot: "To Amarili, who is about to swallow the broken pottery that is in her mouth." Referring to someone who literally incorporates the natural elements of her surrounding, this line can be read as a metaphor of the vision of the body displayed in De Mey's works. Transforming its environment, the body projects itself on it; reciprocally, being influenced by its milieu, the body also incorporates it.

As such, and contrary to the medical, organic conception of the body as a self-regulating, stable structure, as well as the myth of the body as a fixed and radically unassailable, closed and intimate entity,<sup>17</sup> De Mey's phenomenological films present bodies that are not fixed but transforming. Indeed, in films such as *Rosas danst Rosas* or *Ma Mère l'Oye*, the body appears open (to its surroundings), and the world-body boundary porous. Ultimately, this emphasis on the permeable relations between space and body calls for abandoning the philosophically obsolete notion of "the body" as a supposedly closed entity, in favor of *corporeality*. This terminology is more adapted to a discussion of these screendance bodies, which appear open and versatile as a result of their interactions with their milieus, as it takes into account our reversible experience of *inhabiting* the world (feeling and being felt, impacting and being influenced) and the openness and adaptability (to various environments; to others) of our physicality.<sup>18</sup>

### **Embodied Experiences: A Cinema of Sensations**

Finally, I would like to highlight how this emphasis on body-space interactions in De Mey's films naturally induces highly embodied experiences for the spectators. By focusing on bodies and movements, and on interactions between the dancers and their sphere of action, screendances in general, and De Mey's in particular, offer a highly sensory cinema. Indeed, in the absence of a proper narrative thread to develop,

on what else besides physical, kinesthetic, spatial, or rhythmic sensations could these almost exclusively silent dance films focus? Unlike many film productions that prioritize character and psychological development, De Mey's screendances give precedence to bodily experiences and sensory qualities: his close attention to bodies leads him to capture organic and physical images, and his shooting of spaces evokes sensations of distance, scale, texture, surface, temperature, and so forth. This creates a cinema of sensations: a cinema that captures sensations and addresses the spectators' senses.

Thus, by bringing to the fore cinema's sensorial (and sensual) impact, De Mey's films offer spectators multisensory experiences with an emphasis, of course, on kinesthetic sensations, but also on tactile feelings. Certainly, it is a self-evident truth that all his films suggest kinesthetic sensations, as they all explore choreographic works. That said, it is worth examining a few instances where this evocation of kinesthetic sensations is heightened, either because it induces a particularly strong kinesthetic empathy, triggering a bodily reaction in the spectator's body, or because these sensations are so eloquent that they can suggest snippets of stories and embody discourses.

As for the suggestion of micro-fictions and discourse, *Rosas danst Rosas* provides striking instances. The richness and complexity of sensory effects and kinesthetic qualities in this film suggest embodied thoughts and micro-fictions that are not channeled through classical, word-based, explicit narrativity, but instead are interwoven into the sensory effects, in the very fabric of the *mise-en-scène*, and conveyed by the dancers' eloquent movements. For example, the film succeeds in evoking the women's sexual drive through their movements and the way they are underscored on screen by filmic techniques and strategies. The women are seen compulsively touching their crotches, running their hands through their hair, pulling down their tops to reveal their shoulders and cleavage, and tossing their hair. This sexual tension is cinematographically enhanced by De Mey: he captures these gestures in close-ups, repeats them many times in the editing, and includes cut-ins that focus on similar carnal details. In the same vein, the sound of their panting, heightened by De Mey in post-production through aural close-ups and superimpositions, also hints at their sexual arousal. The location of the film, the stern Rito school, adds layers of significance to this: as I mentioned earlier, the massive, disciplinary architecture of the building weighs down on the body and seems to repress their sexual and rebellious leanings. Again, De Mey echoes this repression via his filming techniques: the long tracking shots in the corridors, the circular dolly shots in the classroom where the girls are sitting on chairs, and the long sequence shots also seem to embody a surveilling, controlling entity. In this film, the movements, the space, and their filmic treatment are thus the bearers of micro-fictions: they express sexual and insubordinate desires repressed by an exterior authority that, although unwillingly, the bodies seem to internalize. Hints of stories or discourse and expressions of feelings are thus embedded in the flesh of the dancers, in their movements and gestures, in the particularity of the space, and in the mode of filming

them. Therefore, this film can be read as a form of embodied story, a screen narrative told through sensory effects, body-space interactions, movements, and film strategies. This suggests that screendance can develop forms of narratives and thoughts which do not rely on logocentric modes of understanding (based on words: that is, on dialogue, on densely written and rational plots, on psychological characterization, and so on) but on more embodied, sensorial, and empathic ways of grasping what is at stake.

As for the strong kinesthetic empathy triggered by De Mey's films, a striking example is again to be found in *Rosas danst Rosas*: because of the throbbing rhythm of the music and the dance, the relentless, heady repetitions of some sequences of movement, as well as their speed, occasionally increased in the film through extremely accelerated editing, we are induced to feel in our very flesh the kinesthetic qualities of this structured though playful dance. Similarly, in *Fase*, the two female dancers and their series of endlessly repeated, hypnotic movements, combined with the obsessive music, inspire corporeal sensations of flowing qualities, kinesthetic trance, and physical exhaustion in the audience. The kinesthetic empathy generated by these films is an invitation to feel the dance in our very flesh and, ultimately, an invitation to dance.

More unusual physical and kinesthetic sensations are also conveyed by spaces. For instance, in *Prélude à la Mer*, the kinesthetic qualities of the dance are enhanced, made especially legible by the flat, unobstructed location that increases the visual impact of each movement. The space induces here a "hyper-radiance" of the movement.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 6:  
*Prélude à la Mer* (2009,  
dir. Thierry de Mey).  
Courtesy of Thierry De  
Mey.

Moreover, certain sites give some of De Mey's films a sense of immensity and vertigo that could not be achieved in theatrical settings. In *Prélude à la Mer's* opening sequence, the seemingly endless tracking shot that crosses the arid site relinquished by the Aral Sea gives an impression of its immensity; this, the lack of landmarks, and the boundless, empty horizon provokes a feeling of disorientation and a sort of lateral, spatial vertigo. In *Dom Svobode's* spectacular six-minute final sequence shot by De Mey, the sheer, rocky cliff conveys a more literal sense of vertigo: the dancers have to defy the laws of gravity by moving along the cliff (with the help of a rigging system), and the camera's viewpoint, shooting from an opposite cliff, exacerbates the sense of

danger, making the spectator dizzy by turning upside down his points of reference, especially as it alternates long, medium, and medium close-up shots at a rapid pace. De Mey's films thus engage and affect their spectators physically, generating specific corporal states and kinesthetic sensations.

De Mey's films do not only convey kinesthetic sensations, however: they also suggest a plethora of tactile sensations, evoked through the rich interactions between the dancers and their spaces of action. For instance, *Prélude à la mer* suggests the roughness of the vast expanse of sand by capturing the crumbly, stony texture of the ground, crackled by the dryness. Similarly, the way the dancers—who represent two fauns—are solidly grounded on the floor as they walk on all-fours, roll-up, and rub their bodies on the sandy expanse, suggests, especially through the sounds produced by these contacts, the roughness and dryness of the site. Here, the sound of the steps evokes the texture of the ground; in *Rosas danst Rosas* the echo of the movements suggests the vastness of the building; in *Love Sonnets*, the loud noise of tiles breaking under the dancers' feet conveys the impression of the strength and energy of their movements; and so forth. Space takes on haptic qualities. Indeed, in these films, De Mey fully draws on the capacity of images and sounds to evoke the other senses, that of touch in particular, and hence they seem to invite the audience to adopt a “haptic gaze” or “haptic visuality,” which “encourage[s] a mode of visual perception akin to the sense of touch, where the eye ... becomes responsive to qualities usually made-out through skin contact.”<sup>20</sup>

The combination of all these sensorial elements creates atmospheric and embodied scenes and constitutes a poetic frame for an intensified sensuality: this “hypersensoriality” is an invitation for the audience to experience the film with all its senses. By exploring the screendance medium as a medium of the senses, i.e. as a privileged site for capturing and suggesting rich sensory qualities and complex corporeal states, De Mey's films move their audience physically and intellectually: they create embodied fictions and thoughts (that are both to be felt and deciphered) with bodies, their relationship to space, their sensations, and the very texture of the filmic images and sounds.

## Notes

1. I use this concept both as a reference to Deleuze and Guattari's notions of “deterritorialization” and “reterritorialization,” which account for any process that decontextualizes a set of given relations and actualizes them in other contexts, as well as to the geographical sense of the term (a displacement into other territories). If the stage is dance's traditional context or space (“territory”), video dance “deterritorializes” and “reterritorializes” dance in another (technical and aesthetic) context. For Deleuze

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and Guattari's concept of "deterritorialization," see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

2. Charlotte Imbault, "The Place to Be," *Mouvement* cahier spécial Thierry De Mey (2011): 31.

3. Thierry De Mey in an interview conducted by Dick Tomasovic, "Thierry De Mey," in *Filmer la Danse*, ed. Jacqueline Aubenas (Brussels: La Renaissance du livre, 2007), 230, my translation.

4. Ibid.

5. Unpublished interview with the author, March 2013, my translation.

6. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "flesh of the world" is deeply linked to his theory of the primacy of embodiment and encapsulates his idea that our perception does not merely filter in information from our surrounding environment. Rather, our body and its environment are inevitably engaged in dialectical, entangled, interconnected interactions. Our body is caught in the "tissue" or in the "flesh" of the world; but, conversely, the world (since we perceive it through our body and since our body can impact and reshape it) is made of the "fabric" (*étoffe*) of our body. That is to say that the body and that which it perceives (the world) cannot be disentangled from each other. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) and "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159-190.

7. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

8. Imbault, "The Place to Be," 28.

9. Tomasovic, "Thierry De Mey," 82.

10. This term was coined by Augusto Boal. It refers to the dual roles in certain theatrical works in which the audience is encouraged to participate both as spectator and actor, i.e. both observing and creating dramatic meaning and action.

11. "Barbe Bleue," Charleroi Danses, accessed September 8, 2013, <http://www.charleroi-dances.be/>.

12. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), 36.

13. Unpublished interview, March 2013.

14. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975). An obvious example of such "performative utterances" is found in the course of marriage ceremonies when, for instance, a woman says: "I take this man as

my lawfully wedded husband." Just by saying this, she does something: she performs the act of taking a man for husband.

15. This echoes the etymological significance of *choreography*, as the art of writing dance, and addresses the possibility for this ephemeral art and its fleeting movements to leave a trace in memory. Of course, this is also a *mise-en-abîme* of the operation of the film itself which constitutes a durable trace of the dance.

16. See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology and Primacy of Perception*.

17. These particular conceptions or "myths" of the body are explained and debunked in Michel Bernard's highly phenomenological theories of the body. See Michel Bernard, *Le Corps* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

18. For a discussion of the notion of *corporeality*, see Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* and Bernard, *Le Corps*.

19. Camille Guynemer, "Mouvement intérieur," *Mouvement* cahier spécial Thierry De Mey (2011): 5.

20. Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and The Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 66. For the notion of "haptic visuality," see also Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

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## Understanding The “Dance” In Radical Screendance

*Anna Heighway*

There was a time when screendance implied a dancing body. The “dance” may have taken the shape of formal vocabulary or a looser interpretation of movement as dance, but common to either approach would have been the sight of humans in motion. Certain recent screendance films, however, such as David Hinton’s *Birds* (2000), Becky Edmunds’s *This Place* (2008), and Constantini Georgescu’s *Spin* (2009) are void of human presence. Screendance artist Chirstinn Whyte observes the effects that these changes have had on current practice. She writes, “Networks and alliances are currently running ahead of established models, with initiatives springing up between the fault lines separating old from new, and reshaping the form at an accelerated pace.”<sup>1</sup> Yet whilst screendance making revels in the freedom of reconceptualization and reinvention, questions arise with regard to the experience of viewing, namely: what is the “dance” in screendance now that the human body has left center stage, and do audiences have the requisite concepts to identify and appreciate works that have outgrown traditional models? This paper investigates just what is required of viewers’ perceptions that might allow them access to screendance today. It also explores the field’s current relationship with dance through an analysis of those works that lie at screendance’s outermost edges, which here shall be referred to as “Radical Screendance.”

The tale of the genesis of screendance has long cemented our association of the field with the dancing human. This story usually embarks at the moment when the birth of cinema and dance coalesced in Thomas Edison’s *Annabelle the Dancer* (1894-95). Two divergent paths are then posited: one mainstream, exemplified by the likes of Busby Berkley’s 1930s Hollywood epics; and the other experimental, through American avant-gardists’ works such as *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (1945) by Maya Deren. The historical thread, either way, establishes a model of screendance in which an audience’s recognition and appreciation necessitates the presence of people unquestionably consumed within the act of dancing.

The moment of screendance’s move towards a broader definition is more difficult to pinpoint. However, it is clear that the conceptual changes that led to a remarking of boundaries originated at the epicenter of screendance itself—that is, through a perceptual shift from within a community of filmmakers, pedagogues, curators, and academics, which I will call “The Republic of Screendance.” The Republic’s refocusing of the dance in screendance away from the dancing figure and onto human motion provides an alternative history for screendance that begins with works such as Eadweard Muybridge’s famous *Motion Studies* (1879). In this looser screendance model, the filmmaker need not frame the pirouette, but could explore more natural, non-theatrical forms of human motion such as running, falling, or the throwing of a

punch. This new lineage facilitated an even more liberated screendance paradigm in which the "dance" in screendance need not be "dance" movement, nor human motion, but anything kinetically driven, full stop.

In 2010, Claudia Kappenberg and Douglas Rosenberg promoted these changes through the publication of their journal, *The International Journal of Screendance*. The introduction reads, "the journal supports scholarship intended to expand the parameters of what may currently be considered screendance."<sup>2</sup> The direction of this expansion is highlighted through Kappenberg's line of questioning: "Does screendance need to look like dance?"<sup>3</sup> Such questions have brought about a broad diversification in screendance practice. In addition, the screendance canon has experienced an expansion that borders on all-inclusion, as the reconceptualization of the dance in screendance has led to the re-classification of a whole host of vintage avant-garde films. The majority of these films do not portray the body in motion. The achievements of the early European avant-garde, such as Fernand Léger's, *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924), as well as that of Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967), Walter Ruttmann (1887-1941), Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Hans Richter (1888-1976), Man Ray (1890-1976), Eugene Deslaw (1898-1966), Lotte Reiniger (1899-1981) and those of the later wave; Len Lye (1901-1980), Shirley Clarke, (1919-1997) Ed Emshwiller (1925-1999), Chick Strand (1931-2009), Norman McLaren (1914-1987) and Stan Brakhage (1933-2003)—to skim only the surface—now all fit under the rubric of screendance.

Such a rapid remodeling of screendance is not without its issues. When David Hinton pitched his proposals to make a screendance work made entirely from footage of birds, there was resistance. He noted, "The main issue about the film, seems to be, is it a dance film?"<sup>4</sup> Filmmaker Becky Edmunds talks similarly of the field's reception of her observational style:

The work that I made, I feel very much related to dance ... but one of my problems was where to show my work because although it was clear to me it came from dance, when I was submitting to the festivals that are called screendance festivals, they weren't taking the work, because there wasn't in there, movement that they could perceive as dance.<sup>5</sup>

Four years ago the screendance community itself appears to have lacked the appropriate concepts to accept a human-free work as one of its own. Yet although screendance might now "get" itself, it is well worth probing these early responses to Radical work, as it foregrounds the nature of the issues that viewers might experience engaging with these works. Philosopher Graham McFee writes: "understanding, indeed, even seeing and hearing takes place under concepts ... what I see depends on the concepts I have."<sup>6</sup> To understand Radical Screendance, viewers must therefore apply to it those concepts specific to Radical Screendance, as to attend to it via anything else would mean experiencing it as something different.<sup>7</sup> The initial responses that Hinton and Edmund's work elicited typify this misapprehension, recalling similar moments in art history when audiences have not been ready to access

radical work, from the opening night of Nijinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) to the birth of Duchamp's "Readymades" or Yvonne Rainer's post-modern dance. With the evolution of a practice comes the abandonment of its old models, which, no longer representative of current ideology, become outmoded constraints. It follows that if audiences are to engage with Radical Screendance, they need to acquire concepts of understanding that are relevant to the field in its current form. The reason for the Republic's reticence with *Birds* is that they were, at that time, invested in an interpretation of dance as human movement. The key to unlocking concepts for understanding Radical Screendance, therefore, requires an exploration of our own understandings of the term "dance."

We need only ask ourselves whether dance would exist without people to understand our historic claim to it. Rosenberg writes, "Dance lives in the body."<sup>8</sup> McFee, likewise, refers to it as "a form of human behavior."<sup>9</sup> No matter what value is stressed, be it expressive, functional, or performative, human agency is intrinsic to this account of dance. For, as Sue Jones points out, "we cannot perform dance without our knowledge nor by mistake,"<sup>10</sup> as to dance is to partake in "intentional human action."<sup>11</sup> It follows for Carr therefore that "plastic ballerinas, automatons or trained apes cannot and should not be said to dance in the strict sense that machines may be said to produce or perform music," because none are able to justifiably partake in this account of dance. According to these views, those screendance works that omit the human body cannot feasibly be concerned with dance. Something is clearly amiss. Either the filmmakers are wrong to attach the label "screendance" to these works, as are the Republic of Screendance in their authentication of these acts, or else there must be an alternative means of approaching the "dance" within screendance. The key lies in Carr's use of the words, "in the strict sense," for it hints at the possibility of other, less rigid ways of understanding the term, which might better serve as concepts for understanding Radical Screendance.

Dance as a flexible concept is an idea that has been explored by several philosophers. Sue Jones believes the term to hold "many layers of meaning"<sup>12</sup> and Francis Sparshott likewise asserts that "there is no such thing as a *complete* knowledge of what dancing is"<sup>13</sup>; "there are innumerable understandings."<sup>14</sup> This interpretable account of dance can be understood through reference to how we approach the term "dance" linguistically. Sparshott explains that it is, in fact, "peoples' normal usage of words which determines their meaning."<sup>15</sup> Sparshott explains the diversity of dance accordingly: "The variations in our perspectives on what we recognise as our common practice of 'dance', or as versions of that practice, are negotiated by subtleties in our use of language."<sup>16</sup> He thus highlights the many perspectives of dance that we are capable of adopting, by nuancing the multifaceted relationship between the words that we use and the contexts to which they relate. Our language expresses a diverse attitude towards dance, therefore, through the direct, the synonymous, the associative, and the comparative, to name but a few. As Sparshott further writes, "Sometimes a word is the most appropriate name for a thing we are applying it to, sometime it is only one among many things it might be called, sometimes it is not

meant to be literally correct but to be recognisable as a metaphor."<sup>17</sup> This means that we "do use the word 'dance' in relation to the movements of swans, bees, butterflies and flowers"<sup>18</sup> just as we could to the movement of "plastic ballerinas, automatons or trained apes."<sup>19</sup> The disparity between Carr's arguments and this fact resides in our ability to apply the term not just to those things which are "unquestionably dance" or dance "in a strict sense," but also to "those that could be *called* dance."<sup>20</sup> It is with this latter, pliant view of dance that we should situate Radical Screendance. As Latika Young, former festival coordinator for Dance Films Association writes, "We adopt an expansive view of what constitutes 'dance', a breadth of scope that is then also reflected in our curating decisions. We often screen films ... that have absolutely no conventional dance in the traditional sense."<sup>21</sup> This ability to take a malleable approach towards dance is essential to this study, for it suggests that we might already have in our grasp some of the most vital concepts required for an understanding of Radical Screendance.

A further concept for an appreciation of Radical Screendance requires that viewers approach its works using mind over sight. As Amy Greenfield states, a screendance work "may not 'look like' a dance," but has the "meanings of dance."<sup>22</sup> The suggestion here is that we might not be able to identify the "dance" in screendance based on sight alone; rather, our concepts for appreciation might reside somewhere out of eyes' reach. In order to access Radical Screendance, an audience has to probe deeper than the surface of things, as this cerebrally-driven field de-emphasizes the "recognizable," visible "doing" of dance, in favor of its conceptual basis. This move towards the conceptual is being driven by a corresponding move towards a more research-led approach to screendance practices that enable filmmakers to engage in an on-going interrogation of the potentialities of dance and filmmaking relations. As a result, the ideas of these artists become processed through their work in ever-inventive ways. As Kappenberg and Rosenberg note, "we aim to reframe dance as a form of research that examines the inter-relationships of composition, choreographic language, and meanings of body, movement, space and time."<sup>23</sup> It is therefore common practice to find screendance makers referring to their work as "research." Becky Edmunds, for example, runs a "research-led screen dance practice, which seeks to deepen the screen application of dance practice,"<sup>24</sup> and Chirstinn Whyte speaks of her "microprojects" that "explore movement and time."<sup>25</sup> Foregrounding the idea of research similarly serves to de-emphasize the materiality of the end product by privileging the conceptual and processual aspects of film and dance making.

Yet the more that the "dance" in Radical Screendance recedes into the minds of its makers—even when armed with the concepts outlined above—the more identifying a screendance from non-screendance can be problematic. An additional concept for accessing Radical Screendance, therefore, must be the intentions of the creators themselves. As McFee asserts, "intention seems crucial to avoiding *misperception* of ... artwork."<sup>26</sup> There is, however, no question that intentionality in relation to screendance presents a number of issues, screendance's reclassification of avant-garde films being but one. As an area far beyond the reach of this paper, suffice

it to say that for the purposes of the forthcoming exploration of works, the best possible interpretation is gleaned through an analysis of the works of Radical Filmmakers and the discourse through which they reference them.

## Screendance's Understandings Of Dance: The Works

### *Dance As Movement*

The following exploration of work uses appropriate concepts, as outlined above, to uncover some of the dance perspectives currently exercised in Radical Screendance. We begin with the dominant experience of dance valued as movement. Dance writer J. Anderson writes, "Dance is not simply a visual art, it is kinaesthetic as well; it appeals to our inherent sense of motion."<sup>27</sup> We can relate this interest to what Lorrettann Devlin Gascard refers to as our "kinetic urge."<sup>28</sup> Dance perceived as movement becomes the ideal fix. Screendance, in turn, can be seen as a mining of the potentialities brought about through the inter-relationship between dance as motion and film-making.

A cinematic focus on motion can be traced back to the fine art of the avant-garde. Despite its immense range, one concern common to the early avant-garde painters was the desire to convey temporality. This aim eventually brought the focus onto motion, as movement, being a temporal phenomenon, necessitated the passing of time. This, in turn led to the development of novel pictorial styles and techniques. Fernand Léger speaks of "the introduction of mobile perspective, the sequential depiction of movement."<sup>29</sup> The advent of cinema created a bespoke medium for realizing these aims, for "film renders the world in motion ... movement, is the alpha and omega of the medium."<sup>30</sup> The result was a whole host of films which preceded screendance's use of the cinematic process to manipulate and initiate motion. In much of this canon, furthermore, we find the beginnings of Radical Screendance's use of non-human movement to nuance dance.

The techniques that early avant-garde filmmakers used to affect movement from non-human subjects varied. Some artists approached cinematography with a fine art sensibility, whilst others embraced the possibilities of film-making more exclusively through editing techniques. The former approach involved drawing or painting abstract forms, which when passed through a projector became animated illusions of motion. Many such films drew on an interchange of formal concepts between music, dance, and cinema, to create a "pure," "absolute film" of visual rhythms.<sup>31</sup> Walter Ruttmann's *Lichtspiel Opus I* (1921) for example, sets all manner of hand-painted blobs, points and swirls, morphing, dabbing, and colliding to the accompaniment of Max Butting. Len Lye, in his films, *Colour Box* (1935) for the General Post Office and *Colour Flight* (1937) for Imperial Airways, used camera-less techniques, scratching and stenciling forms directly onto film stock. The final effect was a similar dance of colorful shapes, which pulsed to the popular big band music of the era. An analogous exploration of music, dance, and cinema was portrayed by Hans Richter, Oskar Fischinger, Viking Eggeling, and Norman McLaren, enjoying an especially

memorable commercial success through Fischinger's "Toccata & Fugue in D Minor" in Disney's 1940 film, *Fantasia*.

Fernand Léger and René Clair, on the other hand, conveyed the mechanical rhythms of modern life through editing. Léger emphasized the purity of his intentions in describing his masterpiece, *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) thus: "No scenario. The interactions of rhythmic images that is all."<sup>32</sup> René Clair in 1923 wrote more broadly of the lure of cinematic motion: "The public loves movement ... the action graded by the disposition of images."<sup>33</sup> Qualifying "movement," he further commented about *Ballet Mécanique*, "I do not say movement registered by the image itself, but the movement of images one in relation to another."<sup>34</sup> This effect of movement was achieved in both films through the use of montage editing. Karen Pearlman describes this process as "the assembling of images and sounds into relations that generate rhythms, ideas and experiences of a whole."<sup>35</sup> The audience comes to experience motion through montage, not just through the movement of captured images, but additionally through the carefully orchestrated structuring of individual shots in the edit. The temporal and spatial inter-relationships that pass before audiences' eyes create rhythms and dynamics, which are subsequently experienced as movement. Although there is a human presence in both of these films, objects are also set moving about the frame through jump cuts. That these filmmakers played on the association between movement and dance is obvious from *Ballet Mécanique's* title, whereas Clair's film, *Entr'acte*, (1924) becomes relevant through its context, as it was played in the intermission of Francis Picabia's ballet, *Relâche* (1924).

Although it is *Ballet Mécanique* that Christopher Green refers to as an "experiment in the controlled creation of movement,"<sup>36</sup> this statement encompasses the ethos of the entire Screendance practice. The field's cementation of avant-garde filmmaking practices with its own is a shrewd move as it provides screendance with even greater ties to film art. In addition, it provides the cinematic origins of the field's continued exploration of dance, not necessarily through the body, but absolutely through the kinetic.

### *Metaphor*

Another means through which screendance corresponds with the non-human via dance is through the use of metaphor and analogy. Scholars Lisanne van Weeldon et al. explain how metaphors work linguistically. They write: "one object, the target is compared to and understood in terms of another object, the source ... perceptual similarity between two objects enhances a conceptual link between the two."<sup>37</sup> Our ability to perceive dance in many Radical Screendance works functions similarly, as in the absence of "recognizable" dance content, the "conceptual links" that must be made in order that we perceive dance nonetheless become consciously embedded into the work by the filmmaker. The intentionality of filmmakers in devising and articulating metaphors, as well as our act of deciphering them, is central to an audience's understanding of dance's significance within these works.

Whereas some works interweave an element of metaphor into the larger complex of the work, *Spin!* (2009) by Constanti Georgescu serves more as a grand performance of metaphor, as well as a metaphor for performance, in which the “target” is spinning tops and the “source” is ballet. Georgescu is an interdisciplinary artist who specializes in choreography, performance, and video art. *Spin!* is a five minute excerpt, taken from a larger “video-dance performance” entitled *Remake*, premiered at Theatre Bremen in 2008. What began as a “three hour spinning top jam-session”<sup>38</sup> in performance ends up the content of a film, in which spinning tops triumph in a “ballet-like” spectacle, to the music of Beethoven.

All aspects of the mise-en-scène in *Spin!* serve to produce metaphorical links. The setting, a sea of pristine white, like a world of icing sugar, is home to a corps de spinning tops, each and every one as vibrantly red as Moira Shearer’s shoes. The film is instantly reminiscent of a grandiose ballet, fading up through a moment of white, like the opening of curtains; the establishing moments make full use of the dynamics of the music to mark the introduction of a single defocused top, which spins in flutters, center frame. The metaphorical performance thus begins. The idea of a show becomes further enhanced through the cinematic process in several ways. Georgescu uses a conventional style of shooting and editing that emphasizes the movement inherent to the objects themselves, through fixed frames and longer shot durations. The tops are presented from few angles: head on, or through an oblique top shot. This conventionality forges associations between the generic space and that of a performance space, as shooting from a fixed fourth wall mirrors the set-up not just of traditional theatrical event coverage, but also the audience’s position within a proscenium arch theatre. Within this visual confinement, however, Georgescu makes a clever selection of shots that encourage the audience to make very specific connections. Those shots, which feature a single top or inflect one amongst others, conjure the hierarchical ranks of the ballet company, with the most prominent object being that which spins most rigorously, evoking the soloist. This impression takes on an air of parody, as a sudden whirl of entrances bumps the centralized top out of the limelight. Once the metaphorical links have been sewn, we appear to read further similarities into events automatically, elaborating our interpretation so that the nib of the tops become pointe shoes, the revolutions “fouette” turns, and the curve of the spinning top the ballerina’s tutu. We relish too, the moments of harmony, when two tops spin in sync as if performing a *pas de deux*.

The edit similarly serves to feed the trope. The cuts are clean, working to provide fresh moments as well as to create a synchronicity between the visuals and the score. Although the film is in fact just a basic montage, the uncompromising drive of Beethoven’s score functions as the master structure of the work, to which the visuals are matched in post-production. We consequently perceive the impression of a tightly choreographed performance through what is essentially the unpredictable movement of spinning tops. This choice of dramatic score, beyond the histrionics it adds, works to further cement theatrical connotations. When all these facets are put to work, we experience a full blown ballet-like experience through childhood toys.

A work like *Spin!* does not ask that we abandon our conventional notions of dance, but rather that we use these as a reference point from which to engage our imaginative understandings of the concept. It is this perceptual and conceptual inter-relating that conjures such a strong impression of the flesh of the dancer through the spectacle of wood and lacquer. Films of this nature offer us the chance to explore the prolific life of dance through the pliancy of our perception. As Jones writes, "anthropomorphism, metaphor and analogy can provide valuable ways of achieving understanding of what might be meant by this term 'dance' into its variety."<sup>39</sup>

### *Choreography*

One of the more obtuse relationships between dance and screendance derives from an approach to filmmaking that is based on affinities perceived between the processes of making a film and making a dance. Removed from the confines of the dancing body, choreography becomes a transportable process that "anyone can access."<sup>40</sup> In the same way then that we might carry out a queer analysis to engage with a film or text from a particular perspective, we might approach filmmaking through the experiential framework of choreography. The potential that this type of dance and filmmaking connection can offer to screendance artists is vast, as a choreographic framework can be employed at any stage of the filmmaking process. In her book *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image*, Erin Brannigan calls the result a "filmic performance" in which "the choreographic quality of the dancefilm can be considered in relation to both the profilmic and filmic elements."<sup>41</sup> The conceit, as Laleen Jayamanne further articulates, reads as follows: "In film the lighting, editing, camera distance, and movement are equally potent 'performers.'"<sup>42</sup> In theory this means that any aspects of a film's process can be choreographed by its maker. In practice, the approach that artists make will largely be influenced by their own experience of dance-making and their conceptions about how it might inform the filmmaking process. It is not surprising, then, that screendance works that take such an approach are also referred to as "choreocinema" or "cinechoreographies."

This choreographic methodology, then, is the filmmakers' conceptual transposition of pre-existing filmic processes, in which "the cinematic process" becomes "written through by a variety of choreographic operations."<sup>43</sup> This approach can therefore remain difficult to discern from, say, a film that features movement, which has not applied such a focus. For now this conceptual approach means that anything could potentially be interpreted as being screendance, highlighting a need for further studies that might explore any tangible results of screendance's use of a choreographic approach to filmmaking. The differences are certainly subtly qualitative, sometimes so much so that their effect is barely perceptible in the end product. For this reason, the following analysis draws heavily on the words of the filmmakers, as their language reveals a lot about the ways in which they perceive choreography to relate to their filmmaking.

The kind of “filmic performance” that British filmmaker David Hinton affects with *Birds* (2000) comes from adopting a choreographic approach to editing. This is possible due to similarities between the formal construction of dance and film. Hinton posits:

On a very fundamental level, making a film and making a dance are a very similar kind of activity; they’re both about giving structure to action. If you think of film as just a formal language ... you can look at any film as a dance film. All films take images of action and try to put these images together in a rhythmic and expressive way. In this sense film and dance work along the same lines.<sup>44</sup>

As a non-dancer/filmmaker, Hinton represents a growing number of filmmakers lured to screendance by its “open territory.”<sup>45</sup> Hinton speaks of a “richness ... where you can still try all these things; it hasn’t in anyway become formulaic.”<sup>46</sup> As a filmmaker without any experiential, embodied knowledge of dance, his take on both dance and choreography assumes the structural air of one who specializes in the assemblage of images. He subsequently states:

Film editing gives you everything that a choreographer wants, the ability to select any movement that you want on the face of the earth and give shape to it in any way that you want, as soon as you have movement in the cutting room, it’s completely under your control, you can decide exactly where you want that movement to begin, where you want it to end.<sup>47</sup>

According to one of Dance Films Association’s directors, Marta Renzi, Hinton advocates three practical approaches to creating screendance. Either “Begin with a previously choreographed dance,” “create the ‘structure of action’ simultaneously in dance and film,” or else “‘Harvest’ movement, creating the structure of action in the editing room.”<sup>48</sup> *Birds* conforms to the latter practice, as “All of the language that is being used is film language.”<sup>49</sup> The result is that the film relies on a “purely cinematic means to make a dance”<sup>50</sup> and the more you watch, the more it comes becomes one.

Hinton created *Birds* using montage editing. This style of composition enables him to structure random archive images of birds into a syntactically coherent dance of visual and audio rhythms. If we view choreography as “the art of manipulating movement: phrasing its time, space, and energy into affective forms and structures,”<sup>51</sup> the montage functions similarly, crafting individual shots of moving birds together, like steps, to form a series of relations that are punctuated across time and space into phrases and that extend to comprise the larger choreographic structure. Separate images are further cut together using repetition and juxtaposition to form intricate rhythmic patterns of movements, which mirror the construction of motif and phrasing in dance. For example, in the opening section, set in a forest, shots that accentuate side to side motions are choreographed intermittently with those of birds moving downwards into frame or articulating circular pathways with their wings. These

patterned phrases are then often recycled, adding layers of rhythmic complexity to the overall structural design.

Hinton also manufactures a continuity of movement by joining what are in fact disparate images, captured at different places and times, into an illusion of coherence. "I'm cutting it so that the movement is continuous; it feels like there's one movement, so you have a kind of continuity, but continuity with transformation at the same time."<sup>52</sup> A shot of two birds in chase pans to contain them as they skim swiftly right to left across the water. This is then cut with a shot of a different bird, also travelling right to left in relation to the frame, also flying low over water, then three birds running right to left on the water itself. If you look at the backgrounds of these shots, their disconnection becomes apparent; they have been captured at different locations and at different times. Yet what you more readily perceive is a fluid spatial and temporal progression of motion across a horizontal pathway that mirrors the processes of dance construction, whose phrases, too, articulate a continuity of motion through moments of change. This is one of Hinton's achievements: that the movement of birds becomes comprehensible through precisely those self-same concepts that we use to approach even the most "intentional action" of a dancer. And this is precisely the kind of connection that you are meant to make: "The point to me, is that every principle that is applied to birds in this film, could be applied to dancers."<sup>53</sup>

Yet the film works not only on a formal and metaphorical level, but on a deeper philosophical plane also. Hinton's choice of ornithological content initiates poignant anthropomorphic contemplation. The beauty of the movement within each individual shot, as well as the satisfying sense of fluid unity, ultimately undermines the centrality of man's place within dance. The hugely ornate textures created by the waves of birds flying in formation, swelling and retracting in a paradox of chaotic order, not only degrades our own attempts at the orchestration of movement, but highlights the artificial nature of human practices such as choreography, performance, and filmmaking. Hinton comments, "one of the things that these birds represented for me, is totally authentic movement, because the bird does not know that it's putting on a performance." The film leads us to a conclusion that advocates of dance as "human intentional action" would find sobering. For even should we wish to mimic the dance-like movements of these birds, as Hinton suggests we *could*, in reality our "intentional" dance could never touch the levels of sophistication, precision, or indeed beauty, that the instinctive non-dance movements of birds achieves without effort. And yet there is a clever irony that lies beneath the ponderings that Hinton's choreographic approach to filmmaking sets up. For despite the formidably instinctual movement that fill each and every frame in *Birds*, these creatures only ever set flight as a direct consequence of the conscious, man-made processes of filmmaking.

### *A Somatic Approach To Film-Making*

Another way in which screendance relates to dance is through a somatic approach to the making of a film. Somatic, here, does not mean privileging the body at

the expense of thought, but rather an approach to filmmaking that initiates at the body. Brannigan calls this a “dancerly” approach,<sup>54</sup> through which the “physical thinking,”<sup>55</sup> as well as the corporeal experience of dance and choreography, becomes transferred onto the process of filmmaking in much the same way that a seasoned musician might approach it through the ears. We might best acquire an understanding of the nature of somatic perception through the words of Claudia Kappenberg. She describes the approach as “coming from the inner to the outer ... Choreography not as working with bodies, it is the body, an inner-attitude.”<sup>56</sup> Chirstinn Whyte describes this corporeally-centered way of experiencing the world, as having “dance-informed eyes,”<sup>57</sup> which, in terms of screendance making, means making decisions as a filmmaker through the internal experience of dance and choreography.

After her initial role as a dancer alongside the likes of Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, and Anna Sokolow, Shirely Clarke turned to filmmaking in 1953.<sup>58</sup> Despite her status as a prolific contributor to the American underground film scene, through her award winning feature length documentaries and dance films, the “dancerly” stamp of her aesthetic is interpreted throughout her oeuvre. Henry Breitrose, writing for *Film Quarterly* in 1960, thus wrote, “Clarke was originally a dancer. Before making films she took the precaution of learning a great deal about film technique; but she remains an instinctual filmmaker, whose feeling for movement generally seems to have carried over into her feeling for the camera.”<sup>59</sup>

Clarke’s early screendance work, *Bridges-Go-Round* (1958), replaces the dancing body with the bridges of New York City. What makes this work especially pioneering is Clarke’s early reference to its status as a screendance work, despite its lack of bodies. According to Clarke, the film, “simply establishes the fact that you can make a dance film without dancers.”<sup>60</sup> The film was created as “little bits of Americana,”<sup>61</sup> for exhibition at the United States Pavillion, as a part of the 1958 Brussels World Fair. Although like Hinton, Clarke spoke of “the choreography of editing and the choreography of space/time,” her dance perspective results in a further embodied approach to the orchestration of shots and the movement of the camera. She comments, “By choreographing the camera itself, you can add a whole new level of dance.”<sup>62</sup> She thus perceived the timing, quality, and spatial progression of camera movement as choreographic tools.

You can sense her dancerly approach to her subject, through the careful orchestration of fluid pans, tilts and zooms that circle and sweep about these giant structures with an effortless lyricism. The camera (and Clarke’s body behind it) thus becomes one of the central characters in Clarke’s filmic performance, for although they cannot be seen, there is a profound sense of their tangible presence throughout. A choreographic approach is further applied throughout the edit, through which Clarke further composes her moving images into visual rhythms. The shots are superimposed into delicate layers that ellipse and elide in smooth counter directions, so that the monuments of New York City seem to dance with one another. Changing color tints add further rhythmic punctuation, adding to this kaleidoscopic waltz comprised of immovable metal. As Henry Breitrose noted, “the bridges become plastic materials for

a highly abstract subjective study in structures and movements ... the great steel girders, the taut cables, the towers and railings and roadways and abutments seem almost to dance."<sup>63</sup>

Becky Edmunds description of *This Place* (2008) as "A rhythmic and patterned document of place"<sup>64</sup> would benefit *Bridges* well. The work is the manifestation of Edmunds's interest in work that "might not have a theatrical dancing body in the shot, but which is very much influenced by dance and dance practice."<sup>65</sup> Chirstinn Whyte comments, "Becky Edmunds sidesteps the issue of 'dancer-as-subject' by using aspects of environment as choreographic raw material."<sup>66</sup> Shot at PACT Zollverein, a disused colliery converted into a performing arts school in Germany, the film too deals in brick and metal. Edmunds also echoes Clarke's choreographic approach to the camera. She states: "I got very interested in what is it that I'm choreographing when I'm choreographing. Am I choreographing a body in the frame, or am I choreographing the space around the body, or am I choreographing the camera itself?"<sup>67</sup> Although *Bridges* and *This Place* correlate, it is Edmunds' even deeper conceptual connection of both choreography and embodiment within her practice that, she believes, makes her work "absolutely about choreography."<sup>68</sup>

Edmunds struggles to verbally explicate this correspondence high-lighting, once again, the difficulty an audience might have appreciating such works. If we consider the function of choreography within her filmmaking process, we understand why.

I can use it (choreography) as a way of looking at something ... and if I use my definition of choreography to look at something, then it will enable me to notice certain things about it ... I will obviously notice movement, but I will also notice rhythm and pattern ... and also maybe I will then notice the relation of my own body to the thing I'm looking at ... just by looking at it with the notion of choreography ... often if I look at something and I really don't understand it, I'll look at it as a piece of choreography to see if it helps bring something out.<sup>69</sup>

Adopting a choreographic approach to filmmaking for Edmunds serves not just as means of perceiving the operations of film-making, but as a way of understanding the world. She describes it as though it were a pair of glasses that can be taken on and off, adding clarity when needed or discarded when a different vision is required. The choreographic is thus used as mode of perception, which Edmunds adopts within her larger research in embodied "looking." She states, "I found myself in an extraordinary place ... and I was practising looking."<sup>70</sup> This statement serves as the ideal synopsis for *This Place*, a work that reveals its alien environment from a whole host of perspectives.

Like Whyte, the eyes form part of Edmunds embodied approach to filmmaking. She thus states, "It is a physical practice, and that physicality very much includes the eyes and the behaviour of the eyes, and practice in looking and being able to recognise something."<sup>71</sup> This sense of physical seeing is eerily palpable in *This Place*, through its probing, tentacle-like use of camera and twitching images that stutter like

blinking eyes. Although there is no body in sight, we sense the presence of the “looker.” Edmunds also considers the interrogation of her bodily positioning within an environment as forming part of her choreographic method, enabling her to further navigate her way through the filmmaking process, affecting the choices she makes and providing fresh perspectives. She asks, “If I put my body in a big space would something change: could I find my way to a wide shot, and to the body in wide shot?”<sup>72</sup>

Every aspect of *This Place* serves as an opportunity for Edmunds to reveal a new aspect of her embodied sight. Whereas *Bridges* used the physicality of the moving camera and the layering and pacing of images to convey harmony, *This Place* disorients. Over the opening glimpses of industrial architecture that wax and wane, for example, we hear the sounds of a forest. The shots also de-familiarize through obtuse angles and reflections, confusing up from down, right from left and real from unreal. The strong sense of unfamiliarity and curiosity within the space comes in part from Edmunds’ insistence that the process be as un-premeditated as possible, so that her reactions to the places she films are somehow “real” and in-the-moment. The effect is one of profound interrogation and exploration not so dissimilar to the introspective mind-body improvisation of William Forsythe. The film serves as an affective manifestation of Edmund’s refusal to assume a fixed point of knowledge through a multitude of fragmented perspectives that seem to disallow that we ever know for certain where we are and what it is that we see before us. What we experience, then, is a journey built out of a journey: an exploration of the unknown, manufactured through the embodied responses of a filmmaker to her environment. Although the film’s relevance to choreography functions more to enable the artistic process of its maker than as a discernable feature of the work in this instance, the categorization of this work as screendance emphasizes the complex relationships that dance can manifest within current practice.

The evidence suggests that audiences do possess much of the requisite cognitive stock to access Radical Screendance works but that the implications that some of the more esoteric choreographic approaches to screendance making have on identification and intentionality might benefit from further enquiry. A vital part of audience’s appreciation of Radical Screendance lies in accepting its rejection of dance in any “strict sense” in favor of a wealth of possible meanings. It is as such that we are able to frame the links between the non-human and dance within its practice. Furthermore, screendance’s move away from a traditional understanding of dance does not mean that it becomes divorced from an audience’s understandings of the term. Rather, the clue for unlocking screendance lies, ironically, in engaging with our inherently multifaceted relationship with dance, one which is capable of embracing the concept as metaphor, process, attitude, and construct. The role of this cutting-edge visual practice is thereby significant, as the understanding and indeed construction of its works require that we question, stretch, and ultimately enjoy confronting the rigidity of our ideas about what dance and film-making can be.

Radical Screendance is not necessarily instantly identifiable, nor is its relation to dance always easy to decipher, but that's precisely the point.

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## Screen Position and Proprioception

*Marc Boucher*

My contribution to critical and artistic dialogues within the intersecting fields of dance and screen-based images consists in examining the role of peripheral vision in the perception of dance in artistic contexts where projections are used. There is, as I will point out, sufficient evidence from phenomenological and neuro-physiological accounts to conclude that motion perception is affected by peripheral visual perceptions. Consequently, it is maintained that the spectator's experience of dance, especially when screens are involved, depends to some degree on peripheral visual perception, which in turn contributes to proprioception. In the installations that I will discuss here, the viewer's proprioception, or ability to sense his or her body's position, motion, and equilibrium, is addressed according to the way the screens are placed in relation to him or her. As with staged dances where projections are used, we will concern ourselves with the relationship of the dancer to the screen as seen from the seated viewer's perspective. Projection screen installations combining live dance performance will also be looked into. My interpretation of "screendance" therefore does not refer to dance film or dance video. Instead, I investigate the perceptual contexts where the screen can be said to be part of the scenography and, likewise, the projection part of the choreography. With digital multimedia, the distinction between scenography and choreography can be blurry, and many artists aim precisely to meld them together. What constitutes a screen now encompasses much more than the standard white flat rectangle.

The question of image content is certainly not irrelevant here, but it is not my main concern. What is of prime importance in my analysis is the dynamic value of the images that fall on the viewer's retina: how the visual field is filled and how that affects the viewer's proprioception. The question I wish to address most precisely is how peripheral visual perception informs proprioception in such a way that it allows the spectator to feel movements that are not of his or her making *as if* they were his or hers.<sup>1</sup>

Before we go any further, a primary distinction must be made between two different yet complementary vision systems, central vision and peripheral vision. Although one learns in high school about the "rods" and the "cones"—the latter's sensitivity to form and color, and the former's to contrast and movement—little mention is ever made of them again. Were it not for the needs of flight simulators, the research into peripheral vision would certainly not be as rich as it is now.<sup>2</sup> What has emerged from such research is deeper knowledge concerning the intimate connection between vision and balance. The Central Nervous System (CNS) relies on visual cues from the environment in order for us to not only locate ourselves in it, but to move in it. The CNS has no direct access to the world; it therefore must make

internal models and hypotheses about it, and these “representations” are then verified through our ability to perform diverse tasks: standing without falling over, walking across the room without tripping over this or crashing into that. In certain contexts, it is difficult for the CNS to create an effective internal model because of conflicting information from the senses.<sup>3</sup> But the body, so to speak, has to learn how to cope with conflicting sensory information. In other words, top-down cognitive factors must eventually override the hard-wired response mechanisms. Cars, escalators, elevators, boats, trains, midway rides, and IMAX theaters can provide puzzling sensory information to the CNS: we see movement that we do not feel, or we feel movement that we do not see. Screen projections can make us feel as if they were our own movements that are not.

With this in mind, in the first two sections of my article, I will explain how proprioception and vision are interrelated in such a way as to give rise to such paradoxical sensations of movement. The illusory feeling of movement, that is to say when there is no actual physical engagement on the part of the perceiver to account for it (i.e.vection), will be discussed, as it provides an insight into the workings of sensory perception that differ from the mundane understanding of the senses. Having explored the relationship of vision to kinesthesia, I shall, in the third and fourth sections, present various screen based installation and scenographies that show how artists arrange the different media scores so that they work together towards immersion.

## Proprioception

In his famous and influential sensory system classification, Charles Sherrington defined proprioception in dialectical relation to exteroception and interoception.<sup>4</sup> In nineteenth-century epistemology, the distinction between inside and outside, self and world, was deemed absolute and self evident, which is not so much the case today. Yet such a naïve conception is apparently as inescapable as the one according to which we have five distinct senses. When there is a lack of deeper insight, including scientific knowledge, as to how the senses are interrelated, “common sense” understanding prevails insofar as it is deemed useful in everyday contexts. Proprioception literally means perception of self, of one’s own body. It has to do with the muscular sensations associated with body and limb position and motion, and sense of balance: in other words, weight, motility (the variations of relative position of limbs and body segments to one another), mobility, and equilibrium. Proprioception results from the integrated inputs of various types of receptor cells in muscles, tendons, joints and inner ear; these provide information of a mechanical nature, that is to say in terms of vibration, elongation, tension, variation of position, and linear and angular acceleration as perceived by various specialized receptor cells in the corresponding tissues.

The body not only perceives itself as being in space, but also as moving in it, primarily through its constant struggle with gravity. Kinesthesia, or sense of

movement, refers specifically to the sensations that accompany our movements as we generate them, and is usually defined as a subset of proprioception. In Sherrington's system, exteroception refers to the five canonical senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) and literally means perception of exterior objects. This commonsensical view is not unproblematic—especially with touch, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others have pointed out. In the act of taking one hand in the other, we are at once touched and touching, receptive and active, object and object. Touch does not merely “passively” register “external” objects. It also has a haptic component: grabbing and holding objects involves complex feedback mechanisms, in which action and perception are intimately woven together. Feedback mechanisms are also at the heart of the postural control system, which is now generally considered part of proprioception. We have seen that proprioception, by including postural control, effectively ends up relying on senses defined as exteroceptive (vision and balance).<sup>5</sup>

Visual cues are highly important in affording the possibility of locating oneself in space and moving in it. Especially important are cues from peripheral vision, to the extent that, for example, screen position matters significantly in regard to a viewer's experience. Suffice it to say, for now, that a deficient peripheral vision can dramatically affect balance in seeing subjects. Blind persons have developed a much keener ability to rely on the vestibular apparatus (inner ear) and pressure sensitive plantar receptors in the foot, and hearing (echolocation) in their interactions with the environment.<sup>6</sup> In postural control, sensorimotor activity involves the adjusting of motor commands to sensory perceptions through feedback loops in the cerebral cortex; the existence of multiple loops between various cerebral centers is suspected.<sup>7</sup> Feedback is at play in motility, perception, and postural control. The latter allows us to position ourselves, move, and act in the physical world according to internal models the brain elaborates, and through which it compares its predictions with reality.<sup>8</sup> Feedback loops allow the brain to work through its internal modeling of motor space, linking exteroception, proprioception, and sensorimotor activity in the process. Proprioception can also be defined as the perception of the body itself as spatial, how it occupies space and moves in it. Thinking of proprioception as one of the sense modalities is problematic, especially since proprioception is arguably the very condition of possibility of sensory perception. In other words, proprioception is the very ground to sensory perception as it provides the *a priori* “sense of self” or of embodiment.<sup>9</sup>

### **The relationship of vision to kinesthesia**

We have seen that vision is highly important to proprioception, defined as including postural control and kinesthesia, and recalled the distinction between central and peripheral vision. Peripheral vision is intimately tied to proprioception as it provides visual cues for the CNS in order to establish our position in space and control our movements and posture in it. Though the distinction between proprioception and kinesthesia may seem a little abstract, however, we intuitively know that feeling our body as our own and feeling ourselves in motion are different sensations. Also called

“sense of movement,” kinesthesia results from the variations in tension of muscles and tendons, and changes of angles of articulations as perceived by specialized receptors in those tissues. Accordingly, kinesthesia includes sensations obtained by variations in body and limb positions, relative to one another and relative to exterior space. Kinesthesia relies on vision in ways that are beyond our awareness, and without peripheral vision input, equilibrium becomes difficult to maintain. We can, however, experience kinesthesia in darkness, or in silence, or even both—in other words, either with or without the contribution of vision or audition.

In the context of film viewing in a cinema theater, moving images produce kinesthetic sensations in viewers as they would in any given situation where our movements result in varying sequences of moving images impressed on our retinas. Through the interplay of bottom-up and top-down processes,<sup>10</sup> the CNS attributes the cause for the movement of the images as being ours or not ours. Visual impressions play an important role in the complex process of integration of spatial and bodily perceptions. We perceive through the corner of our eyes an astounding quantity and variety of moving visual patterns and objects, either walking down a busy street, or driving through it in a car. Some of our responses are automatic, while others depend on our degree of attention. In any case, the CNS’ internal modeling of the situation must conciliate kinesthetic and visual sensory information. The perception of the relative movements of objects surrounding us must be coherent with our own body perception. The CNS processes retinal input, which it compares with other sensory input.

“Optical flow” is also a very important, if not the most important component of peripheral vision input. It has to do with how visual patterns glide across the retina, according to the movement of the perceived object, and to our own movement relative to the perceived object. Both movements (ours and the object’s) are involved when we move towards something that is also moving towards us, or away from us, or in a different direction. Theorized in the 1940s by American psychologist J.J. Gibson, optical flow provides information that helps us determine the direction we are moving based on where we are looking. It can be easily understood as motion blur as illustrated in a still image; it is photography’s way of showing movement direction and speed. A still image from a camera following a moving subject can therefore provide two sets of flow information. Moving vehicles can provide puzzling sensory information to the CNS: we see movement that we do not feel, or we feel movement that we do not see. Moving images, especially screen projections, can make us feel as if they were our own movements that are not. The visual and vestibular systems can interact in such a way as to cause the visually induced illusion of self-motion, or visual “vection.” It is not a visual but a proprioceptive illusion, and it can be influenced by cognitive factors, that is to say top-down mechanisms, or learned behavior.

The nearly uniform motion of a large part of the visual field causes the subjects to feel that the motion relative to it is their own; therefore, vection occurs. Vection, which was first experimentally studied by Ernst Mach in 1875, is still not fully understood;<sup>11</sup> watching a high-speed chase from the driver’s perspective in a film,

however, can provide a good empirical example of the phenomenon ofvection, which heightens the impression of being in the driver's seat. It provides the feeling of "being there," in other words of "presence" defined as the perceptual illusion of non-mediation.<sup>12</sup> Most of us have experiencedvection in real life contexts, perhaps when suddenly realizing that it's not the train that we are in that is departing, but the one on the next track. Another instance would be while we are stopped at a traffic light. In this case we may feel as if moving backward if the car in the next lane starts off first. In these situations, we are made to feel "as if" we are moving on the basis of the CNS' interpretation of the visual cues and in response to contradictory sensory information. Since vision is a dominant sense, the CNS assumes that the perceived movement, with its optical flow pattern, results from the subject's motion despite the fact that there is none. Vection can, however, cause discomfort to some individuals, akin to motion sickness, whether in a flight simulator, a Cinerama theatre, an IMAX theatre, or a virtual reality simulation.

When information from the visual and equilibrium systems concur, as they usually do, the optic flow impressed on the retina agrees with input from the vestibular system. The latter acts as the body's plumb line and gyroscope, registering changes in position in relation to the gravitational field as well as in acceleration. When we walk down the street, we do not perceive lampposts and buildings as whirling around, but ourselves as moving about them. This follows the rule that information from exteroceptive sense modalities "comes into a complex intermodal relationship with somatic proprioception to form a coordinated and intermodal sensory feedback."<sup>13</sup> From hereon, I will investigate the viewer's relationship to screens depending on whether his or her perspective follows the traditional frontal model, or is based on more recent installation forms, where one is free to move about the screens variously deployed.

### Screens on stage

Dancing on screen takes us back to the very beginning of cinema, in 1895, with *Annabelle Serpentine Dance* performed for the camera by one of the many imitators of Loïe Fuller's style. Dancing *with* screens takes us to at least July 23, 1965, with Cunningham's *Variation V*. This intermedia extravaganza included various film projections by Stan VanDerBeeke and video projections by Nam June Paik on four screens, and a background cyclorama. With *Variation V*, we can start thinking about the idea of scenography of screens, and reflect on how projected moving images relate spatially and dynamically to the performers and viewers. Interestingly, *Variation V* was closely followed, on December 2<sup>nd</sup> of the same year, by *Formes disponibles*, choreographed by Canadian modern dance pioneer Françoise Riopelle, and aired on Radio-Canada. It featured dancers performing in front of two movie screens, and a cyclorama at the very back. Those screens were laid out at angles in the television studio space, and the projected moving images gave different perspectives on the dance.

Since 1965, screens have become ubiquitous along with new media technologies, while dance became ever more diverse and sophisticated. Intermedia is practically mainstream nowadays, while Fluxus, sadly, has not made substantial inroads into shaping artistic sensibility of audiences, in my opinion. Proprioceptive properties of moving images in performance contexts need to be addressed by the artistic directors of projects that involve not only dance and projections, but also dance and interactive technologies, projection mapping and computer vision.

Thanks to the use of video projectors, which has become common in theaters in the last two decades, the visual background of the stage can easily be provided with endless dynamic properties. Dance and film projections have been used in combination in the past, but infrequently so. Portable video recorders and digital video editing rapidly made interdisciplinary ventures combining dance and moving image projections quite accessible. The latter have at times overshadowed the dance, but nonetheless made possible new forms of multimedia dance. With projection mapping, a technique that makes it possible to use three dimensional objects as projection screens, the dancer can be transformed into a screen on which visual patterns and virtual costumes can be displayed. Klaus Obermaier, working in collaboration with dancer and choreographer Chris Haring on a project called D.A.V.E., used projection mapping with fantastic results at the turn of the millennium.

What's novel about D.A.V.E. is the concentration of the projections on the body in motion while avoiding conventional spatial and screen projections. You don't think about the video anymore; it just belongs to the body. It's a part of the body, or rather the performer is part of the video. The boundaries grow indistinct and are deactivated. Video projection, physical presence and acoustic environment thus blend into a symbiosis and create their own new reality: D.A.V.E. – digital amplified video engine.<sup>14</sup>

Along with sophisticated and powerful projectors came new image making techniques, which allowed not only interactive moving images to be generated in real time, but to direct them precisely at moving performers. Dancers become display surfaces that are not only moving through space but are constantly changing their shape. Obermaier combined frontal and background projections in his interactive dance and media performance titled *Apparition* (2004). The outline of the dancers was analyzed by a motion tracking system, the technique of projection mapping allowing projections to be targeted exactly on the bodies. These moving images are generated in real time to fit within the silhouette of the dancer, the motile area whose outline is detected by the tracking system. This frees the dancer from the constraints of being in the exact spot and in the precise shape which earlier methods of projection mapping imposed, as used in D.A.V.E. and in other contexts since the 1960s. As Obermaier writes on his website :

...the real-time system for generating visuals developed for APPARITION is built on top of computational processes that model and

simulate real-world physics. The inherent kinetic properties of these simulations inspired our view that the overall interactive system is much more than simply an extension of the performer, but is a potential performing partner. The independent behavior of the physical models for example is not 'controllable' by the performer, but can be influenced by his or her movement. This interplay between dancer and system and how one begins to understand the properties of the other has been crucial to the conceptual and aesthetic development of the work; helping give shape to the choreography and underpinning its dramaturgy.<sup>15</sup>

Obermaier's aesthetics in *Apparition* are geared towards immersion, with the seamless combination of frontal projections of motion-mapped images, and almost ten meters wide background projections. We are lead to kinesthetically empathize with the dancers, which can be seen as protagonists in a dynamic visual drama. The setup for *Apparition* allows an almost seven-meter wide projection space upstage, narrowing to a pinpoint at nine meters downstage, where the projector is hung. For the background, two rear projectors are used to cover a close to 40-square meter screen area. Interactivity here is at the core of the relationship between the dancer and the projected image, which merge in a visually and dramatically coherent whole. Figure and background are distinctly set off against one another; while the central vision is focusing on the dancer, the peripheral field is filled with congruent dynamic content. The flowing quality of the movement contributes to the hypnotic effect of the ensemble, which many spectators mention. In one specific sequence, the projected patterns of particles moving on the screen flow towards a center that is determined by the position of the dancer in front of it, thus inducing intensevection. This gives the illusory proprioceptive sensation of being drawn in, as if taken to a point lying beyond the screen. In this stunning multimedia choreography, the spectator's visual field is immersed in movement from two qualitatively different sources: movement of the dancer that addresses foveal vision and attention, and movement of the surrounding images falling in the peripheral field. The merging of the dynamic impressions from these two sources corresponds to a merging of the senses brought about by the interrelation of foveal vision, peripheral vision, proprioception, and kinesthesia.

### **A palette of screens**

Floor projections, often on white marley, are also used in live multimedia dance. The audience should, however, then be provided with an elevated vantage, since the stage floor becomes in effect the backdrop. Upstage naturally lend itself to be read as upwardness, and downstage as downwardness. The dancers will be in direct contact with the floor most if not all of the time, unlike frontal and upright situations, where foreground and background are set some distance apart, up to several meters. In other words, the difference between high angle and frontal propositions can be likened to that between relief and free-standing sculpture. The

physical and virtual dimensions will appear as fusing together. Most sections of *Mortal Engine* (2008) exemplify this type of proposition, with the added feature that it was presented on a raked stage. *Mortal Engine* is a “dance-video-laser performance using movement-and-sound-responsive projections”<sup>16</sup> by choreographer Gideon Obarzanek, interactive system and visual designer Frieder Weiss, and the Australian contemporary dance company Chunky Move.

This ingenious sloping stage ... acts as a giant screen for the lights and abstract images to be projected onto. [The dancers] are like magnets moving across a giant Magna Doodle. Where the dancers go, their smudges follow. As the shadows and performers seem to morph into one another it is difficult to distinguish between that which is alive and that which is engineered.<sup>17</sup>

Multimedia may bring new life to raked stages, as they provide a surface on which both bodies and images can coexist, serving as background and ground. When the stage is sunken, as in a theater in the round context, spatial references of up and down become altogether irrelevant; there is no absolute reference for upstage and downstage. For example, consider *Glow* (2006), “an illuminating choreographic essay”<sup>18</sup> by choreographer Obarzanek and software creator Weiss, in which the audience surrounds the dancer on all sides. In this interactive context, the dancer is immersed in the visual imagery she brings forth through her very own movements.

[She] creates a world of light around her as she moves.... Her arm sweeps white light around the stage floor like small ridges of sand. Later she will be part of the pattern of black fretwork sweeping across a now-white floor. Often her body is scored with faint lines like the ripples in water silk. At times she seems to be morphing into light or, at one point, being edged toward the boundary of her rectangular world by dark, shifting shapes.<sup>19</sup>

There is some similarity here with the projection mapping methods and technology used for Obermaier’s *Apparition*, both being custom made. In *Glow*, “Mr Weiss’ system uses image-processing techniques to ‘find the outline of the body and connected body parts.’ This data is then fed into his ‘palette’ of computer algorithms which then create light and video displays projected back onto the dancer and stage.”<sup>20</sup> Finding the outline of the body is one of the properties of computer vision, otherwise known as artificial vision.

Projection mapping (or video mapping) can be thought of as the interface through which the relationship between figure and background in the context of real-time computer-dancer interactions take place. Projection mapping is also called “spatial augmented reality,” and all so rightly in the context of *Seventh Sense* (2011), a work performed by the Taiwanese Anarchy Dance Theatre, with choreography by Chieh-hua Hsieh, and interactive designs provided by Ultra Combos new media agency. This piece can be described as a performance in a mixed-reality environment: in other words, a space where digital objects exhibiting physical properties and

dancers interact in real time. In mixed reality performance, space and movement from virtual and physical world are interconnected, and can provide the feeling of immersion.

The stage for *Seventh Sense* is a white open-sided cube, with projections on the floor and three sides. It also is an interactive environment, a Cave automatic virtual environment (CAVE), which can contain not only the performers but also some members of the audience, allowing them to share the experience in the interactive space. At the beginning of the performance, two dancers move in pools of colored light which display amoeboid movement, like gelatin blobs, crawling and swimming, or as some form of ectoplasm sticking to the dancer. Then a grid pattern fills the space, a cubic landscape in which the squares grow and revert to their original size in sequence, according to the motion of the dancer. The grid landscape then behaves as if it was keeling over from one side to the other, in response to the dancers movement and location. The displayed horizontal and vertical lines do not correspond to their physical equivalents. Sensation of body weight provides a reference to verticality denied by the visual display. Vection is induced in the viewer given the contradiction between visual and proprioceptive inputs. Another visual pattern used in *Seventh Sense* is that of clouds of particles swishing around, similarly as in *Apparition*, but this time filling a three dimensional space, and not just the background. With the combination of these last two displayed visual pattern behaviors, one feels as if the CAVE were floating on some invisible stormy sea.

The distinction between performance space and installation space is also blurred in Rebecca Allen's *The Brain Stripped Bare* (2002), which calls for two performers, appearing in the flesh, as shadows behind the screens, and as images on the screen. The spectators can deambulate through the 35-foot wide circular space, which is ringed by five large projection screens.

Surrounded by a circle of screens the audience is free to shift their point of view. Live performers merge with shadows, projected images and sounds, revealing stark human forms that move in startling and perplexing ways. This creates a raw, very physical yet illusory interactive experience that connects an audience to a performance in a way not previously explored.<sup>21</sup>

One of the screens in Steve Paxton's *Phantom Exhibition* (2009) is suspended parallel to the floor, which provides an unusual perspective on the dance appearing on it, previously shot from below through a glass floor. This creates a perceptually correct situation, though paradoxically one is otherwise never exposed to it.

Five large screens surrounding the exhibition space show images of Paxton and other performers moving according to that method [contact improvisation], as well as dance moves simulated with computer graphics, along with poetically rhythmical explanatory narration. Within this overwhelming visual setting, the visitor perceives

with all his senses the relationship between the human body and gravity.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 1:  
Still from *Phantom Image* (2009), dir. Steve Paxton.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

In these installations, which are not interactive, the postural system of the spectator is nonetheless addressed, since she or he has to maintain body equilibrium through perceptual cues provided by both the physical space and the virtual space of the moving images on the screen. Overhead projections can be straining on the viewers neck, which is why Montreal's Satosphere usually provides cushions rather than seats. The projections inside this eighteen meters wide spherical dome, whose apex is therefore higher up than in a planetarium, are overwhelmingly large and create an illusion of depth quite different from that provided by 3D glasses. For its inauguration, a dance and projection piece was shown, titled *Intérieur*, and billed by its artistic directors Marie-Claude Poulin and Martin Kusch as "one of the rare dance-and-media performances in the world to be specifically conceived for an immersive environment"<sup>23</sup> (motion mapping was not involved).

In the middle of the space, at a podium, we can see a bustling woman.... In the dome, vast like her thoughts, her secrets are amplified, her fears increased tenfold, her personality multiplied.... Skies of liquid architecture and textures, orbital movements and navigations in imaginary geometries, will alter the perception of gravity. Above the spectators' heads and all around them, images will seem to charge at them: liquid textures possibly referring to flesh, faces anxious and oppressive, running along the walls of the dome.<sup>24</sup>

Sadly, the event generated as much hype as disappointment, but the fundamental problem it posed is a difficult one and yet to be resolved, if it can ever be. It concerns the integration of performance to projected moving images in a space that visually dwarfs the performers. The artists may find it useful to ask themselves questions such as those Obermaier is reported to have had in mind before and during the making of *Apparition*:

What choreography emerges when software is your partner? / When virtual and actual images pace share the same physics? / Where

everything that moves on the stage is both interactive and independent? / And any form, dancing or still, can be transformed into a kinetic projection surface?<sup>25</sup>

It is always possible to create newer stage/screen environments where dance interacts with images without relying on virtual immersion technology or interactivity software, as Benoît Lachambre did with *Is You Me* (2008). In this work, the partly raked stage becomes an augmented and ephemeral space, where Laurent Goldring's real-time drawings are improvised in response to the movements of dancers Lachambre and Louise Lecavalier.

## Conclusion

In works for the stage, scenography can be thought of as an installation through which the performers evolve, and in which the spectators can subjectively project themselves, as is the case with film viewing in a cinema theater. *Vitarama*, a filming and projection system involving eleven cameras in the shooting and eleven corresponding synchronized projectors, was designed for the *Perisphere* pavilion at the 1939 World Fair in New York.<sup>26</sup> *Vitarama* was developed by Fred Waller, who discovered that spatial perception depends mostly on peripheral vision while experimenting with ways to improve U.S. Army flight simulators. He realized that a curved panorama is more efficient than a flat one, as the visual field is also curved, all of which led to the *Cinerama*—the IMAX of the fifties, so to speak—which was soon superseded by 70mm wide-screen film technology.

Early on in the twentieth century, the Russian avant-garde artist and composer Mikhail Matyushin (1861-1934) conducted experiments in order to demonstrate that the broadening of visual sensibility allows for the discovery of a new "organic substance" and rhythm in the apprehension of space. He announced in a 1923 manifesto the program for a research group called *Зорвед* (*Zorved*: *Zor* = see; *ved* = know) that would become the Collective for Expanded Vision in 1930. Work was centered on the goal of expanding human vision to a full 360 degrees range. Despite the preposterousness of that quest, experiments were carried out with a degree of scientific rigor. The concept of expanded or amplified vision was based on a synthesis of Cubism and of Ouspensky's teachings,<sup>27</sup> and it was pursued with a kind of mystic zeal, which Malevitch and many others shared. Matyushin studied how the perception of shape and color was dependent on where it fell on the retina. Charts presented at an exhibition in Leningrad, in 1930, show how shapes and colors were perceived from various angles.<sup>28</sup> As R.B. Elder notes, this "'amplified vision' did not include just the eyes; he expanded it to involve hearing, tactility, and thinking—in short, a kind of conscious synaesthesia."<sup>29</sup>

In artistic contexts, peripheral vision is particularly stimulated when one is viewing staged works where moving projected images replace static backdrops. Large film projections have been used on stage as part of theatrical performances for nearly a century. In the 1920s, Erwin Piscator used projections expressly to bind stage and

audience in a politically motivated space. Piscator had a cinematic and non-narrative idea of the theater, and he relied on the impact of projected images to bring it about. In his “theater as social education,” the stage was a medium that conveyed information by means of collage and montage techniques. For Alfons Paquet’s play *Fahnen* in 1924, Piscator made the unusual choice of projecting images stage left and right. In 1928, Ernst Toller went even further with both lateral and frontal screens for his production of Tolstoi and Shchegolev’s *Raspoutine*, and he capped the set with a silver fabric covered hemisphere. Piscator approached Gropius and the Bauhaus in 1926 to help conceive his *Totaltheater* project, which planned for slide and cinematic projections that would enclose the whole space, walls and ceiling.

In *A Book of Five Rings* (circa 1645), the Japanese Buddhist swordsman Miyamoto Musashi’s distinguished between looking and seeing. Whereas looking refers to central vision, to focusing intently on an object, seeing is a mode of attention characteristic of peripheral vision, to which one attends in an unfocused yet actively receptive fashion. Musashi stressed that seeing is more important than looking; the distinction between both remains relevant today as it relates to two different ways of paying attention.

The privilege accorded to frontal relationship to images has perhaps a lot to do with the discovery of the laws of perspective, and their systematic application to staged works since the Renaissance. Cinema and television consolidated what likely had already become a cultural preference, since these technologies were based on, and limited to, frontal relationship, except with devices such as those devised by Fred Waller. Screen position relative to the viewer must be taken into account as more and more technological devices and artistic propositions aim their moving images indirectly at the viewer, as the recourse to visual immersion becomes increasingly important with new media. It may be impossible to predict how far this trend will go, but experiments are carried out in order to provide peripheral visual stimulations in domestic settings with specially designed projection systems that turn the side walls of the television room into lateral screens.<sup>30</sup>

For various reasons, shutting out peripheral visual stimulations has proven to be, perhaps by default, a more economical and practical way of dealing with the problem of reconciling peripheral and foveal stimulations in artificial contexts. Nonetheless, many artists use perceptual strategies involving peripheral stimulations, and it is arguably important that they and their audiences educate their knowledge of vision according to phenomenological accounts and neuro-scientific evidence—in other words, learn to appreciate in an embodied manner, or with due proprioceptive awareness, the distinction between looking and seeing.

## Notes

1. This raises fundamental philosophical issues since the absolute and immutable character of the distinction between self and object is put into question.
2. It was spearheaded in the 1930s, namely through the work of Fred Waller who was employed for this purpose by the American Army. He was later to invent a filming and projection system, the Cinerama, which was in the 1950s the precursor of 70mm film. In between, he invented the Vitarama, a system using not three projectors, as with the Cinerama, but eleven, aimed at a curved wall, which happened to be the inside of the Perisphere pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair.
3. The CNS can interpret conflicting information from the senses as hallucinations, and since ingestion of poisonous substances can cause hallucinations, vomiting may be triggered, as a sort of preemptive measure.
4. See Charles Sherrington, *The integrative action of the nervous system* (New York: Scribner, 1906).
5. This challenges the pertinence of the distinction between proprioception and exteroception, if not the capacity of language to describe sensory perception without falling into semantic conundrums. This is better addressed elsewhere, namely in aesthetics, but I hope it will suffice here to state that traditional Western philosophy is grounded on sets of absolute, if not rigid and dogmatic, distinctions, such as between "inside" and "outside." However useful such distinctions are in everyday language, as well as in formal (i.e. computer) language, they impose limits to our understanding of living processes. See Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht, Holland: Kluwer, 1980).
6. The awareness or sense of body is obtained in cooperation with vision and equilibrium (vestibular sense); a deficit in one can, in some cases and to some extent, be compensated by reliance on the other. See Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 47.
7. Posture control also challenges the view that action and perception are separate. Posture is preparation for action; it is expressive, reflects intention, is dictated by culture and various other factors, and always contains an emotion. See Alain Berthoz and Jean-Luc Petit, *The Physiology and Phenomenology of Action*, trans. C. Macann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
8. In other words, it projects onto the world its pre-perceptions and hypotheses. See Alain Berthoz, *Emotion and Reason: The cognitive neuroscience of decision Making*, trans. G. Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

9. Sacks maintains that proprioception may very well constitute the “fundamental organic mooring of identity—at least of that corporeal identity or ‘body-ego’, which Freud sees as the basis of self” (*The Man*, 52). “I feel my body is blind and deaf to itself ... it has no sense of itself” declared Christina, the “Disembodied Lady” who suffered an irreversible loss of proprioception, a rare and puzzling affliction caused in her case by a bout of polyneuritis (ibid., 51) Furthermore, “whenever consciousness begins, it will already be informed by embodiment and the processes that involve motor schema and proprioception.” See Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 77.

10. “Bottom-up” refers to afferent neural pathways and “top-down” to efferent pathways—sensory input and motor output, if you will.

11. “Visually induced vection is a functional phenomenon and not just a laboratory curiosity because it probably contributes to the veridical sense of movement when walking or while being transported. To date, scientists have not been successful in isolating any single necessary condition except for the presence of optokinetic stimulation in the form of a moving visual pattern that is registered background.” Sheldon M. Ebenholtz, *Oculomotor Systems and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 143.

12. Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton, “At the Heart of It All: The Concept of Presence,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 3, no. 2 (1997), <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue2/lombard.html>.

13. Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, 106.

14. Klaus Obermaier, “D.A.V.E,” artist website, <http://www.exile.at/dave/project.html>.

15. Klaus Obermaier, “Apparition,” artist website, <http://www.exile.at/apparition/background.html>.

16. Penelope Broadbent, “Review: *Mortal Engine*,” *Australian Stage*, March 8, 2009, <http://www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/melbourne/mortal-engine--chunky-move-2296.html>

17. Ibid.

18. Jennifer Dunning, “Crossing the Border From Light to Human,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2008, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/arts/dance/08chun.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/arts/dance/08chun.html?_r=0).

19. Ibid.

20. “Moving to the algo-rhythm,” *The Age*, March 13, 2007. <http://www.theage.com.au/news/technology/moving-to-the-algorhythm/2007/03/12/1173548107497.html>

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## Bodies, Camera, Screen: Eiko & Koma's Immersive Media Dances

*Rosemary Candelario*

Eiko & Koma are New York-based Japanese American dance artists known for their subtle, focused, and finely controlled movement vocabulary through which they alter the perception of time and space. For over forty years they have created works for the proscenium stage, outdoor sites, galleries, and the camera that address elemental issues of life, survival, death, and rebirth. Their close and unsparing attention to nature, mourning, and human relationships to other humans and the world around them has won them prestigious awards including Guggenheim, MacArthur, and United States Artist Fellowships, Bessies, and Doris Duke Performing Arts Awards. Although the pair typically creates their own costumes, sets, and soundscapes, they have collaborated with a wide range of artists including Kronos Quartet, Margaret Leng Tan, Anna Halprin, and a group of student painters from the Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Eiko & Koma began to make and screen what they call media dances or dances for camera in the early 1980s.<sup>1</sup> In addition to projecting the media dances onto large screens and walls, displaying them on wall-mounted or freestanding monitors, and making DVDs available for purchase, Eiko & Koma have also incorporated media dance into live performance, for example projecting their dance for camera, *Lament* (1985), onto a makeshift canvas screen they held aloft in the current in the outdoor work, *River* (1995).

Eiko & Koma's choreographic practice develops a particular relationship between the duo's dancing bodies and the sites with which they move. I call this process a "choreography of immersion." By immersion I mean a process of diving deeply and actively into another environment. Immersion suggests being absorbed into and kinesthetically engaged with another element, with the possibility that the process may transform both the bodies and the site. In live performances, this often takes the form of the dancers quite literally immersing themselves in the environment—whether this be an outdoor site such as a particular body of water in *River*, a built environment such as the set for *Mourning* (2007), or the installation for *Naked* (2010). The dance does not happen in the site, but rather emerges from the dancers' bodily relationship with it. Crucially, Eiko & Koma not only immerse themselves in sites, but they make room through their choreography for the audience to immerse themselves as well.

What is impressive about Eiko & Koma's choreography is the way they are able to adapt this live immersive practice to their media dances and intermedia works that bring together performance and media dance into live installations and stage or site works. In Eiko & Koma's media dances, the immersive body-site relationship is effected

at three sites: Eiko & Koma's live bodies, the camera, and the screen.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I examine Eiko & Koma's media dances *Wallow* (1984), *Husk* (1987), *Breath* (1999), and *Wake* (2011); the intermedia "living installation," *Breath* (1998); and screen structures the duo created for viewing their media dances in Retrospective Project exhibitions (2010-2012). As I trace the possibilities for kinesthetic engagement between bodies and sites across each of these particular works, I call attention to the variety of ways Eiko & Koma choreograph immersion, some more effective than others. While the inherent framing of media dances would seem to limit the viewer's agency, as I will demonstrate Eiko & Koma employ strategies such as mobile frames, long takes, and moving back and forth between live and screenic choreographies in order to provide audiences with the opportunity to immerse themselves in their media dances.

### **Bodies Immersed in a Site: *Wallow***

Conceived as a dance for camera version of the proscenium dance *Fur Seal* (1977), *Wallow* was choreographed on site at Point Reyes National Seashore in California. Eiko & Koma quite literally immerse themselves in the seals' environment, in contrast to the built environments that characterize their proscenium and installation dances and their other dances for camera. In the live performance *Fur Seal*, the dancers playfully alternate between imitating seals—lying on the ground, upper body raised forward and up, hands working like flippers—and exploring the full use of their human legs through walks, runs, jumps, balances, and lifts. Like *Fur Seal*, the media dance *Wallow* depicts a mating ritual that repeatedly compels the two dancers together and drives them apart, but in contrast the nineteen-minute silent media dance features the attempt to actually embody seals. The transformation of the dancers into seals is given credence by the setting, a rocky coastal scene that annually hosts scores of breeding elephant seals.

*Wallow* opens with a shot of Eiko lying on her stomach in the sand on a beach, waves lapping her toes. She is a seal making her way onto the beach to mate and give birth. Clad in a dark furry shift, she rests her weight on her chin and her arms, which lay tucked under her torso; her pelvis is raised skyward. Slowly she begins to roll onto her left side, and then back again, the whole operation taking about five minutes. At times, the only indication that the video image is not in freeze-frame is the rushing of a wave around Eiko's body. She lifts now her neck, now her feet. Eyes close, then leisurely open. She is feeling what it means to be on land again, what it means to move on land rather than through water. After six minutes, the scene cuts to show Koma for the first time. He, too, lays in the sand at the edge of the tide, wearing the same furry shift, water rushing at him from around a large rock. Although the viewer does not know for sure where Koma is located in relation to Eiko, one can sense that he is on the same beach, an also-presence. He flops insistently for a moment—is he stuck? —and then rests. He flops again, again. For three minutes he struggles in place.

Following a fade-out, the two approach each other for the first time, raising their torsos off the ground and propelling themselves haltingly forward with their

hands *cum* flippers. They reach for one another with their necks, straining. Scenes fade, one into another. Throughout, the camera maintains a two shot, staying close in on Eiko & Koma's bodies. Although the dancers are immersed in an actual seal breeding ground, the camera focuses not on the sweeping rocky coastline or foamy waves, but the drama of the "seal" mating. When the coupling has ended the two head back towards the sea, parallel to one another, propelled forward by a form of locomotion done lying down on one's stomach without the aid of arms or legs. Visible tracks in the sand mark their passage back to the sea. This is the only establishing shot of the dance, which freezes and then fades on a wave that is about to consume the dancer-seals. The artificial arrest of movement—of the dancers and of the water—invites the viewer to fill in for oneself what happens next.

As in many of Eiko & Koma's works across proscenium, gallery, outdoor, and media settings, they choreograph the piece as a snippet in time, and thus the "ending" marks a viewing boundary in a process that they suggest does not in fact end. The camera is present primarily as an observer of these bodies in this landscape, to record a particular series of moments in time. The shots reinforce the viewer's role as an outside observer—perhaps of a nature documentary—unable to intervene, but continuing to watch with a slightly prurient interest. Eiko later wrote about how they wanted *Wallow's* camera angle to be at seal-level, but, as she says, "the cameraman could not comply"<sup>3</sup> with their wishes.

Despite the distant, static camera, however, there is still room for the viewer to kinesthetically engage with the work. As the water continuously flows in and out of the frame, it reminds us of what is beyond the frame. Not only are the dancers moving, but the site is, too, as waves roll onto the beach from an unseen sea. Filmmakers often use offscreen space to imply that the audience is only seeing a slice of a broader world, and Eiko & Koma use the technique similarly. Eiko writes: "if what is in the frame can suggest what is outside of the frame and relate to it, viewers can sense that what they see is a part of a larger world. They may focus, but they are not bound."<sup>4</sup> This desire to allow the audience room to have their own experience with the dance is a constant across Eiko & Koma's body of work.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this media dance is its intentional lack of sound, as indicated in the opening credits.<sup>5</sup> The absence of sound forces the viewer to become an active kinesthetic participant in the media dance, paradoxically listening even more closely, filling in a score by drawing on her own imagination or by experiencing motion (e.g. the crashing of a wave, the blowing of wind through the dancers' hair) as sound. Even in this early media dance with its relatively fixed camera, Eiko & Koma give the viewer the space to not only enter the dance but also extend beyond the dance's frame.

### **Camera and Screen Immersed in Bodies and Sites: Husk and Breath**

In *Wallow*, Eiko & Koma immersed themselves in a site while the camera remained an outside observer. With *Husk*, the camera immerses itself in the site of the

dancing body. For this media dance, Eiko & Koma worked alone; Eiko performed while Koma operated the camera. Their interest in what they call “eye-angle,” not realized in *Wallow*, is evident here in the placement of the camera on the floor at the same level as the body, and in the way the camera glides along the floor, dancing with Eiko as a partner.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Koma mounted the camera on a tennis ball so that he could smoothly maneuver the camera around the space while maintaining its contact with the floor. Using monitors in the space, the pair worked together in the moment of performing/shooting to frame and reframe the movement. The camera fluidly maneuvers around Eiko so that sometimes her feet are closest to the camera, and other times it is her head. Occasionally it is Eiko herself who moves in and out of the frame, as in one shot where a lone leg is dragged across the screen. The camera shifts to frame the body’s movement while at the same time the body continues to move, with or against the camera, and in the process redefines the frame. There is both coordination and tension between the two intentions. The result is a nine-minute media dance as one long take with no post-production editing.

*Husk* opens on an abstract scene accompanied by nature sounds. Leaves, dirt, and the outline of a mountain or a sharply angled branch are discernable in the dim light. A steady breeze blows a leaf through the shot, and everything in the frame softly undulates. After less than a minute, the camera begins a slow pull back and it becomes evident that the opening landscape was in fact an arm tucked behind a back, elbow pointed up. The camera moves with the dancer, taking the viewer in close to explore the body, which is itself the landscape (rather than being set in a landscape as in *Wallow*). Leaves are scattered across the ground and all around the figure is a deep black, as if the moon were shining a light on this specific scene. The lone figure’s face and neck are smeared with dirt, while the rest of the body is enveloped in a heavy cocoon of leaves, feet occasionally visible at the other end. The insistent crickets on the sound score and the constant breeze outpace the slow, constant shifting of the figure. Movement is simultaneously initiated from multiple points of the body, and does not proceed sequentially, giving the impression of innumerable smaller organisms at work in this one figure.

Although the body is eventually identifiable as Eiko, her body (the site) and the camera are already so immersed in one another that they form for the viewer a new collective landscape. In *Wallow* the camera maintains its distance from the dancers and the site, keeping the coupling seal-dancers well within its frame. *Husk’s* ground-level camera angle, however, by interrupting a unified viewing of Eiko’s body, contributes to the perception that there are multiple organisms present and that they are merging in and out of one another. For example, from a supine position, feet planted on the floor, Eiko arches and twists her upper back and neck around so that her right cheek rests in a nest of leaves on the ground. The medium shot captures her face, her sternum, left shoulder, and left leg; but the leaf sheath that covers her skin from sternum to just above the knee blends in with the leaves on the floor, and her black hair mirrors the black background, fragmenting her body and distorting any sort of unified viewing of it. The parts do not seem connected to the same individual body,

but seem as a whole with the surroundings. About two-thirds of the way into the media dance, Eiko begins to shed her mulch cocoon, her torso emerging leisurely from it. In the final scene of the piece, her torso disappears from view, leaving the cocoon, blowing leaves, and crickets behind.

What is particularly important about this media dance is that Eiko & Koma found a way for the performer (Eiko) and the camera (Koma) to dance together in a "choreography for body and camera."<sup>7</sup> The pair is so well-known as a duo that audiences familiar with their work may read the camera as Eiko's dancing partner; in this way, Koma is present in the screen dance despite his apparent absence. In fact, the camera views Eiko the way that Koma would were he dancing with her in the work: close up and at the same level. This proximity of the camera, and hence the viewer, allows the audience to experience the intimacy with which the dancers typically perform. This close framing directs the viewer to see from a perspective not possible in a live performance. Perhaps to make up for this control, the camera functions more as a body in space rather than a distant observer. This reworking of camera as intimately moving body is Eiko & Koma's invitation to viewers to experience this media dance with their bodies as well as their eyes.

At the same time Eiko & Koma challenge the *Husk* audience to watch from an immersed position—an eye angle that implies a body lying on the floor and moving with the dancer—the timing stays largely true to their live performances. Eiko writes, "we hope to bring to video a sense of shared endurance similar to that in a theater."<sup>8</sup> To accomplish this, they prefer uninterrupted long takes, suggesting that cuts and edits interfere with the experience they are trying to achieve. This tension between long takes and edits is epitomized in *Breath*, a media dance that developed out of a durational live performance.

Based on the strength of works like *Husk*, the Whitney Museum of American Art invited Eiko & Koma to create their first "living installation," in which dancers, screen, and audience are all immersed in the same primal scene. For almost four weeks from May 28-June 21, 1998, the duo performed *Breath* seven hours a day in an intermedia forest environment that they designed, including video projection, dappled lighting, and a set made of raw silk, dirt, and dry leaves. The two dancers performed alternately for one or two hour stretches, such that only one was present in the installation at any given time. As one replaced the other, their choreography created a continuous scene of a lone but not lonely creature nestled underneath a tree in crackling brown leaves and rich humus, propelled in the space by muscles and joints shifting with the subtlety of breath. A museum visitor who happened upon the installation might not notice the naked body at first, blending as it did with the set: an ur-being who has just been disemboweled from the earth, or perhaps an ancient creature decomposing along with the vegetation.

For the *Breath* set video, Eiko & Koma worked with ideas of body as landscape first explored in *Husk*. Whereas in that dance for camera Eiko was eventually identifiable as the dancer, the video used in the *Breath* installation concentrates on the type of abstract images that open *Husk*. The camera here enlarges, blurs, and

abstracts the dancers' body parts such that a shoulder becomes a rock, the curve of a hip a rolling hill, a sharp joint a mountain peak. When this scenic landscape is incorporated into the installation, it is not used as a mere backdrop for the live performance, nor as a representation of the bodies that are in the installation, but as an essential component that co-generates the environment. Projected without a border, the image bleeds into the surroundings, interacting with the dappled and subtly shifting light. In fact, Eiko & Koma choreographed the video as a co-performer, in motion along with the dancers and the breathing set.<sup>9</sup> Curator Mathew Yokobosky captures the scene well:

Every element of this installation is moving. There are fans, and the leaves are always fluttering. The bodies are moving. The video is moving. You can almost feel the air moving within the space, too. It's a very different concept of what we normally think of as an art installation, because it's a complete kinetic world.<sup>10</sup>

What makes a work like *Breath* unique is that it may be visited in person and is further co-constructed with the audience. Museum visitors may come and go as they please: walking around it, sitting up close, observing from a distance, for a minute, an hour, or multiple times over the course of a month. Of course the audience members were not able to fully enter the immersive environment, only to stand or sit at its edges.

In conjunction with *Breath's* tenure at the Whitney, Eiko & Koma experimented with converting a live immersive environment into a mediated one, creating a 14-minute screen dance by the same name. Jerry Pantzer directed a professional film crew and co-edited the resulting footage with Eiko. Unlike the live installation, Eiko & Koma appear together in the media dance, now isolated, then connected. The sense of everything being in motion that Yokobosky described above is also present in the media dance: the bodies, site, and camera are always moving, often shifting together as in a common inhale or exhale. The soundscape, too, seems to breathe with the rhythm of the cuts and fades that characterize the first half of the media dance. The second half of the dance is one long take, which brings the viewer into phase with the creatures' alternate timescape.

As in *Husk*, *Breath* invites the viewer to understand the camera not just as their eyes, but also as their body. Unlike in the earlier media dance, however, the camera-body here does not lie alongside the dancer at her level, but frequently shifts perspective and eye-angle. The camera moves side to side, up and down, zooms in and out, even canting occasionally, giving the impression of a curious museum visitor who wanders around the larger space: now standing, now kneeling, now walking closer. The camera immerses the viewer in the piece's three-dimensional environment, which evinces a depth not present in *Wallow*. Even though there is a tension between framing the dance and allowing each viewer to choose where to look, there remains nonetheless ample opportunity for an active kinesthetic viewing from within the frame.

Conflicts arose between Eiko and Pantzer during the editing phase, which culminated in each producing their own version of *Breath*.<sup>11</sup> It is worth quoting Eiko at length in order to understand the source of the tension and what she is seeking from their media dances:

We are no longer resistant to adventurous camera work, sophisticated tools, and elaborate editing, as long as we can decide how to use or ignore them. *Breath* crescendos into a 7-minute uncut segment of our duet, scored but not choreographed tightly. This segment was the occasion of our biggest dispute [with Pantzer]. Although Jerry understood that Koma and I need an unconventional amount of time to involve a viewer with our bodies, he felt that the uncut phrase was much too long and not cinematic or theatrical. Nevertheless, Jerry agrees that this untreated section is a truthful rendering of what we do in performance.<sup>12</sup>

This statement reveals the conflict between wanting to produce a purely cinematic creation and the desire to capture the qualities of live performance, a conflict which seemed to be concentrated in this particular disagreement in the tension between cuts and edits on the one hand and long takes on the other. I noted earlier Eiko & Koma's preference for long takes because the pair believes they function in media dance the way their trademark slowness in live performance does, providing what Eiko calls "breathing room"<sup>13</sup> for the audience to immerse themselves in the work. Yet it is important that *Breath*, unlike *Husk*, does not rely solely on one long take, but preserves some of Pantzer's preferences for shorter edits. Indeed, these cuts, countered as they are with the swelling of sound, feel more kinesthetic than cinematic, like an eye blink, or the pause after an exhale before the lungs begin to expand again. In effect, both Eiko's and Pantzer's editing techniques provide rich opportunities for the audience to engage kinesthetically with the work.

### **Overimmersion: Wake**

Eiko & Koma's most recent media dance, *Wake* (2011), itself another adaptation for camera of a live installation, *Naked* (2010), would seem to contradict Eiko's earlier call for "breathing room" in their media dances. James Byrne shot *Wake* in extreme close up with a body-held camera during *Naked's* initial month-long run at the Walker Art Center, and edited it a year later with Eiko at Colorado College.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the live installation *Naked* gave the audience many options to immerse themselves in the work—they were able to look through holes in the canvas surrounding the installation, watch from benches or cushions on different sides of the performers, or observe while standing or moving around—the tight framing in *Wake* provides no such options. Rather than enabling an active kinesthetic engagement with the dancers' bodies and the site, the camera here seems to limit the viewer's participation in what can be seen.

Although Eiko & Koma's trademark ambient soundscape and timing of the moving bodies still invite the viewer to engage with all their senses, *Wake* positions its audience to see things quite differently. First, the media dance is black and white, which prevents a viewing of the dance as "live." Having spent a number of days at the *Naked* installation, *Wake* does not give me the "I am there" feeling that *Breath* does. Immersion depends on the possibility of entering a site; the black and white media dance makes this somehow less probable. More significantly, though, the unwavering extreme close up dictates what the viewer sees, foreclosing a more open participation. This is a marked change from observing dancers in a landscape (*Wallow*) or experiencing a constantly shifting three-dimensional perspective around and above the dancers' eye level (*Husk, Breath*). Unlike in *Husk*, where the camera dances with the performer, transforming her fragmented body into landscape through its immersion with her, here the camera seems to be merely investigating the dancers. Only one body part is in focus at a time, and the fragments never become more than separate parts. This does afford an attention to the delicacy of the movement and an enhanced detail—wrinkled hands, the fluttering of eyes right before they open—that the audience normally would not be able to see, but the cost of this detail is the loss of possibility for the each viewer to have their own experience. *Wake* reveals that simple proximity of camera to body does not necessarily enable immersion. Whereas in *Breath* the space of the live installation was filmed in such a way that the viewer feels immersed in the site, *Wake's* camera is itself overimmersed in the bodies (who themselves are the site of the media dance) leaving little room for the audience to also enter.

### **Screen as Immersive Site: Retrospective Project**

In 2009, Eiko & Koma launched their three-year Retrospective Project, through which they experimented with how a body of work can be seen and felt beyond the instance of a specific performance. The Project aimed to examine their body of work for its continued or shifting resonances for contemporary audiences through museum exhibitions of photographs, sets, and media dances; a new living installation; creation of new works inspired by dances in their repertoire; the revival of older works; and the publication of a catalog by the Walker Art Center. Eiko & Koma also revitalized existing works by collaborating with musicians with whom they had a long history. Eiko & Koma's Archive Project grew out of the Retrospective and seeks to create an innovative, artist-led archive in which a collection of digital and paper files, photographs, press, programs, sets, costumes, videos, and audio material is not just documentation of Eiko & Koma's artistic work, but is also a resource for further artistic production and imagination. In both Projects, media dances have played a central role, with spaces created for viewing Eiko & Koma's media dances exemplifying the ideas behind both Projects. Not coincidentally, the viewing spaces remain remarkably consistent with the duo's choreographic practices.

The first Retrospective Project exhibition, *Time is Not Even, Space is Not Empty* at Wesleyan University's Zilkha Gallery,<sup>15</sup> marked a new phase for the pair, in which they began to work with "performance video footage as raw material, a resource from which [they] construct a new artwork."<sup>16</sup> For example, the performance footage from the one-time site specific *Event Fission* (1980) was projected on a specially made massive canvas that mimicked the cracked, lumpy material that covered Eiko & Koma's bodies in the performance. Here the dance is so immersed in the screen, it is as if the dancers' skin has become the screen, which is itself a site where the viewer can experience the dancers' bodies at an enormous magnitude. Watching the documentation video on this screen, which visitors could examine up close, the moving images lack sharp edges, seeming to become multidimensional as they seep into the cracks on the canvas, and move over its textured surface.<sup>17</sup>

A few years later in the Retrospective, Eiko & Koma created an altogether different way of displaying and viewing their media works for a video installation that accompanied *Naked* at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York.<sup>18</sup> For this exhibition, the videos were displayed in individual "wells."<sup>19</sup> These square structures, made variously of wood or thick board and standing approximately two feet square and three and a half feet high, invite exhibition visitors to bend their heads and torsos over and into the well in order to watch the videos displayed at the bottom. Eiko & Koma expanded the number of wells for a trio of exhibitions: *Residue* at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts,<sup>20</sup> *Time is Not Even, Space is Not Empty* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago,<sup>21</sup> and *Residue* at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.<sup>22</sup> For *Residue of Nakedness*, a video installation at Colorado College's IDEA Space, Eiko & Koma employed for the first time a variety of sizes of wells: taller wells for performance footage, shorter and broader ones for dances for camera.<sup>23</sup> Although the selection of videos and number of wells varied from one exhibition to another, the videos typically included not only media dances but also documentation of live performances.

The wells invite a different relationship to the work than standing and watching it on a monitor mounted to the wall or sitting in a darkened theater seeing it on a large screen. Mounted on a wall, a media dance may seem like a "moving picture," another image in a gallery. But diving head and torso into the well takes the viewer into a personal, one-to-one relationship with the screen. It also suggests that watching is a physical act. Even those who do not fully plunge into the wells may involve their bodies with the structures in other ways, for example by gripping the sides of the wells as they lean forward or tilt their heads downwards to see the screen below. In any case, the frame may focus vision, but the body watching exceeds the well by spilling over it or grasping its exterior. The word "residue" used in many of the exhibition titles after all suggests a textural sense—there is something left to touch or feel—that requires a body to experience it.

As part of the exhibitions in New York and College Park, Eiko & Koma constructed yet another kind of structure as video installation, a four-sided "Tea House" made from canvas, feathers, sweet rice, sea salt, and water.<sup>24</sup> Although open to

the ceiling, light seems to emanate from the sand-colored textured walls of the Tea House itself rather than from up above. These scorched canvas walls provide peek holes so that one could look from the outside without ever having to enter, just as one could stroll by the row of video wells, peeking over the top to see what is there, but never stopping to watch.

Exhibition visitors must walk up the low, short ramp through the door-shaped entrance at one corner of the structure and fully enter the Tea House in order to view the media dance made specifically for this installation. But unlike a movie house, where the screen is on one wall, and all viewers sit in fixed chairs facing the same direction, the Tea House places the video at the center, recessed below floor level and underneath a thin layer of water. Here the frame is not the four edges of the screen, but the four walls that enclose both the ever-shifting audience and the media dance. The viewer is left to choose how to watch the video: stand over it, sit on one of the scattered cushions near it and peer down, or sit further away and let the dance for camera be but one aspect of the site. Here the viewer does not spill over the frame as in the wells, but is completely immersed in it, as the screen is itself immersed in the viewing structure. The Tea House seems to be a material manifestation of Eiko's aforementioned desire for "breathing room" in their media dances. It invites viewers to approach, to come in and see what is there, to spend time and have their own experience. Repeated visits at different times of the day, in different moods, reward the audience with an entirely new perspective.

## Conclusion

Eiko & Koma's media dances consistently immerse the bodies of the performers and viewers in the various sites of the work. Camera and screen are not only tools that make these body-site relationships possible, but are participants in the immersive processes. In *Wallow* and in the *Breath* live installation, for example, it is the dancers who are immersed in the site, as they are in most Eiko & Koma live performances. Moreover, in the *Breath* installation, the screen itself is immersed in the site. In *Husk* and the media dance *Breath*, the camera becomes immersed in the site with (and sometimes as) the performers, dancing through mobile framing, and long takes, and serving as not just the viewer's eyes, but their whole body. Finally, in the *Breath* installation and the Retrospective Project's video wells and Tea Houses, the viewer is physically immersed in the screen site.

Eiko & Koma's media dance methodology—the kinesthetic immersion of performers, viewers, camera, and screen—has broader implications for how we think about the screendance frame. The camera view-finder and viewing screens are all frames that would seem to determine the audience's view of the dance (especially over and against live performance), but in Eiko & Koma's work the bodies of the performers and the viewers alike exceed the frame even as they are immersed in it. Although vision may be squared off, perception extends beyond the right angles. This sense of the screen offering an invitation into a world while at the same time not

limiting the viewer's experience of the world to what can be seen is Eiko & Koma's major contribution to media dance.

## Notes

1. Eiko & Koma use the terms "media dance" and "dance for camera" interchangeably to describe their works created collaboratively by their live dancing bodies, a camera, and editing processes, and made to be watched on some sort of screen. I follow their lead and use these terms to describe their work. In addition to the works discussed here, Eiko & Koma's dances for camera include *Tentacle* (1983), *Bone Dream* (1985), *Lament* (1985), and *Undertow* (1988). Video-based gallery installations also include *On Nakedness: Video Installation* (2011) and *Naked: Video Installation* (2011).
2. The notion of multiple layers of sites present in a screendance is not new. For example, Douglas Rosenberg suggests, "the screen has clearly become a well-understood site for dance. However, it is always a site that is doubled: the initial layer is the built environment or landscape in which the body (dance) is located; the secondary layer is the media by which the performance is inscribed, bonded into one screenic image." See "Excavating Genres," *The International Journal of Screendance* 1 (2010): 64. Kyra Norman takes this idea one step further to consider the viewer, writing: "it is through a sincere attention to place in the moment of recording that the substance of the work arises; at the same time, this material is being shaped by an awareness of the space of the screen and a projection into the future, toward the edit, that screen space, and the future viewer." See "In and Out of Place: Site-based Screendance," *The International Journal of Screendance* 1 (2010): 14.
3. Eiko Otake, "A Dancer Behind the Lens," in *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*, ed. Judy Mitoma (New York: Routledge, 2002), 84.
4. *Ibid.*, 84.
5. The words "This work was conceived with no sound track" are splashed across a black screen before Eiko & Koma ever appear.
6. In a 2006 movement course at UCLA, Koma taught about eye-angle through the poetry of Masaoka Shiki and photographer Eugene Smith. Shiki, a noted haiku poet (1867-1902) spent a number of years bedridden with illness and many of his haikus deal with things he could see from bed through his window in his bedroom. His eye-angle influenced his art. In Smith's famous photograph, *Tomoko Uemura in Her Bath*, Tomoko is very close to her mother. Her eye-angle is perhaps just a foot away. Koma used these works to introduce the idea of dancing and watching from a different angle.

7. "Husk," Eiko & Koma, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://eikoandkoma.org/index.php?p=ek&id=1860>.
8. Otake, "Behind the Lens," 83.
9. In this sense, Eiko & Koma's use of video in this installation reflects Deleuze's proposition that the postwar "cinematographic image itself 'makes' movement." Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1989), 156.
10. Matthew Yokobosky, "Movement as Installation: Eiko & Koma in Conversation with Matthew Yokobosky," *PAJ* 64 (2000): 35.
11. Eiko's version is the one commonly in circulation.
12. Otake, "Behind the Lens," 87.
13. *Ibid.*, 83.
14. Eiko & Koma previously collaborated with Byrne on *Lament* (1985) and *Undertow* (1988).
15. November 19, 2009-January 7, 2010
16. "Video Installation: Residue Of Nakedness," Eiko & Koma, accessed March 23, 2013, <http://eikoandkoma.org/index.php?p=ek&id=3753>.
17. Scholars distinguish between dance documentation and screendance (see Rosenberg's *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially Chapter 1 "Archives and Architecture), and justifiably so. Nonetheless, Eiko & Koma's experiments with new methods of screening documentation of their live works demonstrate the unexplored potential of work previously considered merely archival.
18. March 29-April 9, 2011.
19. Eiko & Koma sometimes refer to the wells as "sculptural frames."
20. July 19-October 30, 2011.
21. Jun 24-Nov 13, 2011. Even though this exhibition, curated by Peter Taub, shares a title with the 2009 Zilkha Gallery one curated by Nina Felshin with the artists, the content and design were significantly different.
22. September 13, 2011-May 24, 2012, University of Maryland at College Park. This exhibition was similar in content to the one at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
23. November 27-December 18, 2012. This exhibition explicitly linked nakedness to

video. All of the videos shown, media dances and performance footage alike, were pieces performed naked, which for Eiko & Koma represents a state of vulnerability and openness. In this context, the immersive environment of the viewing wells takes on an added layer of emotional and physical intimacy and vulnerability for the viewers. The feeling that the wells isolate an individual viewer from others in the gallery at the same time as it connects her more closely with the media dance may be more acute here.

24. The exhibition in Chicago included a constructed space used for both video projection and live performance that was similar to the Tea House, but included some significant differences. This larger space had multiple canvas walls, but was not enclosed on all four sides. Here the video was projected on the back wall whenever Eiko & Koma were not performing in the space, inviting the question: are they or aren't they live? This installation was certainly an immersive space to watch the video, but here, unlike in the Tea Houses, the video replaces Eiko & Koma's bodies in the space, rather than the media dance itself being the site.

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## Faces, Close-ups and Choreography: A Deleuzian Critique of *So You Think You Can Dance*

Sherril Dodds and Colleen Hooper

### Facial Choreography and the Choreographic Interface

In everyday life the face occupies a central position within human expression and social interaction: its features are perceived to present a unique identity, and we breathe, consume and communicate through our faces.<sup>1</sup> Across film and television, the camera has long been fascinated with the face through the framing device of the close-up. Film scholar Paul Coates asserts that the screen operates as a mask between a distant spectator and a face situated within a complex matrix of spatial and temporal coordinates.<sup>2</sup> In dance, too, the face plays an important role, in that its expressive capacities are composed according to a range of performance styles and genres. The same applies to screendance, although in this instance the face is subject to a “double choreography.” The screendance face both displays the codes and conventions of the particular dance idiom, and also the compositional modalities of camera work and editing, which re-choreograph faces across new vectors of space and time. In this article, we explore two ideas as a means to examine the “screendance face.” First we introduce the notion of “facial choreography” to reflect on how the screen apparatus produces representations of dancing faces informed by aesthetic and social values. Secondly, we develop the concept of a “choreographic interface,” which we conceive as an intertextual site of meaning whereby a dancing face both references and enters into a dynamic exchange with other faces. While these two concepts could be applied to any screendance face, to elucidate these ideas in motion, we turn to a specific screendance case study.

A quick trawl through the archive of dance routines featured on the popular reality television dance competition *So You Think You Can Dance* reveals a proclivity for dance styles that deploy dramatic, spectacular, and emotive modes of facial expression.<sup>3</sup> Across solos, duets and group routines, viewers witness passionate contemporary dance numbers that convey themes of love and loss; Latin American ballroom sequences that signal tempestuous and sexually-charged exchanges; and Broadway comedy routines replete with huge grins, faux confusion, and cheeky winks. We therefore turn to a single audition clip from *So You Think You Can Dance*, which features Brian Henry, a 22-year old African American man from Brooklyn, New York, who specializes in krumping.<sup>4</sup> The competition narrative that underpins *So You Think You Can Dance* already offers rich opportunity for dramatic facial expression, but krumping further engages intense and exaggerated facial gesticulations within its vernacular performance style.

Although a small body of researchers has briefly examined facial expression within live performance disciplines,<sup>5</sup> dance scholar Erin Brannigan represents one of the few to consider the face within the field of screendance practice.<sup>6</sup> Brannigan's work centers on "dance film," and the pertinence of her research here lies in her concept of "micro-choreographies."<sup>7</sup> Recalling film theorist Béla Balázs, who makes claim for the close-up's capacity to magnify dramatic expression, Brannigan describes how subtle facial movements transform into micro-choreographies within the context of dance film. Although we focus here on the television medium, the "small screen"<sup>8</sup> similarly constructs intimate images of localized facial motion rooted in danced expressions and social interactions, both of which serve to "choreograph" meaning within reality television dance shows. Brannigan employs the seminal work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in relation to concepts of facial expression, which we also call upon as the primary theoretical lens for this study.<sup>9</sup> Yet whereas Brannigan offers a reading of dance film that resists the hierarchical organization of the body, since the face does not serve a central purpose in the "contemporary dance" idiom that informs dance film, we commit to a close analysis of the face as articulated through the choreographic framework of reality television dance shows, in which spectacular facial performances are key.

Deleuze and Guattari have devoted considerable thought to the human face from their perspective of post-structuralist philosophy. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they conceive of the face through the semiotic lens of a "white wall" of *signifiance* and a "black hole" of subjectification.<sup>10</sup> In a somewhat bleak, anti-humanist vision, they describe this face as a white surface of inscription that is forever deterritorialized from the black hole of subjectivity, a consciousness that can never be accessed or articulated. The construction of this face arises through an "*abstract machine of faciality (visagéité)*,"<sup>11</sup> which dance scholar Andre Lepecki interprets as an assemblage of concrete ideas, signs, and phenomena.<sup>12</sup> The abstract facial machine thus produces legible messages that resist ambiguity, polyvocality, and heterogeneity. Hence the face can only be meaningful through the semiotic coding of the facial machine. As Deleuze and Guattari state, faciality "carries out the prior gridding that makes it possible for the signifying elements to become discernible, and for the subjective choices to be implemented."<sup>13</sup>

In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Deleuze usefully draws attention to the face and motion.<sup>14</sup> Deleuze envisions film as a "*machine assemblage of movement-images*"<sup>15</sup> in which the "movement-image" is comprised of "perception-images, action-images and affection-images."<sup>16</sup> The affection-image serves as prime interest here in that Deleuze characterizes it through the close-up of the face, which he portrays as a "pure affect," deterritorialized in time and space. Film theorist Richard Rushton explains pure affect in the sense that a sad face does not represent a sad person, but rather the face *is* sadness.<sup>17</sup> For Deleuze, the face consists of two poles: the reflective face, which is a unified surface of "pure quality" that is rendered immobile and receptive; and the intensive face, which constitutes an experiencing face that

conveys a series of expressions that break free from its outline and cross thresholds, which might bring about new moods, emotions, or interactions.

Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of the face provide a rich analytical tool for our study of *So You Think You Can Dance*. First, in reference to "facial choreography," we call upon Deleuze and Guattari's concept of faciality to illustrate how the reality television "machine" choreographs the facial expression of Brian Henry to ensure his legibility as an African-American krumper. Secondly, we employ Deleuze's idea of the "reflective" and "intensive" face in reference to the montage of competitor, judge, and spectator interactions, specifically through the close-up. This dynamic framework of exchange, we argue, constitutes a "choreographic interface"; while Henry's intensive face provides opportunity to critique the reality television format, his reflective face enables the construction of pedagogic, aesthetic, and performative values that attempt to regulate social and cultural norms into the viewing experience. Before we move on to this analysis, however, we will contextualize krumping as a dance practice.

### Krumping from Street to Screen

In a recent essay, ethnomusicologist Christina Zanfanga traces how krumping evolved from "clowning," an African American vernacular dance developed by Thomas "Tommy the Clown" Johnson in South Central Los Angeles.<sup>18</sup> Located in a community that had witnessed the social and racial turbulence of the Rodney King riots in 1992, Johnson developed clowning as a form of entertainment for children's birthday parties.<sup>19</sup> The dance drew on a combination of hip hop funk styles, Jamaican dancehall, and stripper dancing, but began to shift in tandem with its environment.<sup>20</sup> As young people became subject to constrictive regulations by the Los Angeles Police Department, which sought to penalize them for minor noise and conduct violations, dancers responded by transformed clowning into a "harder, more aggressive and personal solo style called krumping."<sup>21</sup> Characterized by sharp chest thrusts, rapid arm gestures, and syncopated isolations that course through the body, krump dancers frequently bare their teeth, purse their lips, stick out their tongues, and lip-synch words while they dance. These micro-choreographies of the face offer a compelling example for the purposes of this article.

The legacy of social and economic disenfranchisement and pent-up frustration intimated above has therefore come to be associated with krumping, and David LaChapelle's film documentary *Rize* (2005) clearly plays to this connection.<sup>22</sup> As such, considering *Rize* alongside *So You Think You Can Dance* enables us to view the facial choreographies presented within the documentary form as part of the choreographic interface that we employ to read Brian Henry's krumping audition. Although *Rize* is a documentary film and *So You Think You Can Dance* is a reality television series, both fabricate highly mediated representations of reality. The film closely follows the historical narrative outlined by Zanfanga with opening footage of burning buildings from the 1965 LA race riots and the 1992 Rodney King riots, and the first part of the

film focuses on Tommy the Clown's redemptive passage from drug dealer to dancer within some of the most rundown neighborhoods of the LA suburbs. As the film begins to focus on krumping, the colorful clown costumes and mask-like painted clown faces disappear in place of a more aggressive and agitated style of dance that features intense and mobile facial expression.

Set around shots of dilapidated buildings, battered cars and a dirty old mattress on the sidewalk, the camera cuts to headshots of krumpers who reflect on their lived experience: "we're from the inner city, or what you would call the ghetto"; "in better neighborhoods they have performing arts schools ... there's nothing like that available to you when you live where we live"; "what we are, are oppressed." These statements are also intercut with groups of krumpers dancing in basketball courts and other street locations to edgy, urban hip hop tracks, such as *Get Krumped* by Lil C and *Beastly* by Flii Stylz. The dancers jerk their torsos and lash out their arms in rapid, quick-fire motion, often pushing, grabbing and shoving at other bodies in the tight krumping circle. Their faces signal anger, rage, and pent-up emotion with gritted teeth, furrowed brows, and flashing eyes. As the film follows the krumpers, ideas concerning sexuality, violence, and religion are rooted into these dancing bodies.

In a scene that explains the "stripper dance," a feature of both clowning and krumping, a series of shots display sweaty bodies consisting of naked male torsos and women dressed in bra tops against a bright pink wall smeared with dirt or mold. The camera cuts between rear images of their buttocks shaking and pelvises twerking, and frontal images that display puckered lips, breathy exhalations and eyes shut as if in private ecstasy. Although the dancers themselves do not make links between the movement and sexuality, the composition of the shots clearly invoke ideas of the erotic. Throughout the film, the audience is reminded that these African American dancers are situated within a social landscape of violence and crime. In one sequence of shots, dancer Lil C describes how his father committed suicide, Tight Eyez details being shot by a family member, and Baby Tight Eyez relays stories of his mother's drug abuse. Yet this "social reality" is intercut with glossy images of a small circle of krumpers, with oiled black skin, dancing against a vivid blue sky. Although their intense, thrusting movement and aggressive facial gesticulations echo ideas expressed earlier in the film—that krumping offers a way for them to channel their anger through this "ghetto ballet"—the tight framing of the muscular black bodies against a pulsating urban hip hop beat recalls the commodified dancing images of commercial music video. Indeed, film critic Chris Ayres suggests that director David LaChapelle "ends up glamorizing the violence,"<sup>23</sup> and film scholar Belinda Smail identifies how the film is "oriented towards presenting the pleasure of the spectacle of krumping."<sup>24</sup>

The documentary narrative of *Rize* builds towards the Battle Zone, a dance competition organized by Tommy the Clown, which pits the clowns against the krumpers. The placement of dancing bodies within a competition framework offers a clear link to the competition narrative of *So You Think You Can Dance*. As the film moves to a close, however, it begins to signal the links between krumping and

religion. The need for spiritual comfort arises through the shared suffering of this community as several scenes focus on the random shooting of a young krumper, Quinesha Dunford. Psychologist Nicole Monteiro suggests that “krump” forms an acronym for “Kingdom Radically Uplifted Mighty Praise,”<sup>25</sup> and Zanfanga describes how “many of the dancers proclaim that they “get krump for Christ.”<sup>26</sup> Yet the film ends with three of the dancers krumping on a stretch of urban wasteland against a bright blue sky, and the gratuitous slow motion shots dwell on oiled “six-packs” and bouncing breasts. As we will show, these competing discourses of sexuality, aggression, and religion engendered in *Rize* also feed into the construction of krumping in *So You Think You Can Dance*.

### Close-up Pedagogies of Krumping

The clip we focus on introduces Brian Henry at one of the regional auditions, which typically attract dozens of aspiring dancers who hope to be selected for the “choreography round” of the competition.<sup>27</sup> Dance scholar Kate Elswit usefully formulates the notion of “extended choreography” to explain how reality television employs not only the danced routine, but also the introductory shots and the judges’ feedback as a contextualizing narrative that serves to characterize the dancers, as well as to position spectators within a desired viewing experience.<sup>28</sup> The idea of an extended choreography allows us to consider the motion, composition, and editing of Henry’s face throughout the entire audition as a form of “facial choreography,” and the framed interactions between Henry, the judges, and the live studio audience as a “choreographic interface.” We commence with the pre-audition scene, which introduces Henry prior to meeting the judges.

Framed in a mid-shot against a red brick wall, Henry vigorously thrusts his chest back and forth as his muscular arms drop and cross in front of him and, with eyebrows contorted into a frowning scowl, he appears to emit a silent growl. Dressed in typical street wear of a backwards baseball cap and red t-shirt, with “Brooklyn New York” emblazoned across the front, the familiar *So You Think You Can Dance* theme music, a mid-tempo guitar track heavy on synthesizers, plays in the background. For a moment, his facial expression appears ambiguous as the shot cuts to a close-up in which he playfully sends a “wave” along each eyebrow, disconcertingly chews on an imaginary object, and aggressively bites toward the camera while snatching out with his hand. In Deleuzian terms, we might suggest that the shot operates as “pure affect” in that Henry’s face, dislocated from the centering coordinates of time and space, does not *represent* but *is* play, intimidation, and aggression.<sup>29</sup> In these few fleeting moments, Henry’s confusing assemblage of facial expressions disorients the spectator, but quickly, the semiotic principles of Deleuze and Guattari’s “facial machine” come into play in the form of the codes and conventions of reality television.<sup>30</sup> One such semiotic code is the familiar voiceover of host Cat Deeley, who enthusiastically chimes, “Brian Henry is ready to show off what he’s learned—on the streets!”

Both Elswit and cultural theorist Guy Redden argue that reality television talent shows engage a form of pedagogy that educates its audiences about performance standards and behaviors.<sup>31</sup> Media scholar Su Holmes, meanwhile, suggests that the close-up acts as a rhetorical device in that it “offers the impression that we are getting close to the person, something then intensified by the particular formal and aesthetic construction of reality TV.”<sup>32</sup> In this brief introductory scene, a series of close-ups swiftly constructs a pedagogy of krumping and a characterization of Brian Henry that makes both the dance and the dancer legible for the television spectator. The importance of facial choreography in krumping is immediately established and continues throughout the pre-audition scene: Henry crosses his eyes, sticks out his tongue, snarls aggressively, and strains his jaw and mouth.

Yet in addition to movement vocabulary, the audience receives further pedagogic instruction regarding krumping as a social and cultural form. Although many of the shots feature Henry in close-up, these are interspersed with mid-shots that reveal a stark, urban environment. In one instance, he dances by a fire escape staircase, and then on a metal walkway with a high-rise apartment building in the background. This firmly locates the vernacular form of krumping as a street dance practice that inscribes his body with working class values. The prosaic urban setting, brick walls, and fire escape suggest a life that lacks privilege, opulence, and wealth, and provides a compelling intertextual reference to the same discourses of poverty, deprivation, and marginalization evident in *Rize*. His acquisition of dancing knowledge has clearly not been attained through a private training school, nor does it take place within a venerated theatrical space. Instead, the camera shows quite literally how Henry learns and performs on the street.

Although *So You Think You Can Dance* has featured scenes of other dance genres on street locations, Henry’s position as a “street dancer” continues through the entire audition scene, and the trope of a “raw street body” is reiterated and magnified through several close-ups of Henry as he talks and then dances. His mobile facial expressions are intense and unpredictable, while his voiceover states, “I’m aggressive, I’m what you’d call a gully, attitudish, grimy, gutter.”<sup>33</sup> Yet unlike *Rize*, in which the krumpers detail their violent and unstable lives, *So You Think You Can Dance* simply hints at a disenfranchised existence without evidencing the veracity of Henry’s reality. Nevertheless, his self-definition plays into a masculinized and racialized understanding of krumping, which follows from the framework of social and economic turbulence that underpins its evolution and has further circulated through *Rize*. Henry’s black, male body can be read through critical race theorist David Theo Goldberg’s articulation of an “Underclass.”<sup>34</sup> Henry’s self-identification as “a gangsta”, his embodied investment in this “aggressive” dance style, the inner-city street location that positions him outside the world of gainful employment, and his preoccupation with dance as a leisure form, all of which potentially prevents his entry into middle class society as a productive worker, clearly align him with this notion of a racial Underclass.

*So You Think You Can Dance* constructs frameworks of value in response to different dancing bodies and, from Henry's pre-audition clip, we can see how it produces the krumping body as an aggressive, streetwise Other. Yet this racialized and masculinized body remains safely contained within the reality television format. Although some of the facial choreography in the pre-audition scene exposes a menacing, "grimy" self, we move on to see several head shots of Henry that serve to allay any sense of anxiety. Communications scholar Paul Frosh asserts that the head shot has dominated the history of television, and describes how the televisual close-up differs from the cinematic close-up in the way that television faces employ a mode of direct address.<sup>35</sup> He conceives of this as a form of "parasocial interaction"<sup>36</sup> between the "talking head" and the television spectator, which assumes a personalized one-to-one relationship when "we are brought 'face-to-face' with our distant interlocutor."<sup>37</sup>

In the case of Henry, while the facial close-ups of his expressive dancing body are unsettling and intimidating, his talking head (as a familiar televisual device) serves to inform and reassure the spectator. Following the initial series of shots that portray his body within a dangerous, vernacular context, the scene cuts to an intimate facial close-up set within a quiet indoor location. He sits and calmly explains, "When krump came out, I got it right from the beginning." His benign demeanor, his gently raised eyebrows that signal a tentative explanation, the clarity of his language, and the passivity of his static body made safe within the indoor setting semiotically reposition him as secure and legible. This didactic strategy occurs again as his voiceover states, "I make stories with movements," and the clip cuts to another close-up of him on a residential street of town houses. This time, he slowly enacts his danced facial expressions and hand gestures, but each movement directly corresponds to a short phrase that he speaks: "Is that you over there?" and he thrusts his arm back and forth while staring intently ahead; "Boom, hold up," he looks sharply to the left while gesturing "halt" with his hand; "I'm gully," he frowns, clasping his fist to his chest; "I yell out," he cups his hands to his mouth; "'Cause they hear me," he points to himself, nods twice, and so on. Thus his body is no longer threatening, and his face and gesture are no longer illegible, as he carefully decodes himself. The intimacy of this head shot gently instructs the individualized spectator as to how to read his body and, once again, we shift to a reassuring indoor close-up where he succinctly concludes, "To my eyes, I'm writing, with my body."

From this pre-audition scene, we observe how Henry's dancing body is "facialized" through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the abstract machine. In the opening shot, his body initially appears free of this semiotic coding as his face seems to resist meaning through its strange contortions and ambiguous expressions. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari assert that a tic can dismantle the organization of the face, and Henry's spasmodic facial and bodily gestures threaten to escape the disciplinary and authoritarian structures that "give the new semiotic system its means of imperialism."<sup>38</sup> Yet this fleeting moment of uncertainty quickly dissolves as the facial machine begins to delimit Henry's dancing body through the rhetorical apparatus of

voiceovers, head shots, and specified locations. The voiceovers contextualize and give meaning to krumping as a dance practice; the head shots reassure audiences that Henry's dangerous streetwise persona can be constrained through the salving conventions of reality television; the inner-city landscape classifies the dance and the dancer within a legible matrix of race, class, and gender; and the indoor close-ups safely position Henry as a static and meaningful interlocutor.

Notably, Deleuze and Guattari conceive the face as a racialized and gendered construction through their characterization of the "white wall" of the "White Man."<sup>39</sup> In these terms, the facial machine determines normativity and allows for no intrusion, deviance or difference. Therefore the assemblage of voiceovers, headshots, and circumscribed locations ensure that Henry can only ever be read through the normalizing lens of a racial Other. As Rushton suggests, the overcoding of the abstract machine produces "faces" that are transparent and readable, and the excess of mediated faces that exist in print and on screen exemplify this semiotic operation.<sup>40</sup> In the following section, we will see how Henry attempts to resist this facialization, but becomes ultimately incorporated into the discursive framework of the reality television machine.

### Meeting, Greeting, Dancing, and Resisting

Throughout the studio audition scene, Henry, the three *So You Think You Can Dance* judges (Nigel Lythgoe, Mary Murphy, and Jason Gilikson), and the live studio audience are variously framed through close-ups, mid-shots, and full body shots.<sup>41</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, however, we want to call attention to a series of poignant facial close-ups to consider how Henry is aesthetically and performatively choreographed into this reality television show through Deleuze's notion of "affect-images." Deleuze observes that the face "gathers or expresses in a free way all kinds of tiny local movements which the rest of the body usually keeps hidden."<sup>42</sup> He further describes how the internal composition of each close-up in relation to other close-ups produces an "expressed complex entity" that comprises multiple singularities, some of which connect and some of which divide.<sup>43</sup> We will therefore examine the choreographic *interface*—that is, the micro choreographies of facial interaction between Henry and the judges, and the extent to which they align with or divert from each other.

Deleuze asserts that affect can either exist as a reflective, immobile component or an expressive and intensive movement. We would argue that a predominantly "intensive face" emerges in the first part of the audition when Henry meets the judges and performs his dance; however, in the following section, a progressively "reflective face" comes into being as the judges offer their feedback. Deleuze envisages the "intensive face" as an expressive series of micro-movements that exceeds its surface and crosses boundaries. As Rushton observes, Deleuze prioritizes the "direction" rather than the "expression" of thoughts and feelings that mobilize the face,<sup>44</sup> and this succession from one quality to another clearly presents itself in the first part of the

audition. Indeed, the importance of editing comes into play as the temporal order of shots produces a dramatic narrative that underscores the sensationalism and competition typical of reality television shows. Here we see an unsettling trajectory of facial close-ups that evoke a mocking antagonism, an authoritarian appeal, outright denial, insistent classification, measured obstinacy, pure rejection, and a mobilized affirmation.

The audition scene begins as Henry enters the stage and, after a few polite greetings and introductions, judge Nigel Lythgoe inquires as to which dance style Henry prefers to perform. The camera cuts to a close-up as Henry provocatively responds, "You know that violent style you was talking about, krumping? That's what I do." In doing so, Henry stands confidently, frowning slightly, almost in a playful reprimand of Lythgoe's implicitly misguided interpretation of the dance. The shot swiftly cuts back to a close-up of Lythgoe who raises his palms in an open gesture of reasoned appeal, but accepts the categorization of krumping as violent, and offers a moral stance against this supposition. With a paternalistic raise of his eyebrows Lythgoe states, "It doesn't always have to be violent though!" Lythgoe continues with an assertion that krumper Russell Ferguson, the season six winner of *So You Think You Can Dance*, avoids its violent associations, at which point, the camera cuts to a close-up of Henry and, with a slight smile of disdain, he defiantly interjects, "I'm not Russell."

From this short exchange, through close-up to close-up, we witness the "pure power" of antagonism, reason, and denial. This succession of expressive qualities continues as Lythgoe locks Henry in a penetrating stare and provocatively questions, "So you're going to be violent?" Refusing to enter into this discourse of violence, Henry's face exudes calm, but his mouth obstinately states, "I'm gonna krump." Immediately aware of his vocal and facial resistance, all the three judges are caught in a mid-shot, their mouths locked in an open expression of astonishment as they emit the sound "whoa!" Although pantomimic in style, their faces clearly enunciate the marked shift from polite interactions to defiant provocations. Notably, the judges are further aligned through their white racial constitution, with Lythgoe from the United Kingdom, Murphy from the United States, and Gilikson from Australia, and their class-based privilege as successful professionals and high-profile celebrities from the entertainment industry. The camera again cuts to a close-up of Henry whose facial movement rapidly shifts across two distinct expressions, both of which refuse to be lured into Lythgoe's desire to position him as a violent, racial Other. First he stands, with gaze directed firmly away from the judges, his right palm raised as a sign of rejection, and his chin and bottom lip jutting outward to enhance his determined attitude; he then shifts slightly to raise both hands in the air, which may suggest a passive resignation, but his continued refusal to meet their gaze as he turns his head to face the opposite direction, strongly indicates a man who will not succumb to their taunting and who will not accept their racialized characterization of the dance.

On the one hand, the tension that unfolds as Henry and Lythgoe enter into a facial contestation over the associations of krumping with violence serves to engage

television viewers in a compelling narrative drama.<sup>45</sup> Yet performance scholar Megan Anne Todd argues that the presence of krumping on *So You Think You Can Dance* facilitates, “a platform and a visual space of dialogue for narratives beyond and critical to the cultural hegemony in dance aesthetics and society.”<sup>46</sup> In Henry, and his interaction with the judges, we see the expressive lines of “faceicity” as suggested by Deleuze, as Henry intensely resists their complacent positioning of him as a dangerous Underclass. Rushton describes how the “intensive face” conveys feeling and experience; it acts as a dynamic and expressive force that breaks free from its outline through an autonomous series.<sup>47</sup> Thus, while Lythgoe and his fellow judges seek to inscribe Henry with a rhetoric of racialized street violence, ideas already circulated through *Rize*, Henry’s rapid succession of intense facial expressions of provocation, reprimand, disdain, denial, calm, determination, and rejection, and the facial responses of doubt, authority, and astonishment that this arouses in the judges, serves to negotiate and critique their normative claim.

Another brief exchange follows between Lythgoe and Henry regarding celebrity krumper Lil C,<sup>48</sup> which alludes to the legacy of *Rize* and the concomitant popularization of krumping in music video.<sup>49</sup> Henry responds through a stinging critique of the popular media’s appropriation and commercialization of krumping, at which point Lythgoe invites him to dance. Throughout the dance, the style of filming shifts radically as the camera frames Henry’s body almost entirely through full shots, with only occasional mid-shots and cut-away shots to the judges. In Deleuzian terms, this signals a change from the dislocated spatial and temporal coordinates of the close-up and its quality of pure affect, into an “action-image,” which offers clear spatial and temporal determinates.<sup>50</sup>

Henry performs to a hip hop track with a driving beat, in what appears to be a spontaneous and improvised response to the music. In typical krumping style, he displays syncopated isolations, powerful arm gestures, and spectacular facial contortions, including one visually-arresting moment in which he mimes eating his hat and vomiting it back into his hand. Of note, however, are the strong emotions implicitly aroused through the dancing experience that prompt Henry to strip off his t-shirt, drop down on all fours to pound the floor with his knuckles, and rip off his necklace. As the music fades and the dance comes to an end, clearly impassioned by the act of krumping, Henry repeatedly shouts “Yeah,” which he underscores with clenched fists and flexed biceps. This apparent mobilization of passion and aggression is reflected in a shot of the cheering audience members, one of whom mirrors his vocal and physical affirmation. The extension, magnification, and fixing of this sheer physicality follows with a close-up of Henry who frowns intently, unable to take pleasure in the crowd’s enthusiastic response. As Holmes suggests, the reality television close-up provides a, “superenhanced realism offering a perspective unavailable to the naked eye, which acts as a guarantor of authenticity and real emotion.”<sup>51</sup> Once again, Henry’s self-affirmative passion presents itself as pure affect.

Within this first part of the audition, the exchange between Henry and the judges, followed by Henry’s danced presentation, can be illuminated through

Rushton's discussion of the "virtual" and the "actual" in relation to the face.<sup>52</sup> Drawing on Deleuzian philosophy,<sup>53</sup> Rushton asserts that while experiences are actual, the face presents a virtual expression of them. Ironically, the virtual constitutes the mode through which experiences are "actualized"; hence, the actual does not exist without the virtual. Consequently, this assumes that the virtual face potentially offers a myriad of endless possibilities; yet when the face comes into relation with another face, this delimits possibility to the finite. In reference to Deleuze and Guattari, Rushton describes how this interaction "unleashes potential," and uses the example of how a "frightening face" that appears in a peaceful world offers the possibility of making the world "frightening."<sup>54</sup> During the pre-audition scene, Henry's face initially appears replete with possibility through its alienating, comical, and menacing contortions. Indeed, his racialized and sexualized body, as a streetwise, snarling Other, engenders the frightening face that potentially acts as a dangerous threat to the peaceful world of televised light entertainment. As Henry encounters the judges, however, the choreographic interplay of facial close-ups increasingly restricts this realm of possibility. While at first he seeks to resist this through the intensive facial encounters between himself and the judges, as well as through the mobilization of powerful dancing emotions actualized through his virtual face, as we see during the judges' feedback, his dancing body becomes increasingly circumscribed and "faceified" through the establishment and dominance of the "reflective face."

### Evaluation, Reflection, and Faceification

The judges' feedback commences with Lythgoe, who now tries to position Henry within a lens of social and economic disenfranchisement. In a tight close-up, with gently knitted eyebrows and slight tilt forward, Lythgoe's face suggests concern and curiosity as he states, "I guess that it came out of frustration." As before, Henry attempts to resist through calling upon an alternative narrative of krumping. His head briefly shakes in denial and he glances above (almost as if invoking a higher presence) and firmly replies, "Not for me, I krump for my God, I krump for Christ." Notably, the links between krumping and spirituality also feature in *Rize*, but for the purposes of *So You Think You Can Dance*, it appears that the violence and oppression associated with krumping fuels the spectacle and drama of reality television, rather than the less inflammatory notions of morality and worship. Not satisfied, Lythgoe insists, "No, no, no, I'm talking about where it comes from," as he emphatically gestures to an imaginary object or being emitting from his body. Yet Henry remains resolute. His intensive face insists, "This is praise; this is a praise dance." For a fleeting moment, the camera cuts to a close-up of Lythgoe whose face registers utter confusion, almost a "loss of face" with mouth agape and brow knotted, before returning to Henry's continued protestations. This approach clearly fails to position Henry according to Lythgoe's prescribed rendering of the disaffected krumping body, therefore following some awkward murmurings among the judges, attention swiftly moves to judge Mary

Murphy and, from this point on, Henry's robust "faceicity" gradually disappears to be replaced by a "reflective face."

For Deleuze, the reflective face constitutes an immobile and receptive surface.<sup>55</sup> It emerges as a "pure quality" common to several objects, thus creating a sense of unity. Unlike the intensive face, it lacks excitement, dynamism, and expression; rather it reflects, and thus collapses inwards.<sup>56</sup> Murphy begins her critique by commanding, "Brian, could you put on your shirt please!" thus shifting the audience's attention toward his body. Captured in close-up, she turns to the audience and opens her mouth in mock outrage as if both shocked and overwhelmed by the allure of his body. As Henry compliantly puts on his t-shirt, a close-up follows of Murphy who elaborates to the audience, "Otherwise I won't be able to focus on my critique!" The shot cuts to the audience cheering and laughing, and then back to Henry who softly smiles as he straightens his shirt. The *interfacial* unity of Murphy's comedic response to the desirability of his body, the audience's jovial affirmation, and Henry's benign acquiescence collaboratively construct the pure quality of a reflective face. This facial exchange does not constitute an expressive series, but instead the unified and reflective iterations of humor simply collapse inwards.

Murphy's portrayal of Henry through the lens of a hyper-sexualized masculinity plays into a primitivist representation of the black male body that has operated since the beginning of film. Director, D.W. Griffith first presented the "Brutal Black Buck" in his controversial 1915 film, *Birth of a Nation*, which film historian Donald Bogle describes as African American men who are "oversexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh."<sup>57</sup> Goldberg asserts that the concept of the primitive emerged in the fifteenth century to describe an "origin," and which evolved in anthropology to refer to ancient or primeval societies.<sup>58</sup> The term has subsequently developed to take on a racialized understanding that contrasts white European culture with non-Western cultures. From an evolutionist perspective, primitivism assumes that whereas European culture exhibits civilization, rationality, and order, the African body represents the uncivilized, promiscuous, and illogical Other.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the relations between Murphy's mockery, the audience laughter, and Henry's passive smile "reflect" a collusion through the consensual acceptance of his naked torso as a dangerous representation of the uncivilized and oversexualized primitive body. In Deleuzian terms, Henry's chest is faceified.

The critique continues as Murphy shifts from a disciplining of his body, to a castigation of his voice. Framed in a close-up, her face changes register to reflect a stern and serious attitude as she urges him to, "be careful when you knock fellow dancers who have come before you." For a brief moment, Henry resists through further explanation of his mission to reclaim krumping from the mainstream, but Murphy cuts this short. In close-up, devoid of emotion, with gritted teeth and a blank stare, she coldly states, "It's the tone of what you said ..." For a brief second, Henry looks awkward as doubt and confusion flash across his face, but he quickly returns to an immobile expression as he nods subserviently in compliance with her critique. This process of faceification continues as she brings her critique to an end. While Murphy

complements Henry's krumping as "fantastic," and suggests that she would like to see him perform in the next round, her affirmative smile reflects upon and fixes his smile of pleasure in response to her praise.

The desire to delimit Henry's dancing body as unfinished and unrefined persists with judge Jason Gilikson's feedback. Once again, the shot cuts to a close-up that magnifies Gilikson's authority as a judge. After a brief comment regarding the entertainment value of the dancing, his gaze settles on Henry. His face adopts a slightly quizzical expression and his hands appear to grasp at an elusive truth as he states, "I think what it comes down to is I can't quite picture you doing a Broadway number, or a Viennese waltz, or a cha cha." As with Murphy, this commentary invokes a primitivist rhetoric in that the dances to which he refers are aligned with a white Euro-American aesthetic within the performance context of *So You Think You Can Dance*. Multiple dance scholars have traced the aesthetic and ideological shifts as vernacular dance practices are transmitted from African American to Euro-American bodies through a discursive framework of "savage to civilized."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Todd observes that *So You Think You Can Dance* perpetuates an "aesthetic prejudice toward the upward held torso and the unbroken line of classically 'Western' trained dancers."<sup>61</sup> Thus located within a similar narrative of refinement, Gilikson fails to see how Henry's raw, violent, and vernacular body might be disciplined to the civilizing standards of competition ballroom and the Broadway stage.

Yet in spite of this moment of doubt, Gilikson continues with the suggestion that he would need to see Henry's capacity to achieve this in the next choreography round. In response, Henry nods, his arms held open, in a passive and reflective acceptance of all that Gilikson suggests. This compliance continues as the camera cuts to a close-up of Lythgoe. His face registers little emotion except for an extremely slight raise of the eyebrows and twitch at the corners of his mouth as he mischievously interjects, "I'm a 'yes' to choreography because I want to see if you can put your feet where your mouth is." In response to Lythgoe's humorous play on words and affirmation of his dancing ability, the shot lingers on a close-up of Henry's reflective face as he quickly winks in acknowledgement of the joke, and then smiles openly to the camera in recognition of his success. In return, the camera cuts back to a close-up of Lythgoe, also smiling as he bids goodbye to Henry. As an important point of closure, the relations between Henry and Lythgoe are no longer resistant, intensive, and combative, but compliant, reflective, and incorporated into the aesthetic and ideological framework of the reality television machine. In that brief wink, Henry accepts and colludes with the power structure that seeks to make his body legible to the television audience as a racialized, sexualized, and masculinized Other. Furthermore, he signals his willingness to disregard his vernacular krumping agenda to be re-trained in the choreography round according to the judges' Euro-American dance standards.

## Facing the Facts

In this article, we have departed from the genre of vernacular krumping to consider how its intense use of facial expression is re-choreographed for the purposes of documentary realism and reality television. We draw on Deleuzian philosophy to show how the facial machine of the reality show *So You Think You Can Dance* makes the krumping body meaningful through televisual devices, such as didactic voiceovers, circumscribed locations, "talking head" conventions, and the parasocial intimacy of the close-up. The spectator cannot assume that *a priori* meaning or subjectivity exists prior to facialization; rather, dancer Brian Henry and his krumping practice are constructed through the semiotic regulation of the reality television close-up. Although his dancing body and use of facial expression initially convey instability and ambiguity, the reality television framework creates a pedagogy of krumping as a raw, unrefined streetdance, and performatively positions Henry as a potentially dangerous black Other. These ideas build on a narrative of krumping already in circulation through the film documentary *Rize*, although the viewer is offered no contextualizing information regarding Henry's personal background. Instead, the judges attempt to contain him through racist narratives of social and economic marginalization, a violent masculinity, an excessive sexuality, and an uncivilized and undisciplined body. Through an intensive series of pure power, however, the close-up magnifies Henry's refusal to be represented in these terms. His face and body commit to krumping's vernacular legacy and he exposes and resists the judges' aesthetic and ideological desire for him to conform to a Euro-American dance paradigm. Yet in order for Henry to progress in the competition, he needs to conform; therefore, his face changes to one of immobile compliance as he acquiesces to and mirrors the judges' feedback through the pure quality of his reflective face.

This entire exchange models a power framework of white, Western supremacy as the faces of the three white judges delimit Henry's African American body so that it can only be known through the close-up lens of a racialized, sexualized, and masculinized Other. In reference to faciality, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, "Racism never detects the particles of the other; it propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out."<sup>62</sup> Notably, although Henry successfully passes this audition, he does not make it beyond the choreography round. On one hand, this could be read as his failure to conform to the Euro-American ideal; on the other, his elimination attests to his political commitment to vernacular krumping and continued resistance to the normalizing intent of the reality television machine.

Although our analysis only focuses on a six-minute clip, the concept of "facial choreography" and the "choreographic interface" can be applied to other screendance genres as well. The framing of the face through the close-up and the temporal organization of those shots produces a clear sense of facial composition, and the interactions between screen faces, the implied positioning of the spectator within those exchanges, and the intertextual references to other screen faces create a choreographic interface, which forms a rich site of meaning-production. This choreographic exchange provides an analytical framework to expose the pedagogic,

aesthetic, and performative values that underpin reality television dance shows, and may be applied to other dance genres within the reality television format or within screendance generally. While the choreographic interface clearly seeks to delimit our knowledge of the dancing body according to social and cultural norms, it also facilitates an “actualized” site of expressive facial interactions through which values can be constructed, resisted, and negotiated.

## Notes

1. Dan McNeill, *The Face* (Boston: Little Brown, 1998).
2. Paul Coates, *Screening the Face* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).
3. *So You Think You Can Dance* premiered in 2005 on Fox television and is now in its 11th season. Its contestants are required to perform dance routines in a variety of styles within the format of a knock-out competition.
4. “SYTYCD USA: Brian Henry auditions (krump),” BboyRisky1, *YouTube*, 2011.
5. See Phillip Auslander, “Musical Personae,” *The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (2006): 100-119; Sherril Dodds, *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); Abigail Feder, “‘A Radiant Smile for the Lovely Lady’: Overdetermined Femininity in ‘Ladies’ Figure Skating,” *The Drama Review* 38, no. 1 (1994): 62-78; Brenda Foley, *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Katherine Liepe-Levinson, *Strip-Show: Performances of Gender and Desire* (London: Routledge, 2002).
6. Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
7. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 44.
8. Although film and television employ different modes of production, dissemination and reception, Frosh (2009) observes how the notion of the small box-shaped television set has been replaced by large, high definition, flat screen televisions, which Rodan (2009, 367) notes can create “isolated cinematic spaces.”
9. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
10. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

11. Ibid., 168, emphasis original.
12. André Lepecki, "Machines, Dances, Neurons: Towards an Ethics of Dance," *The Drama Review* 51, no. 3 (2007): 119-123.
13. Ibid., 179-80.
14. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*. Although Deleuze focuses on film, as with the work of Brannigan, these ideas can be extended to television through its capacity to frame and edit two-dimensional images.
15. Ibid., 59, emphasis original.
16. Ibid., 66.
17. Richard Rushton, "What Can a Face Do?: On Deleuze and Faces," *Cultural Critique* 51 (2002): 219-237.
18. Christina Zanfanga, "The Multiringed Kosmos of Krumping: Hip-Hop Dance at the Intersections of Battle, Media and Spirit," in *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, ed. Julie Malnig (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 337-353.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 342.
22. *Rize*, Dir. David LaChapelle (Lions Gate, 2005).
23. Chris Ayres, "You Don't Want to Face the Gunfire of Compton? Go and Watch the Movie," *The Times*, June 28, 2005, 17.
24. Belinda Smaill, "Injured Identities: Pain, Politics and Documentary," *Studies in Documentary Film* 1, no. 2 (2007): 160.
25. Nicole M. Monteiro and Diana J. Wall, "African Dance as Healing Modality Throughout the Diaspora: The Use of Ritual and Movement to Work Through Trauma," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no. 6 (2011): 234-252.
26. Ibid., 247; Zanfanga, "The Multiringed Kosmos of Krumping," 345.
27. After the first round of open auditions, the judges select promising dancers to perform in the choreography round, in which they must demonstrate competence in a variety of choreographed routines.
28. Kate Elswit, "So You Think You Can Dance Does Dance Studies," *The Drama Review* 56, no. 1 (2012): 136.
29. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*.

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30. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
31. Elswit, "So You Think You Can Dance"; Guy Redden, "Making Over the Talent Show," *Exposing Lifestyle Television: The Big Reveal*, ed. Gareth Palmer (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 129-143.
32. Su Holmes, "'Reality goes pop!': Reality TV, Popular Music, and Narratives of Stardom in Pop Idol," *Television & New Media* 5, no. 2 (2004): 161.
33. "Gully" can be defined as from the street, the gutter and/or a "gangsta" ([www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com), accessed April 4, 2013).
34. David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Knowledge," *Theories of Race and Racism*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), 154-180. Goldberg describes the Underclass as a racialized construct, which pathologizes the black community as an "undeserving poor." Read within the spatial representation of an inner-city landscape, the Underclass refers to those unmotivated to work, mothers on benefit, street criminals, and urban gangs.
35. Paul Frosh, "The Face of Television," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625 (2009): 87-102.
36. *Ibid.*, 90.
37. *Ibid.*, 91.
38. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 181.
39. *Ibid.*, 176.
40. Rushton, "What Can a Face Do?"
41. Judge Nigel Lythgoe is a former dancer who has produced multiple reality television shows, including *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Popstars*, *Pop Idol*, and *American Idol* ([www.fox.com/dance/bios/hosts-judges/nigel-lythgoe](http://www.fox.com/dance/bios/hosts-judges/nigel-lythgoe); [www.imdb.com/name/nm0529328/3](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0529328/3)); Mary Murphy was a former championship ballroom dancer ([www.fox.com/dance/bios/hosts-judges/mary-murphy](http://www.fox.com/dance/bios/hosts-judges/mary-murphy)); and Jason Gilikson is also a former ballroom dancer and award winning choreographer ([www.jasongilkison.com](http://www.jasongilkison.com)).
42. *Ibid.*, 87-88.
43. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 104.
44. Rushton, "What Can a Face Do?," 228-9.
45. See Elswit, "So You Think You Can Dance Does Dance Studies," for further discussion of the narrative dramas that underpin reality television dance contests.

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46. Megan Anne Todd, "Aesthetic Foundations and Activist Strategies of Intervention in Rickerby Hinds' Buckworld One," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4 no. 6 (2011): 151.
47. Rushton, "What Can a Face Do?"
48. Lil C starred in *Rize* and featured as a guest judge on *So You Think You Can Dance*.
49. See for example *Hung Up* by Madonna, *Hey Mama* by Black Eyed Peas and *I'm Really Hot* by Missy Elliott.
50. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*.
51. Holmes, "Reality Goes Pop!," 161.
52. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*.
53. Rushton calls upon additional material here from Deleuze's, *Difference and Repetition* and Deleuze and Guattari's, *What is Philosophy?*
54. Rushton, "What Can a Face Do?," 228.
55. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*.
56. Rushton, "What Can a Face Do?"
57. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, 4th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001).
58. Goldberg, "Racial Knowledge."
59. Goldberg, "Racial Knowledge," and Nadine George Graves "'Just Like Being at the Zoo': Primitivity and Ragtime Dance," in *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, ed. Julie Malnig (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 55-71.
60. See Susan C. Cook "Talking Machines, Dancing Bodies: Marketing Recorded Dance Music Before World War 1," in *Bodies of Sound: Issues Across Popular Music and Dance*, ed. Sherril Dodds and Susan C. Cook (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 149-162; Jane Desmond, "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies," in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. Jane Desmond (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 29-54; George Graves, "Just Like Being at the Zoo"; Juliet McMains, *Glamour Addiction: Inside the American Ballroom Industry* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).
61. Todd, "Aesthetic Foundations & Activist Strategies," 151.
62. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 178.

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# **PROVOCATIONS AND VIEWPOINTS**



## Fleshing the Interface

*Dianne Reid*

*To be a mature dance artist is a particular act of survival. It requires both a hardening of political resolve and a softening into the complex flux of physicality. There is a richness of expression, personal and technical, that lives within the mature dancer's body—textural detail and virtuosic nuance that emerges from the experiential. There are emotions and truths housed in this physicality that dancing can access...<sup>1</sup>*



Figure 1:  
*Dance Interrogations* in  
the Medina Treasury  
Tunnels, 2012  
Image courtesy of the  
artist

People talk about “getting their head around something” as a euphemism for understanding, accepting, or mastering an idea. The phrase supports the notion that one must move away from and then back inside an experience to appreciate its complexity and detail, its multiplicity. As artists pick up cameras and begin to look at the moving body from a number of perspectives simultaneously, they began a multifarious journey that connects and complicates the roles and languages of author and subject across spaces, sites, and art forms. Screendance is a complex circumnavigation of flesh and pixels, of dissection and resurrection, unfixing in order to re-render the moving body to the sum of and greater than its parts. To work as a screendance artist is to enter a creative and philosophical loop that begins seeking to capture and fix the dance experience and, in the process, discovers possibilities for undoing, diversifying, and reconfiguring the danced exchange.

Screendance dismantled my proscenium arch, liberated my body in space and time, and enabled me to dance (and dance for) audiences existing in other spaces and times. The camera provided me with a means to guide my audience more directly into my body—and then to ride my point of view and rhythms as I cut together my dance journey.

*In choreographing for video I am exploring mechanisms by which I can translate the kinaesthetic intimacy of dance and the body to the screen—to make my sweat bead on the surface of the screen. In doing so, I am drawing attention to the “individual” experience, the emotional and psychological landscape which “lives” in the physical landscape.<sup>2</sup>*

Creating dance for the screen grew from a desire to find a more direct link for the audience to my creative vision, to my imagination. It enabled me to capture a particular moment, an intimacy and, by fixing it (at first on film or videotape, then as digital files), to hold onto and replay that exact moment. It is proof that my dance/my body/I exist—I have a tangible history of experience and emotion and idea, that moves and feels and speaks for and to you, the viewer, and I can share it with you as quickly as your internet connection allows. Some years ago I wrote about my journey from choreographer to dance video artist as an “unlearning of my role and processes as choreographer.”<sup>3</sup> Excited by the choreographic potential of video editing, I identified with Maya Deren’s statement that it was like “finally finding the glove that fits...and I could move directly from my imagination onto film.”<sup>4</sup>

*I was cutting choreography—re-defining screen narrative through a kinaesthetic script and re-defining the spatial and temporal constructions of my choreography through the cinematic tools of montage.<sup>5</sup>*



Figure 2:  
Image from *Dance Interrogations* Promotional Video  
Courtesy of the artist

Over the last ten years (and the first decade of this new millennium), a period that frames the creation of my body of screendance work, the physical body has become more distant in a cultural sense. Our lives operate over multiple sites—we are “interfaced” rather than face-to-face, and we must search for our three-dimensionality inside the pixels and portals of technology. A body in a physical landscape is re-sited as it is technologically captured to the frame of the screen or to the motion capture software, then “recorporealized to another storage medium such as tape or DVD. Finally, it is re-sited again at its end point, as a screen image.”<sup>6</sup> That which sought to bring us closer has separated us. We become veiled through these tiers of representation, seeing and seen through the eye of the lens not the lens of our eye. This shift in our cultural way of looking and being in the world has affected how we view and make screendances (that term itself an evolution through the many stages of development of the field).<sup>7</sup> The tools of recording and manipulating an image are at every consumer’s fingertips. The mobile phone condition has reached epidemic proportions, hunching us, thumbs a-quiver, over the tiny screens in the palms of our hands. Thousands of domestic production houses walk the streets capturing, colouring, cutting and copying their own and every footfall. The collaborative, creative artwork has been squashed underfoot by this unseeing image-eating machine—a guerrilla audience bent on the upgrade, reducing “reflection” to replication rather than rumination.

*In a culture like ours, so preoccupied with images of bodies and bodies of images, we tend to forget that both our bodies and our vision have lived dimensions that are not reducible to the merely visible.*<sup>8</sup>

As much as I celebrate the possibilities of a new piece of technology, I have been mourning the physical body. As I upload my screendances to YouTube and Vimeo, as I submit them to a festival on the other side of the world, I begin to feel like the proverbial tree falling in the forest—invisible and intangible again. Even though I can count the number of “views,” these are disembodied viewers. The online and “televisualized”<sup>9</sup> connection doesn’t have the quality of the fleshy interface; we cannot touch. I miss bumping into people. I yearn for the risk of the live collision, the happy accident, the fleeting encounter, the spontaneous revelation, the connection of body to body. I want to now undo the screendance artefact and re-configure it into a live encounter, a process “unplugged.”

And, over the past decade, another thing has happened and is happening with my relationship to dance and choreography—that relationship has matured. Of course, my physical body has matured and this is gradually shifting my range and stamina, but rather than being a loss, it is a redirection. In fact, it is a refinement. It is recognition of the wealth of creative material that now resides in my body, which can be accessed through improvisation. This extends beyond dance “steps” to the many aspects of my lived experience, both real and imagined. I am carrying hours and hours of footage, which, with performance practice, can be edited in real time in the presence of the audience, placing the lens in our collaborative hands.

Interestingly I find that my question remains the same throughout my journey as a screendance artist:

*If I can direct the viewer through the verbal and language, to the kinaesthetic, and if I can merge form and content more directly, can I lead the viewer to a physical utterance? My task ... became a desire for this convergence—a direct relationship between form and content, between spectator and performer/author, between the language exterior and the felt interior.<sup>10</sup>*

And so now I have begun a particular dance interrogation, a probing of the many screendance sites, simultaneously, finding and crafting frames of and on the body in the same space and time in duet with my audience. I am proposing a “living screendance”—an interactive art in which the sharing of physical space also shares the power, responsibility, and creative voice. By dissolving the space between performer and audience, invading their intimate and interior spaces through proximity, touch, question, and implication, I seek to interrogate the way we view the dancing body and implicate our bodies as creative and communicative vessels. My role as improvisational performer is simultaneously that of subject and witness, uncovering the artifacts of my experience as I share a particular experience with an audience. I interrogate my physicality and in doing so uncover the traces of emotion, vocabulary, incident, and idea that have moved through my architecture. I implicate my audience in the narrative as our bodies share thirty minutes in a particular architecture. It is a three-dimensional sharing of interior spaces both physical and metaphoric.



Figure 3:  
*Dance Interrogations* in the Medina Treasury Tunnels (2012)  
Photo: Evie Photakis

*Dance Interrogations* is the title of an ongoing solo performance practice initiated in late 2011. The title is the clue to the content and the form. Dance is both the location and the tool of interrogation. The questions and responses are about the dance, the body, and the self. But I am a moving target, a shifting site, an aging body, colliding in new ways with other bodies, sites, memories, and images.

Presented in intimate, non-theatrical locations, the thirty minute dance and video “event” is a sharing of space, suggestions and sensations between my actual and imagined bodies<sup>11</sup> and the bodies of the audience. The role of “audience” is challenged through my movement around, proximity to and interaction with specific individuals, who are also having to stand and move with me and each other in order to: see me as I am hidden by a wall or another body; avoid impact with my dancing body; or in response to my direct suggestion (and because of a limited or complete absence of seating). These viewers are made aware of their own and each other’s bodies, themselves providing physical frames and narrative content. Each performance becomes a creative collaboration imposed by the sharing of this site. There is no scripted or pre-choreographed content; the movement and narratives arise out of the moment and the context, albeit with recurring themes about the body/architecture, memory/desire and touch/relationships.

I establish a “frame” for each performance event with the physical site—an interior akin to an interrogation room or holding cell, one that might serve as a metaphor for the body’s interior. For the Adelaide Fringe 2012, the site was a tunnel in the basement of what was once the Treasury Building, a trio of small vaults of distressed sandstone and brick. The crumbling textures and the window and door openings leading to another hidden tunnel provided metaphoric material for the body, aging, memory, inscription—the architecture implying the body’s interior, the lungs and stomach, or the circulatory system.



Figure 4:  
Image from *Dance Interrogations* Promotional Video  
Courtesy of the artist

*A subterranean space, a crypt, dungeon, a derelict tunnel—with a door and a window leading to a closed narrow space of soil ... Like a body, the caverns of the internal torso resolving into the matter of the layers of fascia. My audience and I were inside a larger body ... vaulted spaces like lungs lined with a crumbling brick and stone vault of rich reds and creams, flaking and fluted, that came away in my hands, stained my feet, scratched and bruised my limbs. We were all foreign bodies in this architecture and my forensic examination extended from stone to flesh, across and around the negative spaces of their bodies, climbing them and their reactions as I physically scaled the walls, ledges...*

*Disappearing from view behind other bodies or the wall masking another cavity ... using their windows and doorways to privilege a gesture, to illuminate a detail, illustrate a connection. Their moving flesh providing pathways and places to rest ... my shifting of levels and relationships to gravity building perspectives on their landscapes, changing their scale and balance. I lie between someone's feet and look up—they become my Everest and I become their fallen body. I fit myself into their curves and edges—solve the jigsaw of that performance's population as I find their elbow point fits into the cup of my hand, my ear onto the top of their shoulder, a side of a head resting into the hip crease. I approach as a familiar friend, a like-mind, and they allow me to build our relationship of similarity, support, and comfort. Their physicality is written into the narrative. They are co-authors and co-actors, kin, a community brought together by the consequence of site.<sup>12</sup>*

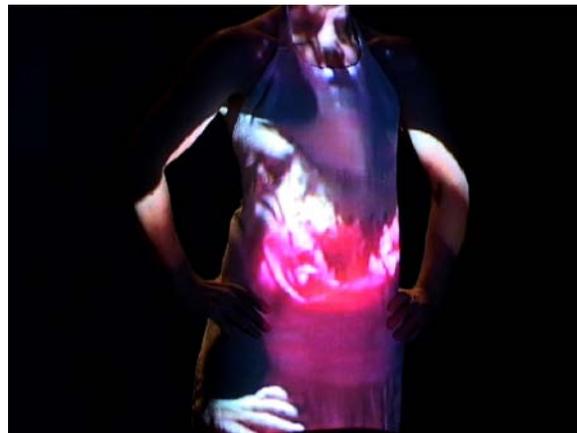
My venue for the Edinburgh Fringe was a blacked-out, two meter square hotel room. With the walls invisible and only a small circle of light on the carpeted floor, it was as if the audience and I were suspended in a muffled womb.

*The solo in Edinburgh became a true interrogation  
a black hole of an interview room with space for only a handful of victims  
I began the season with it empty except for my body,  
sometimes laying mid-floor, sometimes blurring the edges  
and as the days progressed, added or subtracted chairs,  
static forms—4 grouped for a card game or 1 laying askew as though a scuffle  
has occurred—the interactions with audience became much more loaded and  
intense framed in this darkness (than the tunnel in Adelaide)*

*and yet still some trust developed over the 30 minutes  
so these strangers became collaborators in my unpacking...*

*bits of joy jumping us in unison, pieces of longing connecting our hands and cheeks  
the added final image of my ghostly self on my stripped back body helped spear  
the black, pierce an opening in our minds to another time, location, identity beyond  
that show's hundred moments<sup>13</sup>*

I incorporated two discrete moments of video projection onto the surface of my own body, drawn from an earlier solo work, literally referencing a past or lost self. I became the screen, my body the site of the screendance via my “skins,” the micro landscapes of costume layers that are populated by video projected imagery and animated as they are revealed or discarded. I wanted to be able to peel myself, to metaphorically get under the surface, to reveal other identities, past selves, dreams, traumas. At about halfway through the work I reveal an opening in the room and, through a beam of projected light, let in another world. Past selves alluded to up until that point now appear as moving images. My real body is stopped, as are my audience who must herd into a small group parted by the beam of light in order to see the projected imagery. We are all pinned by this new artificial interface as I am speared by micro images of myself crawling and climbing over my torso. I am zooming in on myself—amplifying a moment edited into a new multi-layered exchange, my screen self interacting with the frame of my live body in direct physical relation to my viewers. It is both ridiculous and reflective, this metaphor for technology’s “breaking” of the body; we are reduced and reproduced, defying gravity and yet still falling.



Figures 5 and 6:  
*Dance Interrogations* in the Medina Treasury Tunnels  
2012 Courtesy of the artist

*As she runs up against more walls, scrapes along more floors, the suit becomes worn and ripped. Eventually its use has been served and it is removed, revealing the floral dress underneath... and the tone of the piece changes a little. With skin shed, everything seems a little bit more accessible now; there's not as much need in the movements. Reid still performs in the audience's face, but rather than feeling confronting, it almost feels a little... well, joyous.<sup>14</sup>*

Joy: that feeling eludes us in our post 9/11 terror-ridden existences. We need to reconnect with that possibility in our bodies, the possibility of opening, releasing, engaging, listening, laughing, and noticing. When I improvise, my dance magnifies ordinary moments and celebrates the present moment. In this way its historical and social background is that of the viewer, rather than of the dance itself. It brings together fragments of many people, places, and ideas into a dense and diverse summary.

*"... through improvisation I was going to be able to live ... therefore I see it as a life practice, so that what I'm working with when I'm improvising is not separate from how I'm looking at living and how I'm looking at my relationships ... it has to do with our place on the planet here and what we're doing ... I think a lot of people are looking for something else now because things are getting so bad ... people are going 'wait a minute! What do we need for life to have more meaning?'"<sup>15</sup>*

Susan Kozel talks about "distributed intelligence," how "our thinking, our moving through the world, occurs on a full body level."<sup>16</sup> The attentive state of improvisation stimulates and illustrates an integration of the cognitive and the physical. There is potential to access knowledge through moving. To work in dance is always to be working in relationship with moving and changing bodies. We are all being re-made day to day, physically and emotionally, and so the need to attend to the "now" is paramount. Improvisational scores are exercises in live, "fleshed" editing.

*As an improviser, with or without camera, I am engaging in the present moment, paying attention—to my breath, to the moment when breath becomes sound, to what a movement uncovers, to sensation, to what distracts me. Now ... I am noticing the juxtaposition ... of my body and the buildings I move through. I am considering the potential of my breath to permeate their surfaces and for their particles to move through me. I am enjoying the idea that structures can be fluid and that the poetic intersects with the academic.<sup>17</sup>*

In my live screendance I perform and edit simultaneously. I craft in the moment using my body and imagination as a changing landscape upon which other temporal scenes and identities are played out in relationship to those viewing. I perform within and in direct contact with the audience and our shared physical site. The non-theatrical and/or small spaces I use force the audience to move to view or to view from different angles and proximity (or at least to be made aware of these choices). By using screendance projections onto my live body (and, in the future, hopefully also onto the bodies of those in the audience) I stretch the physical site into more dimensions, using projected footage to see the interior, the desired, the imagined, the fears, regrets, the anatomical workings.

And so we come back around again, in this circumnavigation of the screendance—reconfiguring our relationships to the dancing body, the living body,

one another. The question of the elusive body keeps turning up, and with it, the question of sustainability. My dancing body is a war memorial, a reminder that all our clever complications begin and will end in this fleshy interface.

Maggi Phillips, in her paper “Diversified moves of a specialised ecology: can this art form be sustainable,”<sup>18</sup> suggests that “our greatest strengths derive from our imaginative capacity” and that we could “approach the complex problem of sustainability of the art form ecology with an unpredictable play of ideas.” The future of the dance form, our capacity to connect to our embodied knowledge, “[begins] with the small moves in imaginative play, extending outwards to connect with other human beings, other spheres, other perspectives.”

*The reflective abilities cultivated by artists can offer new perspectives and procedures to attempts to naturalize phenomenology and forge a first-person science ... turning reflective movement into heuristic tools.*<sup>19</sup>

Coming close to other bodies, either via the camera or in the intimate live encounter, is revolutionary. It dismantles the status quo. It is a particular feedback that enables me to sustain a dance practice and to consider its capacity to enhance our interrelationships with each other and our bodies/selves. It reminds us that we are made of the same matter.



Figure 7:  
*Dance Interrogations* in the Medina  
Treasury Tunnels 2012  
Courtesy of the artist

*Matter is not mortal ... it is transformational, it moves through time and space, from form to form, but it is never lost. We know about this kind of immortality; our intimations of it take a million bodily forms—the curve of the child’s head inherited from his great-grandfather, the familiar posture of a woman sweeping, passed down since time immemorial,*

*the hand raised in farewell, the curve of the lips smiling a greeting; these are the genetic and social ways we humans endure forever. But the transformation of our personal matter extends beyond the genetic and social world of humans; the material each one of us is made from comes from and goes to the world around us.*<sup>20</sup>

There is something about the feedback and interaction of the real-time dance encounter that I ultimately want to capture as a screen work, perhaps in some relationship to the live act (the format of that will reveal itself as I go). There's this wonderful irony in the evolution of my screendance practice—seeking to make dance tangible by transposing the real body onto a virtual skin, then seeking to make it more elusive, unique, by dropping it back into the clunkiness of the biological structure. And now, I seek to shift the perceptions of the dancing body again—dismantling and reforming digital architectures within the physical body, giving weight to the transient, significance to the incidental—considering the global impact of a single event. A “recorporealization ... the complete construction of an impossible cinematic body, in which the real and the fictive are hybridized.”<sup>21</sup>

*I'm writing about the video projections and thinking about the dilemma of wanting to be unrehearsed/unplanned but also to have access to ready-made images at any time and place during the event. Like with improvisation I can assign certain moods or events to particular parts of the space ... possibilities of hot spots that animate myself or the audience (I think I do only want imagery to fall onto skin ... real skin, or the worn or discarded skins of clothing) ... To what extent do I want to pre-write material and assert control over (parts of) the event? Or amplify the unknowns? I think I just want to keep shifting around the problem, the problem of me and you ... a variety of documents of the process, to create other collages...setting up different configurations of spaces, material, people, cameras...and I think about improvisation as a long-term practice, how to access the peculiarities of the now (today's body is different to yesterday's), to stay fresh in the recurring images, acknowledging my habits but unpacking it anew for someone else ...  
Virtue/osity ... today's undoing...*<sup>22</sup>



Figure 8:  
Image from *Dance Interrogations*  
Promotional Video  
Courtesy of the artist

## Notes

1. Dianne Reid, "dance as an act of survival," May 2, 2012, <http://hipsync.blogspot.com.au/>.
2. Dianne Reid, "Cutting Choreography," in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, eds. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London and NY: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2007), 47.
3. Ibid.
4. Maya Deren, "Biographical Statement," in *The legend of Maya Deren: a documentary biography and collected works*, eds. V. A. Clark et al. (New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film culture, 1984), 57. In the foreword to this volume, the authors state that all the documents written by Maya Deren came from the Maya Deren Collection of the Boston University Library, and the libraries at UCLA, UC-Berkeley, Cornell, and Syracuse.
5. Reid, "Cutting Choreography," 55.
6. Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.
7. "Screendance...though not a perfect term, implies that the method of apprehension (the screen) modifies the activity it inscribes (the dance); in doing so it codifies a particular space of representation and, by extension, meaning. Those other terms—video dance, filmdance, dance for camera, and so forth—should instead be considered as specific subcategories of screendance." Ibid., 3.

8. Vivian Sobchack, "Is Anybody Home? Embodied Imagination and Visible Evictions," in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 179.
9. "Televisualized" is a term coined by Sherril Dodds in her article of the same name.
10. Reid, "Cutting Choreography," 56-57.
11. I perform "imagined" bodies through projected video imagery, or a discarded costume, or via spoken word description.
12. Dianne Reid, PhD Journal entry, January 8, 2013.
13. Dianne Reid, "International Reflections," September 16, 2012, <http://hipsync.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/international-reflections.html>.
14. Pete Muller, "Dance Interrogations," *Festival Freak*, December 16, 2012, accessed January 1, 2013 <http://ff.moobaa.com/?p=3307>, emphasis added.
15. Kirstie Simson, qtd. in *Force of Nature*, dir. Katrina McPherson (Scotland: Goat Media, 2011).
16. Susan Kozel, "Connective Tissue: The Flesh of the Network," paper presented at *Dance rebooted: initializing the grid* (Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia: Ausdance, 2004).
17. Reid, "Making things visible," 89.
18. Maggi Phillips, "Diversified Moves of a Specialised Ecology: Can This Art Form Be Sustainable?," paper presented at *Dance rebooted: initializing the grid* (Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia: Ausdance, 2004).
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## Media

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## Paradigms of Movement Composition

*Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt*

*Translated from the original Swedish by Suzanne Martin Cheadle*

### Paradigms of Movement Composition

My background is that of a dancer. Since childhood I have also been a storyteller. This made it difficult for me to understand why there had to be such a sharp line between dance and theater, between magic and realism, between movement and text. Is that line about to be erased?



Figure 1:  
Photo of Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt in the performance 20xLamentation 2013 (by Laila Östlund). Courtesy of the artist.

In the beginning of the film era, actors were also dancers. The training of bodily posture and gesture was essential for the stars of silent cinema. In silent films, movements were there to prove the moving image. When talkies first appeared in the beginning of the 1930s, dance continued to enhance the dramatic or emotional events in a film. By the same time in India, the foundation had already been laid for the large film production industry that today employs many choreographers and dancers. A Bollywood film is not complete without the actors breaking out in dance. And, looking further eastward, what would a Kung Fu film be without an aesthetically choreographed fight? To me it seems that when European and American film gradually became more and more realistic and psychological, film-makers refrained from expressive movements, and instead employed a literary model. Dance became increasingly rare in Hollywood.

Dance film, therefore, while not exactly a *new* genre, has only recently become its *own* artistic genre, developing in new directions and enjoying a new autonomy. New dance film festivals are popping up all over the world—festivals where dance film is the rule and not the exception.<sup>1</sup> I have found freedom in these festivals where dance is celebrated as the fundamental component, and where we can ask questions about what dance is, or could be. However, when a dance film is shown, and becomes the distinctive ingredient within a feature film festival, it reaches and challenges new audience members. The narrative of dance films examines states of mind, situations, places, and meetings rather than telling a story. It does not have to be realistic or psychological. Dramatic situations that are built up only to be later resolved are absent from this realm. Dance film offers a change of the conventions of feature film. Who knows, Hollywood might get interested again.

***My own very first experiment with dance and film: Gothenburg, October 1994***

*We have three rolls of 16mm black and white film that I begged from Kodak—then a phototechnical empire, today a shrinking giant from a bygone era. We have a Steadicam to use all night long.<sup>2</sup> It will give us a metaphysical look. We follow my manuscript with precision, but improvise when it is necessary. Nothing but the film matters to us this fall. I am employed at a national theater from which I have a monthly salary, which is so unusual in my field. At the theater, I find dancers, actors, costumes, a fog machine. I know when they are free and can book them in front of the camera. We are making our first film. I am responsible for the fog machine. The banana oil from it smells sweet. We just filmed in the basement with the Steadicam and scared my neighbors on their way to and from the shower and laundry room. Laila and I have splashed down the whole basement hall with water—her idea. She holds Joel by the hips so that he won't fall when he walks. The camera is terribly heavy in this position. He uses headphones to listen to the music so he knows how slowly to walk. I hold down the button on the fog machine. The light fades through the fog and is reflected by the water on the surfaces of the hallway. The names of the lamps are not Par, Profile, or Fresnel; they are Redhead, HMI, and Blondie. Theater light and film light seem to be from different worlds, with unreality as a common denominator. When they reach the sign to the laundry room, Laila doubles the f-stop and freezes. She stops Joel from colliding with the bend in the hall. I let go of the button.*

## Initiation into the field

My first encounter with the concept of dance film was at a seminar in 1994, arranged by Teater og Dans i Norden [Nordic Theater and Dance] at Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts. The invited speakers were Charles Atlas (USA), Walter Verdin (Belgium), and Vibeke Vogel (Denmark). For three days, we got to see Western dance film classics by Maya Deren; Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and Walter Verdin; DV8 and David Hinton; Charles Atlas, Merce Cunningham and Michael Clark; Josette Baiz; Régis Obadia and Joëlle Bouvier; Magalie Charrier; Victoria Marks and Margaret Williams; Wim Vandekeybus and Iturbe; and others. At this seminar the speakers decided to announce the genre *video dance*, to put an end of the label confusions when creating artistic works for the camera. However, this word was not used for very long. Today, the genre is also called *dance for camera*, *choreo cinema*, *media dance*, or *screendance*.

The seminar made a deep impression on me, and it was at the very least a starting point for my own creations. I was 26 years old. I recorded my very first dance film on 16mm—without any technical film education, without any previous experience of film or video making—just a couple of months later in collaboration with Joel Olsson and Laila Östlund, students at the Academy of Film at the University of Gothenburg (now Valand Academy).<sup>3</sup> It was called *Fröken Tuvstarr, hennes älskade och den skallige Quasimodo* [*Miss Tuvstarr, her beloved and the bald Quasimodo*];<sup>4</sup> we worked with passion and frenzy, unconventionally and as equals. I was inspired by Maya Deren, Régis Obadia, and Joëlle Bouvier, and the house I then lived in. It was my manuscript, my choreography, directing, scenography, and costumes. They were inspired by Fritz Lang. It was Laila's and Joel's storyboard, cinematography, and lighting. The film premiered at the Gothenburg International Film Festival in 1995. That same year, it received the *mention spéciale* at the international dance film competition *Vidéo Danse Grand Prix "pour l'expression d'une univers personnel et la caractérisation des personnages."* At that time only a few dance film festivals existed globally: Dance on Camera in New York City, ADF's International Screendance Festival, a traveling festival called IMZ Dance Screen, and Vidéo Danse Grand Prix in France.

From the perspective of the Swedish dance community, however, people thought my film contained too little dance to be called a dance film, something pioneering female director Maya Deren had problematized 60 years earlier. The choreographer and dancer who create film often end up falling through the cracks, but these cracks are now well-visited and increasing in number. Because the film was in 16mm viewing format, however, it was not limited to dance film festivals. It could be shown at film festivals all over the world, in places such as Brussels, New York City, Bucharest, and Paris. The film gave me mobility and legitimacy. I met colleagues out in the world who worked like me. I took valuable courses in dance for the camera at the American Dance Festival at Duke University, in Madison, Wisconsin, and in New York City, all with Douglas Rosenberg; in Brighton, England with Miranda Pennell and Becky

Edmunds; and in the one-year course entitled *Fine Arts and New Media* at the Valand Academy, with Mats Olsson. After I had made many videos, as well as my second film, *The Dancer - a Fairy-Tale* on 35 mm, a feature film combining dialogue and dance, I was even invited to join the network *Doris* for female film directors in western Sweden. But while the other members made “real” film, I made the deviating dance film. Katinka Faragó, Ingmar Bergman’s film producer, wrote to me, “You are so funny! Why don’t you forget about dance, and focus on dialogue?”

### **Gothenburg, October 1994**

*I stand in a room in the basement with the bald Quasimodo in the next room. The room is lit from outside.*



Figure 2: Photo of HMI-lamps outside building, 1994 (in the photo: Laila Östlund).  
Courtesy of the artist.

*The eyes of the lamps are pointed in from the mundane asphalt, the parking lots, the staircases, in through the window towards the magic of the basement. We each have our own personal doorman. Ex-boyfriends. They have received instructions from me about how to count. The cinematographers come rushing on top of the camera dolly, flying onto the track. They count, too, aloud so the doormen can hear. The doors to Miss Tuvstarr, whom I am playing, and the bald Quasimodo open simultaneously. Tuvstarr’s hair stretches all the way down to her knees. I am wearing a wig of linen that I sewed myself. Quasimodo is in a white silk tunic and thin sandals of brown leather. His name is Christian Fielder and he is strikingly beautiful. In realist films, he has played a villain, murderer, and policeman. Here, though, he becomes mythical, just like me. The concrete and plaster become painful gravel under my feet.*



Figure 3:  
Photo of Quasimodo, played by Christian Fiedler, 1994, by Laila Östlund. Courtesy of the artist.

*The cold gnaws at my bones. Tuvstarr and Quasimodo look up simultaneously on the assistant's count. Their gaze sends the viewer into another room, under the roof, in the attic.*

An excerpt from this scene, in Miss Tuvstarr, her beloved and the bald Quasimodo, begins at 00:29 <https://vimeo.com/101088984>

*The police come in the middle of the night while I'm rolling up cable. They shine their flashlights in my face. We have moved up to the attic, and the cables are stretched between the banisters, from the three-phase outlet in the basement up the entire staircase. I am in another element, in the dance; I don't flinch, continuing to wind up the cable like Laila taught me. Carefully. "What are you doing?" the policemen ask, trying to sound serious. "We are filming!" I answer. They see the clapperboard and smile, retreating respectfully from the attic. We are a new trio working together. Me, Laila, and Joel. It is us, us, us. Where should we put the camera? The big room intended for hanging clothes to dry is now lit. I'm trying out my dance floor. Joel flies up to the rafters. "If you're going to dance there, I'll do a take from up here."*

### **Birgit Cullberg, the mother of Swedish TV Ballet**

The pioneering works by Birgit Cullberg (1908-1999) and Måns Reuterswärd (1932-), made for Swedish television in the 1960s and 1970s, influenced the first generation of dance filmmakers in Scandinavia. As a teenager, I knew the scenes from Cullberg's and Reuterswärd's *Abbalett* by heart.<sup>5</sup> Because of technical constraints, Cullberg was compelled to develop ways of choreographing and composing for and with a single camera. For Cullberg and Reuterswärd, the space in front of the camera became a new stage, with the camera in the front row. We can see this as a site-

specific experiment because in 1969, the Cullberg Ballet had neither stage nor studio of its own. Whole ballets were composed in the studio of channel 2 of the Swedish national television station (SVT), where Cullberg drew on the floor a perimeter the dancers had to observe. The picture was often framed with a dancing limb close to the camera. The audience might end up looking through an armpit, a foot or an elbow. What was important happened further away, in the middle of the picture, where the entire choreography was conveyed without actually abandoning the conventions of theatrical space.

In these films, dance was the central element and carried the meaning of the piece. Cullberg was clearly the originator and not simply playing second fiddle or working as an assistant, a role that Donya Feuer (1934-2011) assumed in her work with Ingmar Bergman, one which she escaped to create her own documentary *The Dancer* (1994).<sup>6</sup> Cullberg also experimented with new techniques and new camera angles. In 1971, Cullberg and Reuterswärd won the Prix Italia for *Rött vin i gröna glas* [Red wine in green glasses]. The dance film won prizes in the category for musical programs, which was not surprising, since both dance and dance films have historically been subordinated by music. In *Rött vin i gröna glas*, the dancers appear to swim forward through an oil painting. The dance is filmed from the ceiling in a blue room so that the background is changeable, in this case appearing as an oil painting. We approach the dancers. The movements give the sense of nearness, yet the dancers don't leave the ground. In reality, we are viewing them from above, but the chroma key technique means that we believe we are looking at them from the side. After discussing the creation of the film with Måns Reuterswärd, I understood how Philippe Decouflé's *Abracadabra* (1998) had been created.<sup>7</sup> Decouflé (1961-) also makes dance theater, but his dance idiom is vastly different from Cullberg's.

Reuterswärd and Cullberg's close collaboration with a television channel was unique for the time, and unfortunately no one has continued this practice in Swedish television production. Mats Ek's ballets have been documented by SVT, but to my knowledge only *Gammal och dörr* (Old and Door, 1991), featuring a powerful 83-year-old Cullberg as protagonist, was created specifically for the camera—and SVT didn't dare broadcast it until twenty-one years later.

### **The Filmmaking Dancer/Choreographer**

What does it mean to be the filmmaking dancer, shifting between positions? In collaborations between dancer and traditional film director, there is a balance of structure and power. Can a dance filmmaker be the author, equivalent to a film director? What skills does s/he need in order to achieve that? This question gets especially complicated in projects where the artist contributes with his or her own specific craft to the piece, as when a choreographer also dances in his or her own film or a photographer directs his or her own film. Whose film is it, then? The film director is trained in both the instruction of people and the technical craft involved in photography. S/he is trained in teamwork, staging of filmic space, camera techniques, lighting, and postproduction. In Sweden, you can study film directing, but not film

choreography, at the university level. This causes an insurmountable obstacle between film companies, film institutes, and the individual dance artist.

It is difficult to find continuity and depth when working with dance film. Ideas for dance films are disqualified already at the brainstorming session. An already very commercialized industry does not want to invest in experiments. According to the Swedish choreographer Pontus Lidberg, "Dance film falls through the cracks. The Swedish Arts Council refuses to support film, end of story; the Swedish Film Institute refuses to support dance, end of story. It is easy to refer to current practice and avoid taking a stand on dance film. After many years of persistent nagging, my films finally received support from the Film Institute, and this was only thanks to the facts that SVT was a co-producer and that the films were considered *drama*, not dance."<sup>8</sup>

Film choreographers seldom have a background in film, nor do they have access to a technical education in film. In the course on film directing that I took in Gothenburg, taught by Reza Parsa, a male director of feature film, we learned filmic conventions and foundational skills. I was told that "art films" and "dance films" were what you did at the beginning of your career as preparation for "real" feature films. In spite of this advice, I made great use of the practical structures that I learned there when I was later making dance films. I used foundational skills like tripod-based camera approaches; close-up, medium shot, long shot, as are also used in dance film. What I learned in dance film courses—different experiments to capture choreography on film with a handheld camera—have been very important for my artistic choices, but not enough for communicating effectively with a film team. This is why I am somewhat critical of short courses intended for dancers who want to learn how to film. I would rather see a larger effort in which dance filmmakers are given the same chance as traditional filmmakers to engage with their art, where traditional filmmakers are no more or less important than film choreographers. We must not take it for granted that choreographers should be less accustomed to technology than directors, and also not ignore gender perspective behind these assumptions, where the traditional film field is dominated by men, and the dance film field is dominated by women.

Sometimes, the dance filmmaker moves between different practices, but in the process s/he ends up on the periphery of them both. I think that the field of dance often comes with a strict bodily regimen that can be difficult to rebel against, a bodily regimen that does not exist in the visual arts or among actors. I have been asked by my dancing peers more than once in my work as a film choreographer, "How do you keep up your physical strength and flexibility, how can you continue your dance practice during filmmaking?" My answer is usually, "I am a filmmaker when I film and a dancer when I dance." I don't think either Stephen Chow or Charlie Chaplin ever had to answer such a question. Eventually, a new practice should result, a dance film practice, possible to embrace and allowing us to be centered.

Today, more accessible and more mobile cameras are integrated into filmmaking, and the choreographer is physically and economically able to challenge the discourse of film production. We have seen many films from experimental studio processes where the camera functions more as a conversation partner than an

observing external gaze, an approach that might be difficult to comprehend for someone outside the practice of dance. In these films we also see the dancer functioning as an originator who challenges the stereotypes that are easily created when dance in film is relegated to a pedestal. Sure, we love Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse, but other expressions are possible. Australian choreographer, dancer, and dance filmmaker Dianne Reid's *this could be the start of something* is an excellent commentary in this context.<sup>9</sup>

Dance filmmakers develop their own strategies, structure maps, and storyboards. They use their own cameras and create their own festivals. Movements are composed for body, camera, and space, with separate phases of generating material and composing the film as a synthesis of creative and curating practices. How can we develop film terminology, finding new methods and idioms for framing dance on camera? This calls for further educational options or recurring advanced courses where dance and film artists, on equal footing and with pure curiosity, can have conversations about how to develop these methods. Where we can sketch out new versions of camera tracking, or ask how handheld camera improvisation can interact with tripod-reliant close-ups. A traditional film manuscript is complemented with drawings in the method taught at the traditional film schools. Distances, angles, and frames are categorized and named with words, words that are unknown to choreographers but essential for practical execution. We must invent a common language for dance filmmakers, create new accessible names for our own established methods, and make advanced techniques accessible to dancers.

### ***Gothenburg, October 1994***

*The steps moving from behind the camera to in front of it are long and heavy. Cold feet inserted into hard, black sneakers. My frozen, stiff body in a black chiffon dress, with rhinestones around the waist, from a vintage shop in Manhattan. A Moroccan man in the shop next door helped me tailor it. As dancers we will need to have Marley-type vinyl flooring most of the time. I should make a note of that myself, at least, since I am the ambassador of dance. We will need carts for the cameras, and jibs. We will also need better floors in general. There is no one checking the safety of the work environment; there is only me, Laila, and Joel. We don't work with reality. The industrial locations where many artists create their dance films are not hospitable. They are too cold. Too hard. But they are beautiful on screen. All too often the environment is used to convey a brutally beautiful aesthetic, but it might possibly be able to portray a human's vulnerability. All too often the dancer is given the charge of taming these harsh spaces with her/his body.*

*Now we are no longer three. It is the two of them, looking at me. I see to the actors, the dancers, and the extras. But no one sees to me. I would rather wind cable, but I have to dance. They are waiting for me,*

*they are finished. The lens is polished, the film gate brushed. I am the one who decided to do this but feel like a frightened deer in the headlights. Now I must dance. We are making a dance film and I am the one who will dance. Quiet on the set. The camera rolls. Clapperboard. Action. I run in and pretend that I am Joëlle Bouvier. I throw myself backwards into the chairs we set out as my track. The plaster and concrete fall apart, become small ball bearings under my feet. The air chafes my skin. My joints could burst into powder. We do another take. Joel's feet hang down from the beam.*

### **Choreographing With and For the Camera Based on Nonlinear Treatment of Movement**

The dancer's perception offers a view of the world as more than just dance steps. The logic, energy, and events in a dance film can be difficult to define. There is no development, but the viewer feels that something is happening, something is recognizable in the dance. Another film: a wide shot is framed, sound: contemporary art music. The image remains a long time, causing the viewer to think of dance, or art, or murder. Contemporary art music is often imported to dance, to art and to crime stories. (What a destiny.) The camera looks out over a field. It is hand-held, and the movement of human footsteps makes you believe it is your own gaze. It is you who are standing there on the field. In the middle of the field is a rock; zoom in on the rock, run to it, keep running. Next to the rock lies a dead bird of prey; ten balloons are released into the sky. From far off on the right, ten people come. The way they walk reveals that they are dancers. Their bodies occupy space, stretch out. The dancer becomes a person who does not speak, one who is strong, and agile. There are no facial expressions no matter how anxiety-ridden these dancers may be. One of them rushes to the rock, remains there and begins to dance next to it. The other nine people continue on; the hand-held camera gives you the sense that you are walking along with them. A rocket goes off in the distance, in the same direction they came from. A metaphysical gaze in the form of a Steadicam sweeps over the field and the people. We sense a dramatic contour: empathy, fear, and flight. The story is told in such a way that it seems to be a never-ending cycle, one we don't analyze or criticize, one we simply live in the middle of, one that may never change.

We can say that every movement in the above example of the fictional manuscript is musically choreographed. The different spaces are made rhythmic by the choreographer according to an existing musical phrase. Camera movements and shots are written into the manuscript from the beginning, because in this context they can be considered choreography and not only as a planned cinematography. But imagine that the dancer casts off his or her dancer persona, and enter into the film not as an aesthetically heightened dancing body but as a person who is heading somewhere, who has a name and who just happens to enter into conversation with someone along the way. The conversation might be with or without words. The dancer wants to make this predetermination impossible, to turn toward that which is

not yet categorized. The result can be very exact and readable for the collaborators, but institutions like the Swedish Film Institute seem to lack this special kind of literacy.

A house can be a manuscript. We find characters inside the walls, in the basement, and in the attic. If the choreographer is already used to working with film, s/he has probably created a choreography that will tolerate being edited. It isn't dependent on unity and shouldn't be claimed to be a singularity. The editor is hesitant with the scissors at first. Shouldn't the logic of the body be followed? Isn't the order of steps important? The carefully planned and executed rhythm, should it really be tossed out the window?

When I show dance film to theater directors, I get commentary that I never hear from dancers. Some of it is pure misunderstanding. I like these misunderstandings. I think they are valuable in that they challenge our internal gaze, our bodily field: "They breathe, stand so straight, look past each other even though they touch each other. It is self-centered. Where are the relationships? Why don't they communicate? Is dance afraid of clarity?" One could blame the strong theatre discourse: the need to define relationships and make things understandable. Particular actions, a solution, catharsis. Centuries of theatrical narrative have made many of us blind to other types of narrative: an act-free, scene-free narrative, as if dialogue were to dance. I read dance film via the body and interpret spinal movements more than I interpret gazes. Spinal movements need not in themselves say anything, but they communicate human experience and the condition of being.

Nevertheless, these questions from outsiders have helped me to realize something: film can reveal the theatricality of dance. Exactly as actors' theater voices need to be toned down for film, the toning-down of physical energy can be necessary. The need to cast off the dancer persona, which on film is read as something other than a graceful stretching of the back, lengthening of the neck or raising of the knee. On film the dancer persona can become violent and self-absorbed. Is this really the intention? I have seen it happen myself. Dance film can mean objectification and fetishism of the event of dance. A profusion of flexibility and strength is one thing on stage and another thing on film. Think of all unreflective dancing male-female pairs in which we seem to forget the world order we live in, with all of its mundane symbols. In this discussion we invalidate the dancers. What happens if we take them seriously? Who oppresses whom, who throws whom, who tugs on whom? If the answer is always that dance shouldn't be read in this way, that it is "just" dance, haven't we put blinders on? If we look at it as pure, untranslatable art and repeatedly claim that this is all we see? All this because we have had to defend ourselves against overzealous interpretations that we fear may diminish the art of dance.

I long for a different kind of representation, like DV8's last performances, comprised of political conversations spit out in the middle of the movements. Isabel Rocamore who turns the war in Iraq into dance.<sup>10</sup> I long for more politics and less aesthetics, less fetishism. I want to see dancing humanists, dancers who are activists. I want to meet the dancer as a person, with and within the complicated and complex dramaturgy of dance.

My first dance films were shown internationally at traditional film festivals because they were on 16mm and 35mm film. At these “film” film festivals, I escaped being seen as a dancer, being read as an aesthetic body. My dance film was read as “film” film, though it was naturally placed in a special category: “New Media” or “International” or “Music.” I answered questions about my homeland, about politics, about Ingmar Bergman, about all sorts of things that had nothing to do with my body. I experienced the enormous freedom to escape the stereotypical confines of my field.

### **Gothenburg, 1995**

*The 16<sup>th</sup> annual Gothenburg International Film Festival. Our premiere. We were consumed by love. But also hate. It was shocking, actually. We were blissful newbies; we could hardly stand, we were so excited. The auditorium of the Haga Theater was sold out. I gave splendid interviews. Answered questions. Talked about dance film, non-linear storytelling, ducked out, got up, tried to go forward but ended up talking and walking in circles. Lost the toes, landed on the heels. Referenced John Bauer.*

Female journalist 1: “Why make a film like this?”

*Because...*

Female anthropologist: “A female search for identity?”

*No. It's more of a fairy tale. A mix of fairy-tales.*

Female filmmaker: “Yes, well does the Film Institute like this stuff?”

*Don't know.*

Female journalist 2: “You dusted off your dance shoes and went for it!”

*No, they didn't need dusting off. They are always on. But I understand that you want to write this; it sounds more journalistic.*

Male sound designer: “Does she laugh at men?”

*No, she laughs for herself.*

Bosses who want to eat dinner, just with me. Yes, it's true.

*“Incomprehensible. But beautifully filmed.”*

Male film festival grand marshal: “My three-year-old liked the breasts.”

Ex-boyfriend: “My friend saw it in Lund. He thought it sucked but said you're really hot.”

*I retreat to the forest. Climb barefoot up the slippery trunk.*

Female teacher: “Like Hugo Simberg's Injured Angel.”

*Yeah, maybe more like that, but 1990s-style. John Bauer. Arosenius.<sup>11</sup>*

Male critic: "Postindustrial symbolism."

*Symbolism we laugh at.*

Female critic: "An ironic play on images."

*Ironic is the wrong word. As if we laugh while we are dying.*

*We want to return from the panic of whether or not the film exists. The frenzy of formulation, the belief in what is written, spoken. Thoughts collapse, the ability to infer. We can't reach conclusions. We want to exist and continue to work—and only that. We want to return to the composing, and rolling up cables. There, we find identity. We want to return to the cables, the lamps. Our tools and friends, our practice.*

Today I understand that the grand marshals of film festivals and many of the journalists lacked the necessary tools for reading dance. They were even provoked by the wordlessness. They were confused by concepts, weak-kneed. Outside of Sweden, people knew Maya Deren; they had a frame of reference. I sat in the New York Public Library and watched reel after reel. I clearly identified with Maya Deren. More Maya Deren than the symbolist painters Simberg, Bauer, or Arosenius. Many years later, I see Tove Skeidsvoll, playing a forest sprite in her and Petrus Sjövik's film *Outside In* (2011). The camera approaches her; the film emphasizes the fictionality of the birch forest. We know that we are in a studio, that everything is made up. We begin to see black-robed, cable-rolling people beyond the trunks and fog machines. Then Tove goes on the attack. She leaves her forest, the universe she had been assigned to, and runs outside of the frame. She takes action while the technology clumsily retreats to the walls of the studio. An artists' reclamation of space before technology gets it all.

Twenty years have passed since I made my first film, *Miss Tuvstarr, her beloved...*, and as I watch it again I realize that the film itself, the final product, is of less importance than the actual work: the honest exploration that we did together as equals.

### **Choreographing Non-bodies through Film: Creating Dance from Abstract Motion, Expanding the Scope of both Dance and Film**

How can one categorize a dance film? As a practitioner, I think classifications are very helpful, but I often have an allergic reaction to them, and a fear of definitive statements, because in my practice I am not trained in argumentation. This sort of training has been completely absent from my artistic education, but I also often feel that things escape me as soon as I categorize them. I think it might be the issues around curatorial demands that I sometimes have wanted to revolt against. I will try anyway. If we compare performance documentation with original work—that is, if we look at a film of dance that was created for the stage and dance that was created for and in relation to the camera—we see obvious differences in intention and execution. Documentation can hardly be called film, yet this has been a category at dance film

festivals. The English dance company DV8 Physical Theatre, under the direction of Australian Lloyd Newson, made both early on. Of thirteen performances, five have been adapted as dance films to the great pleasure of all who cannot make it to their theater in England. The adaptations use the same dancers, manuscript, choreographer, and music, but the performances have been completely re-created specifically for the camera.

We can also compare Cullberg and Reuterswärd's TV-ballets with Wim Vandekeybus and Walter Verdin's dance films. In the former, for example in *Fröken Julie* (Miss Julie, 1984), we see the choreography as it would appear in theatrical space, as if we were sitting in the audience. In the latter, especially in *Roseland* (1990), space is dissolved and we as viewers are not introduced to a consistent front. The dancers fall in and out of the picture. The camera constantly shifts its point of view. This is where the traditionally educated editor might get confused. The medium of film inserts itself in a way that it doesn't always have the opportunity to in a traditional feature film. In this case, dance film is a clear example of how dance and film enrich each other. There is no doubt that it is dance, that the actors are dancers, and that a choreographer has created the movements in and for that exact space.

As we look at the 2000s, the questions get more complex. David Hinton's *Birds* (2000), which won accolades at Dance Screen Brighton, raised discussion of re-editing existing films—in this case, nature films with birds—into new choreographies, using birds as unsuspecting soloists. He was re-choreographing the pre-choreographed, so to speak. His dance film was completely without dancers but was still wholly based on movement. The cuts and the music signaled the work of a choreographer, while the unrepeated movements of the birds gave the sense of dance. Another point of the discussion was the question of whether the film's creator must be a dancer. To this, my answer is no. I see many examples of visual music films (Mary Ellen Bute, Norman McLaren, Len Lye) as dance. Visual music is not a new genre but perhaps was considered new to the context of dance film at IMZ Dance Screen, so again, it was a case of curatorial framing. When what is categorized as "visual music" can also be called "screendance," it is the boundary-crossing itself that is important. We re-categorize and re-formulate genres in order to expand the field and to welcome new viewpoints and interests. But I still want to require the continued presence of dance in dance film. Dance should not get labeled "dorky" and fade from the field. Make dance films about birds but continue to be curious about dance of all sorts: ugly dance, "dance" dance, new dance, old dance, conceptual dance.

What does it mean to apply a choreographic eye to the world, capturing motion and calling it dance? This happens in Liz Aggiss and Joe Murray's film *Beach Party Animal* (2011), which invites abstract motional thinking and portrays the world as a moving sculpture. The camera discovers and determines new angles. Whole Ferris wheels are thrown out into space and we cannot see if they are fixed or if they and their passengers are slung away for eternity. Camera angles and cuts make existence rhythmic, just as in choreography. Guerilla dancers appear as soloists on a beach. In one scene, the floor underlay finally affects the human body. There is no aesthetic

enhancement in the glass-eating man who struts forth over the rocky beach, but rather burlesque comedy—a characteristic I recognize and love in Liz Aggiss' work. In *Beach Party Animal*, an alternative vacation life is portrayed, a post-industrial Jacques Tati. The film rewords deeply human traits, aesthetic ideals, social class, the desire to leave cares behind. Naturally, it is a dance film, with the added benefit of the humor and musicality of honorary doctorate and dame of dance film Liz Aggiss.

The appropriation of dance films into meta-dance films can also be a way to choreograph non-bodies with the help of the filmic medium. I do this, for example, with my own experiment, *Tåskor – Transparent – Talang* (Toe Shoes – Transparent – Talent, 1997), splicing together and cutting apart the dance and ballet films I grew up with. I searched for the mantras I had forced myself to abide by as a practitioner: "Such a body has no place in ballet," pronounced by Natalia Makarova in a documentary about ballet, but repeated in another context—Bollywood. In the making of the film, I highlighted different mantras so that even an outsider could relate to it and reflect on it. I had the opportunity to problematize different discourses in the field of dance that had previously been taken for granted—for example, what type of body belongs in an expression of dance? I treated the fetishes and symbols I had been fed with as a dancer: the objectification of the feet, the desirability of toe shoes, and the ideal dancer's body. This experiment was done at an art academy, not a dance academy. I have met similar controversies in female video artists but incredibly infrequently in dance artists.

How can we embrace these different paradigms? In dance film education, different perspectives need to be presented, reflected on, and taken seriously. Should dance filmmakers claim dance as their field, or film, or neither? Should a dance filmmaker be educated differently than other filmmakers? Should s/he be trained to lead a traditional film team or to work alone? Must s/he be a dancer? With the emerging theoretical discussion and with specific educational opportunities directed at this genre, we can help dance filmmakers find a place in and between the established worlds of dance and film. I believe in giving these filmmakers a hundred opportunities instead of just two. I wish for policies at granting institutions that will make dance film possible, for film colleges that offer relevant programs. I long for a film industry that is truly interested in dance.

I am curious to see Richard Raymond and Akram Khan's *Desert Dancer*, which will be released this year, about the Iranian dancer Afshin Ghaffarian who taught himself to dance with the help of YouTube, even though both dance and YouTube are forbidden in Iran. I also look forward to Swedish filmmaker Carl Javér's documentary film *Freak Out!* (2014) about alternative movements in the beginning of the 1900s, with appearances by Mary Wigman and Rudolf Laban. I long for films that challenge the conservative language and bodily regimes of dance, that continue to refer to dance film history, and that accept more non-Western expressions. Shim Sham and Rosseuve's *Two Seconds After Laughter*, in which we encounter self-reflective Javanese dance (Yogyakarta) in a contemporary context, is an excellent example. Or Brown and Patnaik's *Statues Come to Life* (2012), where the ancient dance form Odissi

becomes the main event. In 2013, my own documentary film on traditional Japanese dance, *The Dance of the Sun*, was released in Sweden (shown at the American Dance Festival on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

In 2013, a dance film festival was founded in Bandung in western Java by the choreographer and dancer Alfi Yanto. Thanks to this festival, I was able to participate in contemporary Indonesian dance film experiments and familiarize myself with the art and activism of WajiWa Bandung Dance Theatre. Recognizing the evolving field of screendance does help us look into what we have already recorded, and to document our present day for future use. It also helps us to encounter new choreographies in new geographies. It can give us exactly the nontraditional, alternative stories of the body that we need in order to dismantle our prejudices about the world, dance film, and ourselves.



Figure 4:  
Photo of Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt in the documentary film *The Dance of the Sun*.  
Courtesy of the Kyoto Art Center.

## Notes

1. In the early nineties I had a hard time convincing the male Swedish film festival grand marshals that one could have more than one dance film in the program.
2. Steadicam is a camera stabilized by a counterweight, thereby providing a smooth, fluid shot.
3. I had some experience of acting in front of the camera, e.g. in a short film with the Swedish movie star Viveca Lindfors in New York City.
4. *Translator's note:* Although "Tuvstarr" means "hassock" or "bunch grass" in English, the author refers to this character by her Swedish name even when speaking in English.
5. Abbalett was created for Swedish Television in 1984 to the music by the Swedish pop group ABBA.

6. My own film *The Dancer, a Fairy-Tale* (1999) was a reply to Donya Feuer's *The Dancer*, as an attempt to provide the audience with less conformist images of the ballerina.
7. Discussion with Reuterswärd in New York, January 2000.
8. Pontus Lidberg lives in New York City. He is recognized for his dance films *Labyrinth Within* (2011) and *The Rain* (2007).
9. Dianne Reid, "*this could be the start of something*" (1997), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZg4RaEFyN0&list=PL5114E2A81B2E5016>. See also her essay in this issue.
10. Isabel Rocamora, British-Spanish filmmaker and choreographer, has made, among other films, *Body of War* (2010) and *Horizon of Exile* (2007).
11. Swedes John Bauer, Ivar Arosenius, and Finn Hugo Simberg are symbolist painters from the turn of the twentieth century.

## Media

- A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945). Dir. Maya Deren. New York.
- Abbalett* (1984). Dir. Birgit Cullberg and Måns Reuterswärd. Stockholm: SVT.
- At Land* (1944). Dir. Maya Deren. Amagansett, Long Island.
- A Moment in Love* (1957). Dir. Shirley Clarke.
- Beach Party Animal* (2011). Dir. Liz Aggiss and Joe Murray. Brighton, UK.
- Birds* (2000). Dir. David Hinton. London: BBC.
- Blue Studio: Five Segments* (1975-1976). Dir. Charles Atlas and Merce Cunningham. New York.
- Bridges-Go-Round* (1958). Dir. Shirley Clarke.
- Dance in the Sun* (1953). Dir. Shirley Clarke and Daniel Nagrin.
- Desert Dancer* (2014). Dir. Akram Khan and Richard Raymond. London.
- Enter Achilles* (1996). Dir. DV8, Lloyd Newson and Clara van Gool. London.
- Freak Out!* (2014). Dir. Carl Javér. Gothenburg.
- Fröken Julie* [Miss Julie] (1980). Dir. Birgit Cullberg and Måns Reuterswärd. Stockholm: SVT.

*Fröken Tuvstarr, hennes älskade och den skallige Quasimodo* [Miss Tuvstarr, her beloved and the bald Quasimodo] (1995). Dir. Joel Olsson, Ami Skånberg and Laila Östlund. Gothenburg.

*Gammal och Dörr* [Old and door] (1991). Dir. Mats Ek. Stockholm: SVT.

*Hail the New Puritan* (1987). Dir. Charles Atlas and Michael Clarke. London.

*La Chambre* [The Room] (1988). Dir. Joëlle Bouvier and Régis Obadia.

*La Lampe* [The Lamp] (1990). Dir. Joëlle Bouvier and Régis Obadia.

*Labyrinth Within* (2011). Dir. Pontus Lidberg. Stockholm.

*Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943). Dir. Maya Deren. New York.

*Monoloog van Fumiyo Ikeda op het einde van Ottone Ottone* (1989). Dir. Walter Verdin and Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker. Bruxelles.

*Outside In* (2011). Dir. Tove Skeidsvoll and Petrus Sjövik. Umeå.

*Roseland* (1992). Dir. Walter Verdin, Octavio Iturbe and Wim Vandekeybus. Bruxelles.

*Rött vin i gröna glas* [Red wine in green glasses] (1971). Dir. Birgit Cullberg and Måns Reuterswärd. Stockholm: SVT.

*Statues Come to Life* (2008). Dir. Bobby S. Brown and Devraj Patnaik. Ontario.

*Synchromy No 4: Escape* (1938). Dir. Mary Ellen Bute and Ted Nemeth.

*Tåskor – Transparent – Talang* [Toe Shoes – Transparent – Talent] (1997). Dir. Ami Skånberg. Gothenburg. <http://youtu.be/p-aPuEHfqE0>.

*The Dancer* (1994). Dir. Donya Feuer. Stockholm.

*The Dancer, a Fairy-Tale* (1999). Dir. Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt. Gothenburg.

*The Dance of the Sun* (2013). Dir. Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt and Folke Johansson. Gothenburg, Kyoto.

*The Rain* (2007). Dir. Pontus Lidberg. Stockholm: SVT.

*this could be the start of something* (1997). Dir. Dianne Reid and Paul Huntingford. Melbourne.

*Two Seconds After Laughter* (2011). Dir. Cari Ann Shim Sham and David Rousseve. Java.

*Under Pressure* (2013). Dir. Alfi Yanto. Bandung 2013.

# **INTERVIEWS**



## "Looking Back"

*A Conversation with Katrina McPherson*

*Katrina was, along with Claudia Kappenberg and Douglas Rosenberg, a founder of The International Journal of Screendance. The first discussions about the journal took place in a remodeled pigsty behind the house that Katrina and Simon Fildes share with their children in the countryside of Scotland. She was the organizer, with Fildes and Karl J. Lewin, of the Opensource {videodance} Symposium in Findhorn, Scotland where many important conversations about screendance took place in 2006 and 2007. Those conversations are still resonating globally. This interview took place at the the 2<sup>nd</sup> Opensource {videodance} Symposium, Findhorn, Scotland, 2007.*

**Douglas Rosenberg:** Would you begin with some observations about screendance in general?

**Katrina McPherson:** I feel like screen dance is currently in quite an exciting state at the moment. I feel—although I've practiced for almost twenty years—I feel the beginnings of a new engagement with the genre, and I think that's coming out of some things that have been happening in the last eighteen months or so. I certainly feel that there's been a connection between an international group of people who want to start discussing the issues around screendance, and as we've often said, "raise the bar" in terms of critical discourse and dialogue. And sometimes I've worried that that's a very abstract notion, but what I'm beginning to see is that it's happening. It's actually happening because the conversations that we are having as we meet in different places and at different times over this period are actually evolving. We're not always going back to the same point, and also the conversations we're having are beginning to, I think, get to the nub of things, which is leaving behind issues of funding and very sort of basic technical questions that I felt that people dwelt on for a very long time, at least in my experience. And getting to actually talk about content and the context that we are making work in and processes and all sorts of things, which I actually find is rejuvenating my interest in the genre. Which has often happened: in my practice I've felt that I've come and gone, I've waned, and I've felt less interested, and then something will happen that will draw me back in, to a fascination, to a particular area of work.

**D:** What about observations about the UK in general—sort of large, broad things about screendance in the UK?

**K:** The current situation in the UK is changing. There was a period of time with maybe about ten, even twelve years where there was a lot of production, and that was

primarily generated through the broadcasters, initially Channel Four and then the BBC in conjunction with the Arts Council of Great Britain and then of England. And that generated a lot of work which has been quite influential, probably even worldwide it's been influential, in terms of the development of the genre. But that situation is finished now. For the last two or three years, there has been very few commissions from television. But what's replacing it are commissions that are—that really come more from an independent arts funding that *claims* to be aimed more at galleries and alternative spaces, but which I think usually seems to feed into the international screendance festival circuit. But the paradox is that fifteen, twenty years ago, when this new UK wave of screendance was happening, there was absolutely no education in the field, or formal education in the field. Whereas now in the last five, six years there's been a proliferation or an explosion with education in screendance and now almost every undergraduate program in the UK that offers dance will have some sort of screendance or dance in television or dance film or whatever module, and there are also post-graduate opportunities for study. So I think there's an interesting thing there because in a sense, there is more opportunity to learn but there is maybe less opportunity to make, or at least make within a formal structure.

**D:** Do you have a quick definition of Open Source Video Dance? What is it? How did it come to be?

**K:** Open Source Video Dance came about as an idea from three of us together: Karl Jay Lewin who's a choreographer based in the northeast of Scotland; Simon Fildes who's a screendance artist, and my partner; and myself. And two years ago, we sat down and we kind of asked ourselves what we felt we needed as artists at this point in time. And we all felt that what we needed was discussion, discourse ... we said we wanted to get together, a group of people who were interested in the same area, not necessarily like-minded but who wanted to discuss issues. We didn't want to look at lots of work, we didn't want to make any work, we just wanted to talk about it. And that was, in a way, the sort of germ of the idea and it grew from there. Karl had recently experienced open space technology in another event. And he introduced us to these ideas and it brought to mind my experience and Simon's experience as well of being at festivals and conferences where the opportunity for debate and discussion was very, very small and narrow; and that often our best conversations, or the most interesting, stimulating conversations, happened in the lunch queue or coffee break queue and then it would be curtailed by the next series of programmed events. So, we thought, we wanted to create an event, a symposium that tipped that on its head, that put the coffee break at the heart, and that's what we did. And in the first Open Source, there was very sort of a fresh, excited, almost quite emotional feeling about it, where I think the people who were drawn to come to it, came there with this feeling that were bursting to communicate with each other about ideas and thoughts and anxieties and so on. We always thought it would be a one-off. But I think that, in a sense, that the impact of that first event was really large, and it was like one of these, you know, big pebble

dropping in the water, and the ripple out; there was just a sense of "we really need or we should do this again and see what happens." And so here we are eighteen months later in the second event, and we've made some alterations, we've got a few more programmed speakers which we felt was maybe an interesting way to give certain people a platform, a set platform, to represent ideas or constructs that they've been working on. But still allowing most of the time for free discussion or self-organized discussion.

**D:** What about history?

**K:** History! Whose history?

**D:** Histories ... Histories of you, your working history, what got you to this point? And tell me something about your community. How'd you get here?

**K:** I was initially drawn to screendance, or video dance as I probably usually would have referred to it, just when I graduated from the Laban Center in London in the late 80s, 1980s, and it was a time when there was the beginnings of what I see was a new wave of dance for television in the UK. It coincided ... my sort of awareness of the possibilities of making dance on screen came about when there was a series on channel 4 called "Dance Lines," where the idea was where you brought a director, television director together with a choreographer, and they were given time to experiment and then make work specifically for the television. So, this series was going on, but for me, the key to that was this edition of the journal *Dance Theater Journal*, that was devoted to dance on television, and I read this and suddenly realized that that was something I was really interested in. I think the interest for me lay in—you know, I had been through a ... had just completed a degree in dance and I was very interested in dance history and in particular the sort of postmodern era. But I was also very interested in making choreography or performance works. But what I was frustrated by was the experience of going to see dance in London and sitting in an audience with another thirty people, all whom were dancers, and all of whom belonged to the same sort of group of people. And I sort of thought, "well maybe the idea if you make dance for television, then you bring dance or you can communicate through dance to a much, much larger audience." So that was my initial impetus and that set me off on this journey of exploration and there was no formal screendance education in that time. So I ended up doing a postgraduate in what was called "electronic imaging" at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art of Dundee, in Scotland, where I'm from. And that course then, as now, is situated in an art college, but also had a reputation for being engaged in video art. Some of the tutors that were there at the time were actually key figures in the UK video art scene. And a lot of the practice and ideas that were being explored and had been explored on that course really fed into video art. So, I came along with my knowledge and experience of postmodern dance practice and came, you know, right up close to video art practice and found a lot of

similarities and a lot of ideas that I could work between the two. So, that really, those two influences, postmodern dance and video art practice, have been really what set me on my way.

In terms of production—production possibilities, I guess you could say—or techniques, I also drew on the fact that quite soon after graduating from Dundee, I ended up directing arts programs for television. So I became very aware of the television processes in that experience. And I think again that added to those two sort of more conceptual ideas—this kind of vein of wide experience that became of making television. So, my impulse had been to make dance for television; ironically, only one piece of screendance that I've ever directed has been commissioned and shown on television, British television, and that was *Pace*, which I made in 1995 as part of the BBC Arts Council of England "Dance for Camera" series. It's a five minute piece that I made in collaboration with choreographer Marisa Zanotti. And I think that was the only piece I made for television, but it's also, in some ways, the most experimental piece that I've ever made. It was the first time that I had the opportunity to work with digital non-linear editing system, which enabled me to take ideas of looping and editing techniques to an extreme that I had never been able to do in this sort of analog world I'd lived in, or worked in before. But also through a collaboration with Simon Fildes, who was an editor but was also a musician and had gone through postgraduate at Dundee as well—he was a video artist in his own right—and that first collaboration with him ... we've continued to collaborate for the last fifteen years, or more in fact—that has kind of determined the way that my work has gone.

And so ... I very quickly realized that actually what I wanted to make was an art form in its own self; it wasn't simply about putting dance on television—although obviously these things share similar techniques and approaches, or can do. So although that was my impulse for dance on television, actually in my own practice, I've always been much more aligned or drawing from the visual arts and also from contemporary dance practice. And strange enough, I think, in the two decades I've been making work and engaged with the area, we now seem to be kind of really there. Television has receded as a place for making work or a place for finding money to make work. And that's lead to people looking at alternative spaces and alternative means of production. And I suppose to me, I guess that can bring some problems because we can't really be just engaging with that world simply because that's where we can get our work seen and funded. It means that we also have to engage with a particular way of thinking about work and maybe that is partly why now at this time there seems to be this grand swell of—I was going to say interest, but there's more than that, sort of desperation that we should have more critical dialogue, which I would think would be more aligned with the kind of fine art, visual art practice than television, which traditionally, and you know, as far as I'm aware, doesn't have a particular kind of critical discourse aligned with it—or most people's experience with television is not bound up with critical discourse.

**D:** Where might this go? Where might you like to see [screendance] go?

**K:** I've written this book, *Making Video Dance*, which is a step-by-step guide to creating dance for the screen. It was written very much aimed at dancers and choreographers who want to make work for the screen, and it's primarily aimed at people who want to make single screen work. Although I would suggest a lot of the techniques in it are relevant for making multiple screen or installation or whatever. But, as I say, mainly aimed at dancers and choreographers who may want to make single screen works. And in a way ... until you know what's in that book, and it doesn't have to be through that book, but until you know the basic, you know, really what's in that book, then you can't really engage with the art form. And I know that sounds a bit pompous, and of course there will be any people that come through and have never, don't know anything about anything technical or processes or any considerations of intention or form or content or whatever, that will still make pieces of work that blow us apart, you know, that are so amazing. But, in general, when I look around and I see work, the people are making the same mistakes again and again and again and again and again. And it's not, it's absolutely—I'm not saying there's only one way to make a piece of work. But what I am saying is that there has to be a sort of integrity and a clarity of intention in work. And that's what I often think is lacking. And so I feel like, maybe I felt like writing this book might help to contribute, just to kind of raise the level. And I certainly don't mean just to raise the level technically, because I think that has happened, you know, people are shooting on very high formats with really high production values, but the work is still not succeeding necessarily. And I think, that to me has to do a lot with something much more basic which is a clarity of intention and an awareness of the context that the work is being made and seen in. So that would be my other thing: this is a thing that I think we're sort of seeing more now, is a sort of a call to people to be more aware of things that have already happened. And again, it's not about looking back and saying this is the way to do it and this is how it should be, but it's just having that kind of knowledge base that is very specific to this genre. You know, it's all very well knowing about the history of cinema, and that is important, and maybe the history of, you know, visual art and that's also important, but now screendance has a history as well that references things—that's what I feel is important, that we somehow manage to acknowledge but also have access to and learn from.

**D:** So can you talk the maturation of the field as you see it? What are the most salient points or the most vital parts of the field now twenty years down the line for you...

**K:** Well, I don't know. I guess I can only really speak from my point of view. I don't know whether this is something to do with, you know, once you've made work for two decades and you kind of want to slow down to a certain extent. I mean in some ways you are more productive because actually in a sense things can be a bit more at your finger tips or things could happen quicker than, you know, your sort of early days where maybe absolutely everything you do you've got to do every single thing

yourself and it can take ages and years to make something. But to me there is sort of a sense of slightly wanting to slow down and be more reflective about what's going on, you know; the energy changes maybe from being desperate to just get out there and make stuff, and make a mark and grab every opportunity, to being a little more kind of on the back foot and a bit selective about what you get involved in and ... but also, maybe realizing that it's not just about making stuff and that at some point we have to talk about stuff and look at stuff and engage with the ideas behind it. Which I think, I mean I've always done in my own practice. I've always thought about what I'm doing and why I'm doing it and I've had a rationale behind it. But it's about trying to share a discourse about that. So it's less interesting now to just talk about "well how did that get made?" and, you know, the production process and so on. But I guess also again it's a personal thing for me because when I wrote my book, which is effectively a workbook, which takes you from the initial idea to the finished product. For me, the writing of that just came out of my own experience over fifteen years of making things and also seeing other people and how they work, and talking to other practitioners and sort of drawing these threads together. But in a sense once that was complete and that last "T" was crossed and "I" was dotted, I could kind of leave that behind in a way. I'm now personally interested more in looking at a critical framework for discussing work and not so much talking about how to do it and the practicalities of things. So, I don't know how that reflects the field, whether it does. I think it probably doesn't. There's always the next generation coming up who are more concerned—you know the students I have, the postgraduate students that I have, are really interested in looking at the next bit of technology and what can offer them. In the way that I was very excited when Avid and non-linear digital editing came along and it completely changed the way that I approached making work. So I guess that also happens in kind of generations, doesn't it?

**D:** One thing I love about you is that you're an activist for the field. And that you give a lot of service to the field, which I also think is amazing. Open Source Video Dance is a perfect example of that.

**K:** For me there's a history to being kind of an activist, as you might call it, in the field, and it comes from coming of age, or coming into the field at a time when it was really quite minority. And certainly where I was living in and working for a lot of the time, which is Scotland, I was pretty much the lone voice in the field. And so I had to do a lot of persuading of promoters and arts funders and so on, and that there is actually a genre or an area of work called screendance or video dance that was separate and equally valid to dance or film but was not the same, was something in its own right. So I think that was sort of inherent in that, there was that, there's always sort of this feeling of we've got to kind of fight our corner. Through working with Simon Fildes, together we've got this feeling that nobody owes us a living, so we have to be active as well and creating opportunities for ourselves and for other people. If we sit back and wait for everyone, things to be organized for us, it's just not going to happen. And

again, I do think that kind of slightly comes from living remotely, from not living at the epicenter of artistic and production activity. You're kind of out on a limb. So you don't want to be out on a limb, you want to be at the center. So you have to, in a sense, bring the center to where you are. And that's the way we want to live and work. You know, we want to surround ourselves with the people that we're interested in; it doesn't matter where they live. So that in a sense was the starting point for Open Source Video Dance, which we now have had two symposia and that was really the germ of the idea when Simon and I sat together with Karl Jay Lewin and said, "What do we want to do? How do we want to progress our own practice?" And we decided that what we wanted to do was bring a group of people together who were interested in talking about what we were interested in talking about. And to create a conducive environment for that and to try and kind of get away from the very, very formal time structure, its environment, that an ordinary conference has and just open it up, so that actually the important issues come to the surface that could be debated. And I think it proved to be very successful over ... it kind of evolved; the first event was slightly different from the second event and we got a little bit more structure in the second event, but I think that served a good purpose. You know, I think we were also kind of ready for that. Whereas on the first open source everyone just wanted a space to go "blah!" [laughs] "This is what I'm worried about and this is what..." I think that people find it very emotional, you know, just be given that space to talk without there being any particular agenda. At the end of it, we didn't have to come out with some decision being made or some proposal being worked up which is often the end, is the required result of a situation like that.

**D:** I quickly have one more thing to ask you. What can you say about your Dogma Dance Manifesto?

**K:** Right, well, yeah...

**D:** Maybe you can give a date ...

**K:** Yeah, I've got to think about Dogma Dance, well 2000, I think. Yeah, probably 2000. Yeah, Dogma Dance came out of two ... I was working quite closely with two other people, not actually creating work but teaching, with Lisa Bixler and Deveril Garraghan and we had a lot of conversations about the kinds of screendance work that we were seeing, and particularly about the issue of the total lack of *dance* in dance films. And we began to kind of think of ... is there a need for some sort of manifesto or kind of strong agenda where we really kind of say, "This is what we think is needed to make a dance film" or in a sense handing the challenge to the rest of the sector and saying, "this is what we think needs to be in the work, and how are you going to respond to this?" It was of course inspired by the Dogma films initiated by Lars Van Trier and all those Danes, but behind it also was this idea of Yvonne Rainer's manifesto from the 60s, and we kind of felt that screendance hadn't, up until that point, had anything like

that. There was kind of a wishy-washiness about what it could be, you know, this one thing can be called screendance and that could be screendance and we wanted to get a bit of rigor behind it. So we launched this manifesto, this Dogma Dance Manifesto, that I think had a list of about ten points that had to be fulfilled in order to create a Dogma Dance, Video Dance. And if you did that you would get a certificate. There was a surprising amount of interest. We had a few open meetings in London and it was, I mean, thirty or forty people at the first one. The idea was also that we would screen work that and could debate, you know, whether it was Dogma Dance film or not and, I mean, it kind of bubbled under really, eventually. But the interesting thing for me is that I suppose the work that I've made, the single-screen work, has always been Dogma Dance work... it's very... it's trying to bring things back to the essence, so it's, you know, we said "No to dissolves" and "No to slow motion" and "No to music just being put on the top without any kind of relationship to what's actually happening in the performance," and I was trying to get back to the sense of performance being at the heart of screendance, as opposed to kind of purely being about production values and design and so on. So yeah, that was Dogma Dance. Might be revived.

# REVIEWS



## Review and Discussion of *The Co(te)lette Film*:

Dir. Mike Figgis / Chor. Ann Van den Broek

Priscilla Guy

### Background / Context

In 2010, English director Mike Figgis presented *The Co(te)lette Film*, a cinematographic adaptation of eponymous live performance by Dutch choreographer Ann Van den Broek, *Co(te)lette* (2007). At the beginning of the film, the camera shows three women on all fours at the centre of a large podium. From the very first shots, the viewer is given exquisite high definitions images and close ups of these gorgeous women and their more intimate body parts as they move frenetically and breath heavily. The synopsis of the film states: "There is no confrontation, nor rivalry. No story-telling, no solution and no ending. [The three women] grapple with the meaning and physical translation of beauty and perishability, rawness and fragility. The dancers are slaves of their own desires while trying to get in control of them."<sup>1</sup>

The live version of this piece was a great success on international stages, touring in Europe and America. In a Q&A after a recent show in Montreal, Canada,<sup>2</sup> choreographer Ann Van den Broek remained vague with regard to her collaboration with Figgis for the film adaptation of her work, mentioning mostly her initial fear of seeing her choreography "stolen" by the voracious camera. She shared amusing anecdotes about their artistic disagreements, yet said very little on Figgis' adaptation of her work. Talking mostly about her own creative process with the dancers, she cautiously navigated audience members' questions on the feminist themes at play in the live version of the piece and their translation to the screen. Leaving interpretations open, she invited spectators to question those aspects of the film they found challenging. Although her personal response to Figgis' film remained ambiguous, she also acknowledged the great exposure the piece received after the release of *The Co(te)lette Film*, and considers it an important, valuable work in the art field.

Although the film has received a fair amount of attention from artists and critics in the film and dance milieus, its most controversial aspects have received virtually no systematic evaluation, and beg further investigation and in-depth discussion in light of its gendered representation of female bodies. As noted by artist and scholar Douglas Rosenberg:

This film (as well as others with similar screen politics) has gone largely unexamined and without the kind of critique that every college student that has ever taken a contemporary art course let alone a Women's or Gender Studies course is trained to do. [...] The fetishization of dancing bodies is common in this milieu, made more so by the uncritical viewing practices that are the norm in festivals and distribution systems.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, most critics celebrate the audacity and radicalism of the film, and applaud images of crude violence, hyper sexualisation, misogyny, slavery and dysfunctional femininity. Under these circumstances, the question must be asked: is the celebration of such images in itself an artistic *tour de force*, or is it rather a perfectly orchestrated marketing strategy reproducing precisely what the original choreography sought to challenge? Rather than offering a formal critique of this work of art, analyzing its implications in a discussion of mediated female bodies, and questioning its beautifully directed yet sensationalist images, most critics seem to welcome the film as a relevant feminist object.<sup>4</sup> The fact that many of its formal/artistic/technical components contradict Van den Broek's initial feminist claim remains absent of the critical landscape.

This essay comprises two parts: (1) a presentation—anchored in previous reviews of the film—addressing both the film's cinematographic and choreographic elements and the disciplinary crossings between dance and cinema, as well as the transformation of the viewer's gaze from live performance to screendance; and (2) an open, rigorous discussion of Figgis' cinematographic strategies and dramaturgic choices in relation to specific types of body representation and gendered approach to performativity. Using Erin Brannigan's writing on kinaesthetic empathy in *musicals*,<sup>5</sup> I question Figgis' representation of the female persona and its implications in the context of his film. Furthermore, building on British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), I highlight aspects of Figgis' film that transform Van den Broek's choreographic material and reinforce stereotyped representations of women on screen. Discussing *The Co(te)lette Film* in terms of artistic/technical merit, I also put forward a critical analysis of the implications of such contemporary screendance practices in relation to the representation of women on screen. This essay thus aims to create space to problematize some of the most pressing issues raised by the film, rather than simply observing *le spectacle* of reiterated *clichés* in our hybrid field.

## Part One: Review

*The Co(te)lette Film* | Mike Figgis, 2010, United Kingdom, 60 min.

"[A true work of art] does not merely describe something of which we are already fully aware. This new reality consists of elements selected from natural reality and is achieved through the establishment of a new, imaginative relationship between these elements and the natural world."

- Maya Deren

Three women are exposed at the centre of a large podium, in a vast loft: neon lights, cold set up and crude ambiance are at play. The camera brings the viewer closer to their bodies, furrowing their face, legs and crotch, while they perform a very tight, sharp and synchronized pelvis movement, breathing loudly, rhythmically. Around them, down from the podium in a softer light, a crowd of men and women, richly

dressed, some of them leaning on high bars with a drink. The ambiance evokes a strip club or a bar. The camera sometimes zooms out in a way that allows the viewer to embrace the scene completely: the podium, the three women and the crowd of voyeurs looking at them, silently, whispering at times. The music completes the portrait: lounge music, beat, techno. Embodying stereotypes of beauty, sensuality, perversion and sexual slavery, the three women perform a one-hour marathon of walks, codified gestures, exacerbated facial expressions, and hysterical climaxes through rhythm and repetition.

While *The Co(te)lette Film* has undeniable artistic qualities (a very meticulous artistic direction, a quite impressive sound score and use of breath, a tremendously seductive image quality) and the impressive choreography inevitably moves us at times, the artistic synergy that we might expect from the collaboration between such an experienced filmmaker and choreographer is not at play. In spite of Figgis' strategies for transporting the choreography to the screen (360 degree filming, close-ups, finely orchestrated *mise en scène*, and use of a steadycam for some segments), the connection between dance and cinema remains tenuous. Rather than using the cinematic potential of Van den Broek's complex choreographic material to propel the piece on screen and reveal a singular version of it, Figgis' adaptation privileges a sensationalist gaze on the choreography, which is a far easier track to go down. The filmmaker makes important choices that alter Van den Broek's choreographic work, including the addition of the crowd around the podium on which the dancers evolve, instead of a traditional stage with wings, and the close-ups on genitals and other body parts which we would not see in a live performance in a theatre. These choices shift the focus of the spectator and dictate not only where to look, but also *how* to look. What was raw in Van den Broek's dramaturgy becomes graphic under Figgis' aesthetic. That certainly counts in the promotion of the film and its great popularity, giving it a pornographic edge that raises curiosity and gathers audience members from way beyond the dance world. At this juncture, the gap separating the live performance and the film is wide: if everything was at stake for both spectators and dancers on stage, everything seems already determined for the three performers on screen. Potentially inventive interactions between movement, camera, and editing are upstaged by a tacky, seductive, and commercial aesthetic.

Although overall the piece fails to convince at the level of the synergy between movement and camera, some scenes achieve such a symbiotic relationship. For example, the scene in which two dancers manipulate a third one, completely naked, hitting her body against the floor in an impressive and highly precise choreographic sequence, is quite interesting. The dancer's arms and legs seem disarticulated while she is completely at the mercy of her colleagues. Skin slaps, limbs hit the floor. Here, Figgis uses the cinematic potential of the choreographic material: the close-ups offer the viewer surprising points of view of these manipulations and highlight the contrasts between hyper-organized brutality and shocking gestures. These images show bruises, red skin and vulnerable flesh, and generate a highly physical response for the viewer. In terms of sound, this scene is wisely explored as we hear the impact of

the body on the floor much louder than we would in a live performance setting, increasing the tension at this point in the film. Sounds of breathing, hits, falls and slaps are amplified and give the whole a surreal feel. The precision of the choreography is the turning point of this scene, which offers a powerful, even mysterious balance between raw and violent behaviour and precise and virtuosic manipulation. Dance and cinema complete each other and propel the initial choreographic material further on screen.

Other scenes offer similar interesting effects by hybridizing movement of the body, of the camera, and of editing, such as the scene of the “rave party” where the use of stroboscopic light, excessive breathing, fast editing, and camera movement contribute to a dramatic construction through a superimposition of choreographic and cinematic strategies. But apart from those scenes and some provocative segments, one must ask: How are hyper-sexuality, violence, sexism, the balance of power, and femininity treated in this cinematographic adaptation? How is the work of Van den Broek reinvented in such setting? And what does the screen offer to the initial artistic vision behind this work?

In press conference after the screening at Cinédanse Montréal in 2012, Figgis mentioned that some choreographers are afraid that their work will be “stolen” by the director, the camera, or the film technique. While Figgis’ film maintains the original chronology of the choreography, the camera does invade the podium where the performers evolve, a shameless voyeur—even predator in some sections—amongst them, crawling next to one of the dancers or seemingly trying to catch the most interesting angle on her body by following her. The choreography does not mould to the site of the screen: rather the camera consumes both movement and bodies. Van den Broek’s choreography moves from subject to object, and so do the women in her work. More than an adaptation of Van den Broek’s work, Figgis’ film offers a totally opposite perspective on the thematic explored by the choreographer, which is significant given that the work is presented as an adaptation for the screen, not a free-reinterpretation.

Let me now discuss the transition of this piece from stage to screen in order to highlight how such a transition led to the reiteration of clichés and stereotyped representations of women and their bodies, instead of generating real discussions about these issues and pushing forward the medium of screendance. As a matter of fact, the absence of discussion about *how* and *why* this subject is brought to the screen evacuates deeper analysis and debates that could be deployed around this film. Most reviews articulate *what* is being presented, which is only one part of the exercise.

## Part Two: Discussion

### *The site*

One of the most crucial elements that deflects Van den Broek’ work when transferred to the screen is the use of the site—that is, the screen as a site. As I already

mentioned, the actual choreographic work (movement sequences and chronology) remains quite intact in the transition from stage to screen, which could lead us to think that the work and its meaning are intact, too. As any serious choreographer would admit, however, movement sequences are only one aspect of choreography. Other elements such as the context and site of presentation come into play to give it its complete signification as an art piece.

Van den Broek uses the stage as a site to challenge some stereotypes, preconceived ideas, and socially accepted images of women. She puts in a theatre what we see every day on the Internet, in advertisements, on television, and in magazines. As a result, she creates a tension by asking three dancers to embody various roles, behaviours and body attitudes, as well as physical and mental states that mirror reality. She takes what we most often see on *screens* (films, television, publicity) and reproduces that social material in a theatre.

Live performance engages audiences in a specific way: the actual presence of human beings on stage challenges the public and initiates a connection between them and the artists. The site shapes the material and greatly influences the way the audience encounters the choreographic material. The proximity with the spectators, or at least their presence in the same room, is crucial in the development of the work on stage. The screen as a site is radically different from the stage. Douglas Rosenberg writes about the site-specificity of screendance:

... screendance culture is an expanded culture, a site-specific practice that, if true to form, moves beyond the simple migration of dance from the stage (with the inherent motivations and logic of dance intact) and re-sites bodies in motion in a filmic or screenic space. Such spaces have specificity that is often at odds with choreographic logic, which had been conceptualized in *actual* three-dimensional space.<sup>6</sup>

In the live version of *Co(te)lette*, the audience is seated in front of the stage, while the sides and the back of the stage are delimited by a thin white curtain that goes from ceiling to the floor. The three dancers occupy that space, in which they are “safe” and from which they can escape at any moment; in fact, one of them hides her head under the curtain at some point, while at other moments the dancers simply face one of those curtains, hiding their faces from our gaze. The theatre provides both dancers and spectators with a frame from which they share a question, a drama, an intrigue. The audience is sitting while the dancers are moving all over the place. The balance of power is in their favor: they control the room, they travel around, they know what is next and the spectators do not. The site allows them liberties, while it keeps the audience “captive” of their seats. Our gaze is directed by various choreographic strategies: sometimes intentionally busy and confused, the work on stage forces us to choose what to look at; sometimes very clearly pointed at one event on stage, our gaze is guided; sometimes caught by a detail, a piece of clothing, or a shoe, our gaze reframes the work with our personal fantasies and interests.

This is, partly, how *Co(te)lette* denounces certain stereotypes: by making them visible, on stage, with no shame and no censure, without giving the answer or the solution to the audience, letting them find their own path through the proposed work. By asking the audience to watch these women, broken, courageous, lost, fierce, and tired, Van den Broek exposes this multifaceted female persona through the site of the theatre and from the perspective of the spectator in her or his seat. Audience and artists share a common time and space for the whole show, from which questions emerge. This duality and the physical presence of both groups (public/dancers) is crucial to the realization of Van den Broek's choreographic goals. The dancers break the fourth wall and challenge the spectators; they perform a highly physical marathon that the public can feel, hear, and observe in real time. Their physical exhaustion, their craziness, and their aggressiveness is palpable, and therefore meaningful in the context of this piece.

Figgis, meanwhile, takes a work that addresses certain questions about the female body, related notably to hyper-sexualization, pressure, and vulnerability, and puts it on screen, which is the perfect site for easy and free consumption of the female body. While Van den Broek performs a critique of this pressure on women by presenting such bodies through multiple physical/mental states in a theatre, Figgis' adaptation fails to move beyond Van den Broek's point of departure, with the result that the former ends up reproducing precisely what the latter seeks to problematize. Figgis' film borrows deliberately from popular references such as soft pornography and the over-eroticized and graphic representations of bodies in advertisement. Objectified women on screen is nothing new or shocking; it is what we are used to seeing on the various screens that surround us. With the use of the cinematic apparatus, Figgis narrows the multiplicity of embodied states to a common and familiar spectrum, to a point where the fine line between the criticism and the simple reiteration is completely blurred. What you see is what you get.

Without suggesting that the adaptation of *Co(te)lette* for the screen is an impossible or impertinent project to accomplish, the motivations behind it can nevertheless be seriously questioned. While feminists concerns about the representation of women in the media must be addressed from various angles, *The Co(te)lette Film* is more of a seductive product that regurgitates reality without digging any further the challenges it entails. When attending the live performance in Montreal, I, to the contrary, saw a work that had much more depth than the film. I saw women pushing their physical limits, I heard them yelling at us, the public, and I felt sorry for, as much as I felt impressed by, their characters. Putting such choreographic material on screen should come with careful attention to the implications of the screen as a site to conserve its specific artistic and social concerns. It is crucial to keep in mind that documenting a piece and adapting it for the screen are two very different projects, and that the latter asks us to build a new hybrid language in order to recreate movement material for the eye of the camera and for the screen as a site.

### *Agency and kinaesthetic empathy*

In the live version of *Co(te)lette*, dancers go from hyper-codified movements to emotional states, from very directional attitudes toward the audience to vulnerable postures. They repeat this cycle several times and, in the process, they communicate the multiplicity of their states to the public. They get close to the first row of seats; sometimes they even touch audience members. They challenge the public, look at them, and walk towards them. They show the audience their vulnerability, their craziness, their despair, their slavery. But ultimately, the dancers are the ones who decide when to stop this cycle. The audience members have no control over what is happening on stage, yet it is somehow happening to them as well, as they share the room with the three dancers. The rhythms of the walks and movements travel from stage to audience. The spectators are ultimately physically engaged with the protagonists: they see each other and experience duration together, increasing the kinaesthetic empathy of the spectator. Such empathy is present as well in cinema, as explained by Karen Pearlman in her writing on editing:

Kinesthetic empathy is feeling *with* movement, a sensitivity we have developed by perceiving and being movement and a sensitivity that, I propose, is particularly relevant to editors of moving pictures. Neurophysiologist Arnold Modell describes the activation of kinesthetic empathy by saying, "The perception of feelings relies on the corporeal imagination, which in turn is determined by the history of the self." I am drawn to this phrase "corporeal imagination," which suggests that the body not only thinks, it imagines, in this case imagining how another body feels. And it imagines in relation to its own experience, drawing on remembered sensation to recognize feeling in movement.<sup>7</sup>

Pearlman builds on Modell's observations regarding the work of film editor and how working with moving images can be as kinaesthetic as working with actual bodies in space. Erin Brannigan also describes the phenomenon of kinaesthetic empathy in films in her chapter on musicals. Writing about key characteristics of famous female film stars such as Marilyn Monroe and Ginger Rogers, she explains that "It is this human potential for physical vigour, power, energy, and force beyond the utilitarian, exemplified in the performance of the musical star, that the spectator intuitively recognizes or feel. The excess somatic energy in such performances transfers kinetically to the audience through an affective force."<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, kinaesthetic empathy is at play in *The Co(te)lette Film*. Because of the formal elements proper to the film and the way it was shot and edited, however, this kinetic relation between performers and spectators is completely different from what Van den Broek had established and interferes with the initial feminist thematic. In the film, the choreography happens on a podium with a group of voyeurs crowded around the three dancers, captured by a camera, consumed by the viewer of the film. The kinetic charge received by the spectator in the live performance of *Co(te)lette* is completely altered by the addition of those voyeurs and by putting the spectator in a

retracted position. The viewer looks at the scene through the lens and happens to be a third witness after the camera and the people crowded around the podium. Combined with the fact that the camera invades the dancer's space, the balance of power that was so efficient in the live performance is completely reversed. The three women cannot escape this situation and fall under the many gazes staring at them. They do not have anywhere to go or hide. No back wall, no curtain. The voyeurs are all around them instead of on one side of the stage, which makes them even more captive. In the live performance, they seem captive of their own obsessions, while on film they are captive of the frame, of the podium, of the people witnessing their crisis, of the camera tracking them. The spectators see their gaze being directed to very specific points in space and specific body parts. A decidedly male gaze eroticizes the choreographic material and propels Figgis' camera. It forces our eye to follow a crotch, it offers close-ups on genitals or breasts, and it shows open mouths, open rib cage and chest breathing fast. The film flattens Van den Broek's multilayered female persona and reduces it to an object of desire.

In her now famous essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975),<sup>9</sup> British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey articulates an incisive critique of the representation of women in the Hollywood cinema of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. What she addresses in this manifesto is illuminating for our discussion, as she describes a male gaze that dominates the form, and a "silent image of woman" that becomes only a receptacle for the spectator's fantasies: "The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look."<sup>10</sup> In Figgis' film, the spectator is not connected anymore to the three performers, but isolated in its own fantasies, guided by graphic and stylistic strategies. The kinaesthetic empathy from the stage version is lost to the profit of physical excitement, arousal, or malaise. As Mulvey points out, women in such films become simple objects of contemplation and/or products of consumption—passive and plain surfaces on which (male) fantasies take form. Spectators definitely traverse a variety of emotions during *The Co(te)lette Film* and they do experience some sort of kinaesthetic empathy under such dynamic—editing plays an important role in this matter, as it is fast and disorienting at times, reminding us of music video or publicity in which the female body is often objectified. Thus, the result echoes socially constructed and commercially reiterated types of visual pleasure associated with the female body, and puts the viewer in a familiar position as opposed to engaging him or her in a kinetic tension—and potentially a critical discussion—in response to such images. The spectator is disengaged from the kinetic charge present in the live version of the work and does not share the struggle of the performers: he or she rather *witnesses* the scenes through the eye of the camera.

In *The Co(te)lette Film*, the dancers' agency is reduced to zero, while in the live performance the three women perform a fantastic and ecstatic embodiment of all sorts of clichés, with powerful interaction with the spectators. While Van den Broek gives her dancers and the audience a challenging experience to share, in which the

female body is being pushed, deconstructed, and exposed without judgment or censure, Figgis reduces this challenge to the witnessing of three women's vulnerability, powerlessness, and hysteria, under the gaze of a voracious camera. To be sure, neither the original choreography nor Figgis' adaptation propose solutions to or judgmental statements about issues pertaining to women's reality in contemporary society. Van den Broek insists on letting her work remain open to interpretations, preferring to present a multifaceted representation of women and avoiding any commentary on it. Yet, she offers an open discussion in which dancing women participate with their strengths and fears, within the limits that are imposed on them, yet constantly pushing against those limits. In contrast, Figgis closes the circle around the women/dancers and makes them objects of consumption.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the strength of the original choreographic work is not only being undermined by *The Co(te)lette Film*, but also completely deflected by its transposition on screen. Not all books make good movies. Not all performances are meant to be adapted for the world of cinema and screens. And if they are, it is worth questioning the implications of such transpositions and the motivations behind them. In *The Co(te)lette Film*, the screen as a site and the way it is used reaffirms endless myths and contradicts feminist themes explored in the original performance. The film, and the way it was directed/edited, offers another occasion to see women depicted as victims or objects: they may well be captive of their own desires, yet under Figgis' vision they are mostly captive of cinema's fantasies.

Screendance needs challenging works, debates and criticism, but it also needs works that carry responsible visions and strong discourses on dancing bodies in order to facilitate its ascension as an art form in its own right. While the representation of women has been the object of several manipulations in the public sphere, screendance represents an important vehicle to challenge, deconstruct, and critically reflect upon them. In 1975, Mulvey called for an alternative approach to cinema in which visual pleasure is destroyed to the benefit of "a new language of desire":

The alternative cinema provides a space for a cinema to be born which is radical in both a political and an aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of the mainstream film. This is not to reject the latter moralistically, but to highlight the ways in which its formal preoccupations reflect the psychical obsessions of the society which produced it, and, further, to stress that the alternative cinema must start specifically by reacting against these obsessions and assumptions. A politically and aesthetically avant-garde cinema is now possible, but it can still only exist as a counterpoint... The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations.<sup>11</sup>

With the increasing accessibility of screendance through digital development and the presence of screens everywhere, this hybrid form could be the perfect counterpoint to mediocre images of the female body. By revealing the power of human body on screen, as opposed to reiterating it as an object/product of consumption, screendance has tremendous potential for feminist artists. In my opinion, that Figgis' film was labeled *shocking, radical, or revolutionary* does not make any sense. Radical works are not simply made of tacky re-collections of controversial images. The problem with *The Co(te)lette Film* is certainly not the fact that it is provocative and edgy, or that it shows nudity, sexuality, or violence: many controversial artists have challenged representations of the human body on stage, on screen, or in public spaces and museums, pushing further the limits of what is acceptable and what people are ready to see or not.<sup>12</sup> But radical artworks also entail a novel and unpredictable way to depict a reality, drawing from the *natural* world (as Maya Deren says) and expressing that reality with boldness, against what is expected. Radicalism in the arts is not an aesthetic or a style: it is an attitude towards creation and a desire to see the world change.

## Notes

1. "Essential Dance Film - The Co(te)lette Film (Trailer)," *Tendu.TV*, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gu2r3P04DnA>.
2. *Co(te)lette*, presented at Usine C, November 19-21, 2013.
3. Douglas Rosenberg, "Re: More Territories for the Co(te)lette Film." *Centre for Screendance*, May 9, 2012, <http://screendance.wordpress.com/2012/05/09/re-more-territories-for-the-cotelette-film/>.
4. See the following Huffington Post reviews of *The Co(te)lette Film*: Jennifer Edwards, "Embodied Women as Window on Feminism: *The Co(te)lette Film* Served Up on Your Lap[top]," April 23, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-edwards/embodied-women-as-window-\\_b\\_1446147.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-edwards/embodied-women-as-window-_b_1446147.html); Jean-François Cyr, "«The Co(te)lette film» de Mike Figgis au festival Cinédanse: la charge émotive des corps," September 21, 2012, [http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/09/21/the-cote-lette-film-mike-figgis\\_n\\_1903129.html](http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/09/21/the-cote-lette-film-mike-figgis_n_1903129.html); and Lisa Paul Streitfeld, "(R)evolution: 'The Co(te)lette Film' And the Death of Sex," September 5, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-paul-streitfeld/mike-figgis-revolutionary\\_b\\_1855699.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-paul-streitfeld/mike-figgis-revolutionary_b_1855699.html).
5. Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
6. Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 155.
7. Karen Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Shaping the Film Edit* (USA: Focal Press, 2009), 10.

8. Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 153.
9. Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), 6-18. <http://www.jahsonic.com/VPNC.html>.
10. *Ibid.*, 7.
11. *Ibid.*, 2.
12. See works from Marina Abramovic, Romeo Castellucci, and Dave St-Pierre for radical artistic approaches.

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## Conversation with Boxing Gloves Between Chamecki and Lerner<sup>1</sup>

*Cristiane Bouger*



Figure 1:  
Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner on  
the video *Conversation with Boxing Gloves  
Between Chamecki and Lerner*  
© chameckilerner, 2009

In 2009 the biennial Performa celebrated the centenary of the publication of the *Futurist Manifesto*, written by the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Performa 09 – The Third Biennial of New Visual Art Performance, directed by art historian and critic RoseLee Goldberg, was held in New York City from November 1-22.

Marinetti's manifesto was published in Paris on the first page of the daily newspaper *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909. The influential text would introduce one of the most provocative and radical artistic movements of the last century, leading the Futurist practices in the decades to follow. While seminal for the development of performance works and avant-garde practices that emerged later during the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> however, Futurism was also profoundly polemical, not only because of its extravagant ideas, but because of Marinetti's sexist and fascist perspective through which he exalted "the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers" and praised war as "the world's only hygiene."<sup>3</sup>

The revolutionary artistic ideas originated by the Futurists manifestos in Italy, a couple of years before World War I, remain controversial. The will to "destroy" the past and scorn all established structures such as museums and academies led the Futurists to envision new directions to the arts in the twentieth century. As RoseLee Goldberg writes, "Futurist Manifestos left no part of modern life untouched, probing and provoking, inventing and challenging, and proposing and projecting new ways to eat, sleep, fly and dream."<sup>4</sup>

The controversy concerning Futurism served as the starting point for the creation of the video, *Conversation with Boxing Gloves Between Chamecki and Lerner*. The work was created by choreographers Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner for the ambitious *Futurist Life Redux*, a Performa project that recreated *Vita Futurista*, the first

and only Futurist film ever made. In the following, I analyze how chameckilerner embraced some characteristics of Futurism to pay homage to the legacy of the movement and simultaneously address a critical response to the Futurists' notorious exaltation of violence and war.

### ***Vita Futurista***

*Vita Futurista*, originally filmed by Arnaldo Ginna in 1916,<sup>5</sup> is considered the only official Futurist film ever made. It presented many of the ideas proposed in 1916 by *The Futurist Cinema* manifesto, co-written by F.T. Marinetti, Bruno Corra, Emilio Settimelli, Arnaldo Ginna, Giacomo Balla, and Remo Chiti. The project *Futurist Life Redux*, curated by Lana Wilson and Andrew Lampert, was part of the celebratory Futurist program of Performa 09. Inspired by *Vita Futurista*, the *Redux* project involved eleven filmmakers and video artists. Each of them was invited to recreate one of the different segments of the original 40-minute feature, of which there are no remaining copies. The segment titles were distributed randomly among the artists.

As stated in the program notes of *Futurist Life Redux*, the original film was thought to be comprised "of at least eleven independent segments conceived and written by different Futurist artists." A single-sentence description of the original segments and a few stills constituted the point of departure for the artists to recreate their own re-imagined version of the Futurist film.

Among the artists invited to be part of the project<sup>6</sup> were the choreographers and filmmakers Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner, who brought in filmmaker Phil Harder to collaborate with their film. Chamecki and Lerner initiated the transition from dance to filmmaking in 2007. In the following year they were among the recipients of the Guggenheim Fellowship, which allowed the duo to work on two video productions: *The Collection* (2011) and *The Line* (unfinished to date). For the Performa 09 commission,<sup>7</sup> their short, *Conversation with Boxing Gloves Between Chamecki and Lerner*, re-imagined the *Vita Futurista* segment, *Discussion with Boxing Gloves Between Marinetti and Ungari*.

As with the other artists who were part of the *Redux* project, chameckilerner received a small budget, the title, and a still of the original segment that they should recreate within a six-week schedule. The still, *Discussion with Boxing Gloves Between Marinetti and Ungari*, shows Marinetti in a movement position that suggests he has just punched Ungari, who has his back turned to the camera. In 2007,<sup>8</sup> Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner had created a video work inspired by boxing fight; to accomplish their Performa assignment without repeating themselves, they needed to rethink boxing by approaching it differently this time. They also asked themselves many questions concerning how to create a significant piece inspired by an artistic movement with which they had critical disagreements, since the sexist and pro-war ideas presented in the Futurist manifestos were not endorsed by the duo.

According to Lerner,<sup>9</sup> one of their fundamental concerns was how they could look back at Futurism, especially if looking at the past meant a betrayal of the movement itself. Therefore, imagining how to be a Futurist in the very present—instead of revisiting the Futurism's past—was a thought-provoking and exciting challenge. Lerner and Chamecki decided to use artistic attributes valued by Marinetti and the Futurists, such as speed, absence of drama, simultaneity, dynamism, and violence. They appropriated those characteristics subtly, and indeed efficiently, by subverting fighting to recreate its meaning.

### ***A Kinetic Film—Not a Video Dance Work*<sup>10</sup>**

By naming their work *Conversation with Boxing Gloves* instead of adopting the title *Discussion with Boxing Gloves*, chameckilerner announce an altered approach to the violence suggested by the original film. Transgressing violence by blurring and reversing its own force, chameckilerner employ two main editing attributes: the overlapped position of the performers facing the camera and the reversed temporality of the action.

The four-minute video was recorded by Harder with a black background, showing Chamecki and Lerner centered on the frame. He filmed four takes of four minutes of each dancer with no cuts, making eight takes. From that point, the artists overlapped the different combinations of footage they had at hand until selecting one take of each of them for the final editing.

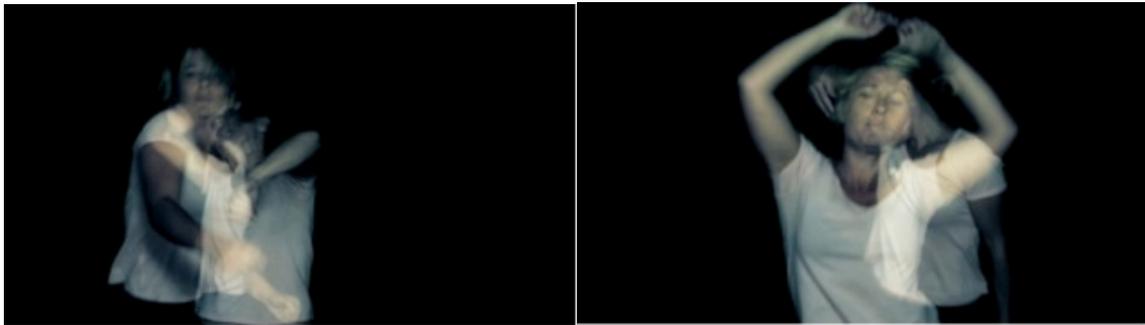
The video action comprises a boxing fight that develops into a dance. We see two women in fight position, facing the camera and, by extension, in direct relation to the spectator. The images of Chamecki and Lerner are merged, simultaneously creating unity and diffusion of their identities. The action of fighting is developed until the point the fight positions turn into dance movements.

The inverted movement of the video is crucial to the subversion of the violence achieved by this work: the video was recorded with Lerner and Chamecki initially dancing, further developing the dance into a boxing fight. The video then was edited showing the footage played backwards; what we see is an opposite sequence of a fight transformed into dance. Because of this temporal manipulation, the violent movement of the punch is reversed, pulled toward the direction of the fighter who threw it, instead of toward her opponent (or spectator). When the attack is pulled back to the aggressor and subtly transformed into dance, the violence is subverted using the punch's own dynamics and speed.

Since the performers face the camera, the spectator becomes involved in the action, in the sense that one is facing the fighters and the blurred movements of their dissolved images. Sometimes it feels that it is me—as the viewer—who is hit by the punch and who sees the opponent dissolve into another woman's body. This impression does not happen by chance. According to Lerner, they wanted not only to attain a perceptual weirdness of the movement expressed on the video, but also to

incite a certain physicality in the viewer, granting the spectator the perspective of the fighter's adversary, in such a way that one could not watch the action passively.

The structure of the work is very simple, since it comprises two overlapped one-take sequences of a dance/fight movement. Still, *Conversation with Boxing Gloves Between Chamecki and Lerner* reverberates as a conceptual and physical response to the artists' initial question about how to look back at the Futurism: the speed so valued by the Futurists—a new mechanical quality in that context—is used to reverse the past into the present. In this regard, chameckilerner makes both a tribute to the Futurists and a statement about the impossibility of their radical wish to destroy the past.



Figures 2 and 3:

Stills of the video *Conversation with Boxing Gloves Between Chamecki and Lerner*

© chameckilerner, 2009

Considering they did not create the choreography for the camera, but rather a film based on a real action, Lerner situates the creation of *Conversation with Boxing Gloves* closer to a *live art* concept than to a video dance approach. Still, she emphasizes the kinetic quality of chameckilerner's work for the camera. In an interview granted for this article, Lerner stated:

Working with film has been an extension of what we were doing [in dance], but we are questioning ourselves about which direction we will head to. We know there is a kinetic quality that is inevitable for us because this is the way we see the world. So far, body and movement are the focus of our films.... A lot of people ask us if we are now making video dance works. We do not have any interest in making video dance. We are making films.<sup>11</sup>

She clarified that her work with Rosane Chamecki always evolved from an action and not from a choreography or narrative. Even in chameckilerner's earlier trajectory, their choreographies were created from a specific action that imposed the development of the dance score.

Considering that one of the crucial factors in performance and *live art* works relies on the performer's ability to attune and embody a compelling state of presence,

Chamecki expands Lerner's approach, pointing out that in their dance works for the stage, chameckilerner always attempted to recapture, in front of the audience, the *momentum* whereby, as in their rehearsals, liveness and presence were unquestionable.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, this re-embodiment is not something easily achieved, and sometimes it hardly reoccurs in the works that are re-performed. From this perspective, Chamecki understands that creating videos allows them to capture these moments, which otherwise would vanish unseen. In that sense, Chamecki ponders if a performance for the camera can, in some cases, comprise more "liveness" than a live performance.

With *Conversation with Boxing Gloves* chameckilerner created a distinctive and effective reinterpretation of some of the attributes of *The Futurist Cinema* manifesto. Interchangeably blurring and defining their own practice, the artists subverted and recreated meaning to make explicit both the fragility and strength of Futurist concepts in a time in which violence, speed, and simultaneity reached completely new dimensions and influence in contemporary life.

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was published as Cristiane Bouger, "Conversa Futurista entre Chamecki e Lerner," *Idanca* (2010), <http://idanca.net/conversa-futurista-entre-chamecki-e-lerner/>. In addition, an extended version of this article was published in 2012; see Cristiane Bouger, "A Discussão Entre Marinetti e Ungari Reimaginada por chameckilerner," in *dança em foco—Ensaio Contemporâneos de Videodança*, eds. Paulo Caldas, Leonel Brum, Eduardo Bonito, and Regina Levy. (Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, 2012), 167–191.

2. Rainey refers to Futurism as "a paradigm for countless movements that followed, some embodying the most vital currents among the twentieth-century arts (Vorticism, Dadaism, and Surrealism are only a few of them)." Nevertheless, stating that Futurism "remains one of the great dead ends of modernism," Rainey criticizes the preoccupation of scholars and critics "with establishing genealogies of modernism and the avant-garde." See Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman, eds., *Futurism: an anthology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 1, 46.

3. F. T. Marinetti, "Manifeste du Futurisme" as published in *Le Figaro* in 1909, in RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1988), 10. For the English translation of Marinetti's manifesto, see Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, *Futurism*, 49-53.

4. RoseLee Goldberg, "Music for 16 Futurist Noise Intoners," a Performa 09 Commission, (New York: Program Notes, 2009).
5. Lana Wilson and Andrew Lampert, "Futurist Life Redux," in RoseLee Goldberg, *Performa 09 – Back to Futurism* (New York: Performa Publications, 2011), 94-97.
6. *Futurist Life Redux* was comprised of works by Aida Ruilova, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Michael Smith with Bill Haddad, Shannon Plumb, George Kuchar, Shana Moulton, chameckilerner (with Phil Harder), Ben Coonley, Trisha Baga, Matthew Silver and Shoval Zohar (The Future), and Martha Colburn.
7. A Performa Commission with SFMOMA and Portland Green Cultural Projects.
8. The video mentioned was part of the dance work *EXIT*, presented at The Kitchen, in New York, May 2007. *EXIT* marked chameckilerner's transition from dance to filmmaking.
9. Although the work in question is more accurately defined as video, Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner constantly refer to their work as "short films." This definition also appears on their website and program notes. In this article, I opted to use the term "film" only when I refer to chameckilerner's approach of their own practice. See chameckilerner, "Films by chameckilerner," accessed June 15, 2014, <http://www.chameckilerner.com/film.html>.
10. In the first version of this article I opted to employ the term *kinesthetic*. However, the term *kinetic* is more frequently used in dance-theoretical sources and it seems more accurate to refer to the body in movement in chameckilerner's videos. See Bouger, op. cit., accessed June 15, 2014, <http://idanca.net/conversa-futurista-entre-chamecki-e-lerner/>.
11. Interview conducted by the author with Andrea Lerner (New York, 2009). Quote translated by the author. In the original recorded conversation in Portuguese, Andrea Lerner states: "Trabalhar com filme está sendo uma extensão do que estávamos fazendo [na dança], mas estamos nos questionando sobre qual direção tomar. Nós sabemos que há uma relação cinestésica que é inevitável para nós porque é assim que vemos o mundo. Corpo e movimento são o foco dos nossos filmes até aqui.... Muitas pessoas nos questionam se estamos fazendo vídeodança. Nós não temos o mínimo interesse em fazer vídeodança. Estamos fazendo filmes."
12. Conversation by phone with Rosane Chamecki on April 17th, 2010.

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## Still, Moving: Reflecting on *All This Can Happen*

Kyra Norman

*All This Can Happen* is a 50-minute film created by choreographer Siobhan Davies and director David Hinton. Arising from the artists' shared fascination with the work of Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge,<sup>1</sup> the film is entirely composed from still and moving images taken from the early days of photography and filmmaking. An almost overwhelming array of visual material drawn from several different archives across different countries, *All This Can Happen* is arranged around a single narrative thread adapted from Swiss writer Robert Walser's 1917 novella *The Walk*, narrated by John Heffernan, and supported by a responsive, entrancing soundtrack by Chu-Li Shewring.

Derived as it is from images made in the early twentieth century, *All This Can Happen* brings into focus a more recent shift in our perceptions of photography and film that began around the end of that century and that is still unfolding: that, as dance-trained filmmaker Miranda Pennell has observed, "as media began to converge and fragment, what had once been understood as the essential and distinct powers of still and moving images, particularly their relationship to time, began to fragment."<sup>2</sup> In Volume Two of *The International Journal of Screendance*, Pennell responded to film theorist Laura Mulvey's writing on stillness and the moving image, observing that the "fascination with halting, delaying and repeating movement" that Mulvey discusses "surely describes the curiosity, pleasure and drive of the choreographic impulse."<sup>3</sup> *All This Can Happen* balances the telling of Walser's story with a deep investigation of the choreographic impulse that Pennell considers and the potential of the screen as a space for choreographic inquiry.



Figure 1:  
"Alice in Wonderland" still  
from *All This Can Happen*,  
courtesy of BFI National  
Archive

## A continuity of connection

The opening image of *All This Can Happen* is rich with texture. A man, lying in bed, stares back at us. Our engagement with this image in terms of movement comes more from our eye being drawn to the flickering light and shade—the difference in marks and scratches between each still image creating a dappled, frenetic effect as they run in sequence—than a direct response to the body on screen: the movement of the man's head is barely perceptible, seeming indeed, perhaps, a trick of the light. The shifting areas of light and shade render the man more and less visible, before the screen fades to a cloudy white. The man re-emerges from the cloud, his movement a jerky flicker, and the screen then splits into two, the left-hand portion showing an explosion on a hillside, disappearing into cloudy white smoke as, in the right hand portion, a soldier slides down the bank. Over the next fifty minutes the screen space continues to be filled with near-constant motion, at each moment offering several layers of information and inviting us to make connections between images.

The sheer volume of information with which we are presented ensures that any meaning we derive is as elusive and agile as choreography must be. As William Forsythe, in “Choreographic Objects,” suggests:

Choreography is a curious and deceptive term. The word itself, like the processes it describes, is elusive, agile, and maddeningly unmanageable. To reduce choreography to a single definition is not to understand the most crucial of its mechanisms: to resist and reform previous conceptions of its definition.<sup>4</sup>

It is testament to the rigorous, original and often playful organization of material in *All This Can Happen* that it does *not* become “maddeningly unmanageable” for the viewer. In this, the film aligns with the idea that choreography, as Jonathan Burrows puts it, might be “about making decisions—or about objects placed in relation to each other so that the whole exceeds the sum of the parts—or about a continuity of connection between materials.”<sup>5</sup> Watching *All This Can Happen*, I felt I was being presented with an articulate answer to the central question Forsythe poses in his essay: “What else, besides the body, might choreographic thinking look like?”<sup>6</sup> The film marks a step forward in the active curiosity of both artists: a progression from Hinton's previous archive-derived works such as *Birds* and *Snow* (the latter a collaboration with choreographer Rosemary Lee), and a progression of Davies' long-standing interest in the choreographic possibilities of everyday movement.

According to Davies, when she told Hinton she would like to take the seemingly simple activity of walking as the impetus for their collaboration—the orchestration of “this massive amount of information—probably about one thousand activities in the body which allow us to walk”<sup>7</sup>—Hinton's reply was that this sounded very boring.<sup>8</sup> Hinton recalls that his immediate instinct was to “dramatize the walk.”<sup>9</sup>

For Hinton, as is evident in his other works, the grammar of film demands some form of narrative structure.

In watching *All This Can Happen*, it is fascinating to see these two sensibilities at work: the interplay of orchestration and dramatization as organizing principles bringing together contrasting cinematic conventions and histories. As art theorist and curator Laura U. Marks has observed:

In its early years cinema appealed to the emerging fascination with the instability of vision, to embodied vision and the viewer's physiological responses.... [But] As the language of cinema became standardized, cinema appealed more to narrative identification than to body identification.<sup>10</sup>

*All This Can Happen* stands somewhere between these two positions, questioning the ways we perceive and formulate meaning. Burrows' suggestion of choreography as a "continuity of connection between materials" seems particularly apposite in positioning this film's questioning and construction of meaning as a choreographic endeavor.

### A lasting impression

That dance is ephemeral is a given, being here and then gone; film disintegrates more slowly, allowing us to reflect upon it in a more leisurely way, but disappear it does. *All This Can Happen* foregrounds this slower but no less sure disappearance in two ways. Firstly, there is the use of images where the process of decay is already apparent—the saturation of color fading, the appearance of texture through the degradation of the fabric of the image. Secondly, there is the creative re-use of images to tell stories other than their own, and stills reframed as movement. What *All This Can Happen* demonstrates is that film's existence is finite but not final.

Writing of perspectives on time and place in her book *For Space*, geographer Doreen Massey describes a moment when her "imagination was reworked."<sup>11</sup> She was in Keswick in England's Lake District, thinking about history and how the town had changed: considering that, over all the human activities the traces of which remained in the town from Roman times to the present day, there had presided Skiddaw: "a massive block of a mountain ... high, grey, and stony ... impressive, immovable, timeless."<sup>12</sup> Her reworking of imagination, as she describes it, was her realization that the nearby Skiddaw was itself not as permanent as it might appear. Its rocks were shaped rather by shifting coastlines, eroding ancient lands and volcanic activity over many centuries: "A long and turbulent history, then. So much for timelessness."<sup>13</sup> And as Massey observes, as history continues to unfold, so the mountains continue to move: at the rate of a couple of centimeters a year, she writes: "about the rate at which our fingernails grow."<sup>14</sup>

My impression of watching *All This Can Happen* is that a similarly simple but irrevocable reworking of imagination is at play: a shift in realization around choreography, photography, film, and the passage of time. Davies' and Hinton's film is imbued with the ephemeral quality usually accorded to performance—ungraspable in its complexity, leaving a lingering impression of form, patterning, strata, sensation. Although structured in response to narrative, the overall experience of watching is of moving beyond words.

There is something in Massey's translation of the rate of tectonic shifts (moving mountains) to a human scale (the growth rate of fingernails) that seems fitting in discussing *All This Can Happen* as a work that shapes an almost unfeasibly large archival scope into the narrative of a day in the life of one person; as one reviewer, Sukhev Sandu, describes it, the film is "both harrowing and full of levity, pathological and poignant, microscopic and expansive."<sup>15</sup> And crucially, as another reviewer, Sanjoy Roy, notes, "all this *did* happen"<sup>16</sup>—all of the material is drawn from documentary film and photography, contexts then fused together, meanings rearranged, images repurposed to illustrate and illuminate Walser's story and, more widely, something of the human experience of moving.

*All This Can Happen* offers rich material for considering the convergence and fragmentation of photography and film media—from what did happen, through what can happen, to what might happen next—questioning the nature of these forms while also questioning what choreography might be or do. To draw on Heidegger's famous essay on technology, this film is concerned more with "catching sight of what comes to presence in technology [than] of merely staring at the technological."<sup>17</sup> What comes to presence for me through *All This Can Happen* is an exhilarating torrent of information about the world, a wealth of imagery that leaves me marveling, and a sense of cautious excitement as to what might happen next.

## Notes

1. Siobhan Davies, talk given by the artist to introduce a screening of *All This Can Happen* at Arnolfini (Bristol, UK: 2013).
2. Miranda Pennell, "Some thoughts on nowness and thenness," *The International Journal of Screendance* 2 (Spring 2012): 72.
3. Ibid.
4. William Forsythe, *Choreographic Objects*, n.d., accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.williamforsythe.de/essay.html>.

5. Jonathan Burrows, *A Choreographer's Handbook* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010), 24.
6. Forsythe. *Choreographic Objects*.
7. Claudia Kappenberg and Sarah Whatley, "A Report on the Screendance Symposium, University of Brighton, February 4, 2011," *The International Journal of Screendance 2* (Spring 2012): 144.
8. Davies, talk at Arnolfini.
9. Kappenberg and Whatley, "A Report," 144.
10. Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 7.
11. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 131.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 133.
14. Ibid., 137.
15. Sukhev Sandu, "The Mighty Walsler," *Sight & Sound 23*, no. 12 (December 2013): 56.
16. Sanjoy Roy, "Review of *All This Can Happen*," *Aesthetica Blog*, n.d., <http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/blog/review-of-all-this-can-happen-by-siobhan-davies-and-david-hinton/>.
17. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1954, 1977 ed.), 32.

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## Contributor Biographies

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Dr. Harmony Bench is Assistant Professor of Dance at The Ohio State University, where she teaches in the areas of Critical Dance Studies, Dance History, and Performance Studies. Her research focuses on digital and screen media as they intersect with and inform choreography, movement, gesture, and dance as a social practice. With Simon Ellis, she is the incoming co-editor of *The International Journal of Screendance*.

### Marc Boucher

Marc Boucher trained in circus arts and joined Cirque du Soleil in 1984 for its inaugural tour. In 2002, he completed a doctoral program in Fine Arts (*Études et pratiques des arts*) at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM) with a focus on dance and video projections. As a researcher in dance and technology, he privileges historical and aesthetic perspectives. Marc has written several journal articles and book chapters dealing namely with synesthesia, proprioception, peripheral vision, sensory immersion, virtual body, and biofeedback. Since 2007, he has been an associate professor at HexagramCIAM, a UQÀM research center in media arts.

### Cristiane Bouger

Christiane Bouger (Brazil, 1977) is a New York-based artist and writer. Her articles and essays have been published in books, catalogues, magazines, and journals in the United States, England, Brazil, and Portugal. In 2012 she was a nominee in the category Emerging Critic Award for the ALICE – Artistic Landmarks in Contemporary Experience (Belgium). Website: [www.cristianebouger.com](http://www.cristianebouger.com).

### Rosemary Candelario

Rosemary Candelario is Assistant Professor of Dance at Texas Woman's University. Her research interests include the globalization of butoh, Asian and Asian American dance, artist archives, site-specific performance, arts activism, and representations of sex and reproduction in performance and popular culture. She is working on a book on Eiko & Koma for Wesleyan University Press and has published in the *Journal of Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, *Asian Theatre Journal*, *The Scholar and Feminist Online*,

and *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen*. Rosemary earned a PhD in Culture and Performance from UCLA.

### **Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt**

Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt, PhD student in the Department of Drama and Theatre, Royal Holloway, University of London, is a Swedish performer, choreographer, filmmaker and writer. Currently she is developing ways of incorporating traditional Japanese dance and theatre into her contemporary performances and films. Her artistic investigations concern gender constructions in Japanese theatre and dance, and the gender codified walk, *suriashi*. Her recent performance "Dust falling, rain falling" was dedicated to the archived cross-gender performers *Shirabyoshi*, and the performance "20xLamentation" looked at different schools of suffering in Christianity, Buddhism, modern dance, Kabuki, Noh, karaoke, etc. Her documentary film on Japanese dance, *The Dance of the Sun*, is being shown around the world right now, for example at Dance For Camera in New York in 2015, and has recently been released on DVD.

### **Sherril Dodds**

Sherril Dodds is a Professor of Dance at Temple University. She has authored *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art* (2001) and *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance* (2011), and co-edited *Bodies of Sound* (2014) with Susan Cook. She co-founded the PoP MOVES research group and initiated the SDHS Popular, Social and Vernacular Dance Working Group. In 2008 and 2009, she was an Erasmus Visiting Lecturer at Trondheim University in Norway, and in 2010 she was a Visiting Academic at the Centre for Cultural Research at Griffith University in Australia.

### **Simon Ellis**

Simon Ellis is a choreographer, dancer and film-maker. He trained at the Victorian College of the Arts, and his choreographies have included *Full* (2001), *Indelible* (2003), *Inert* (2006), *Gertrud* (2008), and *Desire Lines* (2010). His film projects include *Then/Now* (2008), *Tuesday* (2009), and *Anamnesis* (2010). He collaborates with Colin Poole as *Colin, Simon & I* and in 2014 they presented *A Separation* (2014) at Lilian Baylis Studio. Most recently, Simon worked with Chisato Ohno and Jackie Shemesh on *Pause. Listen.* (2014). Simon teaches choreography and performance at Roehampton Dance, London. Website: [www.skellis.net](http://www.skellis.net).

**Priscilla Guy**

Priscilla Guy is a Canadian artist and scholar holding a Master in Dance from York University, with a thesis focusing on screendance. She founded Mandoline Hybride in 2007, a Montreal-based company that creates interdisciplinary works ranging from screendance, site specific performances and choreography for the stage. Her work has been presented in Canada, the United States, Spain and France, as well as in several international screendance festivals. Priscilla is co-founder of Regards Hybrides, a Quebec French platform dedicated to the articulation and development of screendance. She also regularly collaborates on international projects, publications, juries, and conferences on screendance.

**Anna Heighway**

Anna Heighway is a dance artist currently working in the Bath and Bristol, UK area. A degree in Media Arts, an MA in Dance Studies from Roehampton, fifteen years working in television, Qualified Teacher Status and vocational dance training at the Royal Ballet School has culminated in a wide spectrum of dance interests. Anna is a member of 3rd Stage Dance Company. She currently performs, choreographs and teaches for this unique collective. Her current research centers around the use of Screendance as a vehicle for expanding the concept of dance. Anna hopes to explore these ideas at PhD level.

**Colleen Hooper**

Colleen Hooper is a 2011-15 Temple University PhD Fellow and she received the 2013 Edrie Ferdun Award for Scholarly Achievement. Her interests include community performance, cultural studies, and site-specific dance: she is presently researching dancers who participated in the U.S. Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) from 1974-82. She graduated from The George Washington University with B.A. degrees in Dance and English and received a Dance M.F.A. from Temple University. She is the Graduate Editorial Assistant for the *Dance Research Journal* and currently serves as a Graduate Student Representative to the Society of Dance History Scholars Board of Directors.

**Claudia Kappenberg**

Claudia Kappenberg is a performance and media artists and Course leader for the MA Performance and Visual Practices at the University of Brighton, UK. Claudia leads the international AHRC Screendance Network and is co-founder and editor of *The International Journal of Screendance*. She co-curated the *What If Festival*, London in 2010. Her writing has been published in *The International Journal of Performance Arts*

*and Digital Media* and *Anarchic Dance* (Routledge, 2006), among other places. Her performance projects comprise screen-based installations and live site-specific events and have been shown across Europe, the United States, and the Middle East. Website: [www.ckappenberg.info](http://www.ckappenberg.info).

### **Katrina McPherson**

Katrina McPherson is an award-winning Scottish screendance artist whose work is highly regarded on an international level. Katrina has also had a career as a director of arts documentaries for broadcasters, including the BBC, Channel 4 and ITV. Katrina is the sole author of *Making Video Dance* (Routledge, 2006), the only published practical guide to making dance for the screen. She is a much sought-after teacher and lecturer and has led master-classes and workshops in the UK, Ireland, Germany, Australia, USA and China.

### **Kyra Norman**

Kyra Norman is an independent dance artist based in Cornwall, UK. She has been following her curiosity as to what, and where, choreography can be for over 15 years: working across dance, theatre and film as a maker, curator, writer and teacher. Kyra is on the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Screendance* and is currently completing a PhD, exploring the screen as a site for choreographic practice, at the University of Bristol, UK.

### **Katy Pendlebury**

Katy Pendlebury is a filmmaker with a background in contemporary dance. Katy's films have screened at festivals worldwide including the International Video Dance Festival of Burgundy, Brighton Festival, Videodanza Buenos Aires, LiveScreen (Sadler's Wells), Cinedans Amsterdam, InShadow Lisbon, ACT Bilbao and dancin' oxford. During Katy's recent MA in Performance and Visual Practices at the University of Brighton, she expanded her practice, experimenting with creating live choreography to camera through integrating performance with live projection. Katy trained in dance at London Contemporary Dance School and holds a BA in History of Art from Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

### **Dianne Reid**

Dianne Reid is a performer, choreographer, camera operator, video editor and educator. She works in both live and screen contexts. She was a founding member of Outlet Dance in Adelaide (1987-89) and a member of Danceworks from 1990-

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1995. Dianne completed a Master of Arts in Dance on Screen in 2001 and her dance video works have screened internationally. From 2004-2006 she was Artistic Director of Dancehouse before receiving an Asialink Performing Arts residency to India in 2006 at Darpana Academy of Performing Arts. Dianne has worked as a lecturer in contemporary dance and dance video at Deakin University since 1996 and is currently a PhD candidate in screendance and performance improvisation.

### **Douglas Rosenberg**

Douglas Rosenberg is an artist and a theorist and the author of *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image*, published by Oxford University Press, as well as editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies*. He is a founding editor of *The International Journal of Screendance* and his work for the screen has been exhibited internationally for over 25 years. He has been a long-time advocate of screendance as a curator of the International Screendance Festival at the American Dance Festival, as a speaker and organizer of symposia and international workshops. His most recent screendance is *CIRCLING*, a collaboration for the screen with Sally Gross, an original member of The Judson Dance Theater Group. Rosenberg is a professor in the Art Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

### **Sophie Walon**

After graduating with a multidisciplinary BA from Lycée Henry IV (Paris), Sophie Walon received a four-year scholarship from Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon. She completed a masters degree in philosophy at ENS Lyon and a masters degree in film aesthetics at the University of Oxford. She has also worked as a film critic for *Le Monde* in 2011 and 2012. She is currently undertaking doctoral research on representations of the body in dance films at Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris, where she also teaches film theory and history.