

# Postscript

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## Abstract

An issue of a journal that focuses on just one art work may be unusual, but the range and the breadth of the perspectives adopted by all the authors included here demonstrate that there is much to appreciate in this single work. Such attention given to *All This Can Happen (ATCH)* might also suggest that, as editors of this issue, we regard it as a landmark screendance work, and in many ways it is. It arrived at a time when changes were taking place in the art world. *ATCH* reflects, or perhaps contributed to, some of these changes, including: that of the shifting relationship between dance and visual arts that has subsequently posed a challenge to established hierarchies, the fascination with early technologies as source material in the production of new art work, and a growing interest in reconnecting with the past through reusing and reimagining archival content.

**Keywords:** archive, Siobhan Davies, David Hinton, Channel 4, Etienne-Jules Marey, Screendance Symposium

At the time of its first showing, *ATCH* also seemed to mark a departure for Davies from her live dance works although it actually revived a relationship with film that had begun much earlier. Davies was one of the first dance artists to take part in a Channel 4-backed project, *Dance-Lines*<sup>1</sup> in 1987, which brought together British-based choreographers, dancers, and filmmakers to learn about each other's craft and make work. This experience seeded Davies' affinity with the film medium and led to her acknowledging soon after this time that her dance work was more closely related to film than other performing arts, for its poetic and multi-layered compositional possibilities. But *ATCH* was her first partnership with filmmaker (and veteran screendance maker) David Hinton. Their partnership has clearly been a strong one from the start, built on years of respecting each other's practices, growing through more than 30 years of making dance and screen work.

Reading in this issue their own reflections on making *ATCH* in conversation with Claudia Kappenberg reminds me of the time at the Screendance Symposium<sup>2</sup> at the University of Brighton in 2011 when Davies and Hinton were invited to come and speak about *ATCH* as it was beginning to take shape in their thinking. They shared with

us their starting points and inspirations. As we reported in the 2012 volume of this journal, Davies contemplated her choreographic practice and asked, "How can I bring this body of information into the language of film? How can we witness the shifts/the thoughtfulness of the action?"<sup>3</sup> Davies voiced curiosity about the way in which moving to a screen would influence her thinking about "dance," and she expressed something that has always been a characteristic of her choreographic explorations: the complexity of the moving body. Davies described how even in the orchestration of an apparently simple activity such as walking, the motion embodies a "massive amount of information—probably about 1000 activities in the body which allow us to walk."<sup>4</sup> In the interview with Kappenberg, Davies reiterates her curiosity with detail in moving, commenting on how the film medium might meet her "fascination with the million moments in fluid movement and expression."<sup>5</sup> She continues, "I know they are there, but we don't experience them unless we find the means to glimpse them by concentrating on a single chosen frame, by finding that fragile moment when an expression alters or the body shifts, almost imperceptibly, in a response."<sup>6</sup> Davies also recounts in this interview how they "re-sequenced a series of frames of movements according to a score"<sup>7</sup> to break up fluidity in her movement and to challenge her to rethink her previous way of constructing movement, reflecting that: "At first these felt as if I was deoxygenating the movement. But I was also thrilled by this new relationship to movement in these tiny increments."<sup>8</sup> This preoccupation with the subtleties and density of detail in the human body is where dance and film find a fertile congruence.

Whilst the partnership between Davies and Hinton might have spawned a very different kind of project for Davies in particular, there are traces of ideas and gestures that have recurred throughout her oeuvre in different ways. The fascination with human motion and the early photography of nineteenth-century scientist Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904) links back to her interest in his contemporary, the anatomical photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), whose work revealed itself as a reference point in earlier choreographic projects, including *The Art of Touch* (1995) and *Birdsong* (2004), as source for researching the articulation of the body in motion or as compositional device. The creation of her own digital archive, *Siobhan Davies RePlay*,<sup>9</sup> may also have prompted a deeper interest in archives and the potential of retrieving and re-rendering archival content for *ATCH*, even if Davies and Hinton's time spent digging into the archives came later in their project. Nonetheless, as the conversation with Kappenberg about their creative process makes clear, archival research played a key role in sourcing content; Davies talked some time later about the miles of film rushes that this research generated and the subsequent hours spent with Hinton selecting, editing, and composing this content.<sup>10</sup> Their meticulous work results in a "constant interplay between stillness and movement"<sup>11</sup> that conveys the contrasting expressions of solitude and collectivity, and a journey that weaves its way through myriad images drawn from social, historical, scientific, and artistic records. From

botanical images stilled in time to allow the viewer to appreciate the delicacy of the vascular structures to stuttering movies portraying human frailty and failings, the visual and rhythmic interchange is surprisingly poignant—an observation made by many. Knowing something of Davies' rich artistic career to this point and considering Hinton's previous screen projects, one may see *ATCH* as a more personal shared essay. The sense of mapping an individual journey or career, of time unfolding, and the way a life is imprinted on or inscribed by changing patterns in our working, social, and emotional lives is embodied in the narrative of the protagonist, the walker.

Soon after *ATCH* was completed, I remember Davies questioning where it would be shown and how that would influence its reception. If "framed" as a dance project, would it not be welcomed in the art gallery or cinema? If promoted as a film project, how would it be received by dance audiences? The conversation with Kappenberg reveals both Davies' and Hinton's thoughts about their constituencies and where the work might "sit." The multiple screenings of the work in a wide variety of contexts and the many responses to the work (as illustrated by the articles in this volume) might suggest that this is a non-issue; but how work is received, critiqued, and appreciated does matter to artists, particularly those artists who are working across disciplinary boundaries, or artists developing "a coalition of practices" that, according to Davies "makes them bolder."<sup>12</sup> Hinton notes how the screening conditions can alter and detract from the subtleties of the film quality, the grain of the film, and the lighting—all of which impact on its reception. However, Davies also talks about the beauty of the different contexts in which the film is viewed; *ATCH* "transports" the viewer, but how it is received is deeply informed by and is situated within the wider context in which it is screened. Consequently, *ATCH* defies simple categorization. It has been appreciated and enjoyed as an art work, a dance work, a screendance work, a film, or even an archival art documentary.

What this issue has aimed to demonstrate is that, for many commentators, critics, scholars, promoters, and other artists, *ATCH* resonates on numerous levels and in myriad ways. Each author reveals a specific engagement with the work, a different way of tuning in to the subtleties and layers of the film, and a preparedness to take time to *notice*. These responses will likely please Davies and Hinton, who were preoccupied for much of the making process with "noticing." As Hinton explains, "One of the things we're trying to do in *ATCH* is to encourage the viewer to consciously enjoy things which would simply slip past in a more conventional film. We are using various tactics to say to the viewer: 'Hey, look more carefully at this, isn't this great?' [...] It is only through working in the dance world that I could have arrived at this way of working with images. And, of course, by using this device, we are also saying: 'Look, this is dance.'"<sup>13</sup> Or as he neatly summarizes, "Although the image is humble, we are emphatically saying: 'Look at what's happening in this image. It's a quiet way of shouting.'"<sup>14</sup> Whilst *ATCH* continues to be screened and generate yet further

responses, the partnership between Davies and Hinton also continues with a new project, *The Running Tongue* (2015),<sup>15</sup> a film installation in collaboration with 22 artists that continues their joint investigation into the intimacy and delicacy of human action. And still we are looking forward to what next they will make happen.

## Biography

Sarah Whatley is Professor and Director of the Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE) at Coventry University. Her research focuses on dance and new technologies, dance analysis, and documentation, somatic dance practice and pedagogy, and inclusive dance. The AHRC, EU, and the Leverhulme and Wellcome Trusts fund her current projects. She led the AHRC-funded Siobhan Davies digital archive project, RePlay and is Academic Advisor: Digital Environment for The Routledge Performance Archive. She is also founding editor of the *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* and sits on the editorial boards of several other Journals.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dance-Lines, supported by Channel 4, began with a series of short pieces directed by Terry Braun and Peter Mumford in collaboration with different choreographers. In 1987 for the first series, Davies produced three untitled pieces for television. The following year she worked on two longer dance films, both filmed versions of staged works (*White Man Sleeps* and *Wyoming*). See: <http://www.siobhandaviesreplay.com/record/34>; <http://www.siobhandaviesreplay.com/record/38>

<sup>2</sup> The Screendance Symposium was the culmination of the AHRC-funded Screendance Network that brought together artists and researchers to debate the practice. The Network also led to the establishment of the *International Journal of Screendance*. See: <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/screendance/screendance-network/symposia>

<sup>3</sup> Kappenberg and Whatley, "A Report on the Screendance Symposium," 144.

<sup>4</sup> Sally Banes and André Lepecki, *The Senses in Performance*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Davies, Hinton, and Kappenberg, "Siobhan Davies and David Hinton in Conversation with Claudia Kappenberg Part 1," 152.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Davies, Hinton, and Kappenberg, "Siobhan Davies and David Hinton in Conversation with Claudia Kappenberg Part 2," 163.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>9</sup> Davies and Whatley, "RePlay:" See: <http://www.siobhandaviesreplay.com/>.

<sup>10</sup> In conversation with Whatley, Siobhan Davies Studios, March 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Davies, "All This Can Happen." See: <http://www.siobhandavies.com/works/all-this-can-happen/>.

<sup>12</sup> Davies, Hinton, and Kappenberg, "Part 1," 149.

<sup>13</sup> Davies, Hinton, and Kappenberg, "Part 2," 168.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Davies, "The Running Tongue"; See: <http://www.siobhandavies.com/work/the-running-tongue/>.

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