Making

Television

Dance (Again)

Erratum
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Bottom Image: Douglas Rosenberg, Still From La Mécanique, Death Valley, CA, 1986

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EDITORS
Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram, Marisa C. Hayes

The International Journal of Screendance

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Making Television Dance (Again)

Editorial: Volume 14
Marisa Caitlín Hayes and Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

The present volume of *The International Journal of Screendance* continues to build upon a format that proposes two distinct but complementary pillars: a thematic focus coordinated by guest editors alongside diverse research published in response to an open call for papers. Following the *IJSD*'s 2022 issue, "Choreographing the Archive," we have found this format to be one that strikes a balance between the dynamic range of topics that screendance scholarship currently encompasses with the need for going further via in-depth explorations, organized in a dedicated section. Additionally, the journal is pleased to continue publishing interviews, shorter articles, and reviews that remain important forms of transmission for advancing debates and exchanging information within the field.

For our first issue as co-editors, Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram and I are delighted to share Katrina McPherson and Douglas Rosenberg's exceptional guest editorship in the section, "Making Television Dance (Again)." During an era in which the very concept of television has been uprooted and transformed, the guest editors' extensive experience of Anglo-American television as a site for screendance experimentation is a timely reminder of how shifting forms of technology inform the histories and future(s) of screendance. Evoking the legacy of Bob Lockyer—an influential director and producer of dance for television—McPherson and Rosenberg combine oral histories, extant documents (which we have the good fortune of reprinting in these pages), and media theory, among others, to make a compelling case for screendance's creative legacy on television, focusing in particular on the medium's materiality as an impetus for artistic innovation. With this section, McPherson and Rosenberg explore an essential aspect of screendance history that has been largely ignored until now and in doing so, set an exciting precedent for further investigations into television's role in screendance production and transmission around the world.

Several contributions in this issue are complementary to McPherson and Rosenberg's thematic television study, while expounding upon additional areas of inquiry. The technologized dancing body is the subject of Pam Krayenbuhl's article, which examines the distinction of the televised medium through the lens of American choreographer Twyla Tharp's 1977 small screen production, *Making Television Dance*. In "The Resistive Gaze in Kuwaiti Screendance," Najat Alsheridah's research focuses on the representation of women who perform the *Zar* dance in Kuwaiti screendance, including a recent appearance on the television show *Mohammed Ali Road*. Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram's interview with Kamalini Dutt highlights the latter's directive under Doordarshan (Indian National television) to envision dance production within India from the 1970s to the 1990s and to evolve strategies for recording traditional and contemporary dance styles. Closing the television section, Kaustavi Sarkar's "Odissi on Screen: A Meditation on Regional Television" examines the effects of the small screen on a specific form of dance, Odissi dance drama from the eastern state of Odisha in India.

The issue's additional research papers tackle an array of topics, including Tina Wasserman's "Drawn to the Light: Cinematic and Performative Ecologies in Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963) and Eiko Otake's *Night with Moths* (2019) in which the author analyzes interactions between human, animal and botanical beings on screen. As ecosystems continue to bear the weight of the anthropocene, considering movement dialogues on screen between diverse life forms takes on a keen sense of urgency. Harmony Bench's interview with artist Tia-Monique Uzor, "The Noise My Leaves Make: Black British Women and Surrendering to Belonging" broaches another crucial topic at the intersection of race, class, and nature. Their conversation explores the creation of Uzor's recent screendance in the English countryside, a landscape that, as the interview underscores, remains largely inaccessible and unwelcoming to people of color.

Finally, a variety of book and film reviews, as well as event reports, published in this issue attest to the robust number of screendance resources and activities happening internationally. Claudia Kappenberg considers the screening "An Evening of Film at Siobhan Davies Studios" in London, while Claudia Rosiny reviews Daniel Belton's latest screendance, *Ad Parnassum – Purapurawhetū***.** Reporting on the book launch of *Maya Deren: Choreographed for Camera*, Clare Schweizer contextualizes author Mark Alice Durant's talk and screening at the San Francisco Cinematheque. Other book publications on Fred Astaire, as well as tap dance and race are thoughtfully assessed for journal readers by Brandi Coleman and Crystal Song. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all contributors for creating the collective conversation that the journal represents. Their desire to share diverse perspectives and approaches to screendance make this space a collaborative and thoughtful endeavor within today's global village. We also extend warm thanks to the board for their ongoing dedication to the journal's mission, as well as numerous former editors for their generous assistance as we transition to our new editorial roles.

Future issues currently being planned include a focus on feminism and its legacy within the history of screendance past and present. To coordinate the topic, we are delighted to welcome scholar Urmimala Sarkar (Jawaharlal Nehru University) and Sumedha Bhattacharyya **(**O.P Jindal Global University) as guest editors. The feminist issue's call for papers is currently open and can be found posted on the journal's website. If you are interested in submitting an article regarding another topic, please see our submissions page on the website where papers are accepted on a rolling basis. Cara Hagan will also guest edit a forthcoming issue on screendance festivals, which we look forward to reading next year.

As always, we appreciate hearing from readers and future contributors. If you would like to inquire about contributing a paper or a review, please do not hesitate to get in touch via the website. We'd also like to inform readers that the *International Journal of Screendance* now has a Facebook and Twitter page. If you'd like to follow news about future issues and calls for papers via those platforms, we'd be happy to see you there.

Marisa C. Hayes is an interdisciplinary arts writer and curator. She contributes to a variety of print and electronic publications in English and French, including *Dance Magazine*, *CN D Magazine* (Centre national de la danse, France), and *The Theatre Times.* She is currently head of visual arts education at L'Arc - National Theatre (France) and co-directs the Festival

International de Vidéo Danse de Bourgogne. Marisa also co-hosts the film podcast @Afterimages_pod.

Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram is a dance educator, choreographer and poet. Trained in Bharatanatyam, Butoh and Flamenco, Sandhiya has led and performed in several collaborative performances between dance styles, served on the Jury Panel for the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival and used dance therapy to work with survivors of domestic violence. Sandhiya enjoys working at the intersection of science, technology and art. Her current research and teaching interests lie at the intersection of cinema, performance, and philosophy, with a specific focus on environmental humanities. Her works have been published in the Art and Perception, Nature, Sahitya Akademi's Indian Literature Journal, The Trumpeter, International Journal of Screendance, Scholar and Feminist Online, Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, Lens Network on Sustainability.

Making Television Dance (Again)
Katrina McPherson and Douglas Rosenberg

This special half-issue of the *International Journal of Screendance* is inspired by Bob Lockyer, long-term producer of dance at the BBC, who died in 2022 aged 80. Through his directing and commissioning of dance for broadcast television, as well as his teaching and writing on the subject, Bob Lockyer had a big and lasting impact on screendance.

For us, Katrina and Doug, as for many others, Bob was a friend, a mentor and a significant presence in our chosen artistic field. In the research presented here, and as an homage to Bob, we assert the place of TV as a catalyst in the evolution of screendance and in our own artistic practices. In doing so, we seek to redress the balance on what we see as the underrepresentation of the importance of television, both as an entity and a system — and of video art, TV's avant-garde offspring — in the story of screendance.

We in addition propose that dance for television created a site in, around and despite which experimentation could flourish. This happened particularly in a period when the television technologies expanded and platforms fragmented, moving beyond their initial monolithic nature, presenting opportunities and cracks into which imaginative executives could sneak new ways of thinking about, presenting and producing art — and in Lockyer's case dance — into the broadcast schedules.

The legacy of television has been internalized by contemporary screendance, as witnessed in the reinstatement of TV production processes, hierarchies, intentionality and aesthetics in the form. Even as we write, television remains the most flexible, malleable and fluid space of production, appropriating each new technology and social movement into its programming. As we move further away from the era of mainstream television, it feels important to highlight the often lesser-known connections between early film, video and electronic media broadly. In particular, we focus on the pivot from the experimental film of the 1950s and early 1960s to video art and the nascent interdisciplinary days of electronic media in the 1970s and beyond, and their impact on screendance. We situate this intertwined history in an intimate non-space, where camera, dancer and the editing of both gave rise to a sense of experimentation of the medium inside the televisual media itself. With a largely US-UK focus, and yet acknowledging the global reach of the themes discussed, the research presented here dips back into existing archives, interviews, published texts, program notes and pamphlets, as well as the writers' own first-person experiences.

We describe the televisual as a site where artists contributed and destabilized institutional broadcast television. For artists like us, working at first with analogue video, the materiality of the form embedded dance in an electronic landscape, the body in motion inserted in the fields and frames of the image. This meshing of form and content at once challenged and inhabited television, and disrupted the normative, narrative-driven portrayal of its culture.

Whilst discourse around dance on screen often relies on narratives of film and cinema to buttress the form, the bigger presence in contemporary screendance is found in the vestiges of dance's engagement with broadcast television and experimental video. This research is an attempt to begin to reinscribe the histories of dance on television and dance in video art into the contemporary narratives of screendance. This is not intended as a call for the return to older so-called 'lo-fi' technologies, but rather a provocation to locate the spaces for and of experimentation that screendance might (re)occupy moving forward.

ABOUT BOB LOCKYER

> Television is essentially a medium of information and narrative – it tells stories.
> Dance, and abstract dance in particular, is difficult to present on television.
> — Bob Lockyer in *Parallel Lines* (p.132)

Lockyer's legacy goes to the heart of the experimental relationship between dance and television. In his life's work — as director, producer, commissioner and educator — he sought to address the possibilities and the challenges of the relationship between dance and television.

In the introduction to *Making Video Dance* (McPherson, 2019), Lockyer describes his earliest encounters with dance being made for television when, in the 1960s, he was the assistant to Sadler's Wells dancer turned TV producer Margaret Dales on an experimental dance-based series called *Zodiac*. Here, leading modern ballet choreographers of the time in the UK, such as Peter Darrell and Kenneth MacMillan, made innovative twenty-minute dance stories for television. Working on this series gave Lockyer his first taste of directing and of the experimental potential of dance on screen.

Later, as a director himself, Lockyer pushed boundaries as he explored ways in which to represent the essence of a live choreographic work on the screen. Published in the now out-of-print Arts Council of Great Britain book *Parallel Lines* (1993), there is a chapter by Lockyer entitled "Stage Dance on Television." Here he writes in some detail about the creative solutions he found making television versions of three different works by choreographer Robert Cohan in the 1970s. In particular, Lockyer gives an insight into the transfiguration of stage space into camera space that was central to his understanding of the needs of the small screen in relation to dance performance. In his writing, Lockyer reflects on the process of adaptation and intermediality, taking a characteristically pragmatic approach:

> Cohan let me have the set, a sort of cathedral nave yet I felt that, in the television version, it was too dominating. This was because the studio in which we recorded it was too small and we could not distance the dancing sufficiently from the set to counteract the foreshortening effect of the camera. (Lockyer, 1993, 134)

Screenshot from Waterless Method of Swimming Instruction (Cohan, Lockyer, 1980)

Here, we can note the continued reliance on the theatricality that was a staple of television at that time. Carried over from TV's modelling of live work, the origins of dance on television maintained a similar dependence on the illusionary spaces of theater, transposed here into the TV studio.

Lockyer continues:

> Cohan's Waterless Method of Swimming Instruction (1974, TV 1980) is set in and around the swimming pool of an ocean-going cruise liner. On stage, the proscenium arch is the fourth wall of the pool. On the left is a changing room with port-hole windows through which the swimmers can watch people in the pool, a door centre back opens into the swimming pool and a ladder leads from the pool to the walkway that surrounds it.

> For the television version, a removable fourth wall was built and the changing room was re-designed so that I could look through the port holes into the pool. These changes gave greater access to the dance and, by using a camera crane, I could isolate the walkway round the pool. The result was, for me, a successful translation of the stage work (Lockyer, 135).
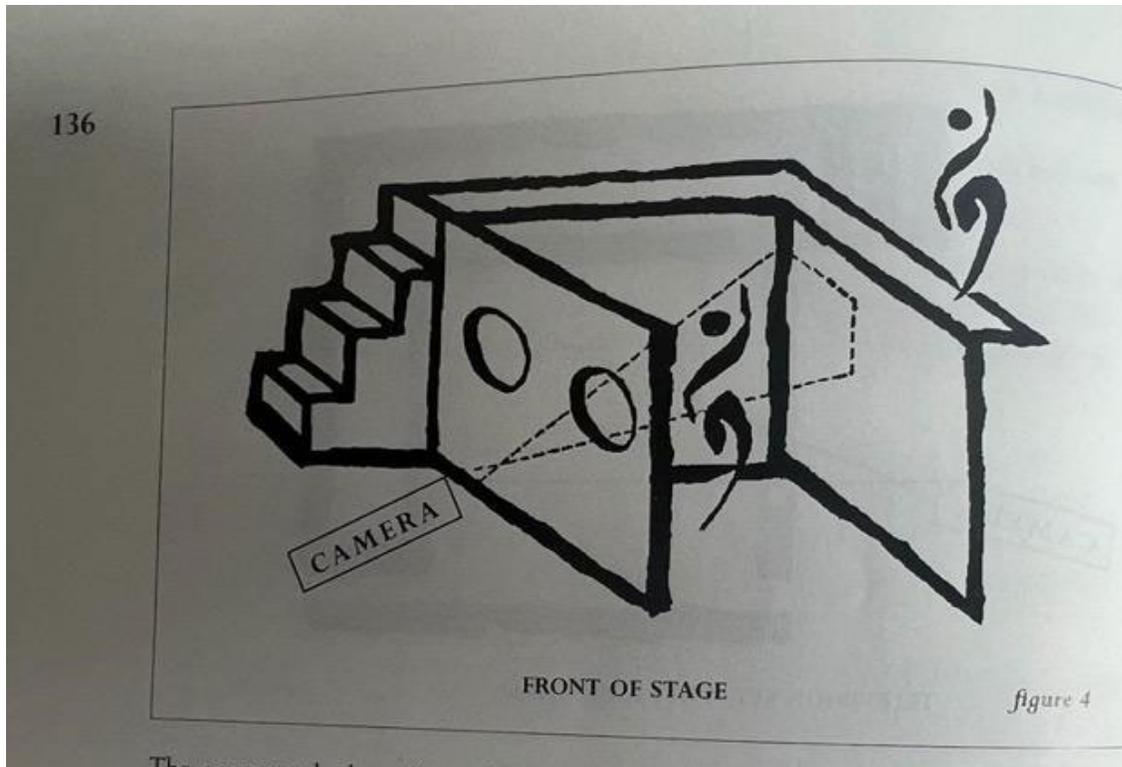
Preparation diagrams for Waterless Method of Swimming Instruction (Lockyer, 1980)

We are reminded again of the synergies between the televisual and the stage choreography. The push-pull of the "original" and the reconceived, site-specific work for television still remains fraught. As Lockyer grapples with the problem of reconciling both versions, he recalls asking:

> How can this impression (of strobe lighting effect on the live stage) be transferred to TV? For the ending of FOREST, Cohan and I had superimposed two images of a line of men coming to camera. This was done in the final edit, and one of the images of the men was delayed by a few seconds, so that it was out of sync with, and superimposed on, the other, it gave the strange, mysterious other worldly effect that we wanted. It was a chance discovery and not envisaged at the time of recording (Lockyer, 136).

In the migration from stage to screen, spaces opened by technical problems created opportunities for experimentation. The solutions were often found in the recording processes and in the materiality of the video format itself: the spatially mobile camera situating the spectator in a new relationship to the choreography; the weaving of the dancing bodies into the screenic image to alter reality. The legacy of adaptation favors a temporal facsimile of the original. Nevertheless, the idea that the televisual dance was in and of itself a creative space, endures.

Bob Lockyer's hand in establishing a visual culture of dance on screen cannot be overstated. His productions found their way beyond the BBC and into weekly TV shows abroad, into VHS and

DVD form and festivals, and became a reference for aspiring screendance makers worldwide, as for arts broadcasters and producers. His impact on dance for television, along with his contributions to UK dance in general, were highlighted in the many obituaries and tributes published after his death:

The Telegraph wrote:

> He would be responsible for significant recordings of Bronislava Nijinska's Les Noces (1978), with the Royal Ballet, and Merce Cunningham's Points in Space (1987), the latter conceived and the former radically reconceived for camera filming.

Lockyer's work with Lloyd Newson's iconoclastic new contemporary troupe DV8 Physical Theatre further proved the point. Newson's acclaimed 1990s stage productions Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men, Strange Fish and Enter Achilles were transfigured and intensified by their reinvention as 50-minute TV dance films. The culmination of Lockyer's approach was the body of more than fifty 15-minute dance films he commissioned, the late-night BBC Dance for the Camera series (1994-2000)." (Telegraph Obituaries, 17 June 2022.

Lockyer encouraged collaboration between directors and choreographers, particularly through the *Dance for the Camera* commissioning program, working alongside Rodney Wilson at the Arts Council of Great Britain. Continuing over several years, and with (by today's standards) large production budgets and coveted space for broadcast slots, this series was extremely influential, not only through the wide dissemination of the work made as part of it, but also for the schemes and commissioned works that emulated it. Important, too, was the work made outside and sometimes in opposition to those commissioned programs.

(An extended interview with Boc Lockyer, conducted by Douglas Rosenberg in 2016 is republished in full further on in this volume.)
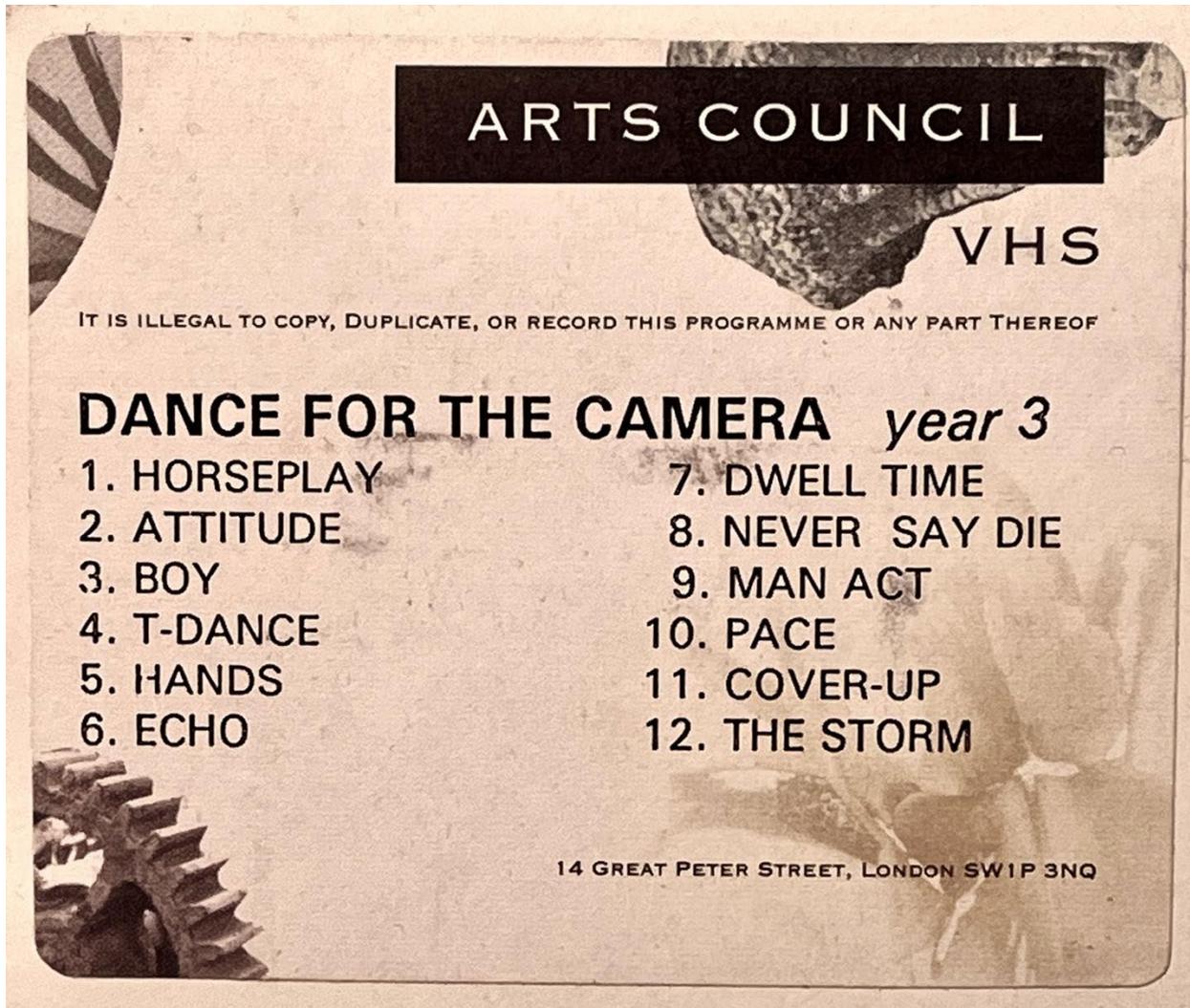
Label of a distribution VHS tape published by The Arts Council of Great Britain c. 1996.

THE TELEVISION–VIDEO ART DIALECTIC

Televisual media has always been held to rigorous technical specifications so as to be "legally" broadcast over the airwaves. In retrospect, the paradigm created by television's strictly enforced format may be seen as a provocation to artists wishing to distort the status quo of broadcast television. The boundaries were clear — TV was made by other people and sent to you, the viewer, representing a limited arena of ideas, strictly adhering to a producer-receiver paradigm. As video technologies evolved, significantly through the 1960s, the same tools began to become available to artists, dancers, choreographers and others, and generations of new makers were able to dismantle and reconfigure the production and distribution models of the very idea of television. What they made represents an alternative electronic landscape, one that challenges the dominance of the visual culture of the "golden days" of television consumption, from the

1950s through the 1970s and beyond. They did so by utilizing the technical tools of the medium, and simultaneously engaging with the very site of television. By inhabiting the materiality of television, video artists — and we argue video *dance* artists — thereby sought to disrupt the pervasive normative and narrative driven the culture of television.

The medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.
 — Marshall McLuhan

"The medium is the message" is a phrase coined by the Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan and the name of the first chapter in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964. McLuhan's pithy use of language to represent the complex and nuanced mechanics of mediation by the contemporary technologies of his era, animated artists' early forays into the creative uses of media.
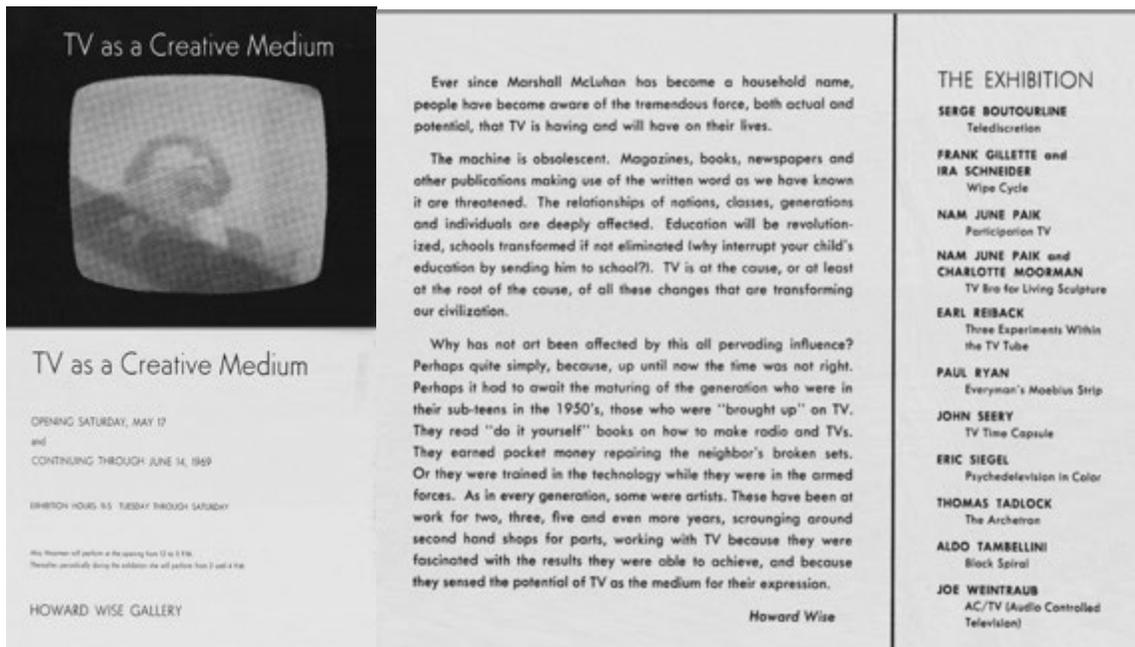
 ". . . they sensed the potential of TV as the medium for their expression" from the TV as a Creative Medium exhibition program, Howard Wise Gallery, New York, 1969.

In 1969, the New York gallerist Howard Wise curated an exhibition that featured video works by artists including Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman from the Fluxus group, multichannel installations by Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider, and others, that reflected McLuhan's prophetic idea about how the delivery systems of media shaped its reception by the viewer.

Wise's landmark exhibition reverberated throughout the art world and helped to insert the art form of video into the greater critical discourse of the arts. Within a year, in January 1970,

the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University presented what was widely regarded as the first museum exhibition of artists' video. The idea that the televisual was a place where artists might contribute and destabilize institutional broadcast television persisted. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s, in the USA, England, Scotland and elsewhere, video art found its way into museums and attracted the considerable attention of curators, writers and the public.

At the same time, the interest in independent television production moved out into numerous communities as video equipment become more accessible and thus affordable, prompting the creation of highly accessible community video production centers across the United States. One such space, Artists' Television Access, a San Francisco-based, artist-run, non-profit organization that cultivates and promotes culturally aware, underground media and experimental art, still persists some forty years after its founding. ATA, born out of a punk music sensibility, provides an accessible screening venue and gallery for the presentation of programmed and guest-curated screenings, exhibitions, performances, workshops and events. The legendary institution adheres to its original mission of fostering a supportive community for the exhibition of innovative art and the exchange of non-conformist, media-based ideas. Even in the era of streaming media and digital video, the idea of television manages to morph into contemporary practice.

Another exhibition titled *The Arts For Television* was held in 1987 at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and typified the emerging critical discourse around what the medium of television could do when untethered from the ingrained sensibilities of the broadcast world. Curated by Kathy Rae Huffmann, the exhibition and catalog deployed McLuhan's philosophical provocations to support the exhibition's point of view. While *The Arts for Television* perhaps seems an arcane idea in the present, the essays included in the exhibition catalogue speak to a critical moment in which artists and curators (philosophers and theorists as well) began to think about how to sever the artistic practice of making Video Art from the conditions of production that linked video to broadcast television. By using practice to think through such an idea, artists including Dara Birnbaum, Nam Jun Paik, Eden Velez and writers such as Huffman herself, Bob Riley, Dorine Mignot and their collaborators, arrived at a fluid conceptual model wherein the technology of representation (video) became detachable from its service to form (television) and artists were able to articulate contemporary ideas within the medium of television, however autonomous from the structure of television. Television was thus framed as a creative medium in opposition to the idea that TV was merely a delivery system for discrete programming. The gesture was deeply resonant for artists in an era in which video technology had become both portable and accessible.

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The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
April 1989

THE ARTS FOR TELEVISION
April 20 - May 30, 1989

Opening at The Museum of Modern Art on April 20, 1989, THE ARTS FOR TELEVISION is the first exhibition of its kind to examine television as a forum for the contemporary arts. This international survey of videotapes by sixty-seven artists is presented in weekly thematic programs: dance, music, theater, literature, video imaging, and experimental television (schedule attached). The exhibition is on view through May 30 in the Edward John Noble Education Center.

Created between 1966 and 1987, the videos represented in the exhibition are examples of alternative programming produced specially for television. These include American productions from WGBH-TV, Boston; WNET-TV, New York; and KTCA-TV, San Francisco; and programs from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, and Yugoslavia. Tapes range in length from three minutes to over an hour.

In Dance For Television (April 20 - 25), nine tapes demonstrate the use of television's abstract space. Included are works by choreographers Trisha Brown, James Byrne, Merce Cunningham, and Mary Lucier, among others. Music For Television (April 27 - May 2) presents sixteen works by such videomakers as Laurie Anderson, Robert Ashley, Kit Fitzgerald, and Robert Longo, who examine music as a means to liberate the image from narrative constraint.

In 1989, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented a second iteration of *The Arts for Television*. This second exhibition greatly expanded the reach of the arts into the space of television and included a number of "Dance for Television" selections by choreographers, video artists and filmmakers. These were placed in the milieu of categories of "art" in televisual space

including "Music for Television," "Theater for Television," "Literature for Television," "The Video Image" and "Not Necessarily Television".

The Museum of Modern Art

THE ARTS FOR TELEVISION
April 20 - May 30, 1989

Viewing Schedule

DANCE FOR TELEVISION
April 20 - 25 at 1:00 p.m.

Merce by Merce by Paik (1975). Charles Atlas/Merce Cunningham/Nam June Paik/Shigeko Kubota. 30 minutes

Dancing on the Edge (1980-81). Trisha Brown. 29 minutes

Portrait (1983). Hans Van Manen. 10 minutes

Repetitions (1984). Marie Andre. 45 minutes

Ex-Romance (1984-87). Charles Atlas. 50 minutes

Visual Shuffle (1986). John Sanborn/Mary Perillo. 7 minutes

Lament (1985). James Byrne/Eiko & Koma. 9 minutes

If I Could Fly, I Would Fly (1987). Mary Lucier. 25 minutes

Waterproof (1986). Jean-Louis Le Tacon. 22 minutes

MUSIC FOR TELEVISION
April 27 - May 2 at 1:00 p.m.

O Superman (1981). Laurie Anderson. 9 minutes

Ear to the Ground (1982). John Sanborn/Kit Fitzgerald. 5 minutes

Rene and Georgette Magritte With Their Dog After the War (1984). Joan Logue.
4 minutes

To Sorrow (1984). Kit Fitzgerald. 5 minutes

Bizarre Love Triangle (1987). Robert Longo. 4 minutes

You Ain't Fresh (1986). Julia Hayward. 4 minutes

I Want Some Insecticide (1986). Brenda Miller. 4 minutes

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Television was part-modernity, part-alchemy, floating through the ether to a dispersed audience, huddled communally in front of a magic box. It would stand to reason that what happened on — and in — that box would be magic too, or could be. Television was a space of possibility within

modernity after the Industrial Revolution. As television became mainstream, it was quickly apparent that viewers might expect the unexpected. This is where Berthold Brecht's theories about the fourth wall were reified, first in black and white and later in color. It was a space that extended the possibilities of theatre and radio into a new tele-visual frontier. It was a time that expected, and even more, demanded experimentation and enchantment.

Television exhibited little of the preciousness of cinema, or the epic self-involvement of the movie business. It brought us parallel streams of narrative, non-linear sensibilities, time frames running simultaneously across a single program, and a multitude (relatively) of channels to choose from. TV was pastiche before postmodernism. It was made for disruption and made to disrupt the viewers' understanding of narrative, storytelling and visual culture across a modern template of temporality and signifiers. Moreover, whilst cinema relied on the suspension of disbelief, TV implied that its stories were real. It blurred the boundaries between high and low, framing the everyday and epic, and juxtaposing the domestic with the public, both in the flow of broadcast and in the setting of the apparatus itself:

> Since the seventies video has come a long way, indeed the very term 'video' – originally adopted by artists throughout the world to signify an alternative stance to 'television' – has become an everyday word and as such is mis-used by just about everybody. In many ways, this is encouraging to the artist, freed from its experimental or even avant-garde caches, artists' video has evolved into a multi-practice activity: from performance related, through feminist, political, synesthetic, structuralist, etc. etc. In all these manifestations and different concerns, there is a common thread, and that thread is television. (Partridge, 1990, 25)

Artists working in a diverse range of media embraced the creative possibilities of video, bringing to their explorations the specific and general concepts, concerns and ambitions of their native artforms. The resulting hybridity was not uniform across these artists' work, nor was the relationship between the media necessarily one of equality. For artists working in live performance, video provided a way of "fixing" the work, of extending its life and widening audiences through new routes of distribution. Some took ownership over this process, sensing — or at the very least, not resisting — the potential of the form and the materiality of video tape. The performance documentation thus became an iteration of the artist's work, enfolded into their practice and shaping its onward trajectory.

Avant-garde dancer and choreographer Blondell Cummings (1940-2015) embraced the media of television and video as a tool for documentation and as an influence for experimental live choreography as well. Creating in the 1970s and 1980s, Cummings called her practice "moving pictures," highlighting her understanding of the potential two-way flow between live theatre, dance and performance art and the emergent video and television forms. This embodiment of the televisual in Cumming's work still feels deeply connected to the original. Encountering Cumming's seminal autobiographical solo *Chicken Soup* work on the Internet, writer Elinor Hitt

observes how the artist's screen performances challenge notions of the limitations of video documentation in comparison with "broadcast quality" television:

> Forty years after its conception, Chicken Soup haunts the Internet's public domain in strange ways. One of the only places that the piece is available in its entirety is on YouTube, a video taken from a 1988 TV program called Alive From Off Center. In many respects, it is a successful if incidental effort at preservation—the video quality perfect, and the score, composed by Cummings, Brian Eno, and Meredith Monk, coming through loud and clear. But the video setting has been curated too intensely, unlike her works on stage. The universality of Cummings's gestures and words are placed in the very particular historical context of a mid-century, middle-class American kitchen, in which Cummings simultaneously evokes bourgeoise housewife life and female domestic labor: She wears a crisp, collared white dress and apron and moves in the stage set complete with countertop, stove, and kitchen sink. This production too heavily guides us toward a fixed interpretation of the abstract words and movement themselves. (Hitt, 2023)

Hitt argues, however, that it is in the spaces created through absence of detail in the rudimentary video-taped documentation of the performance, rather than in its television adaptation, that Cumming's considerable power and life force lives on. The writer contrasts the televisual adaptation of *Chicken Soup* with an excerpt, also found online, of a rudimental video documentation of Cumming's life performance the same work at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in July 1989:

Screenshot from Chicken Soup **(Cummings, 1981/1989)**

> It is in the Jacob's Pillow footage that one can imagine Chicken Soup in its most authentic form. The music is the greatest difference, barely recognizable compared to the machine-like audio in the Alive From Off Center version. Though you can pick out some of the same rhythms and melodies, the music seems to be played live by a single pianist using the score as a template on which to improvise. The set, too, could not be more understated.

Cummings sits at a dark table that almost blends unnoticed against the black backdrop. She is clad, instead of a housewife's costume, in a simple white dress with a large gathered skirt. What emerges is a much more impressionistic, introspective Chicken Soup. This blank canvas of stage could be anyone's kitchen in any period of time—an invitation for the audience to graft their own experiences onto Cummings choreography. This kitchen might even exist apart from any concrete time or place, belonging to communal memory. What is nearly lost in the blur of video is the precision of Cummings's expressions, what Glenn Philips of the Getty Museum calls her "facial choreography". But that lost element comes across in the palpable silence of the audience, the emotional tenor of the theater space itself—a quality that is rarely transmissible by video and that speaks to Cummings's power as a performer. (Hitt, 2023)

TELEVISUAL DANCE

Cinema rejected theater. Television rejected cinema, video art rejected experimental film, digital media rejected the analog world, yet television persists, cannibalizing every form that came before or after. Even as we write, television remains the most flexible, malleable and fluid space of production, appropriating each new technology and social movement into its programming. Commercial TV has, since its beginning, employed bodies in motion, performative bodies, to sell its sponsors' products. From singing, dancing cigarette packs to ballet-trained dancers selling watches or clothing, bodies take space in both advertisements and general entertainment programming.

Television has an appetite that needs to be constantly fed. It hoovers up stories and characters from the off-screen world (does that place even exist anymore?) as it seeks to fill its allotted programming slots. In addition to fictional, script driven and "reality television," cultural activities including those derived from theatre, dance and the art world have provided an endless supply of content. Like film, television started as an experimental technology, and was ultimately co-opted by the entertainment industry. However, as with cinema, the dancing body was involved from the start — a broadcast of ballerina Maria Gambarelli performing for the camera took place just six weeks after the BBC was launched, using John Logie Baird's visual transmission system in August 1932 (Penman, 1993, p. 103). Over the decades that followed, ballet and modern dance were a staple, yet most of these broadcasts were recorded "relays" of theatrical works, presented on the small screen for the continuity of the live action. These outputs were effectively documentations, albeit increasingly sophisticated, designed to bring the glamorous theatrical experience into the living room. It was a public service.

From the 1930s onwards, there have been individuals who have sought to push the boundaries of dance on television, many forgotten, a few remembered or rediscovered. Recent research by Cara Hagan, included in her book *Screendance from Film to Festival*, brings to attention the work of Pauline Koner and Kitty Doner, "the first choreographers to use television as a site for screendance practice" (Hagan, 2022, p. 36). Working in New York in the 1940s, Koner and Doner's short, specially devised episodes were truly innovative dance for television. Importantly, these

producer/ directors also articulated their practices, encouraging stage choreographers to develop "camera consciousness" and describing their hybrid technique of "cameragraphing" (Hagan, 2022, p. 37). In the 1960s, Swedish choreographer Birgit Cullberg was developing radical approaches to making dance for television.

The styles of dance, and how they were presented as light entertainment on and through television, were limited and specific, and largely represented what was deemed to be acceptable and appealing to the "mainstream" at that time. As such, more voices and bodies were excluded than included. For all its radical potential, dance for television was largely based on what was culturally acceptable to those in the position to make such decisions and act on and sustain these preferences.

Elected in 1979, UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal drive towards free markets and "entrepreneurialism" resulted in the privatization of numerous British industries. This led to the launch of Channel 4 in 1982 and ushered in the new regulation that a percentage of BBC output was to be created by independent production companies. Ironically, considering the oppressive right-wing policies of Thatcherism, this would facilitate the commissioning and broadcast of television that was radically different in form and content from what had gone before, and was anything but conservative. TV in the UK expanded rapidly, and much of it changed beyond recognition. This was also connected to the evolution of the technology available to make television and who was given the time and space to use it.

This cultural shift, and the resulting injection of funding and scheduling, were to become the crucible from which a new wave of screendance would emerge. In the UK by the mid 1980s, there were increasingly frequent commissioning of original dance for television by series such as *Dance Lines* on Channel 4 (1986-1992), over seen by Michael Kustov, and subsequently the longer-running *Dance for the Camera* series on the BBC (1990-2004), initiated and executive produced by Bob Lockyer.

The *Dance for the Camera* commissioning arguably operated within the rigid structures of the BBC, and yet were often ground-breaking and collaborative. They come out of a tradition of experimentation on television with different manifestations in different parts of the world. While not equitably produced in many countries due in part to under-resourcing, with the advent of VHS video recording, much of the most interesting and provocative dance-television work circulated globally via bootleg tapes. It was through this informal distribution system that televisual dance engaged its most ardent supporters and practitioners, in the days before the Internet and the proliferation of festivals world-wide. The means of production for television was both a set of tools and a means of circulation and the two were, at that time, linked. Even when filmed with Super 16 or other celluloid stock, the works were constructed for the platform of television, to impact the broader television audience, (and ultimately engineered to conform to the industry's broadcast standards).

Televisual experiments with dance in the 1980s cohabited with a particular kind of choreography that was expressive, theatrical, sometimes brutal and violent. The work that we encountered on television, often late at night, coincided with the zeitgeist's state of agitation and revolutionary

spirit as video, art, and the vestiges of experimental film collided and blurred together. Channels such as MTV featured the mash-up of pop music and of-the-moment video production. The early 1980s saw the emergence of a queer space within broadcast television as a new wave of anti-rock bands infiltrated music video and the simultaneous attention to the politics of the HIV/AIDS pandemic become a part of mainstream discourse. We certainly see this in Bob Lockyer's work with Lloyd Newson, David Hinton and DV8 in making *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, *Enter Achilles* and *Strange Fish* for the BBC.

We also saw a similar framework for dance on television in the States via the program *Alive From Off Center* and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) whose individual affiliates across the country produced a significant amount of experimental collaborative and boundary-breaking work focused on dance in its mediated form. Canada also had similar initiatives for commissioning cutting edge dance films for television via BravoFACT!

In the 1980's, the emergence of personal narratives and frank sexuality met head on, the vice grip of the right with its attempts at the suppression of artistic freedom, and all conspired to create a sense that, while mass culture was approaching some kind of nadir, the technologies of representation technology might save us. In the spirit of montage and post-punk postmodernism, collaboration happened across every art form, creating important cross-cultural inroads. It was a time on intense transmedia activity, where street culture of a particular type migrated onto the screen. Images ingrained in our minds kick off to an angry start with the New Romantic ballerina in Derek Jarman's *Jubilee*, a provocative, prophetic and not -unproblematic shout at what the artist-filmmaker saw as the potential for hypocrisy across all strata of society.

Screenshot from *Jubilee* (Jarman, 1978)

For some television dance, it was a moment of divine symmetry. The choreography of the era had moved into territory that was bold and expressive, and ultimately seemed to resurrect a Dada sensibility. Scottish choreographer Michael Clark mixed neo-classical with neo-punk, working with the band The Fall, designer Leigh Bowery, and dancers including Gaby Agis and Matthew Hawkins to create *Hail, the New Puritan,* a faux cinema-verité style depiction of their chaotic yet creative everyday interactions, directed by New York video artist Charles Atlas and broadcast on Channel 4 as part of the 1986 Dance on 4 series. Canadian Edouard Lock made choreography for David Bowie's live shows and for his own modern dance company *Lalala Human* steps, in whose video dance of the same name Lock and superstar dancer Louise Lecavalier embodied a spikey turbo-charged Fred and Ginger. Coming out of the British cabaret pub circuit, Lee Anderson's all-female group The Cholmondeleys and Liz Aggiss' with her variation of anarchic Austruckstanz infiltrated their aesthetics into the Dance for the Camera consciousness. Through foundational television techniques such as the close-up, mise-en-scène, continuity editing and audio-visual design, these original works for screen enabled and enhanced a wider public's connection with an era of dance performance work that might otherwise have remained obscure.

(SCREEN) DANCE IN THE ELECTRONIC LANDSCAPE

By the early 1970s, two distinct streams of influence had emerged, one from experimental film including the work of Maya Daren, Shirley Clark, Hillary Harris and others, and the other from the emergent form of video art, and the influence of Nam June Paik, Bruce Nauman and Joan Jonas to mention a few. This is evident not only in the practices of making but also in the fabric of the work itself. In both cases, artists interested in framing the body within the materiality of durational performative work for the screen relied on dance and performers of dance to carry the viewers' gaze. The diasporic nature of this perspective accumulated the aesthetics, methodologies and conceptual strategies of the spaces which they traversed within the four corners of the moving image.

TV was an electronic landscape and experimental dance made for television often amplified the visuality of the era. Thus, the electronic palettes of artists such as Merce Cunningham and Doris Chase were literally those of video art: primary colors, over-amped and highly synthesized; shimmering and virtually two dimensions, flat and vibrant at the same time.

For artists working in analogue video, the materiality of the form allowed them to situate dancing bodies not on top of technology, *but inextricably embedded in the electronic landscape*, creating a televisual body in motion inserted in the fields and frames of the image. The lack of legibility of this lower resolution media allowed for a simultaneously poetic and painterly visual language to emerge. In such work, created during the era of television we are speaking of, the inherent soft focus of the image invited the viewer to become lost in an aura of gaussian blur. Here movement was decentered in the space of the frame and simultaneously called attention to the edges of that frame (images were "painted" right up to its borders) creating a tension between the boundaries of the image and screen space. Bodies were situated deeply inside the image, fragmented and recorporealized within the medium, movement disappearing into the varying

opacity of the electronic fields. As a by-product, this work was often about deconstructing what dance and choreography might be within screen space, thus much of the work this essay is concerned with may be taken as a collective manifesto:

YES to the cinematic formalism of Maya Deren, Amy Greenfield, Pooh Kaye and Yoshiko Chuma and also YES to the videotape experimentations of Charles Atlas, Nam June Paik, Doris Chase and Joan Jonas. YES to disruption of the screendance status quo and YES to the vestiges of the televisual.

Doris Chase, Circles II, 1971

In her 1997 essay "Televisualised," published in *Dance Theatre Journal*, Sherrill Dodds writes: "As video dance is a creative exploration of both dance and television, unconventional filming techniques and striking images are abundant." (Dodds, 1997, pp. 44-47)

The choice of terminology (video dance) is important in that video dance links the practice to a long process of separating televisual media production into its disparate parts. After the earliest days of broadcast television, its initial period of live-only broadcasts, followed by experimentation with film, TV at the mid-century (1950s and 1960s) was dependent on the technologies of video for both its creation and distribution. In the 1960s, as portable video recording equipment became available, artists such as Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, Steina

and Woody Vasulka and others, adopted the medium of video as a nascent art form. The roots of video art were clearly in the art world as artists purposefully separated themselves from the histories and practices of film based moving image production. While there was some aesthetic overlap between film and video artists, video art became entrenched in museums, galleries and elsewhere as a new forum for self-expression that was of the electronic era.

Thus, following the linguistic logic of Dodds' choice above, video art (and video dance) appropriated the means of television (video recording) and created new dynamic juxtapositions when makers applied new obstructions and manifestos to the method of recording and the use of the tools of cinema. The video artist Doug Hall described "video's pedigree" as "anything but pure." Hall wrote in *Illuminating Video* in 2005, that video was:

> …conceived from a promiscuous mix of disciplines in the great optimism of post-WW11 culture, its stock of practitioners includes a jumble of musicians, poets, documentarians, sculptors, painters, dancers and technology freaks. Its lineage can be traced to the discourses of art, science, linguistics, technology, mass media, and politics. Cutting across such diverse fields, early video displays a broad range of concerns, often linked by nothing more than the tools themselves (Hall & Fifer, 2005, p. 14).

Doug Hall was one of Douglas Rosenberg's teachers at Art School and he is quoted at length in Rosenberg's book, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image*. Hall's summation of the roots of video as an art form, also expose the interdisciplinary aspirations present in the milieu at the time. Unencumbered by the history of film or other art forms, video was immediately an open field of experimentation and collaboration. Hall himself had worked with dancers in some of his projects as did Nam Jun Paik who, with Charles Atlas, Shigeko Kubota, and John Cage, collaborated with Merce Cunningham on *Merce by Merce by Paik/Blue Studio*, 1978, a half-hour program which was broadcast on WNET Television. The experimental nature of both the film and the institution of Public Television in that historical moment, allowed for a broadcast television experience that immediately seeped into the consciousness of a generation of artists for whom such collaborations would constitute a new way of working across material and disciplinary boundaries.

Merce by Merce by Paik (1978), Nam Jun Paik and Merce Cunningham

Dodds suggests that there was a way to organize such work under the heading of "televisual." She argues,

> The "televisual" names a media culture generally in which television's multiple dimensions have shaped and continue to alter the coordinates through which we understand, theorise, intervene, and challenge contemporary media culture. Televisual culture is a culture which both encompasses and crosses all aspects of television, from its experiential dimensions to its aesthetic strategies, from its technological developments to its cross-medial consequences (Dodds, 1997, p. 45).

The televisual then, makes a space for those bodies visualized via the formalized technologies of television that are a part of a landscape built from video, cameras, bodies, temporal devices and movement. It is television as both an idea and a structural, historic methodology, that animates a particular understanding of what has become a practice across multiple platforms, mostly not television. However, the imprint of television, its mannerisms, form, circulation and its desires along with the embedded viewing practices of television, hover like a ghost around the contemporary practice of screendance.

Video dance and later screendance are a forensic DNA match to video art and, by extension, television. While screendance generally has a familial line to film and cinema, the greatest leap forward in the field has been in the television and post-television space of video and its antecedents. The impact of "the televisual" along with the evolution of accessible video recording, editing and circulation technologies since the advent of Sony's Porta-Pak in the early 1960s, supercharged the use of video as the creative medium for artists through the 1970s and beyond. Even with the technical transition from analog technologies to digital that brings us into the present, the legacy and persistence of video's genetics straddles generations. There is something heirloom about television, the way the box has transformed itself to a sleek, thin

surface, discarding its apparatus and accoutrements along the way. Now less commanding of our attention, rather than imposing its presence or "objectness", it hovers. Television is even more ubiquitous than ever but less conspicuous. TV has invaded our collective memory through a kind of osmosis; generations who did not grow up with it as the central point of reference, indeed the piece of furniture that drew families together, still gravitate to the space of screens to consume content that, it seems, still flows from television's wellspring.

> *We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.*
>
> —Baudillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*

Broadcast television was like a church, or a place of worship, and infiltrating it was like a kind of criminal act, or at least an act of great resistance by dance filmmakers. Television was ever-present in independent media practice. Personal vision was the currency of the televisual era, when excess was an aesthetic choice. Screendance makers committed their work to plastic cassettes, VHS, betacam, and other tape-based formats, and carried them around like treasures, the copies of which were knowingly lesser than the originals. We committed our work to the most fragile of archives, and often circulated it by putting it in a backpack and getting on a plane or train to take it physically to a festival or screening venue. Once inside such spaces, the work disrupted its environment in the most aesthetically challenging ways possible.

Screendance quickly became a liberatory tool for decentralizing the distribution systems of dance. As television was displaced by the Internet and social media, festivals built on digital platforms moved to fill the vacuum, creating opportunities for exchange, exhibition and international collaboration. Along with expansive technology, the circulation systems of screendance made it possible to level the field in a rapid time frame. In looking closely, however, we can recognize a pattern that begins with dance as an experiment in the liberation of the body on screen and becomes institutionalized in ways that minimize experimentation and a more anarchic use of the space of media.

Analogue technologies, however cumbersome, and the limited possibility of mass circulation of works made within that milieu, amplified the artists' engagement with ideas and experimentation in ways that are perhaps not obvious. Now, the ubiquitous access to both the media of representation and its circulation, conspire to create impenetrable images, the surface quality of which make it almost impossible for artists to disrupt. The hyper-efficiency and hyper-resolution of the "in hand" technologies produce photographic representations of the world. These devices do not initiate elegant framing or pans or tilts or dollies. Their job is to deliver sufficient data that can be evolved and resolved in postproduction. In contrast to this contemporary homogenizing media, the televisual image was a kind of drug induced, hallucinatory, sometimes surreal flight of fancy.

The technologies of recording in the contemporary digital landscape aim to fix things that may not in fact be broken. They are often the very things that video artists worked with: the restricting

frame; the glitch; soft focus; the space in between fields. In contrast, sensor-based technology hardens the image. To soften such images requires sophisticated, software-determined postproduction processes that ironically is often meant to mimic the deficiencies of analogue technologies. Previously conscious choices, or iconic visual language caused by the circumstances of low-fidelity imaging technologies are now conflated into user-friendly apps.

Some work made for the screen in the 1960s and 1970s was not specifically intended for television broadcast, though it was a reflection of the homogenization of television and the way the TV framed our experience of life as viewers. In other words, television provided the structure for artists to remake the very conventions of television and experimental work, on the street, in the landscape and in their studios. Video art first had to dismantle the viewer's understanding of the architecture of television, the box, in which all media arrived, whether news, sports dance, or other. The viewing constraints of television became, in a sense, a kind of platform determinism. However, early video artists sought to deconstruct our relationship with the apparatus that delivered mediated images.

Conversely, the flow of media is consumed now via handheld devices, laptops, and other computer screens, with a tacit assumption that the architecture of the screens is of little importance to the consumption of the images contained within them. Artists have historically thrived in situations in which they have something to rail against, aspire to, infiltrate, question and, ultimately, defeat. Without the adversarial relationship of the historical space of the televisual, there are no natural enemies. Without such frisson, we are left to wonder what's next for the artform.

Screendance is a confluence of postmodern movement vocabulary and the deconstruction of cinematic space, or televisual space in the 1970s. Performances made for the camera benefit from the capacity of optical technologies, even in still images, to extrapolate movement through a particular kind of performance. Such a performance makes itself known within the restricted space of the frame of the camera. By frustrating the feasibility of place and body, the camera exerts a capacity to frame experience within a single glance. However, dance in the space of the televisual (until recently) has not historically foregrounded dance as a siloed alternate version of its linear live self, but rather as a part of the fabric of the televisual image. As with prevailing ideas about site specificity in other art forms, *television* was historically considered by media artists to be equally site-specific. Thus, images of dancing bodies were deeply embedded in the visual field.

In 2000, the preeminent dance scholar Sally Banes presented a paper at the Dance for Camera Symposium at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Titled *Making Tharp Baryshnikov*, Banes analyses Tharp's 1977 WNET Television Laboratory commissioned video project called *Making Television Dance* (the title of this essay is similarly a play Tharp's title). In her paper, which is published in full later in this volume, Banes deconstructs the logic and form of the avant-garde approach to televisual dance by noting:

> Indeed, we see a great deal of the backstage process of making this piece, but we never do see the entire dance piece performed live. And, of course, that is because this dance piece never existed "live." Studio audiences saw the

> dancing as it was being filmed, but the piece itself, made for the television screen, is inseparable from what the live studio audience could not see: the camerawork (closeups, long-shots, pans, and so on), the editing, and the video effects (such as keying, retrograde, multiple images, and superimposed freezes). What we, the television audience, see as the finished product--what was ultimately broadcast--is a composite of process and several different "finished" products. For Making Television Dance is basically a view of the inside, the not the outside, of a lengthy cine-choreographic process. (Banes, 2000)

Thus, Banes provides a key to the radical use of the technologies of television via its understanding of dance; the televisual in Twyla Tharp's vision is at once infinitely layered, atemporal, site-specific and non-linear. Most importantly, as Banes so presciently described, the "dance piece never existed "live."

Also published later in this volume, Pamela Krayenbuhl's research presented in the article *Twyla Tharp's Making Television Dance (1977) and the Technologized Dancing Body*, recuperates a significant historical thread of a dance and technology dialectic which conspired to create an egalitarian space within publicly broadcast television. Krayenbuhl writes about the "transitional period" between the analog and the digital wherein Twyla Tharp's *Making Television Dance* and the ethos of 1970s were a liminal space in which the overlaps of dance and the moving image created a kind of altruistic moment in television. It was a moment into which young "techies" delivered the future to an older generation of broadcast executives. She states,

> Through Making Television Dance, I argue that dance experiments with analog television, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, represented a crucial chapter in the history of the increasingly technologized moving body. Though rarely discussed in either television scholarship or dance scholarship, Making Television Dance was explicitly interested in uncovering what the marriage of dance and television (as distinct from film) made possible formally and technologically (Krayenbuhl, 2024).

The contemporary version of screendance has the genetic markers of television dance within its DNA. That said, contemporary screendance (increasingly) reinforces the tropes of theatrical dance, in such a way as to speak past the camera as opposed to with or to the camera, and technology once again leads the way. This time, however, it is in a way that does not readily offer a space for artistic disruption. The Smartphone camera is characteristically 'no camera' and there is little trace of the format within the digital image. There is no dropout, no glitch, in this all-seeing, all capturing sensor-oriented device. The restricting architecture of the frame generally, whether still or moving image, is such that, in its limitation, opens up a vast sea of possibility. Whilst accessible, cameras now have fewer limitations, therefore, ironically, fewer possibilities, in postproduction, everything is fixable, zoomable, programmable and the medium thus becomes invisible.

The restrictions inherent in the analogue medium provided the energy, materiality and discourse through which screendance emerged. It is harder to detect concepts of intervention and experimentation today. Where previously screendance misbehaved, now works are made largely according to an expected format and with festivals in mind. The energy of the interloper is dissipated as screendance is funneled through submission portals and codified processes, and experienced in a space into which it has been invited. The Internet and social media seem more open, and free of broadcaster conventions and budgets, which arguably tended to constrict, yet simultaneously motivated action and counteraction. However, it seems that these online sites do not necessarily offer a context for screendance, or a curatorial perspective, or a format to push against. Screendance comes into existence today without the challenges and fissures that have, in previous times, subverted the form.

Television is a system, an idea that has been, subsequent to its invention, historically adaptable to each succeeding, moving image technology. Yet, screendance still seems to be tethered to the visual culture of television, to its gravitational pull. Contemporary screendance behaves as if it is being made for television.

What happened to our revolution?

Katrina McPherson and Douglas Rosenberg, May 2024.

Biographies

Katrina McPherson is a director, artist and educator. Her collaborative screen-based works are regularly presented at festivals, theatres and galleries world-wide. Katrina had a 15-year career as a television director, making arts programmes for the BBC, Channel Four and ITV. She is the author of *Making Video Dance* (Routledge, 2019) and Course Leader of the MA Screendance at London Contemporary Dance School. Katrina has a PhD by Publication from Edinburgh Napier University in 2023.

Douglas Rosenberg is an interdisciplinary artist, filmmaker, author and the Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His work in performance, video, installation, and other media has been exhibited internationally for over 30 years. He is the author of Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image (Oxford Press). His most recent book is Staring at the Sky: Essays on Art and Culture, published by Korpen Press.

A Conversation, about Screendance and the Televisual, McPherson and Rosenberg

As we wrote **Making Television Dance (again),** we did so as artists whose work made for the screen courses through video art, video dance, experimental film, television and the contemporary field of screendance. Although we – McPherson and Rosenberg — have never created work together, we can track our parallel histories and in doing so, recognize a particular trajectory that owes much to the very idea of the televisual. We are interested in television not for the sake of nostalgia, but a fuller understanding of its role and presence in the histories of screendance. In order to further articulate this, in June 2023, we interviewed each other about the topic of this essay:

Douglas Rosenberg: What was your entry point into video as an art form and its relationship with dance, Katrina?

KM: My impulse stemmed from a wish to bring dance to a wider, more diverse audience through making dance for television. But I was not specifically emulating anything that I had seen. I grew up in a household with no TV and had limited access as a student. It was the *possibility* of televisual dance that inspired me. It was also the idea of intervention. How about you, Doug, how did you find your way to this field?

DR: Television is in my DNA. Studying video and performance in the early 1980s at the San Francisco Art Institute, I was part of a milieu of first-and second-generation video artists, all of whom had come through training in the various "traditional" art forms and worked with a porous understanding of disciplinary boundaries, but with the conviction that what they were doing, inventing video art, was indeed something like a calling. The landscape of video art, with its festivals and distribution systems, was very much like that of contemporary screendance.

KM: Having studied dance at Laban in London in the mid-late 1980s, I grew into my professional life alongside and with the expansion of screendance. At the time, in countries such as the UK, USA, Australia, France and the Netherlands, interest by broadcasters in dance for television was at a new high, in Canada, Bravo had launched as a television service dedicated to film and the performing arts, and in the UK during the 1980s, Channel Four and the BBC were experimenting with new formats for televising art, and dance.

DR: In the States, shows like *Alive From Off Center* appeared on television, expanding the consciousness of its viewers through ground-breaking, intermedia projects and collaborations between choreographers musicians, visual artists, etc. It was broadcast weekly from Minnesota Public Television and was hosted for a while by Laurie Anderson and featured incredible work by collaborative teams of artists, choreographers, video makers, musicians and others. It seemed like it had slipped under the radar and found a place through television in the counterculture of the moment. The series coincided with an early iteration of the culture wars (around 1984), when a group of artists referred to as the "NEA Four" were excoriated for accepting government funding from the National Endowment of the Arts for their anti-establishment, sex-positive, performative work. That these two things could happen simultaneously was made possible

because the right-wing in America had not yet set its sights on dismantling funding for public broadcasting as they had for support of the arts generally through the National Endowment for the Arts.

June Watanabe, Douglas Rosenberg, 1987

Randomoptic Video Piano, Vanessa Smith (dancer) Anna Gillespie (piano), Katrina McPherson, 1991

KM: It's so interesting because what emerged from this era was a new generation of 'hybrid video dance' artists, educated in dance and in film or video, who began to embrace the screen rather than the stage as the primary site for their movement-based practice. These included, amongst others, Becky Edmonds, Miranda Pennell, Michele Fox, and Lucy Cash in the UK, Evann Siebens and Litza Bixler in the USA, Laura Taler in Canada and Tracie Mitchell in Australia. Like me, these were not choreographers who made work for the theatre who then collaborated with directors to make one-off works for television. Nor were we directors who gravitated toward dance as a subject for our films and videos. Our training in and embodied knowledge of both movement making and film/video production shaped our experimental and distinctive screen-based practices.

DR: When I was in graduate school at the San Francisco Art Institute, there were a number of vibrant artist-run spaces in the city that were showing video art and experimental dance and theatre…and there were community video production spaces where artists could become community television producers and have their work broadcast on the stations at the far end of the dial. I had begun to take dance classes and other body-based workshops while studying video art and performance at art school and San Francisco had a rich and diverse arts scene that flowed from a very Bohemian aesthetic, so dance companies collaborated with visual artists and poets and there was a lot of interdisciplinarity. Folks had migrated to San Francisco from New York and were aware of the Judson Church Group and the work of Cunningham and Cage. The Korean born video artist Nam Jun Paik was in that mix too… I took a workshop with him at Video Free America, an artist-run video production facility in San Francisco in the 80s. And I was lucky to connect with the Bay Area choreographer June Watanabe, with whom I had taken modern dance classes and began a decade-long working relationship. We began to find ways to combine video with dance in a live, theatrical situation which, of course, led to making work directly for the camera.

KM: In the summer of 1988, two things happened that would determine the direction of my life. Firstly, Bob Lockyer taught a four-day workshop on television dance for choreographers at the Laban Centre Theatre. Although aimed at established choreographers, I persuaded Marion North, Director of Laban, that I needed to do this course and, a newly graduated student, I was awarded a place. We worked with dancers from Matthew Bourne's *Adventures in Motion Pictures* (Bourne had also studied at Laban) and a small team of camera operators and editors, Bob Lockyer introduced us to the foundational concepts and techniques for adapting dance into the televisual space. We had the opportunity to direct the cameras and the live vision mixing, each making our own screen version of one of A.M.P.'s live choreographic works. It was enormous fun, and I was immediately hooked. Despite having no idea how as a young female dance artist, I felt instinctively that this was the direction that I wanted to take my work and career. Also, that summer, *Dance Theatre Journal* had a special issue focused on the *Dance Lines* series that was being made for Channel 4 at the time. This became an important source of conceptual inspiration for me!

DR Ha! I think my equivalent was the catalog for Amy Greenfield and Elaine Summers' curation, called *FilmDance*, the famous little black book from an exhibition of screenic work in all moving image formats from the 1890s through 1983. that catalog was filled with images and critical writing by artists and others. This floated around the screendance world for years, often in xerox form and remains essential reading.

KM: Yes, and so, there were not yet any institutional spaces that recognized video dance or screendance as an autonomous form and so no formal learning opportunities. My wish to learn and experiment with the technologies and processes of video production led me to the influential Electronic Imaging postgraduate diploma at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design in Dundee. This ground-breaking, practice-oriented course was equipped with state -of the art video and audio making-equipment, embedded in an art college and many of the tutors were influential and emergent video artists of the time, including Lei Cox, Rose Gerrard and Steve Partridge. It was there that I started to combine my embodied knowledge of postmodern dance practices with the video art ideas that I encountered to make experimental dance for and with the television screen.

DR: Similarly, I also had no training in combining dance and video as such. In the mid 1980s I was simply combining everything that interested me into the space of the screen in the context of "performance," which I understood to be quite broad. Around that same time, June Watanabe and I received a commission from the American Dance Festival to collaborate on a work for the stage, so spent the summer there making a largescale piece that combined dance and video as inseparable from each other. That led to a decades-long job for me at ADF documenting dance and starting a class in "videodance" that I taught for many years there. It was during that time that I began to see my work in the context of broadcast television and had a number of projects featured on television in various situations.

KM: Whilst at DJCA, I became fascinated by the idea that video dance might disrupt and alter the flow of broadcast television and be seen by people who were not necessarily seeking it out. I knew of David Hall's *TV Interruptions* which were commissioned and broadcast by Scottish TV in 1971. I had also read that Merce Cunningham had asked what would happen if 30 seconds of dance appeared on television unannounced and so I experimented with this idea in *A Space of Time* (1991), a series of 8 x 30 second video dance pieces which I made in collaboration with dance artists Vanessa Smith and Karen Grant, with whom I co-directed the experimental group Randomoptic Pick Up Company. Fellow Electronic Imaging student Bel Emslie created animated elements that echoed the themes of the locations using cutting edge technologies of the time, for example, the computer graphics workstation Quantel Paintbox. With everything assembled, I then spent many hours in the spaceship flight deck-like edit suit, layering images, altering tape speeds, mixing channels, keying and composted the thirty second pieces. Watching *A Space of Time* now, I see the in-the-moment decisions on timing and opacity that give each 30 second video dance a distinct identity; there are hesitations, missed moments and glorious combinations in those cracks – my embodied exploration of the televisual medium.

Still from A Space of Time, Katrina McPherson, 1991

Still from A Space of Time, Katrina McPherson, 1991

Still from La Mécanique, Douglas Rosenberg, 1986

DR: I performed in my own work often in electronic or actual landscapes. As I was coming from the world of Video Art and Performance, site-specificity was very important for me and something that informed my work for screen as well. In 1989, the filmmaker James Byrne curated a program called, *Eyes Wide Open: New Directions in Dance and Performance Video* at Dance Theater Workshop in New York. My work was included amongst a diverse group of artists working across disciplines to create performative work for the screen. Included in that show were folks like Arnie Zane, Sally Silvers and filmmaker Henry Hills and others for whom video space was a new frontier for the exploration of bodies on screen. James Byrne had directed an exquisite film with Eiko and Koma called *Lament* which I had seen, and the show at DTW helped clarify that what I was doing was part of some larger move that artists outside of my community were thinking about. It really allowed me to conceptualize dance (on screen) in a very expansive way.

Still from La Mécanique, Douglas Rosenberg, 1986

KM: 1995 was the moment when I was able to take the experimental video dance practice that I had been developing for 7 years into the broadcast arena, and it was through myself, dancer-choreographer Marisa Zanotti and composer Phillip Jeck being commissioned by Bob Lockyer and Rodney Wilson to make a 5-minute Dance for the Camera. Pace was experimental on all levels, from the improvised-score based approach to movement, camera and editing, through its non-linear, non-narrative structure to the state-of-the art technologies used to make it. Despite its aesthetic seeming lo-fi by today's standards, we filmed *Pace* on hi-8 video tape and edited on Avid, both cutting-edge technologies in the mid-1990s that required the BBC to make special dispensation to broadcast.

The journey of a work like *Pace traces the* evolving and shifting sites for screendance over the past three decades, an example of how the commissioning of experimental work, championed by someone as forward-looking and open to challenge as Bob Lockyer, can enable work that sustains and contributes beyond its initial site and stated intention. First broadcast on BBC2, *Pace* was subsequently screened at international festivals, including Oberhausen Short Film Festival in Germany and the specialist IMZ Dance Screen, where it was projected in a large-screen cinematic format. *Pace* was then included in some VHS collections sold at specialist bookshops, before upgrading to DVD for distribution as part of a collection of dance films that I had directed called *Five Video Dances* (2006). Over the years, *Pace* has been analysed and written about in books and articles, as well as by students in their theses and dissertations. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, *Pace* found its audience in galleries when it was curated by John Akomfrah to be part of the *History is Now* exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery in 2015, and it was included in the CutLog exhibition at the Royal Scottish Academy gallery in Edinburgh in 2019. *Pace* is now viewed on the Internet, probably most often on a smartphone.

DR: Yes, it is interesting and a bit confounding, that the histories of screendance do not live in a perpetual archive in the way that the creative output of other art forms does. Of course, we all

have personal archives, living somewhere on Vimeo or old hard drives, etc. But, I am not sure that my own work is best accessed in a decontextualized version of internet ephemera. The festival model functions in a way that leads to the virtual evaporation of the work of screendance artists almost as it is being presented. The success of the field is perhaps also its most pressing problem, which is, how do we translate the global phenomena of screendance to some sort of sustainable and flexible, accessible archive? You and I have talked about our shared histories and the way we have navigated our artform over many years. I still am of a mind that, as artists we learn from our histories and that access to a broad archive of work in the field, whether it be painting, quilting or screendance, reinforces the present and offers some kind of foundational knowledge from which to push away from or gravitate toward. A festival recently included my film called, *Of the Heart*, from the mid 2000s, in a 20-year survey of screendance. It was amazing the see the piece in the context of other films from that time frame along with newer work. In such curations, you can see time passing, you can see the changes in the way artists perceive the medium and you can see the threads that persist as we consider bodies on screen across decades. Rosalind Krauss has noted that media-based work does not exist outside of "the replay." I would add that it must also be written into existence by those of us who remember its histories and those who are curating the histories of any moment via the objects and gestures of artists.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH BOB LOCKYER

Bob Lockyer, former executive producer for dance programs at BBC
Television and founding chair of Dance UK, was interviewed by Douglas Rosenberg at the University of Brighton in 2008. This interview was transcribed from video.

Douglas Rosenberg: I'll start off with some history—basic stuff: how did you start; what were you thinking; what was your plan; what happened; how did you get to where you are; how did you get to this point here—?

Bob Lockyer: Well, my professional working life was at BBC television. Television at that time (and I should say that when I left it ceased to be) was a creative medium. Writers were writing for television—the television play. It happened in America, it happened in Europe, it happened in England and elsewhere, but the major problem [was] that choreographers making dance programs weren't getting a chance. There was dance on television, but that was mainly either replays, or things that were brought into the television studio. I mean, it's hard to remember when I started; the idea of videotape was very new. The idea of a digital camera—I don't even know if it was Mr. Sony's dream or not—if there was a Mr. Sony. The first bit of videotape, which I would actually keep in my wallet to show people [was] two inches wide. You couldn't cut it directly, and it cost a vast amount of money. But, I really felt that choreographers, if we could find some choreographers, should use the medium of television. A national broadcasting organization was the only way to do it, because you didn't have lightweight equipment.

Actually, the first chance I had as a director was working with Lynn Seymour on a project, which was based on the poem "The Swan." I've actually got [to get] it out to look at tomorrow—just to see how good or bad it is—because I haven't decided whether I am going to screen it at something. It lasted fifteen minutes, was set to a string quartet, and it was totally created for the camera. In fact, it was much more created for the camera than was planned because, for various reasons, we ran out time and, at the last moment, we had to reduplicate shots to make up the time. The thing was, it was being what I call 'washing line.' The washing line is the music, and then we had to fit the visuals to the washing line; the music wasn't written afterwards.

That was the first thing we did and then [because of] various funding difficulties, nothing else happened; we were bringing in works and making work in the television studio of stage works, but we were not making creative works. That chance came at the BBC when Mrs. Thatcher decided, in her crusade against the BBC, that the BBC had to have twenty-five percent of its output made by independents; that immediately allowed us to go to work with the arts council. And so, dance for the camera was born as a result of Mrs. Thatcher's right-wing attack on the BBC, trying to make production companies make work. That was the birth of dance for the camera.

DR: As far as the starting point . . . it would be helpful to have a date.

BL: You see, it must be . . . I think we're talking the late eighties, I think. I'm terribly bad about dates. I'm just always looking ahead; I'm never looking back. I suppose I should have looked up and seen—but I think it must be the late eighties, early nineties; it's about ten years. Where are we now? About ten or twelve years. Out of that collaboration with the arts council, we made over fifty films; which is quite something.

DR: So let me ask you, because you sort of slid into this notion that dance and television went together, or should go together. Can you go back now and talk a little bit about why? First of all, what was your interest in dance? And second of all, why did you think the marriage would be valuable?

BL: Well, I got into dance because I'm dyslexic. In the days of live television, you had to prompt actors. You prompted actors with a little button that you pressed, and that cut out the sound leaving the studio and leaving the transmitters. So, you gave them a prompt from the prompt corner in the theater. And I got that completely up the spout one day and was sent home from the BBC; it was: "Go home at once!" Then I was called back and they said, "Oh, you must work with Margaret Dale," who was sort of an ex-dancer who worked at the BBC doing dance programs. She mostly brought the Royal Ballet into the studio. But, she worked with [Birgit] Culberg, and various other people, bringing them into the studio to make work, to make television versions of stage works. I started working with her and got involved with Peter Wright, who came in as a television director for a time, before he went back to the theater. I started writing scenarios of short dance films, some of which were made, and some weren't. I just felt absolutely, just strongly, that the choreographic eye was something that was important to bring to the screen. I think there are choreographers who are not interested in it in any way at all; it just does not cross their mind. They don't understand what the camera can do. I mean, I think, it's where the moment of creation happens. In making a dance for the stage—it is in the rehearsal room [first]—then it ends up on stage. In making a film, you have the rehearsal process, the shooting process, and the creation really happens in the cutting room. Certain choreographers are not interested in that process at all. Others of them will just stay there, working away, discovering what one frame, two frames, can do to the whole meaning of the complete film, and are really fascinated by it. That's what we were trying to do—what I was trying to do—was to give them another form of expression.

DR: You're sort of articulating an arc of activity from, more or less, restaging choreographic works for television to—towards the end of your work, which you did at the BBC—creating work out of whole cloth. So, that's quite an arc and the end product is quite different, I think.

BL: Totally different.

DR: So can you talk about how that evolution occurred? And what occurred in that evolution?

BL: Well, I suppose working for a public broadcast . . . I absolutely believe the best stage work should be made available to as many people as possible. And, as the touring costs of dance companies increased enormously, the opportunity of seeing work, I felt, was terribly important.

That's what I mainly did; most of my time at the BBC, I was a director who brought stage works into the studio, and re-created them. But, what I then discovered—that I knew—was the whole idea that screen-time and stage-time is something that is very, very different. [When] you are directing something that then already existed, you had to be very careful not to let the cat out of the bag too early, or you were left with a bag. If you're dealing in a narrative, which is a story line, there were needs for reaction, counter-reaction, because everybody by then had a television, and understood the language of television, and the screen. They understood the screen language, which didn't necessarily work with the stage work. And that's what I was trying to do, was to give choreographers—directors liked to work with choreographers—the opportunity to understand that. [To] use what the screen can do, and what the juxtaposition of shots can do, because the frame is all you have. Whereas, on the stage, you are sitting there and you have no proof where the audience is actually looking. Some people may be looking into the eyes of the person sitting next to them or looking at the stage, but not looking at the center of what the choreographer was thinking about. In a funny way . . . I always said that . . . if you . . . bring a work into the studio, to film a stage work, you actually don't need all those things with the lighting, because the lighting is there to direct the audience at what to look at, what the choreographer wants people to look at. So, in fact, the lighting and the cutting of the script are almost identical.

DR: So where was the transition point, then, for you?

BL: Well, there was never really a transition point, because they both kind of went along in parallel. I mean, the other problem is one of cost. If you were doing a work that was already created, it's actually the creation costs that have been paid for—the dancers have danced them, and worked them. So, if you take something like a Lloyd Newson or DV8 work, "Enter Achilles," which we did, or "Strange Fish," the film versions, which are totally different from the stage versions, which actually came at the end of the production period. They had been produced, they had worked on the stage, they had toured—perhaps in some cases for a year or eighteen months—and then they were re-made with original performers for a film. That process was very exciting and very different, because what happened was, in both cases, the setting of them became totally realistic. In "Enter Achilles," it moved from a strange stage set into an old disused pub—in real spaces—and the dancers re-inhabited this old pub with all its furnishings.

DR: So, how did that happen?

BL: Well, that was a decision that Lloyd made with some discussion with me, mainly on his own. He just knew that what works in the theatrical space would not work in television. You are so used to seeing reality, whether it's a war in Iraq, or you're watching nature programs, it's based on reality. Therefore, that's what he . . . that's how he did it. I think that the whole idea of the theatrical would not have worked; a great ramp stage that lifted up like a craggy mountain at the end is a very theatrical thing. So, the whole thing changed, and in the same way, time-wise, it shrunk from ninety minutes to a television hour. So, forty minutes of the material was cut away, for the reason that one close-up can tell you a lot more than a three-minute dance, perhaps. And that, I think, is something that choreographers have yet [to understand]—that you actually, with small gestures, are telling enormous stories.

DR: When you're talking, I'm thinking of the parallels between what you're describing and literary translations from text, books or fiction, to cinema. There's a . . . I never thought about this before . . .

BL: Yeah, there's a great similarity . . .

DR: Because you're thinking about dance as the original text . . .

BL: Yes . . .

DR: Which is being translated, in a way, in the same way that any other text would be translated . . .

BL: Yes—so yes, I think that's it. Except, often in a dance situation you have . . . the music is actually again, the washing line . . . and you can't take four bars out of the original piece of music, if it's something incredibly well known. But, you can do it if the music has been written and it can be re-written or re-used. I mean, [that was] the advantage of just using Lloyd's piece, as an example. It was a montage, it had a soundscape; you could play with the links of all those things. Cut out a verse, in other words, and lose the two minutes of that [verse], but shorten it all.

DR: So, were you aware . . . was there a consciousness at all of what was going on, what was afoot, when you were making this kind of work? It was a pretty huge change, a pretty powerful cultural phenomenon.

BL: Yeah, I think there was a political move at the BBC at the beginning, which was the BBC as a patron, an arts patron; and that certainly was one of the pushes. Whether that came as a result of what we had done . . . they suddenly started writing about it, and it was in the annual report. As the importance of the BBC as a patron of the arts, whether that came first or we were first . . . . I have a feeling it came after, I think we were leading the way. I mean, I pushed at a slightly open door. I'm not sure that they knew what they were getting, but we succeeded in winning successfully quite a lot of awards with the project, so I think it was quite exciting. But then, politically, it has now completely changed; the whole process of commissioning has changed, and it has sadly fallen off the table.

DR: But, for better or for worse, you created a model.

BL: Yes, yes, we created a model and I was incredibly lucky that I then went around the world talking about it, and teaching it, so I was quite lucky that way. And that, I think, was a bit [of a] strange way, because I was on the staff and getting a salary . . . and there were down times. If I could fill the down times by going somewhere, I was out of their minds and out of the way. So, I was incredibly lucky. I went to Australia and worked with various people there, went to Canada a couple of times, and Bannf, where I met Katrina McPherson, [while] working. I mean, so I was incredibly lucky.

DR: As is everyone else in the community. Again, for better or for worse, you created a model.

BL: We created a model, whether it was the right model or not, I'm not sure. The problem was the one model is then taken up, for good or for worse around the world, you might say, almost. But, I mean, it was a model of plurality—if that's the right word—yes, a plurality of funding. It allowed a broadcaster and two major arts funders, or people, and the company itself, to come in with the amount of money you needed.

DR: So let me just state this question again: For better or worse, your activities, left, or created a model that became the dominant model. If you could reflect on that a little bit and start off by describing what this model is, first of all.

BL: I suppose "Dance For The Camera" created a model—the BBC and the Arts Council created a model, which was taken up around the world. [It] was the idea that teams of people, a choreographer and a director, come up with an idea, a creative idea. They submit that on one side of paper. Originally, they then went away with development money, and if they were lucky with the development [money], they went to the commissioning stage, made the work at the end, and we as the commissioning editors—like in all films—came in, looked at it, accepted it, or didn't accept it. That's it, briefly. The idea was that it allowed [us] to have a large number of people coming in, putting in ideas, and then slowly working down to people who were getting the commission. I think, on the whole, that [it] was quite successful. The problem was, over the ten years, more people wanted to come in, and there was an encouragement of the new people. I think if there was a criticism, it was the old stages, or the people on a learning curve of experience [who] didn't get a chance to have another go, or two goes or three goes. You're not going to make a masterpiece- or perhaps, you are going to make a masterpiece the first time. Perhaps not the second, but it's the third, fourth time [you] begin to understand the language you're working with. I think there was, then, the whole problem of the duration. I think we were all very concerned, but certainly the powers that be at the BBC wanted something that would fill the television slots. And to actually make a twenty-minute dance film—twenty-five, thirty minutes, or whatever the necessary slot—takes a lot of time, and a great deal of money. So that's why fifteen minutes, for example, was the maximum we did for the dance on the camera. We did five and we did nine, and I think the sort of ten-minute slot was the best. [It] was manageable in the budget, and in the time, and actually with the people, working with the people, [they] could actually do [it] with the money that they were given. I mean the thing was that we were absolutely insistent that the creative team actually did get some money out of it. So often in arts things, doing things for love becomes so important; but I think it's important that you actually earned your bottom dollar.

DR: Well, I'm using the term "model," but part of the model . . . once again, if you could go back and sort of talk about this. You described some formal constraints, which lead to the residual effect of, in a way, this sort of short attention span.

BL: Yes, I think I, yes . . .

DR: Do you want to just go with that?

BL: Yes, I'm trying to yes, I suppose, for better or for worse, the dance for camera projects set up a formulaic system. It was very much based on television and the whole idea of television, and sustaining how long people could watch television for. I always think that you don't actually watch television—you listen to it. You move out of the room, you go onto this . . . it's very rare that you sit there glued to the television. You listen to it while you stroke the cat, have a cigarette, glass of wine, or whatever. So, it was working within the formats of television that these projects were devised. And what was fundable, and what was acceptable would get screen time. So that's why they were a series of short, short films, and not hour-long films. Also, budget-wise, one was never going to get a budget that would allow a choreographer to make an hour-long dance film. In fact, I don't think, even now, there is anywhere a choreographer that could make an hour-long dance film without some training, knowledge of the medium. Perhaps there is now. But I don't know . . . whether they would actually want to is another thing. So, I mean, we built this thing, but the other great regret about "Dance For The Camera" was the actual distribution of it. It was designed for television to have one transmission, or two transmissions. And that's all it got, and they were forgotten. The great problem with dance, with dance itself on stage, is that there's no past. If you are a student who is studying dance now, and you want to know who Martha Graham was, then you can dig out the old movies of Martha, because they are actually available. But if you were looking at dance in the United Kingdom, it's very hard to look up, and find footage of the Ballet Rambert, for example, in the fifties, or early Christopher Bruce; all those things are not there for you to look at as a dance student. And I think that is a problem. Also, students of dance for the camera, which now, [there are] seemingly courses are starting up all over the place, they have no idea of the past, or what people have done. The work of David Hinton, and his work "Touch" and "Birds," and those sorts of things, and his work with Lloyd are not really available for study. So, everybody starts new, which I think is one of the great sadnesses.

DR: One of the other things that I wanted to talk to you about a little bit, because I keep coming upon new things, one of the things that I've been thinking a lot about lately, is the nature . . . or not nature, of the actual curating in the screendance community. For instance, a festival shows ten or fifteen films—they have nothing to do with each other; there's no relationship, you have to make a relationship. So, it's like walking through a gallery seeing paintings of fifty different people. So again, for me, it's become the status quo; and for me, it's a big concern. I don't know if you want to talk about that. Things like genres in dance films . . .

BL: I think what we did at the BBC, at the arts council . . . we made a number of films, fifty films; and the development of the work in Australia, in New Zealand, in Canada. Everyone was so excited that they actually made their five films. They were very proud and then showed them, and the idea of dance screen exhibits, and dance screen festivals opened up. And everyone said "how wonderful" or "gosh, how not wonderful." We've now got to the stage where there is a body of work, a considerable body of work. I have no idea how much, but I suppose there must be 5–10,000 small dance films around. But, there's really no one who knows anything about them, or who can get a hold of them. You know, there are a number of curators who curate the festivals, but often their festivals are just screening what has happened in the latest films. They're

not saying, well what I'd like to do is a film series about the work of one particular choreographer/director or however; or one period of time. There is a sense that being able to look at your past, no one is actually looking, and writing, and talking about the art form. And, it's funny that that's what we need to do. We need to be proud of our past and be extremely critical of the work that has gone—but creatively critical about it. We just can't say it's all rubbish, but why we think it is rubbish . . . and writing about how people are using the language, the choreographic language, and the filmic language, and that's not happening. Well, it's not happening as far as I know in the UK, I don't think it's happening anywhere, and that is a great loss. Because, whatever it is, it's actually having a body of work that you can read about things. You can say to people, "here, have you seen this article by somebody?" You can print it off; it may be on the web, but when you print it out and read it, the art form has come of age. At this moment, I don't think we have come of age; we're still in the playroom I think.

DR: It seems to me that much of the feeling, in general, now is simply based on circumstance. So in other words, there's funding for this or that, the circumstance is that it produces some films; or we started a festival, and they've gotten entries from a hundred people. So, the circumstance is that they show these. It's reactive rather than proactive.

BL: Well yes, it's much . . . yes . . . are you going to be proactive, or are you going to be reactive, as you say. I think, you know, it's much easier, in a funny way, to be reactive than it is to be proactive. You know, it's easier to say, "look I've got these twenty-five films which I've discovered, which are wonderful, and we've got to have some money to screen them." That's [more] possible to get together [than to] say "I want to commission these twenty-five people to make films based on—" or whatever the thing, you know the idea, the concept is: loneliness, oneness, whatever; to find that kind of money to commission work, is incredibly hard. It's also the same thing of not having a past; you if you can't get hold of people's films to say, "look this is Laura Taler: I'd very much like to get Laura to make a film about being a refugee, or about being a stranger in a new city." Or whatever the concept is, it's very hard to get, very, very hard—certainly in the United Kingdom. Looking at the cinema, and more and more in television as well, it's a totally written medium, the whole understanding of funding is for the written word. It is the script; everyone can have their opinion on a script it can be re-written—people can talk for hours about 'ands' and 'buts'; and should scene 14a come before14c; and what about if we transport it all to New York, wouldn't that be better because I don't think we can sell it in the Midwest if it's Ipswich in the east part of England, it's got to be in America, and we can give you more money for it. They've got something in their hands that they can work on, but if you're working on a choreographic idea, which is a physical idea, it is incredibly hard to explain what it is. To explain to somebody who has no knowledge of movement, no knowledge of the person you're fighting for, that's the difficult thing. Choreographers, some are wonderfully articulate about their work, and some aren't, and that's the really difficult thing. How do you describe a dance film if you're going off to raise funding for it?

DR: Which would bring up the question, how do you describe a dance?

BL: Yeah.

DR: Once you begin to describe movement, you demystify it, and it becomes . . .

BL: Well, well you know, I was just thinking, Pina Bausch was in London a few months ago with "Café Muller." I think everybody in that audience had a different view about what it was all about. What were those people pushing their way through those chairs, opening those big doors and making their way into the room? What was it all about? Why was it gray, strange, and what was it? That's the wonder of it, is that it's actually working. You know, you switch on the telly and there are the mean streets of New York and the hallowed police car, you are immediately there, knowing where you are. The excitement about pure movement, I think, is that you're not quite sure where you are; although, we might understand so much more than people realize, by how people sit, what they do, how they walk. We know so much about people from that; I mean, body language tells all. Body language is ninety percent of communication. We do know what people are feeling if you go somewhere; you can see whether people are happy or sad; you can tell through body language, and that's what you can certainly do, I think, on film. Dance film is not about dancing on the screen, it's not Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, it's something other than that. It's interesting how little dancing, dance-screen work may have in it. I mean, you [can] choreograph with an eyebrow as excitingly as you can with a *grande jeté* across the stage; in fact, more powerfully. I think there are various moments in big movies where, if you start looking at them, there are sequences where there is no language at all. I'm getting ready to deliver this lecture, I was looking at the *The Leopard*, Visconti's film, and there's this party at the end, which lasts about twenty-five minutes. There's very little dialogue, and what dialogue they have doesn't matter to the story at all. You get the whole collapse of this man, the Prince going down, and suddenly discovering that old age is taking over, and youth is coming in, and the society that he has been brought up in is slowly beginning to collapse. It ends with, well it doesn't end but . . . with a wonderful scene, in close up of Burt Lancaster with a tear just coming into his eye. It is an amazing screen work. I've also looked at *Mon Oncle*, the Jacques Tati film. [In that film], the language doesn't matter; it's not mime, it's the use of real movement, in these cases, real historical settings that are coming to tell you things—telling you a great deal.

DR: So if you were now to describe any situation you want to describe, and see it through, what would you imagine dance film to be? If you could imagine a new era . . . maybe it's the same as before. If you could make it all up, what would your vision be?

BL: I'm not sure what my vision would be. I'm not sure if my vision would be very different from when I started out, which was giving people the opportunity to use the medium, and explore the medium in a new way. I think I would like—if I was given a million- or five-million dollars, or whatever—is to work with two or three people who I admire [and] to carry forward an idea which we could work towards in a different way, which may lead to something, to finding out something new. But, I think it takes time, and it takes creative time, and I think that's certainly, in choreography and in dance screen time, that's not what's there; there is not a possibility of really sitting down and thinking of ideas and storyboarding ideas, which you can then take somewhere. That's what I would like to see. I would like to be given three, twenty-minute films or something;

to commission three people who I admire enormously to make three different projects. I think it might take us into different areas.

DR: I'm also thinking about the transition. Your work was made for television.

BL: It was made for television because that's where I worked, and that's where the opportunities were. Television is this monster that ate material, and instead of showing another ballgame, why don't we show a bit of art? That's really why, I mean, I felt very strongly that the arts should get, and dance in particular, should get their moments of glory on telly.

DR: That's fine . . .

BL: I think what has changed now, is that with multi-screens, with everything, with the digital age, with the lowering of the common denominator, it's become very different. The problem is, you know, the worldwide web and being able to download projects. But, whatever you can do, whether you're pay-to-view or [however] you are going to get that money, that initial money [must come] from someone to make the project. Whatever happens, you may open up the possibilities of screenings. [Wherever] you do it, it's there, and you can see it on your telly, or wherever you watch it: on your mobile phone or your computer. The initial funding has got to be there to make the film. Or, you can go away and of course make something, shoot it on your mobile phone and transmit it on YouTube, or however you do it. Some of it is, I'm afraid, crap; a lot of it is crap. But, it's giving people time, really, to think. Thinking time and development time, which is most important.

DR: So at the beginning, the translation issue . . . for instance, *Laurence of Arabia* was made for the wide screen; it suffers when it's viewed on television. So, the opposite of that: the work that's made for the television screen has been taken, again, fully formed and . . .

BL: Put on the big screen . . .

DR: But when brought into the festival situation and projected really large, there's not much thought about what happens in that translation. Do you know what I mean? I wonder if you have any thoughts about that; the way that dance film has just migrated from one venue to another without some sort of context or consideration; if that's an issue.

BL: I don't mind where it's [screened], as long as it's screened well. I don't mind whether it's appearing on the small screen or a big screen. I object if it's clipping bits off the top, or if it's slightly out of focus, or those things. I'm very surprised sometimes at how good something made for the small screen appears on the big screen. Then again, the amount of what you can get away with when it's only being the tiniest amount of space on your television screen . . . when you blow it up, there becomes, suddenly, a bloody big hole in it or something. You know, continuity goes to somewhere- I don't know. You don't necessarily notice on a television screen, but you do notice when it's blown up large. In the wonderful world of high definition, [there are] going to be even more of those changes; things are going to be made clearer. You know, as the technology

gets better, it shows everything. Whereas in the days where the technology was very simple and very straightforward, it was black and white, or perhaps in color, you could hide an awful lot of things behind it. Now you can see it, if you look at old movies and things. We're now so used to wanting to see it all—warts and all—but that all costs a great deal of money.

DR: You mentioned earlier the Lloyd Newson, the DV8 stuff, which was rife with content—I mean it was deep work. Again, what seems to happen in most, in many, movements, as more and more people come to the form, what lasts *is* form. So it seems like you might see a hundred dance films now—and in my opinion most of them would be more formal: a dancer in the rain, a dancer in a building—without any sort of depth . . .

BL: Yeah I think there is a danger, but I think this has to do with being young, and growing from things you want to do with your friends. You think, "gosh, isn't it wonderful? Where can we go film?" I think if I see another disused factory, where everyone clomps along in a disused factory, everyone seems to have to make their film in a disused factory. A lot of it, no thought is given to it. What is the disused factory bringing to what you're dancing about? You could just take the dance, and put it on stage, and it would be just as viable. In fact, it might be better because what you're doing is just filming a piece of dance. You're not using the film camera to say something different in the editing process. When people say, "Let's record my dance," that's what a lot of people are doing. You've got to make the first dance step you make believable. If it's not believable in the context that you're dancing it in, you've lost your audience straight away. If you lost them, then it's no more than a pop video.

What we are trying to do is something that has more meaning, which requires thought, rather than sitting watching a pop video. I think that's not what people are being taught, or thinking about—the actual contextualization of their movement, and their film—and what the idea [is]. Is there really a true idea, and is theatric movement the way to express this idea, on film or on the screen? And often, that's not it; often, you just have a very nice piece of dance that could have happened on the stage, which people film. What Lloyd Newson did, was take a stage work and the ideas—intellectual ideas—behind the stage work, which may have been two to three years of intellectual study and thought, and rehearsal, and then 18 months of performance with a group of actor dancers, which then was squeezed out and made, condensed down to a piece of screen work. In that condensing down—because that's what the screen does, it condenses down—all you want is a shot of me and a shot of somebody, and there is an interaction taking place that we don't necessarily have to express in a dance way or in a melodic way; so it's actually what dance movement, dance screen movement is . . .

Where does the art form fit in, if it is an art form? It doesn't fit in the world of the cinematic literature. It doesn't fit in the world of television criticism because there isn't any around the world. It doesn't fit with British Film Institute cinema or all those things because it's not cinema. It's not in the movement of the art film business, which is the big business at the moment really. So it has its practitioners, but it doesn't have its supporters and that's the major problem. I think in the next two to three years, [we have] to find a way, [by] finding supporters who will write about it, talk about it and be able to screen it. And then I think it'll be able to grow.

DR: It's, ironically, kind of a blank screen right now . . .

BL: Yeah. Dance film comes out of, and it's part of, the television and the movie business and the role of the producer and the executive producer, in that business is a very creative and important one. And I think that the role of the independent artist working alone in his garret, or her garret, making this product, is quite difficult. I mean, I think if you're a writer, you may well send chapters of your book to somebody you trust to look at. On the screen, I think that there is a sense that you have got to share as a dance filmmaker. If you're making dance film, you've got to share that work with other people in the creative process. Film is a shared creative process. In a funny way, you can now do it on your computer at home in one room. When I started, it was always a community that you were working with—your film editor or your video editor—who were working together. He would suggest things and you would suggest things, and you say, "Well I don't like that, but I like *that*. What if we combine those two?" I think that dance making, films and television programs have always been a community activity . . . And, I think that there is a danger of becoming just a one-man band, a solo thing. You get so focused in on what you want that you cannot necessarily, we say, see the wood through the trees. I think that the use of somebody coming with a clean eye to it is terribly important and that [it] would help a great number of films that I see. I mean, the theater in Europe has dramaturges and things like that, and I think that it's not just an isolated form. It's a people, it's a form where you need input all the time, and I think as much input as you can get makes your film that much better.

DR: We could talk forever. Let me ask you, is there anything that I haven't addressed that you . . .

BL: No, I can't think . . . can I think? No, I don't think there is. Leave that for another time.

MAKING THARP BARYSHNIKOV

Sally Banes, 2000
University of Wisconsin-Madison

In 1977, Twyla Tharp's *Making Television Dance*, an hour-long videotape made in collaboration with director Don Mischer for WNET's Television Laboratory, was aired nationally on PBS. This paper is an analysis of a small portion of *Making Television Dance*, Tharp's brief solo, which ends the screendance event. I will argue that in this solo, Tharp seems to recorporealize herself as Mikhail Baryshnikov, even a Baryshnikov with enhanced powers. Watching the dance now, and thinking about the historical context of the piece relative to the emerging feminist movement of the 1970s, one wonders if she does this partly to assert through her screen-choreography a feminist political stance of women claiming equal rights with men, perhaps even claiming superior powers--as if to say, in this case, "Anything you can do, Misha, I can do better." Yet paradoxically, through her assertion of what one might call masculine "privilege" in a complexly layered gender-bending screen choreography, she also seems to argue for an inclusive androgyny that expands dance roles for both men and women.

In the mid-seventies, when WNET first commissioned her to create *Making Television Dance*, Tharp had reached a turning point in her career as a choreographer. She had moved from the downtown avant-garde (and the university and museum circuit in which some downtown dancers traveled) to commercial and artistic success, and her style and ambitions changed accordingly. In 1972, The Bix Pieces had its premiere at the International Festival of Dance in Paris. That dance, with elegant satin costumes and sensuous, silky dancing set to popular music of the 1920s, was far removed from the rigorous Tharp pieces of the late 60s--which were often complex meditations on mathematical structures danced in silence, for instance, *The One Hundreds*: "a hundred eleven-second segments...performed by two dancers in unison. Then five people each do twenty different segments simultaneously so that the one hundred segments are represented in one-fifth the time, and then one hundred people each do one segment in eleven seconds." The "Studio Introductions" section of *Making Television Dance* graphically traces Tharp's upward career trajectory in geographical and architectural terms, as she rehearses études for the individual members of her company in various dance studios, from her very first tiny and dilapidated studio on Great Jones Street off the Bowery to the high precincts of American Ballet Theatre's rehearsal halls uptown.

By the mid-Seventies, that is, Tharp, working in television and film and receiving commissions from major ballet companies, as well as producing seasons by her modern dance company in New York, had quite consciously become a commercial success--something still disdained by her peers in the downtown dance world. *Making Television Dance* has a distinctively 70s look, not only because of the ways the dancers and film crew dress, wear their hair, and talk, but especially because it mixes raw documentary black-and-white video with polished color images, underscores through both images and commentary the workliness of dance (and art), and intensely emphasizes process over product.

Indeed, we see a great deal of the backstage process of making this piece, but we never do see the entire dance piece performed live. And, of course, that is because this dance piece never existed "live." Studio audiences saw the dancing as it was being filmed, but the piece itself, made for the television screen, is inseparable from what the live studio audience could not see: the camerawork (closeups, long-shots, pans, and so on), the editing, and the video effects (such as keying, retrograde, multiple images, and superimposed freezes). What we, the television audience, see as the finished product--what was ultimately broadcast--is a composite of process and several different "finished" products. For *Making Television Dance* is basically a view of the inside, the not the outside, of a lengthy cine-choreographic process.

Making Television Dance is also very much a piece of the 70s in that it expresses certain feminist values--one of which is a brand of liberal civil-rights feminism, claiming equal rights for women on the dance stage and in the dance profession, as well as in the television studio (where very few women worked as directors) and in intellectual life. Tharp (and other women choreographers of the 70s) claimed equal rights for women by creating dance images of women as intellectual powerhouses. Tharp's work at this time parallels that of "liberal feminism," which sought equal opportunities for women in the workplace, at home, and under the law. In *Making Television Dance*, part of what we witness in the process is that Tharp is very much in charge of the project and, although experimenting with a new form, well on top of her learning curve in terms of dealing with television technology as well as the television crew. Her voiceover commentary, especially, signals her position as a woman who is confident and authoritative, an expert in her profession. In this respect, she claims equal rights with men to be in charge--to direct not only a dance company, but the making of a television program.

Yet I would say that in Tharp's work of the mid-70s one can also see other feminist strands, including a playful commitment to confusing gender codes and appearances, for other reasons than equal rights feminism--for aesthetic as well as moral purposes. Unlike her downtown peers, who created a dance community based on alternative political structures like the collective, where women could flourish in a supportive atmosphere, in the 70s Tharp chose to challenge the gender prejudices of the ballet establishment. She was well aware of the glass ceiling for women choreographers in the hierarchical world of ballet, where even in the twenty-first century, for the most part men create dances and women dance them (along with the occasional male superstar). And yet Tharp's account of her own assertive negotiations with the management of American Ballet Theatre regarding her contract for Push Comes to Shove sounds remarkably like Agnes de Mille's story of her own intransigence when it came to creating Rodeo for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in the early 1940s.

Of course, several of Tharp's works of the mid-1970s -and especially the solo in *Making Television Dance* -have something important in common with de Mille and with Rodeo, in that they set American vernacular country dancing into a ballet context (though in gender-bending ways that de Mille approached with her all-woman cast of the earliest version of *Rodeo* but could not, in the 40s, fully realize). Tharp may also have been inspired by Balanchine's various Americana dances, especially his *Square Dance*, originally choreographed in 1957 but revived for the New York City Ballet just in time for the U.S. Bicentennial in May 1976.

Though she didn't have a caller onstage, as Balanchine had in his *Square Dance*, Tharp's musical choice for the studio event in *Making Television Dance* was what she identifies as bluegrass music--perhaps better characterized as country fiddling closely related to square dance music. In this videotape, one of the things she creates is a screen-squaredance for herself. This, too, bespeaks a 70s sensibility. With the celebration of the Bicentennial and its attendant nostalgia for Americana in 1976, there was an enormous resurgence of square dancing; country dancing, line dancing, and country music were also linked to the bucolic hippie "back to the land" movement (of which Tharp herself briefly partook in the early 70s) and to the Foxfire movement.the 1970s. Indeed, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were known to be avid square dancers. In *Making Television Dance* and in her other works of this period that use country music, Tharp seems to embrace part of that countercultural ethos while also recognizing her need to emerge from it, to move on to a different role--that of a professional woman and serious urban artist (at the same time, she records in her autobiography, she was breaking up with her husband Robert Huot, whose art career she had always deferred to and who now had dropped out to live in the country; the result was that she moved to a downtown loft to become the single working mother of an infant).

In *Making Television Dance,* Tharp's love for both vernacular dancing and ballet dancing combine with her mathematical rigor and her dry sense of humor as she declares the television screen nearly a square and, through video effects, clones herself electronically eight times to dance all the parts in a minimalist square dance.

Before I analyze the solo, I want briefly to discuss the section of *Making Television Dance* in which Tharp and Baryshnikov rehearse *Once More, Frank* (1976), a series of dances Tharp created to Frank Sinatra songs. Television critic John O'Connor, in his review of *Making Television Dance* in the *New York Times*, calls Baryshnikov's presence gratuitous, but clearly it is not. For Tharp is building a visual homology between herself and Baryshnikov in this section, a homology that partly erases their gender differences and partly emphasizes them. That is, they may still be seen as a heterosexual couple, but a couple perfectly equal in stature, literally as well as figuratively, and in dance capacities.

Tharp writes, about the process of choreographing for Baryshnikov: "As though he had ingested my body, he would mime my action perfectly....Misha was an excellent mime and he always loved becoming characters--including me....Actually it was easy for him to pick up my movements because our proportions are uncannily similar." In *Push Comes to Shove*, she seems to capitalize on this mimicry and to transform Baryshnikov, during certain moments, into herself.

But if in *Push Comes to Shove*, she makes Baryshnikov Tharp, in *Making Television Dance*, Tharp performs the opposite operation. In making Tharp Baryshnikov, she takes on a male persona (just as she had earlier in some ways in *The Bix Pieces*). Tharp writes, very explicitly, "I have always felt that one of the things dance should do--its business being so clearly physical--is challenge the culture's gender stereotypes." In the solo section of *Making Television Dance*, Tharp's movements are clearly borrowed from a male repertory, both balletic and vernacular. She has

appropriated for herself what she calls Baryshnikov's "unsurpassed virtuosity in the male domain of ballet--jumps, multiple pirouettes, batterie."

In the solo, Tharp has simultaneously successfully borrowed from male balletic virtuosity and the loping cowboy stance and dance that de Mille's Cowgirl aimed for in *Rodeo*. At a distance (as in the rehearsal of the solo toward the end of the program), it's hard to tell whether this figure is male or female. Though seen in long shot at a distance, because there is also a smaller version of Tharp on screen, she seems to be comparatively large-scale, like a man. She has a short haircut that could serve either sex and is dressed in tight blue jeans, an open-necked white shirt, and shoes with chunky heels (all of which by the 70s were coded as appropriate for either gender). But in terms of country music/country dance culture, to wear blue jeans is to be coded as male. She makes bowlegged leg gestures; flails her arms; takes a wide stance; goes down to the floor to spin; does tight, virtuosic footwork; swivels her pelvis; swaggers; flexes her ankles; and pulls the body up into a sexy freeze. All of these movements are from the country dancing part of the equation, and they are coded as male. Indeed, some of them (for instance, the swagger and the scale of the arm and leg gestures) are marked as male in the larger culture. So Tharp has supplied us with all sorts of signs to read this as a male image.

In the voiceover narration, Tharp identifies herself as coming from the country ("things grow there," she says, marking country roots as vigorous, productive ones) and states that she associates bluegrass music with her father, who himself fiddled occasionally and on family trips would fight with her mother when Mrs. Tharp wanted to switch the car radio to the classical music station. Thus Tharp sets up a gendered as well as a class and national division of culture, in which classical music (and with it, perhaps, classical dancing) is identified as female, European, elite, and boring, while bluegrass music (and country dancing, including square dancing and eccentric solo dancing) is characterized as male, American, folksy, and vigorous. Clearly Tharp is interested in finding dance vigor and thus in poaching in male territory.

In the final version of the solo, Tharp introduces more balletic movements--multiple pirouettes, rondes de jambe, and high kicks or battements--but she has both Americanized them (showing, as she had in *The Bix Pieces*, the close relationship between the vocabularies of ballet and vernacular dancing) and deliberately appropriated them from the male side of the highly gender-coded ballet gamut. Her pirouettes are done with a typically male extended leg that traces a large arc in space as it moves from the front around the body to the back and then closes, rather than staying neatly folded and in place the whole time--as the "working" leg does during the turn in a female pirouette. Her leaps and jumps are large and extended, like a man's, including a big jump in splits, Russian-style. Her arms open wide, like a man's, and she doesn't point her foot, rejecting the canonically beautiful curve of the arched female foot and opting instead for a clunky male country look. In general, her presentation of her body is broad, almost cocky.

"Male movement," then, whether in country dancing or ballet, has to do with taking up space, with large bodily gestures, with the handling of the limbs as a single unit, and with asymmetrical footwork and arm movements, as well as with a certain assertive energy that Tharp taps in the solo. For instance, there is a moment in the solo--after she completes the multiple pirouettes--

when Tharp moves her arms around above her head as she makes large leg gestures. This is an image of spatial dominance and assertive agency that in our culture is coded as male and constrasts strongly with the female-coded dance image of striking a beautiful pose.

The camera, too, creates a "gender advertisement" (to borrow Erving Goffman's term) that at first seems masculine but then becomes complicated in terms of gender-coding. Tharp starts out as a small figure in the frame (mitigating the other masculine signs) and then grows much larger. Yet although her scale in the close shot, as she entirely fills the frame, seems to claim space in ways coded as male (as in the standard male choice to sit with legs wide apart, in contrast to the standard female choice to sit with legs crossed), the camera creates a striking ambiguity--a double coding--regarding gender. As it moves into a close shot, we can see that Tharp's body may in some ways look male (the clothing, the haircut, the movements) but is, indeed, female--closer up, we can now see, in that seemingly androgynous body, her full hips and delicate face. We can see her as <u>both</u> male and female.

With every jump, the image of Tharp frozen in the air lingers on the screen as the dance continues in real time. That is, through the particular video effect used in this section, Tharp ostentatiously appropriates the special trademark of Baryshnikov, known internationally at that time for his elevation and for the way he seemed endlessly to stay poised airborne during his jumps. (Compare Talley Beatty's suspended airborne movements in Maya Deren's *Study in Choreography for the Camera*.) And yet the video effects allow Tharp to surpass Baryshnikov, staying up in the air longer than would be humanly possible, even for that Russian superstar. In this screendance solo, Tharp recorporealizes herself as Baryshnikov, but she becomes a super-Baryshnikov, with augmented powers--powers heightened not by the "magic" so often associated with dance, especially with ballet and its fairytale themes, but by the down-to-earth, assertively feminist, harnessing of science through modern technology, which makes television dance.

Perhaps this "travesty dance," set to her father's favorite music, in some ways allows Tharp to become her father, or her father's favorite son. Perhaps it allows her to become that other father, Balanchine, in her choreographic creation of a brilliant fusion of ballet and vernacular dancing vying with his achievements in *Square Dance* as well as *Agon* and other ballets. Perhaps it allows her to finish de Mille's work by making a Cowgirl who truly becomes a Cowboy. But other aspects of it make clear that Tharp's competitive eye is on Baryshnikov. If in *Push Comes to Shove* he became Tharp, imitating her floppy, fluid, jazzy wiggles, in this solo Tharp becomes Baryshnikov.

And yet, even as she does so, she adds another layer of gender-bending to that recorporealization, mixing male and female, refracting the soft, raggedy movement she gave him in *Push* through a masculine stance--as if she were quoting Baryshnikov quoting her. After seeing *Once More, Frank* in this *Making Television Dance* solo, and even more so if we know *Push Comes to Shove*, we are led to see Baryshnikov as Tharp, and vice versa, and finally, as a result, to see Tharp as Baryshnikov as Tharp. This multiple layering of genders through intertextuality creates a complex image of androgyny that is in tune with the aspect of 70s feminism that challenged gender stereotypes. Rather than creating a twentieth-century version of travesty dancing in

which she "becomes a man," by recorporealizing herself as Baryshnikov in this particular way, Tharp enables both men and women to widen the purview of what they may dance, and to compete aesthetically--to compete in the best sense, for excellence--on a level playing field.

Biography

Sally Banes (1950-2020) was a performer, dance critic, historian, producer, and a pioneer in the field of dance studies. She wrote extensively and her books include the highly influential *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), *Before, Between, and Beyond: Three Decades of Dance Writing* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2007) and *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Duke University Press, 1993).

Twyla Tharp's *Making Television Dance* (1977) and the Technologized Dancing Body
Pamela Krayenbuhl

Abstract:
This article looks at the technologized dancing body on television, particularly in videodance. It asks and begins to answer the question: What were emerging technologies of the late twentieth century able to do with, to, or for the dancing body that was not possible previously, and which built the foundation for the ways today's digital technologies interface with the dancing body? In beginning to answer this question, the article closely examines Twyla Tharp's *Making Television Dance* (1977) and argues that Tharp's piece condenses and summarizes the experiments of videodance during the late twentieth century, highlighting its foundational shift from using technology to exclusively do things *to* the body or extract things *from* it, to instead using the body to interface with and demonstrate the capabilities of a new technology—triggering the machine's capabilities using the body's cues. In other words, videodance reframes the body as a (technologized) tool. Ultimately, this article reveals that late 1960s and 1970s videodance was a transitional interstice between two more enduring forms of screendance: celluloid dance film and digital dance data.

The technologized dancing body has been a topic of much interest, experimentation, and discussion during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.[1] Digital sensors in particular have facilitated the transformation of bodily movement into data, which can then be manipulated to produce many types of outputs, audiovisual and otherwise. By interfacing with data-collecting technologies in this way, the dancing body itself arguably functions as a kind of technology. Hilary Bergen has recently argued that such a technologized dancing body appears at *both* the dawning of the twenty-first century *and* the dawning of the twentieth. Though they are products of vastly different historical moments, governed by analog versus digital media, for Bergen, dancing bodies at the turn of both centuries become cyborg-like through their technologization.[2] In this article, I am interested in the transitional period between these two modes, just before the dominant twentieth century medium of celluloid film gives way to the dominant twenty-first century medium of digital data. During this transitional period, which extended from the mid-1960s to the late 1990s, some choreographers experimented with early sensors and mixing boards, as in Merce Cunningham's 1965 *Variations V*, which used both capacitance devices designed by Robert Moog and photocells designed by Bell Laboratories engineer Billy Klüver to sense dancers' bodies and create sonic outputs. More often, choreographers experimented with newly emergent audiovisual synthesizers. Indeed, this was also the period during which there was a (relatively brief) explosion of interest in video art, including videodance—which was viewed not on the big silver screen, but on television.

For me, the most compelling question about this period of televisual experimentation and transition toward the digital is: What were emerging technologies of the late twentieth century able to do with, to, or for the (technologized) dancing body that was not possible previously, and which built the foundation for the ways today's digital technologies interface with the dancing body? Of course, dance had already been "on television" for years. In the United States, dance was a common component of variety (often nicknamed "vaudeo" by combining vaudeville + video) programming from the late 1940s onward. But while individual dancers gained experience modifying their chorography from its proscenium stage origins for the television stage and its multiple cameras, dances designed specifically

for or *with* television were rare until at least the 1960s. By this point, film had already proven itself capable of interacting with the dancing body in innovative ways. Epitomizing the earlier celluloid era, Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) crucially demonstrated the ways that film as a medium can extend the capabilities of the human body through techniques such as editing (especially the most basic element of editing: the cut) and recording speed (which can produce fast motion and slow motion). However, film tends to merely record an image of the body. While this image can be manipulated, as Deren demonstrates, there are limits on both the level of detail and type of information recorded, and on how much that information can be manipulated. Film also holds temporal limitations; its image cannot be changed "live," in real time. The emergence of video, based in magnetic tape read by electronic scanners (rather than strips of emulsified celluloid projected with light), expanded the range of possible corporeal manipulations both visually and temporally. In this article, I look to modern dance choreographer Twyla Tharp's 1977 hour-long television special *Making Television Dance*, created at the WNET "Television Laboratory" in New York City, to begin to answer my opening question in greater detail.

Through *Making Television Dance*, I argue that dance experiments with analog television, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, represented a crucial chapter in the history of the increasingly technologized moving body. Though rarely discussed in either television scholarship or dance scholarship, *Making Television Dance* was explicitly interested in uncovering what the marriage of dance and television (as distinct from film) made possible formally and technologically. The special crystalizes ways of explicitly using the body as a tool that can control and change the visual outputs that result from its data inputs—much in the same way Cunningham's *Variations V* understood the body as controlling possible sonic outputs a decade prior, but also in the same way that motion capture technology would produce more complex outputs two decades later. It thus exemplifies this moment of possibility and televisual experimentation, innovating new ways to think the body that were foundational to later experiments with digital technologies. It also highlights the role of public broadcast television in supporting and enabling much of the cutting-edge work in the realm of U.S.-based videodance. Funded by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and sometimes other state or national sources, major public television stations such as KQED in San Francisco, WNET in New York City, and WGBH in Boston, developed laboratories and workshops where artists could access cutting-edge television technology and create what the WNET TV Lab called "experimental television," i.e. video art. *Making Television Dance*, additionally funded by the New York State Council of the Arts & the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, was one of many projects commissioned by the TV Lab under this charge.

Thus, Twyla Tharp was not the only artist engaging the relationship between television (or video) and the dancing body during this period. In a 2021 videodance retrospective (offered via streaming, due to the COVID-19 pandemic), SFMOMA highlighted three representative works: *Assemblage* (1968), created by Merce Cunningham and former dancer/television producer Richard Moore for KQED San Francisco; Part I of *Merce by Merce by Paik* (1975-1976), created at the WNET New York Television Lab by Merce Cunningham and video artist Charles Atlas; and *Fractured Variations / Visual Shuffle* (1986), created by video artist John Sanborn, choreographer Charles Moulton, and Mary Perillo for the Minneapolis-St. Paul KTCA series *Alive from Off Center*.[3] All were made possible by the resources and willing engineers of local public television studios. Notably, while not credited as an author on any of these works, video artist Nam June Paik either assisted with or inspired all of them. Paik is often hailed as the "father of video art," in part because he developed some of the first video synthesizers in the 1960s with engineer Shuya Abe (usually at public television stations). These synthesizers became the default technologies of both video art throughout the 1970s–80s and music video in the 1980s–90s. Though not a dancer or choreographer himself, Paik often centered dance in his work and frequently collaborated with Merce Cunningham (Paik contributed live video manipulations to

Variations V). His highly influential *Global Groove* (1973), created in collaboration with WNET lead engineer John Godfrey, used both modern dance and traditional Korean dance as part of its vision of a televisual future. He also collaborated with fellow video artist Shigeko Kubota to create Part II of *Merce by Merce by Paik* (1978), which further digs into the relationships between dance, time, movement, and electronic art. Paik and Cunningham are thus the two most prominent figures in the 1970s videodance scene, each having created multiple works together and in collaboration with others.

As is well-known, Cunningham went on to experiment with digital technologies, including early motion capture, later in his career. He thus may at first seem like the throughline whose works from 1965–1999 might best demonstrate the slow transition from the dancing body merely filmed to the dancing body as a fully technologized data controller. Broadly speaking, this is true, but it is precisely because Cunningham's experimentation is spread out across so many works that it is difficult to pinpoint individual developments. For example, his first forays into videodance experimentation, "A Video Event" (1974) for *Camera Three* with WCBS director Merrill Broadway and *Westbeth* (1975) with Charles Atlas, only implicitly engage with questions regarding video as a medium or technology. While all of the documentation on *Westbeth* describes it as comprising six sections, each addressing a fundamental question about video,[4] the questions and their interrogation are not particularly apparent in the video work itself, as it lacks narration and/or intertitles naming them. Tharp, on the other hand, experimented with emergent technologies far more rarely. As such, *Making Television Dance* consolidates many of the key concepts being interrogated by videodance throughout the period and makes them explicit through both her narration and onscreen text.

Most previous writers on videodance have been primarily interested in the unique dance artistry that can result from the choreographed body and a choreographed camera.[5] But some have more systematically conceptualized the key ways in which electronic media have intersected with and affected dance.[6] Vera Maletic, writing in 1987, outlines the ways that "spatial, temporal, and qualitative components of movement and dance, and of the media technology are correlated and… interdependent."[7] As one might expect, the spatial elements have to do with the size and vector of a corporeal movement as well as the camera distance, angles, and movements, while the temporal aspect has to do with shot duration and movement phrasing. The "qualitative" element introduces the range of special effects that video artists have at their disposal, which perhaps do the most to distinguish the "electronic" body from the live body. Though this classification seems simple and intuitive—spatial, temporal, qualitative—it sets up an implied equivalence between the body and the camera as technologies interacting, which is the framework through which both Tharp and I develop our understandings of videodance.

My focus here tracks the ways in which videodance, as exemplified by *Making Television Dance*, often prioritized technological possibility over artistry per se. This approach, across the works made at the TV Lab and even beyond it, was very much driven by the mission of the Lab itself. In the words of TV Lab Director David Loxton during a 1973 interview with writer-artist Jonathan Price, "The Lab is supposed to be doing a totality of experimentation, and an analysis of what television is now, and hopefully, through some of the things we do, of what television could become. We do a lot of video art because I feel television should have its unique grammar and vocabulary of expression. So in letting an artist explore the possibilities of television, we're hoping that out of that will come a much broader understanding of what television can be."[8] In line with this mission, Tharp works with bourgeoning director Don Mischer to explore a spectrum of bodily and/or technological capabilities in *Making Television Dance*; because of her own expertise in dance, the more familiar piece of the equation for her is the body, so she uses the body as a vehicle to experiment with video technology. Indeed, in the introduction she insists, "I wanted to make something that would be at least as much television as it was dance." Many of the abilities she highlights during the work, such as speed and repetition, are shared by both the human body and electronic video technology. The difference between the two is one of

degree, so the video intervention allows the body to exceed human limits in each category. But at the same time, the dancing body seems to be as active an agent in the process as the video synthesizers used in the Lab, or perhaps even more so; as the title itself implies, it is the body actively *making* television dance rather than merely "Dancing with TV." This word choice is the first of many ways that Tharp insistently highlights the *labor* of the dancing body, even as it is mediated and technologized—it is worth noting that critics today often highlight the lost sense of labor in today's technologized dancing bodies.

Over the course of her six-month residence at the TV Lab, Tharp developed "20 minutes of original dance for television;" editor Aviva Slesin then wove in pieces of the 60 hours of creative process footage that documentarian Joel Gold had recorded on half-inch black-and-white tape.[9] In its construction, the program thus blends the grammars of documentary and video art; though it is largely composed of Gold's "behind-the-scenes" footage of in-studio rehearsals, backstage preparations, and video editing sessions, these scenes blend seamlessly into the edited "final" videodance product with freeze-frames, multiplied images, and so forth. The hour is structured as a series of dances. After an introductory segment that multiplies a single dancer by 8 different cameras to perform every role in a "square dance," the program offers four "études," or studies, on "work" titled "Speed," "Repetition," "Focus," and "Retrograde." The program then includes a brief rehearsal duet by Tharp and Mikhail Baryshnikov, "One For My Baby," (part of a larger 1976 work called *Once More, Frank*).[10] The remainder of the show consists of the rehearsal and performance process for *Country Dances* (1976), ending with a brief solo finale where Tharp meditates on "borderlines." Perhaps surprisingly, Tharp chooses to take advantage of relatively few of the televisual manipulations offered by the synthesizers at the TV Lab; though we see a glimpse of the additional potentialities in the introductory footage, the études and other dance material utilize only a handful of the less intrusive effects. *Making Television Dance*'s resultant videodancing body is ultimately quite similar to a flesh-and-blood body, technologized but not always distinguishable from its unenhanced source body. This choice again seems to highlight the "work" undertaken by the body, refusing to obscure the physical labor of dance with too many electronic bells and whistles.

The most instructive portion of the work for understanding the body as technologized, even a technology itself, are the four études (studies). Importantly, the framing of these four segments as *études* echoes both the classical musical form (imported into classical ballet) of the étude, and the similar framing of Maya Deren's aforementioned *A Study in Choreography for Camera*. In all cases, the goal is to test limits, identify and demonstrate the most salient or generative features of the medium, and provide a model for others to emulate or practice in order to develop the concomitant skills for expression in said medium. While Tharp does attempt to emphasize this need for a (video)dance artist to practice through the use of site-specificity, each of her carefully chosen New York dance studios appear relatively alike in the video itself. Though she clearly articulates the meaning they carry for her (especially with regard to *work*), little of that meaning translates in the image. Instead, these interchangeable studio spaces fade into the background as the video asks us to focus on—*study*—these electronically enhanced dancing bodies.

The first étude, "Speed," theoretically engages an aspect of movement that film had long manipulated prior to the invention of the video synthesizer, as demonstrated by Talley Beatty's mesmerizing turns in *A Study in Choreography for Camera*. However, "Speed," danced by Shelley Washington, also demonstrates video's ability to multiply the body.[11] The segment includes two versions of Washington's body dancing simultaneously: the sped-up and the slowed-down. Each moves—or, *works*—in partial overlap with the other, meeting in moments of pause and then separating again. Washington performs a series of jumps and turns; the choreography calls for little traveling but instead emphasizes the shift between levels (up in the air, standing, low to the ground). This allows the viewer to more clearly distinguish between the versions of her body, because they are close together

yet visually separated into the higher and lower planes. Though Tharp states in voiceover that "video technology was called upon to expand the problem of each étude," the electronic interventions in this case only rarely speed up or slow down Washington's body past the range of human ability. One can only be absolutely certain of video manipulation toward the end of the sequence, when she freezes mid-jump.

Image 1: Shelley Washington performs the "Speed" étude, and the video synthesizer freezes one version of her mid-jump.

Otherwise, it is difficult to tell whether we are seeing Washington's "natural" or perhaps "unenhanced" body moving, or an electronically altered version of her. In a sense, then, the body inscribes a set of instructions in this étude, providing "slow" or "fast" sequences for the video synthesizers to enhance by making them even slower or faster.

"Repetition," danced by Tom Rawe, is study of endurance. More clearly highlighting the dancer's labor this time, Tharp introduces the segment with the statement, "Tom Rawe understands work." She goes on to explain her intentions for the piece: "It is an experiment. Sometimes I want to find physical boundaries exactly the way an athlete or scientist wants to explore what is physically possible. How high can somebody jump? How long can they go? How fast is humanly possible?" While this last question in

particular may seem to more properly belong to the previous étude on speed, taken together with the other questions it helps to explain dance's need for repetition in the form of training, practice, and rehearsals. Only through continual repetition can we as humans build enough strength and skill to test the limits of our bodies. Thus, the electronic multiplications of Rawe in this study do not perform the same choreography at different paces, but rather each iteration of him 'gets stuck' in a repeated loop of a single, particularly difficult movement while another moves on to perform the rest of the variation. One Rawe, for example, repeatedly performs 'clap' pushups. It is unclear whether "live" Rawe did the extra pushups himself or whether the video copied them for him.

Image 2: Tom Rawe performs "Repetition:" one Rawe does clap pushups while another, fainter Rawe, remains upright.

Similarly to Washington's ambiguously mediated body in the previous étude, this leads us to ask: which technology is at "work" here? Is it muscles or electronics or both?

The third étude, "Focus," is performed by Jennifer Way, who Tharp describes as possessing "precise and clear technique." In describing the governing mechanism for this segment, Tharp reveals the extent to which each étude title is designed to be a play on both the body's and the camera's capabilities—in this case, "focus" has a distinct meaning in each context. At the level of the dancing

body, focus refers to attentiveness and precision in one's performance (also drawing the eye of a viewer and thus their "focus" as well), but at the level of the camera, it refers to visual clarity (as opposed to fuzziness) and framing. More clearly than she had in the previous two études, Tharp tells the viewer what to notice in this juxtaposition of two Jennifer Ways: "She performs one phrase twice. Both performances are seen simultaneously. In tight focus, she begins small and releases her movement as the camera pulls back. The other rendition commences very large, a performance designed to project to a distant camera, then recede as the camera moves in." Thus, while the basic steps are the same, Way executes them differently in the two performances, flipping which she keeps small for a tight-focused camera and which she opens up for a looser-focused camera.

Image 3: Jennifer Way performs "Focus," with one version of her doing a leg movement "small" for a camera in tight focus and the other version doing it "big" for looser focus.

For the viewer, Way's second performance is mirrored, such that the layered bodies sometimes seem to be facing—and therefore dancing with—each other, while also (in a sense) dancing with the camera. What is striking about the particularly rule-bound nature of the camera here is that the body's performance choices (doing a movement "big" versus doing it "small") directly govern the camera distance—even more so than Washington's body did in the "Speed" étude. In a way, these rules are a

very basic set of programming commands, such that the body provides the inputs and the camera provides the outputs. Put differently, the body here is a tool that calibrates the camera without actually touching it. While the camera movements and editing here are by no means unique to video, and are just as easy to execute on film, the structure of the rules mirrors the basic functionality of electrical signals.

The final étude, "Retrograde," most clearly highlights the difference between the flesh-and-blood dancing body and the technologized dancing body. The segment is danced by Christine Uchida, who Tharp describes as "genuinely graceful" and lyrical as a dancer. It explores Tharp's contention that "any movement that can be danced forwards can also, with practice, be danced backwards." In this segment, the Uchida on the left side of the screen dances a sequence of choreography normally ("forwards") and then reverses it physically; the Uchida on the right side of the screen dances it only "forwards" and then it is reversed mechanically.

Image 4: Christine Uchida performs "Retrograde," with the version of her on the left physically reversing an *arabesque promenade* and the one on the right mechanically reversing it—this is a rare moment of synchronicity.

Per Tharp's voiceover,

> The exercise was designed so that, at a certain point, the Chris on the left would meet up with the Chris on the right, and the two of them go backwards together so that one might compare physical, literal going-backward-ness with machine going-backward-ness and see how they differ. Thus seeing what is physically possible and what is physically impossible, but conceptually correct. This is the real dichotomy that I find fascinating about television: it can come closer to a conceptual rendition of movement in space than actual dancing. *You* cannot retrograde gravity. The machine *can* retrograde gravity, so that the mechanical flow of Chris going backwards is accurate, but it's physically impossible. It's right, but it's wrong.

This appears to be the first and only time in the études where a truly "impossible" human body is created, and it's hard to spot, even if you're a dancer. This is partially due to the fact that the two "reversals" occur at a slightly different pace, so it is difficult to undertake a precise 1:1 comparison. But when Tharp says the intervention of video here is "right but it's wrong," she implies that she believes in some sort of innate superiority or correctness about the flawed way that a human on Earth reverses movement, thanks to gravity. So in this moment, the body is finally just the body, an organic being affected and limited by "nature"…until one looks to the right a bit and sees the body as modified by the machine. But Tharp is careful to highlight this divide as the crux of it all; this is precisely where the dancing body becomes an "inferior" technology, but still perhaps Tharp's preferred one.

Image 5: Tharp and Mikhail Baryshnikov perform "One More for the Road;" this is a rare moment where both dancers' faces are visible in the cramped frame.

The remainder of the special largely cleaves to the more traditional kinds of screendance that other scholars have written about at length; that is, they are performances with hybrid aesthetic aspirations whose art lies more in the dance *between* the body and technology, rather than playing with the body *as* a technology. Tharp's duet with Mikhail Baryshnikov is about the intimacy that is possible with the video camera. As Tharp explains, "'One More For the Road' was intended to be very quiet and very contained. A private dance conceived more for the single viewer sitting comfortably at home than for one seated in the back (or the front) of a 4,000-seat house. A piece to be seen up close. There's nothing happening with the arms and the legs. I didn't make anything for the arms and the legs; it was made more for the void between us." In practice, the footage is cramped and the movements are hard to follow, and there is a sense that the cameraperson wasn't always sure where to move or point the camera. The intended intimacy is absent because the figures never look into the camera lens and only sometimes look at each other, perhaps because they are used to performing on a stage. Still, there is a clear sense of simple proximity if not closeness, emphasized by a relatively stationary camera and no manipulations by the synthesizer.

"Country Dances," on the other hand, is edited using a wide range of effects and as a result takes on a somewhat phantasmagorical quality.

Image 6: The dancers perform "Country Dances," with the synthesizer infinitely multiplying their bodies as they do so.

Though filmed before a live audience, and though it had been performed live both before and after the taping, the version of "Country Dances" presented in *Making Television Dance* is very different from a live performance. The technologized bodies (of those same four dancers from the études) sometimes appear as "normal," performing their *square* dance while audience members look on from its sides. But almost as often, the videodance cuts to impossible versions of these dancers—confined in a wavy cutout, infinitely multiplied on the screen, or engulfed by ghost-versions of themselves.

Tharp's solo, at the end of the piece, is seen twice—once partially on the stage with the audience, partially through the monitors backstage, and a second time in an empty *square*, which apparently required multiple takes. This second version includes several moments where one Tharp is frozen mid-air as another continues moving. She is careful to leave in footage of herself completely out of breath in between takes, reminding the viewer once again of the intensive labor involved in the dance, despite the fact that technology tends to obscure said labor. Of course, this time the viewer is not guided by Tharp's voiceover or onscreen text, so beyond the playful parallel squares of square dance

and television, the viewer is left as uncertain of the conceptual interrogations here (as in Cunningham's *Westbeth*, for example). But afterwards, the viewer is granted more behind-the-scenes access through Gold's documentary footage; Tharp and Mischer are seen playing back the footage at the Television Lab with engineers, discussing which types of effects to enact on the dancers' bodies at which points. Afterwards, there is a cut to example footage enacting what they discussed. Though we never see the fully edited finished product (perhaps it never was finished), we glimpse flickering, strobing effects, splitscreen, and a cannon of cuts. Certainly television is being made to dance here, but these are effects added on top of the dancers' performance rather than essential aspects cued by the individual bodies or their choreographies.

In these cases, bodies serve less as technologies, active partners in producing outputs, than as what the dancing body usually is: a partner in artmaking. The form of "One More for the Road" and "Country Dances" is similar to that of the experiments by Merce Cunningham, Nam June Paik, and others from the same era. Here and in many such works of videodance, the bodies seem to be minding their own business, moving or dancing along, and it's the camera that is somehow intervening and transforming the bodies. In other words, the dancing bodies are more passive and video technology is acting upon those bodies, rather than the body offering instructions or protocols for the technology to apply and follow.

Tharp's final meditation on "Borderlines," which closes out the special, performs a return to the body as a more active partner technology, and is the clearest precursor to digital sensor-based technological processes such as motion capture. This sequence, Tharp's voiceover explains, is about "the moment when something comes into being." We first see an establishing shot of Tharp wearing a leotard, in a studio space—this is the source image's "input." As her voiceover begins to explain "Borderlines," we see the output: an abstract, outlined version of Tharp against what appears to be a horizon line (presumably where the floor meets the wall). Similar to a shadow "silhouette" (which Tharp briefly mentions) but produced by an entirely different process, the outlined Tharp is so simplified and reduced that it is sometimes hard to see it as a body.

Especially because we are shown only part of her corporeal outline, this final scene verges on a mere play of undulating lines. Explaining how she envisioned this, Tharp speaks the final "line" of the piece: "As the movement continued, it would pass into another realm, and then it would simply sink out of sight and return to the single line which would then fade out and you'd be back into to black and we could go back to radio, which is where I think communication happens best anyway." The slight snark and irony of the final comment notwithstanding, Tharp here seems to ultimately be most interested in reducing electronic movement to its most basic parts—a line in "another realm," outside the one flesh-and-blood humans occupy. This is rather how early motion capture outputs looked as well, reducing complex movements to individual points and lines. Acting as a technology, her body intentionally provides the types of lines she wishes the video equipment to render, controlling the inputs until she dips below the "horizon" line as the final output before nothingness.
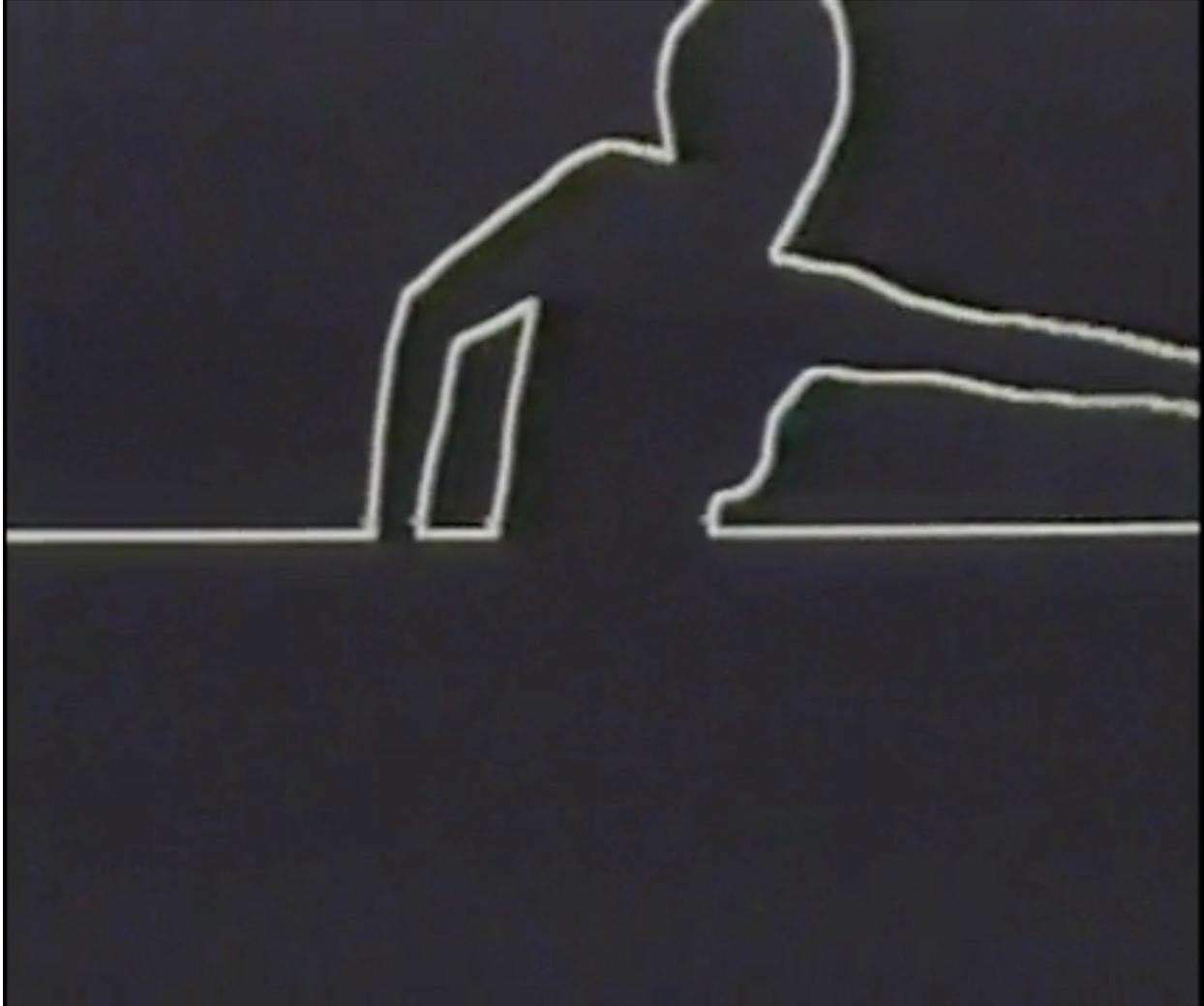
Image 7: Tharp's outline-self in "Borderlines," set against the straight horizon line into which she will soon collapse.

Making Television Dance thus condenses and summarizes the experiments of videodance during the late twentieth century, highlighting the foundational shift that shaped how we now think the body in the digital age: as itself a technology. That is, rather than using technology to exclusively do things *to* the body or extract things *from* it, or even simply change the way we see it, Tharp's études and "Borderline" experiment with using the body in its extremes (its fastest, its most enduring, its most precise, its most simplified, etc.) to interface with and demonstrate the capabilities of a new technology, to trigger the machine's capabilities using the body's cues. The result is *extending* and *enhancing* the body's existing abilities with technology rather than manipulating the body as a passive object. Tharp's 1977 experiments therefore allow us to think through not only how electronic video cameras represented a shift from celluloid film cameras with regard to their means of capturing or recording bodily movement, but also how to make sense of our bodies' relationship to more contemporary technologies. Though the labs in which dance-technology experiments are now conducted are not *television* labs, attached to public broadcast stations, they are still a place to be asking questions about agency. How does our role change as screen-adjacent technologies become increasingly interactive, immersive, and even invasive? How do we retain our humanity even as we surrender ourselves to the realm of interfaces that demand our participation? Perhaps, Tharp seems to suggest, the answer lies not

in what technology can do to us, but what we can do to technology—force it to follow our rules and stop obscuring our labor.

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[1] See, for example, the special section on "Digital Performance" edited by Johannes Birringer in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 24.1 (January 2002) and the collection *Transmission in motion: the technologizing of dance,* ed. Maaike Bleeker (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

[2] Hilary Bergen, *Dancing Media: The Contagious Movement of Posthuman Bodies (or Towards A Posthuman Theory of Dance)*, PhD diss. (Concordia Univ., 2022).

[3] See https://www.sfmoma.org/exhibition/dances-for-camera-merce-cunningham-nam-june-paik-john-sanborn/ for a record of SFMOMA's online exhibition "Dances for Camera: Merce Cunningham, Nam June Paik, John Sanborn."

[4] See "Westbeth," www.mercecunningham.org/media; Roger Copeland, "Cunningham, Cage, and Collage" in *Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance* (Taylor & Francis, 2003), 160; and David Vaughan, "Merce Cunningham's Choreography for Camera" in *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*, ed. Judy Mitoma et al. (Routledge, 2002), 35–36.

[5] See, for example, Sherill Dodds, *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (Oxford University Press, 2010); and Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

[6] Such analyses were far more common during the early videodance era than they are today. An excellent example of this type of work is Richard Lorber, "Toward an Aesthetics of Videodance," *Arts in Society* 13.2 (Summer/Fall 1976). See also Vera Maletic, "Videodance – Technology – Attitude Shift," *Dance Research Journal* 19.2 (Winter 1987/1988).

[7] Maletic, "Videodance – Technology – Attitude Shift," 3.

[8] Jonathan Price, "An Interview With: Lab Director David Loxton," *The Television Laboratory at WNET-13 News* 1.1 (August 1973), 4.

[9] *The Television Laboratory at WNET-13 News* (Winter 1977), 7.

[10] Though the official Twyla Tharp website (www.twylatharp.org) names the televised segment "One For My Baby," Tharp refers to it during the special as "One More For the Road."

[11] Though rarely attempted and much more difficult than it is on video, films have occasionally multiplied the dancing body using mattes and optical printing processes. See, for example, the multiplication of Fred Astaire's shadow in *Swing Time*'s "Bojangles of Harlem" number (1936), and Gene Kelly's "Alter Ego Dance" with himself in *Cover Girl* (1944).

Odissi on Screen: A Meditation on Regional Television
Kaustavi Sarkar

Abstract

This article aims to interrogate the role of the television screen in creating, re-creating, disseminating, and deconstructing the dancing body. It presents a study of the contemporary landscape of odissi dance, a nationally recognized Indian traditional art form from the eastern Indian state of Odisha, through its on-screen representation. As an odissi soloist, I register, analyze, and interpret screenic data, mainly televised interviews of dancers, live telecasts of dance festivals in Odisha, and performances recorded for the camera in the studios. I focus on content primarily broadcast on the state-owned satellite channel broadcasting in Odia, the official language in Odisha. My position is of a *Sahrdaya,* an observer tutored in the codes and conventions of the art form and critically responsive to the structure of emotion in the presentation. I locate the dancing body across discursive, disseminative, and choreographic renditions. This subjective positioning, I argue, democratizes the expressive ethos of odissi embodiment. Commenting on the contemporary curation of the dancing body by the state network, this essay brings larger questions around the representation of gender, sexuality, caste, and regionalism on the television screen.

Keywords: odissi, regional television, public network, aesthetic reception, *Sahrdaya,* Advaita Vedanta

Introduction

Indian dance practices maintain a historically significant connection with television, building a measure of cultural consciousness that presupposes aesthetic judgment—one that is deeply ingrained within social hierarchies across class, caste, gender, sexuality, and regional identity. Built on grounds of education, information, and entertainment, state-owned television has made available its archival content since 1970 for educational purposes. On technical grounds, untrained camerawork often cut out the dancers' hands and feet, and failed to capture poignant facial expressions in the weekly half hour of telecast by national programming from the Indian capital of New Delhi. In addition to the central government owned broadcasting, there are seventeen regional satellite channels. Regional and national television have not always presented a monolithic voice. In her extensive research on dance in Indian media, dance scholar, Pallabi Chakravorty notes that "to counter the cultural domination of Delhi, regional centers like Calcutta Doordarshan reformulated the propagation of the national narrative and identity formation through their own vernacular versions of high culture."

Furthermore, the private funding of channels holds commercial interests in exploiting dance, emphasizing degrees of viewership and popular appeal. The profusion of reality television in India today presents an eclectic microcosm of Indian and international dance forms, where the dramatic, acrobatic, and spectacular appeal of the dance occludes the organic oeuvre as propagated by the state-owned network that historically prioritized classical Indian dances as high culture. In her book-length inquiry on the cross fertilization of Hindi movie industry with its song-and-dance-sequences and dance competitions held on reality television, *This Is How We Dance Now! Performance in the Age of Bollywood and Reality Shows,* Chakraborty theorizes this phenomenon as a democratic maneuver. She argues that the commercial avenue has allowed for technological acquisition and dissemination of knowledge in the arts while noting its democratic ethos and welcoming its opportunities for class mobility. This neoliberal trend of literal and metaphorical spatial and social mobilization through the creative potential and an imaginative dream-

come-true ethos of visual spectacle painting larger-than-life characters colors dance on contemporary Indian television. Televised medial transmission of movement has historically featured elitist dance practices through gradations for different pay-scales representing a select few dance forms. Contemporary trends have complicated this convention by busting existing myths about cultural monoliths and creating new conventions that are both technologically and commercially motivated.

This article focuses on contemporary aesthetic trends in the field of odissi dance, an eastern Indian traditional art form from the state of Odisha (also a recognized classical dance), through its representation on regional television channel DD Odia, the state-owned entertainment channel in Odisha. Odissi is known for its curvilinear folds and circular geometries evoking the oceanic appeal of the Bay of Bengal that washes the shores of Odisha. The Odishan coastline continues to feature in odissi's presence on screen. This connection was made clear in the presentation of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram,* a self-proclaimed Broadway-style ensemble piece created by choreographer/ performer Saswat Joshi for the celebration of DD Odia's foundation day. Joshi's company, *Lasyakala Dance Vision* presented cultural iconography from Odisha through embodied tableaus while a series of moving images were projected in the backdrop. The song accompanying the dance felt contemporary with technologized beats departing from the traditional music repertoire. In Joshi's real-time telecast of live performance of odissi movement in front of projected imagery of Odishan landscape, a live audience frames the concert style performative ethos although a larger online audience appreciates, engages, comments, and interacts through the social media loop. There is a strong feedback loop across social media and Odia television that is outside the scope of this essay.

Here, I position myself as an odissi dancer in this negotiation of bodies and screens, aesthetics and sensibilities, and, finally, in conventions and their departures. As an observer, I am cued to decoding the intricacies of the art form while being moved by its emotional seduction. In that capacity, I am a *Sahrdaya,* meaning the one who relishes the presentation through its emotive content, often connecting the narrative and the embodied elements that communicate and deliver a certain sense of meaning that is finally co-created by the viewer. This subjective positioning, I believe, democratizes the expressive ethos of the odissi embodiment making emotive, metaphorical, poetic, and discursive contextualization. Expression is defined across the physical, the verbal, the emotional, and the visual representation. Conventional modes prioritize the emotional at the cost of the remaining three. With the camera's pedantic intrusion focusing on close-ups of the face, the hands, the feet, and other dynamic elements of the body, there is aesthetic attunement towards the entirety of the dancing body as opposed to having a lop-sided onus of meaning-making on facial expression.

My methodology rests within a dialectic of active deconstruction and recuperation of aesthetic theory undergirding the dancing body caused due to the tension between live performance and screened performance. Highlighting this experienced tension segues to surfacing the constructed nature of meaning-making in movement always already inflected by the medium under consideration. My research focuses on screenic dissemination of odissi movement since 2021. I focus on looking at online archives of odissi dance, mainly on *You Tube,* of DD Odia that was launched in 2009. To supplement my viewing, I also analyse programming connected to odissi, mainly through interviews of dancers on private channels, namely, Kanak TV (launched in 2009) and Prameya News7 (launched in 2015). Through this research, I build upon my existing research on changing discursive trends in the field of South Asian dance studies during and after the Covid-19 pandemic published in an article-length inquiry, "Chhapaka: Toward Online Embodiment and Discursive Shifts in Indian Dance." Through *Chhapaka,* a sling-shot movement unique to odissi, I portray how movement is disrupted and disrupts apparently seamless online pivots from live dancing to the screen. In this essay, I extend my analysis primarily to the screenic interface noting the

disruption of traditional logic and embodied construction due to the visual collage, where the odissi body becomes a referent to, and a tool for, a wider political, cultural, economic and gendered agenda. Yet, the trained viewer actively resists the neoliberal manipulation of the dance experience. In this article, I primarily argue that screenic glamorous intrusions become a ground where the neoliberal economy interacts with and disrupts traditional logic; for example, one's unquestioned surrender to the teacher. In the light of this mediated interface, traditional frameworks and narratives of dance are forced to consider the changing face of transmission, reception, and dissemination of odissi's movement economy.

Below, I first position myself as a trained dancer where the dance-codes undergird my reception of movement on screen. I theorize my screenic reception across an aesthetic attunement between the performance and the observation. This culturally situated aesthetic construction is influenced by camera-choices and digital editing although there is active subjective resistance to this spectatorial disruption. The screenic interventions and intrusions disrupt the status quo of automatic ascribing of high culture to odissi. Through my position of the *Sahrdaya* and its affiliated attention to being and becoming alongside the physical and the metaphysical, I foreground the materiality of movement, which does not assume a prior hierarchy. Rather, it resists odissi's differential stratification through sheer discomfort, one that entails my losing control over the aesthetic experience. After my subjective and theoretical positioning, I focus on DD Odia's treatment of odissi dance across dissemination of festivals, curated performances in its studio, and as oral histories through its emphasis on interviewing artists, educators, administrators, and scholars on a regular basis. Commenting on the contemporary curation of the dancing body by the state network, this essay brings larger questions around the representation of gender, sexuality, caste, and regionalism on the television screen through a democratic exploratory ethos.

Choreographic Positioning

I trained primarily in Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra style in Kolkata under Guru Poushali Mukherjee and then, in *Srjan Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Nrityabasa* in Bhubaneswar (capital city of Odisha), which was founded by Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra on September 3 1993.I savor the artistic meaning-making of the choreographic activity in concert dance as well as on television in my kinesthetically empathic viewing of movement that is further processed in my subsequent studio practice. My savoring is labor intensive, which is triggered by the optical, but chiselled further, with subsequent intellectual, physical, emotional, and kinesthetic processing and absorption, in turn making it a cyclical affair. In this sense, I am a *Sahrdaya,* meaning the one who appreciates the arts across its semantic and expressive components identifying with the technicalities and performative faculties of dance. Watching a live composition in a festival is a multisensory, immersive, poetic, literary, philosophical, spiritual, and performative act for me where the moving body is a palimpsest of textual, musical, emotive, and geometrical theatrics. From this subject position, I qualify the term *Sahrdaya* as it relates specifically to odissi dance.

Sahrdaya originates in Sanskrit literature involving both the theatrical and the literary. Etymologically speaking, *Sahrdaya* consists of *Sa* and *Hrdaya. Sa* refers to a sense of harmonization and *Hrdaya* means to carry away, reflecting on the communion of the intellect, the sensate, and the empathic registers. According to Sanskrit scholar Vidya Mishra, *Sahrdaya* is one who diffuses "being in becoming" where the dichotomy of the physical and the metaphysical is done away with at the aesthetic juncture. Tenth century philosopher and aesthetician Abhinavagupta in his famous commentary on Indian aesthetics, entitled *Abhinavabharati,* notes that the *Sahrdaya,* having been acculturated in aesthetic exposure, creates the reflection of poetic emotions in the mind. In his research on Abhinavagupta "Theatrics of Emotion: Self-deception and Self-cultivation in Abhinavagupta's Aesthetics," philosopher Sthaneswar Timalsina talks of simultaneous introspective and intersubjective breaching across the performer and the audience as well

as the performative worlds imagined, conjured, and enacted. "A dialogue between the spectator and the performer at the level of the heart is initiated in this performance, which breaches the boundary of hearts and allows multiple hearts to be one." Further, the *Sahrdaya* assimilates these emotions becoming one with the felt emotional tenor of the character. Finally, stable, universalized, and aestheticized emotions are triggered in the *Sahrdaya* who occupies a space further blurring authorial production and spectatorial reception.

In order to understand the experiential capacity of the *Sahrdaya,* one needs to establish the aesthetic episteme. Here, I borrow from the philosophical tradition of Advaita Vedanta that proposes a non-dual understanding of existence. It proposes that the empirical reality of our self as an individual is due to ignorance of our real nature, which is indivisible-immaterial-absolute-consciousness that appears as transactional reality like a rope appears as a snake as illustrated in the *Studies in Advaita Vedanta: Towards an Advaita Theory of Consciousness* by author Sukharanjan Saha. While the ontological status of reality is a much-debated topic and beyond the scope of this study, for the purposes of this text, it is instructive to note that the theoretical lens of Advaita Vedanta might provide a measure of aesthetic attunement for the viewer. Viewership in this case observes, associates, and assimilates the performative content on one end. On the other side, it entails a sensate, intellectual, introspective, empathic, and kinesthetic processing of the subject matter only to eventually de-identify the subject-object association into the non-dual whole. In this way, hearts and emotions, subjects and objects, and ideas and movements all merge into an aesthetic of indivisibility with the prevailing of one absolute consciousness. On these grounds, the aesthetic reception of the arts proposes to point the individual self to its nondual consciousness*.* It is in this higher consciousness, the *Sahrdaya* becomes united with the performer beyond the confines and the imperatives of empiricism. Although the experience from the performative occurs at the transactional plane, it has the potential to transcend material reality to attain the blissful state of what Abhinavagupta refers to as aesthetic rapture. As a practitioner of Advaita Vedanta, this epistemological grounding situates my aesthetic reception of odissi movement. In this essay, I am not interested in deconstructing my subjective grounds of experience within the domain of Advaita Vedanta. Instead of making experiential claims of subjective resonance, I resort to the textual underpinnings of nondual philosophy to ground my analysis of dance-spectatorship.

In his book review of Saha's *Studies in Advaita Vedanta,* Ramprasad Chakravarthi cautiously reinforces Saha's claim about the role of Advaita Vedanta in questioning social hierarchies. However, centuries-old exclusionary tactics of Brahmanical philosophy makes this point moot. Yet, there is a degree of sameness inherent in the *Sa* prefix of *Sahrdaya.* This positioning potentially complicates and brings to light conservationist practices in the field of odissi dance. In the online report, "The Question of Caste in Odissi Dance," cultural theorist and poet Kedar Mishra writes that the genesis of odissi dance has not been in the hands of Brahmins (higher castes) although caste hegemony continue to be in practice and needs necessary pushback. In my acculturation of movement, I have experienced the kinesthetic contours of odissi as those represented by a married Odia woman. Through received narratives during classroom teaching in *Srjan,* I have heard how Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra would keenly observe Odia femininity that would filter into shaping his choreographic aesthetic. One could interpolate that such a maneuver unequivocally enforces the gender binary essentializing along the lines of gender and sexuality. Yet, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra was himself the paradigmatic bearer of such cultural embodiment. He has been iconic in his depiction of the feminine *Chali* or gait with footfall followed by a soft hip sideways deflection and a sequential spinal undulation. This imitation of a feminine gait by a male-identified dancing body already complicates the presentation of gender and sexuality. One can bring this discussion to a conversation around gender and caste specificity especially with the intertwining of identities with the notion of perfection; Anurima Banerji notes caste specificity in the description of the women's gait. Born

in a Bengali Vaidya family, I must note my own privileges of class and caste to easy access to formal and aesthetic education. While interviewing odissi dancer/ scholar Rohini Dandavate, I was again reminded of the regional specificity regarding the volume of expressivity that simultaneously is a function of Odishan culture, gender, sexuality, and caste. Her comment on gestural specificity according to regional influence is a poignant note on how movement is shaped and formed in the dance as a direct push-and-pull of Odishan landscape, ethics, and cultural ethos. All in all, I hope to note that as the *Sahrdaya,* I am in tune with the historical, social, political, and economic forces at play. Recognizing difference while resisting hierarchy remains at the center of this viewership embedded within indigenous philosophical, epistemological, and aesthetic grounding.

Choreographic appropriation of the term requires contextualizing meaning-making across the various components of the creative and cultural production. In traditional odissi productions, there is a confluence of poetic verses, rhythmic syllables, melodic notes, gestural vocabulary, postural technicalities, and production elements such as costumes and jewelry. The choreographer works closely with the script-writer and the rhythm and music composers to create the piece that then is presented by a trained dancer. In this transmission of movement, the role of the script-writer is to collate existing material or create new verbiage that provides textual basis and scripted flow of the dance work. This literary activity is simultaneously interspersed with choreographic and musical—both melodic and percussive—interventions. The creation process of a piece, in this case, distributes the authorial subjectivity from a singular author to multiple creators of text, movement, and music. The performance, either solo or ensemble, adds a whole new layer of meaning-making as the theatricality of the work reaches the *Sahrdaya* who is then able to both assimilate within and distance from the content through sensorial, perceptive, kinesthetic, emotional, and experiential registers.

The informed spectator who is acculturated in this aesthetic episteme, is able to generate a deep interest in the produced creative moment resulting in an intense identification outside the individual self, allowing for a merging of the consciousness with the performer. The *Sahrdaya* is supposedly able to generate a total communion of the performative through being and becoming and finally, realizing a blissful state of aesthetic rapture, a state of complete dissolution of individuated subjectivity with its emotions and object-oriented knowledge and merging with the aesthetic in a higher state of consciousness. Trained in Bharatnatyam, German dancer Johanna Devi writes about her choreographic experiments with Advaita Vedanta in which she explored movement from a state of absolute mental tranquillity. In her solo *waves* (2013), she generates "movement without focusing on shape, technique and aesthetics but rather on a resting state of the mind that can be described as emptiness or stillness." Across a similar poetic, metaphorical, and metaphysical appeal, the choreographic arc of each movement in odissi often resembling the oceanic waves in their quality of anticipation, preparation, manifestation, and eventual dissolution, emulates the interpretive process of a *Sahrdaya*.

What happens to the *Sahrdaya* in a study about dance and technology? Technology presents an opportunity for kinesiological abstraction. Through graphic exposition of the intricacies and complexities of movement, it allows for a comprehensive, comparative, and contextualized understanding of the dancing body. In a study of southern Indian Kathakali dance and motion capture technology, Biju Dhanapalan notes how digital technology can "unravel and decipher the complex kinetics." The quantitative—graphical, numerical, statistical, and visual—derivatives can be useful in analyzing biomechanics or visualizing kinesthetic trajectories of the dancing body towards building an integrated digital archive with high-definition video, multichannel aural accompaniments, and motion capture technology. The aesthetic attunement of the *Sahrdaya* is *Vidagdha* or emotionally wrought. This comes often with locating the self within the expressive repertoire of the dancer. But, the self's desire is co-

created in the consumer culture driven programming on television where the dancing body is presented side-by-side with screenic interventions—either live or edited. Dissemination of curated dance festivals in Odisha often infuses other content—interview of a bureaucrat, advertisements promoting tourism in Odisha, showcasing Odisha's territorial landscape alongside its faith-based infrastructure—during the choreographic rendering. Odisha chooses to brand itself as *India's best kept secret* continuing an exploratory-discovery mindset reminiscent of coloniality. Dance fits into this feminized vision of the gendered positioning of the cultural.

The dancing body on screen is framed within the logic of technology, liberalization, globalization, markets, and consumer culture. The intimate encounter of the art and the agentic individuated reception is punctuated by camera angles and video editing. As I navigate the shift of live movement to the television screen, I need to contextualize the receptive economy. Chakravorty recognizes the conflation of desire and dance across the transition from the live body to the screen, which she theorizes as a transition from "rasa" to "remix." While "rasa" refers to the aestheticized emotional tenor of traditional Indian art, it broadly conjures the complex terrain of aesthetic theory imbuing literature, performing arts, visual arts, and spirituality. "Remix" refers to the remixing of older song-and-dance sequences with contemporary ethos, techno-beats, state-of-the-art software, and a culture of editing. Chakravorty notices how the emotive aesthetics have become historical relics concluding that "the search for an aesthetic modernity in India is the story of the recontextualization of 'desire' and the 'desiring subject.'" I take Chakravorty's cue to investigate this process of reframing, recontextualization, revisiting, and revamping of both the desired object and the desiring subject. Not so focused on desire as such, Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram's analysis of song-dance sequences in Tamil movies from southern India identifies screen dance principles, such as playing with memory and materiality, that cultivate and shape audience imagination.

I am arguing that the *Sahrdaya's* appreciation of the *Angik* or physical expressivity although wrapped up within the seductive glamor of screenic intrusion, infuses liberatory logic. The camera's close-ups on hands and feet are particularly instructive as they force attention away from the dancer's gaze. Materiality of gesture, either demonstrated through finger detailing or via energetic extensions of the ankle, foreground an embodied resonance. This is not abstracted via emotional logic or textual—narrative, prosaic, poetic, or prosodic—parameters. The move away from the textual opens up the possibility of reflecting on the intersubjective materiality of performative reception. The receiver potentially brings her physicality—intersectional presence across class, caste, gender, sexuality, and regional identity—in communion with her perception of the same analytics of the observed. The performative is no longer just the artistic content. Rather, the focus on embodied materiality makes space for the autobiographical signature. This maneuver is not available to the traditional *Sahrdaya* who conventionally abstracts the performed through the performative content and similarly subjectively resonates only with the abstraction. On screen, however, the locus on the *Sahrdaya* lies in the profusion of the *Angik* as opposed to the *Satwik* or the emotional. But, gestural mapping through the hands and the percussive explorations through the surfaces of the feet gain precedence in a hodge-podge collage of screenic intrusion for which there often is no aesthetic logic to the broadcasting choices, given the real-time nature of programming. The viewer is forced to create meaning of the movement framed within the larger topographical, sociological, political, economic, and cultural conceptualization. Competing narratives make the construction of an overarching narrative of dramatic intensity bleak. This definitely reduces the status of odissi from its initial conceptualization of *high art*, *high culture*, and reminiscent of social elitism.

The dance becomes an embodiment of the regional life with its performative imagination, when, say, odissi movement is directly followed by a government sponsored awareness initiative about conservation of turtles in Odisha's famous Chilka Lake. Although odissi's national status as a technically challenging art

form gives it cultural value, its embeddedness in the regional topographical landscape of Odisha is largely exploited by public broadcasting. Below, I look at three modalities of screenic intrusion of the conventional jewelry-clad female dancing body as I examine the role of state broadcasting in bringing out oral histories, in curating programming, and in disseminating important festivals in the state of Odisha.

Gestural Efficacy: Locating Gesture on Televised Interviews

It is not surprising to see an array of *Kotki* and *Bomkai* saris from Odisha handloom paraded by odissi dancers in the morning shows on both state-owned and private-funded Odia television networks. Performance and pedagogy are woven intricately with one another in the lives of successful dancers who are celebrated across television. Surya Prakash Upadhyay in his book chapter "Neoliberal Capitalism and the Emergence of Corporate Hinduism in Urban India," argues that religion serves and is served by political and economic interests and is a two-way street where the spirituality of the Hindu gurus continue to remain a strong influence. Indian dancers have taken the role of new age gurus where the art becomes a medium to transmit cultural, moral, and ethical values. However, the alignment of aesthetic values with that of the majoritarian Hindu mold remains mandatory for someone to enjoy screen time to begin with.

Although televised interviews of dancers provide a glimpse into their creative process, the primary takeaway continues to reinforce hierarchy in dance pedagogy. Pedagogical transmission of aesthetics, values, kinesthetics, and bodily practices prioritizes a concentration of control by the educators. This takes the form of apprentice-learning that takes pride in differentiating itself from secular transmission of knowledge. Rather, the dancer is supposed to completely surrender to the art, the teacher, and the cultural codes and conventions marking the aesthetic field of transmission. Respect is considered sacrosanct and the loss of respect, as deemed by the teacher from the disciple, continues to have social ramifications where the student is boycotted from the class. This model of training is far from the auspices of contemporary models of education where the dancer is able to acquire knowledge for a price in the marketplace or even free of cost through open-source mechanisms.

The irony lies in the lack of synchronicity of the screened show. The interviewee is presented in the glitz and glamor with numerous photographs, highly edited performance reels, ensemble productions, and association with political patronage. This is far from the perception of austerity in this knowledge-transfer from the teacher to the taught. The dancer is showcased as a successful career-builder who has made it to fame through sheer determination. Access to information and to power continues to dominate success although the narrative of complete surrender to the mentor as the marker of success is featured, replicated, and propagated. So, the juxtaposition of the neoliberal with the pedagogical sacrosanct does not read as organic. When the interviewee speaks about dedication, surrender, egotistic dissolution, diligence, sincerity, devotion, internalization, and patience, to me, even as the *Sahrdaya,* there is a disjuncture. These values are definite additions to the students' tool-kit. However, the shining make-up on the interviewee's faces and their words of spiritual surrender falls flat and seems lop-sided. Words become less important while the interviewee's gestural usage draw my attention. Their gesticulation, to me, is far more interesting given years of sharpening of performative skills in gestural communication, than their hackneyed reminder of territoriality plaguing the field of odissi.

During Padmashri Kumkum Mohanty's interview, she physically shared body movement. In this interview, Mohanty noted the research behind Odissi Research Center's publishing of the two volumes on odissi technique. While verbally sharing, I could see her demonstrate how deflection of the rib cage as opposed to the folding of the side body established as hallmarks of odissi grammar, also borrowed spatial alignment from the Benesh School of notation. During the research of *The Odissi Path Finder*, sixty static poses were

named, such as *Birama* (pause), *Shikhandika* (one-legged balance), and *Chibukamandana* (holding the index finger next to the chin), by a committee of experts who debated and deliberated over a long period of time to come to a consensus that the poses had, what Mohanty called, "organic links with physical features." Undoubtedly, these are valuable nuggets of historical and pedagogical significance in Indian dance studies.

First a prominent odissi artist and then a celebrated bureaucrat leading Odissi Research Centre in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, Mohanty, undoubtedly has contributed to standardizing dance education in odissi as an administrator. Her gestural sharing on the television screen piqued my viewership as a *Sahrdaya.* Instantly attuned to her aesthetic transmission within her postural meaning-making, I could register the primacy of the *Angika*—the realm of physical expressivity. The entire literature on *Sahrdaya,* in particular, and Sanskritized aesthetic theory, in general, value literary activity. The expressive element of the embodied—physical materiality abstracting the ecological domain in which it is embedded—was a reminder to expand Sanskrit poetics beyond the literal and the verbal. Her postural intrusion alongside her comment regarding movement's connection to physical representation was also a reminder that knowledge in the dance is a co-construction across the Odishan landscape, textual remnants in Oriya and Sanskrit, and finally, scholarly/ creative interpretation/ analysis of all these multiple linguistic, embodied, and ecological elements.

But, seamless aesthetic attunement is periodically disrupted by screenic logic. The role of the television host is necessary in framing these oral history narratives. The interviews are embedded across a multiplicity of activities. Video excerpts from previous performances bring a visual reference to what the interviewees share about past experiences. These sessions are often interspersed with song sequences by a live musical ensemble where again the apparent monotony of musician's craftsmanship is interspersed with departures into Odishan geographical locales and natural beauty. The program is steered by the host across the invited guest and intermittent programming. "Hello Odisha" presented on the state owned DD Odia telecasting from Cuttack, an important city in Odisha. The host for this morning show varies from show to show. Unlike Don Cornelius' star power in his nationally televised show "Soul Train" that promoted African American culture and artistry, "Hello Odisha" draws its star-value mainly from its invited guests. Popular odissi performers, namely Sujata Mohapatra, Iliana Citaristi, Meera Das, Gajendra Panda, Durga Charan Ranbir, Nazia Alam, and Leena Mohanty are a few names featured on television. Similar programs interviewing artists can be found on privately owned Odia-language cable and satellite channels such as Kanak News and Prameya News7. "Breakfast Odisha" is another morning show on Prameya News7. The language used to introduce and address dancers continues to draw parallels among spiritual seekers and movement practitioners. In her interview on "Breakfast Odisha," the host addressed Kumkum Mohanty as a *Jogi,* meaning one who surrenders material possessions. As a state-government bureaucrat working to standardize the teaching and learning of odissi, Mohanty shared how she published two volumes of Odissi technique with in-depth research and consultation with cultural leaders from Odisha.

I describe below how Indian television continues to map neoliberal agenda onto existing hierarchies of knowledge transfer complicating preparatory modes of aesthetic transmission that are in the purview of performing arts disciplines. Odissi repertoire starts with an invocatory prayer to Jagannath, the presiding deity and ends with a salvific note as the dancer seeks liberation from the material world. In the neoliberal marketplace, perhaps it can be compared to the new-age "'salvation wares,' to be sold in the market and promoted through television channels and other forms of media." This is a traditional modality of being but nevertheless is prioritized in neoliberal marketplaces where odissi is bought and sold, marketed and insured, and overall patronized as an elite form by the federal and state governments as a conglomeration

of spiritual, cultural, and artistic practice, nevertheless, aligned with political power and majoritarianism. Furthermore, it disguises the propaganda machinery that the ruling Hindu majoritarian government foments and rekindles on a periodic basis in the garb of aesthetic education and philosophical acuity. Recent clashes in the eastern Indian state of Manipur were allegedly state funded by the Hindu far right organizations leading to sexual exploitation and excessive rioting. Social theorist Purnima Mankekar argues how broadcasting accomplishes a slippage between (upper-caste) Hindu and Indian culture enabling the "growing hegemony of Hindu nationalist discourses of cultural purity predicated on the marginalization, if not demonization, of Islam and Christianity, and the exclusion of lower-caste struggles for social justice."

The Gendered Space of Curated Programming on Indian Television

The screen renders possible certain types of viewing practices that do not just present or represent the moving body as is, but rather, curate it for the viewer. Further, curatorial choices of broadcasting continue to transact in the neoliberal economy offering its own screenic intrusions and spectatorial disruption through the political field apparently as an antidote to commercial interests governed by market economics. Gendered viewing and pedagogical transmission premise curatorial decisions of both solo and ensemble works on television. The televised presentation of *Chakrabyuha*, a choreography by Bichitrananda Swain and performed by an all-male repertory group called the "Rudraksha Foundation", on DD Odia glorifies masculinity through combative power. "Rudraksha Foundation" prides itself on demonstrating that "men can dance like men even in the sensual, sublime, and sculptural dance form of odissi." Gender binary holds strong in the physicality as well as the emotive capacity of the ensemble even while inviting innovative choreography skills and body kinetics. As a counterpoint to this, DD Odia's curation of the primarily female ensemble presentation of *Chausathi Jogini* by the Odishan dance company namely, "Odishi Nrutya Natika" glorifies sixty-four incarnations of the powerful goddess. These dances vary in terms of subject matter. However, the camera angles also frame the definition, perception, organization, and negotiation of power. The technical strengths of the two presentations are not equal. Rudraksha's technical abilities are at a higher caliber than those of "Odishi Nrutya Natika," which is more of a community celebration having the younger generation dance side by side with mature adults. However, I choose these videos as representative of the curatorial dimensions of odissi on television where the selection process is either arbitrary or all-inclusive, preceded by an audition process in which curatorial criteria are not publicly available. Below follows an analysis of the two televised presentations of *Chakrabyuha* and *Chausathi Jogini* commenting on the interplay of movement and gender curation by the screen.

The piece *Chausathi Jogini* celebrates multiplicity of the female form as established at the Chausathi Jogini temple in Hirapur in Odisha. The dance piece has the same name as the temple. The dance is strewn with sculptural iconography as individual dancers organize themselves in ways that visually correspond to the respective goddess at the temple. Divided into sections with musical—melodious, percussive, and lyrical—variations, it enlists the entire gamut of the goddess' iconography. The dance starts with an invocatory prayer to the goddess and ends on the celebratory ethos. Throughout the persona and the characteristics of the changing incarnations—*Ugrachanda, Kausiki, Shakambari, Bhadrakali, Durga, Matangi, Kali*, and *Shivadyuti*—influence the changing choreography and emotive landscapes. While *Matangi* and *Shivadyuti* are of a softer hue, *Kali* and *Ugrachanda* bring out the grotesque. The dance-drama features a soloist at the center while the ensemble rearranges in multiple tableaus and spatial arrangements to communicate the notion of strength, beauty, and power. It is instructive that although the burden of reproduction is not imposed onto the goddess, the piece ends on the note of praising the mother. The choreography ends with heralding the goddess's sixty-four incarnations as the divine mother, invoking the mother from

Hirapur, and glorifying the mother. The original lyrics of the song are "*Chausathi Jogini Ma, Hirapurabasi Ma, Jai Jai Ma*", noting the specific architectural and sculptural references to the temple. The role of the mother is reimagined as the powerful protector who takes on the grotesque. The camera work is far from instructive in this work as wide shots and close-ups often miss the essence of the choreography. Curated programming on television does not seem to require previous rehearsals with camera personnel as evident in the random capture of shots based on real-time decisions and creative discretion. One dancer in the ensemble stood out in the entire production given her power and zeal in depicting the grotesque. Focusing on her, the camera proved that the feminine, as depicted by the teacher, could very well be complemented by her student, who embodied vigor and rigor. This also actualized the previously discussed principle of *Sadhana Chatushtaya* where the mentor and the mentee are captured in a single shot.

Byuha denotes deployment of troops in formations in a tactically favorable situation where the weaker army might win. The creation of *ChakraByuha* is one such strategic military deployment of troops to kill the protagonist, Abhimanyu, who is from the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. *Chakrabyuha* is riveting in its use of percussive combinations to show the creation of the *Byuha* and combative episodes between Abhimanyu against an array of enemy troops. The piece starts and ends on a quiet, contemplative, meditative, and expressive note where the story is laid out through emotional registers. Dialogical conversations—involving the training of Abhimanyu with his father Arjuna and between Arjuna and his friend, the all-knowing omniscient Hindu male god Krishna—added a dramatic element to the choreography. Physicality of the war occupied the last third of the dance with aerial movements, bold combative gestures, and the climactic attack of Abhimanyu. Camera zooms on the individualized expression of the various character portrayals from the epic made the viewing experience very pedantic. The viewer in the live performance of an ensemble, has the option to focus on multiple onstage happenings—spatial formations, relationships across artists, gestural articulation, footwork etc. But, in such a framed viewing, the viewer is made to experience the tragic ending of Abhimanyu as an emotionally charged experience. The piece is scripted in Odia and ends with the words "Samsara Neeti Porae, Ke Kichi Bujhi No Paraye" (translated by me as nobody understands the cause-effect relationship of everyday experience in our lived experiences of material existence). The negation of cause and effect where the empirical is claimed to be a mere appearance of the nondual infinite remains a non-dual concept. Materiality is being done away with although in differential standards.

The subject matter in this case is predominantly male. Mention of a female character happens at the very end when Subhadra, Abhimanyu's mother is mentioned only having given birth to the protagonist. Just the name-dropping of a woman simply instrumentalizes her body and gender whereas the male counterpart enjoys power, status, glory, and martyrdom. Undoubtedly, this piece is about male bravado and masculinity. But, it is also about progeny. Abhimanyu's training with his father, who is considered the perfect warrior in the *Mahabharata,* prioritizes the notion of masculinity not just as display but as continuity. This idea is replicated in the televised presentation of the performance where the alternation between the singular dancing body and wide-angled shots with multiple dancers preface that notion of the Ur man as the harbinger of progeny. Women's bodies are invisibilized as well as irrelevant and only useful for their reproductive value. But the true meaning and purpose lies in generational knowledge-transfer from the father to the son, so that the son carries forth his duty to protect his army from defeat even though he succumbs to death. So, the reproduction of victory at the cost of his death continues to put the onus of historical and generational continuity on one gender. The abrupt end of this broadcasting and a quick follow-through with the DoorDarshan logo, which also looks like a *Byuha,* that is a circular maze-like construct, reiterates for me, how reel life connects with lineage and progeny, the onus of which lies with the male gender.

In a comparative discussion of *Chakrabyuha* and *Chausathi Jogini,* the gender binary remains intact noting a lack of progressive gender politics in broadcasting decision-making. Further, *Chausathi Jogini* characterizes the feminine in a docile avatar—one that is deeply rooted in upper-caste female representation and policing. UK-based artist/scholar Alessandra Lopez y Royyo in her documentary entitled *Performing Konark, Performing Hirapur* based on the work of odissi teacher Guru Surendranath Jena, argues that Jena challenged prevalent notions of femininity in odissi. Exploring anger and disgust, often regarded as unfeminine, Jena's odissi was transgressive and not widely popular. Despite bridging the differential across the gender binary, the male and the female monoliths continue to dominate the audience's perception. Dancing like a man and producing the man technologically where the woman is invisibilized or exists only in her upper-caste persona as a second fiddle, continues to populate the horizon of televised screenings of odissi dance. I cannot help but notice the power dynamic in curatorial choices of broadcasting, as well as in curating the dancing body on screen, along gender and caste hierarchies—one that my spectatorial disruption as a liberatory *Sahrdaya,* is hardly able to recover from. In the next section, I turn to music and dance considerations when examined alongside screenic intrusions.

Public Dissemination of Constructed Antiquity

Temple-dancing died down in Odisha, as was true in the rest of the nation, when Odishan temples—Konark sun temple, Mukteshwar temple, Rajarani temple, and Dhauli Peace Pagoda—became huge tourist attractions due to their dance and music festivals. The showcase, for a live audience as well as for a much larger online audience in real-time, presents artistry of the highest artistic caliber with state-of-the-art lighting arrangements among other impeccable concert production elements. Konark Dance Festival, Mukteshwar Dance Festival, and Dhauli-Kalinga Mahotsav are some of the prominent festivals that are held every year in Odisha with live broadcasting by the state-owned channel DD Odia.

Konark Dance Festival commenced in 1986. Dancers perform in an open-air auditorium that overlooks the Sun temple of Konark. The Department of Tourism produces this extravaganza in early December and promotes this event as a tourist attraction during which elaborate displays by Odisha's craftsmen are set up, including the International Sand Art Festival at Chandrabhaga Beach. This entire event is a tourist attraction where Odisha's cultural heritage is presented. Similar to this event, the Dhauli Kalinga Mahotsav takes place in February, providing yet another opportunity for a collage of music and dance. Here, the audience is able to enjoy the festival in Dhauli hill-top with the brightly lit Peace Pagoda in the backdrop. This festival is jointly hosted by the state government and Orissa Dance Academy, a premier odissi institution in Bhubaneswar. While Konark and Dhauli are in the outskirts of Bhubaneswar, Mukteshwar Dance Festival has occurred in the city center since 1984. It is yet another event organized by the Ministry of Tourism promoting odissi dance in the heart of the capital city of Odisha. The state broadcasting network telecasts in real time these three festivals for the broader public. The experience of viewing a live performance is very different from seeing the same on television. In this section, I analyze the live telecast of 2020's Konark festival, Orissa Dance Academy produced *Shivam Dhimahi,* an all-male ensemble number choreographed by Guru Aruna Mohanty accompanied by a live orchestra consisting of singers, percussionists, string instrumentalists (*Sitar,* violin), flautists, keyboard players, and *Manjira* (a pair of metal cymbals) players.

Odissi could possibly be considered an exercise in visualizing music. Accented choreographic motifs have a definite beginning, a lilting flow, and a concluding stasis. The kinesthetic pauses are usually marked by the percussive registers. The gestural interface draws inspiration from the melodic making the movement a visual representation of music. But, the dance does not only pay tribute to music. Rather, it has textual, poetic, thematic, and choreographic overlays that cannot be captured by the musical notes or the

percussive beats alone. The visual aesthetic sometimes occludes the aural layering. When the dancer performs on recorded music, the dance is the only visual referent. However, often in live musical accompaniment, movement and the corresponding musical intonation can be recognized simultaneously making the viewing experience a perfect blend across dance and music. It is a delight to see the coinciding of the percussive thrusts on the *Mardala* (two-headed drum) and the accented footwork while the lilting upper body emulates the melodious flow.

The live telecast of this performance is skewed since it prioritizes movement in dance over that of the percussive and string instrumentation. The musical ensemble is rarely featured in the fifteen-minute-long piece. There were the usual close-ups and wide-angle shots of the dancers creating a visual spectacle of able-bodied vigor in an all-male ensemble. Visual spectacle of this masculinity overturns the presupposition of music as the male progenitor of dance. In the twelve-piece musical ensemble, there was only one female artist, vocalist Nazia Alam. Nazia had no role in *Shivam Dhimahi.* She was a part of the other composition, *Eka Prosna* that Orissa Dance Academy presented in this festival. While *Shivam Dhimahi* was markedly masculine, *Eka Prosna* was primarily demarcated as feminine; a discussion of *Eka Prosna* is outside the scope of this essay.

The gendered presentation of Orissa Dance Academy at Konark Dance Festival also complements the gendered perception of the dance and music dialectic. Typically, male accompanists create the music for female dancers. In my embodied *Sahrdaya* viewership, this dialectic went through some serious reckoning. The visuality of the telecast prioritizes dance as the primary bearer of the music. Intermittent glimpses of the primarily male musical ensemble delivers the promise that the dance is manifesting the aural texture. The kinesthetic and the choreographic gains a gendered primacy in the masculine that is usually the domain of the sonic. This happens irrespective of the actual gendered identities of the dancers and the musicians.

In this process, there is an overturning of this dialectic. The gender of the dancers becomes irrelevant as the gender of the dance is brought to bear. The dance assumes a masculine dimension whereas the music a feminine tenor. This dichotomy is still problematic given its upholding of the gender binary. Interspersed with tourism advertisements where a female new-age tourist roams freely on the beaches, in the forests, among the mountains, and the plains or a young couple visiting the wide array of Odishan temples present a conservative, heteronormative, and exclusionary ethos that clearly disregards gender-bending practices in Odisha's own history with the Bhakti movement. Reflecting the modality, motivation, purpose, and receptivity of live telecast, as the *Sahrdaya,* I meditate upon the significance of television in the dissemination of dance.

Conclusion

There is a national and international odissi dance community and its on-screen (social media, video-broadcasting networks, film, television etc.) and off-screen (traditional live performance) presence are flourishing. Yet, its academic curiosity remains suspect. It has not seen what media scholar David Looseley calls a "discipline-busting cultural studies approach." While Looseley refers to lack of academic attention to French popular culture, his comment can be insightful in this context. Reconfiguration of artistic disciplinary boundaries by historical and sociological dimensions can counter the lop-sided emphasis on aesthetics that often is representative of certain trends either in building or in dissipating socio political hierarchy. It can be safely assumed that academic deconstruction aims at critiquing and dissipating top-down systemic power imbalances. This critical exercise also, according to Loosely, provides cultural legitimacy. For my purposes, I am interested in creating discursive structures essential to analyzing odissi

movement ecologies and economies. But, unlike Looseley, I am not curious about odissi's legitimacy in regional, national, and international circles. It's meditative quality onstage proves its inherent affective, technical, and performative structures that provide opportunities of introspective meaning-making for the practitioner. Yet, I question odissi's negotiation with democratization—one that is directly related to the experience of the *Sahrdaya* intersecting with screenic intrusions. The screenic *Sahrdaya* through embodied resonance can counter top-down pernicious differentials along axes of gender, caste, religion, and nation. Their empathic reception of movement grounds within difference—one that recognizes the flow of thought, emotion, postural gait, gestural clarity, and energetic detailing—while battling with conventional nationalist or neoliberal agendas. The screenic collage complicates unilateral reading of the odissi movement through Sanskrit poetics or neoliberal commerce. Rather, camera work and edits return the viewing experience at the intersection of cultural analytics of movement codes and conventions, gender, sexuality, caste, region, and the nation. Return to the body inspires active engagement with energy, movement, and a physical experience with the movement. This, I conjecture, is the key point in screenic intrusion into odissi's status quo leading to the democratization of high culture on screen.

I critically reflect on the presentation of odissi on state-owned television by looking at how camera work at times affirms and at times overturns ideas around traditional precepts, conventions, and modalities embedded within the worldview of the dance, making space for its interpretive domain. The reception of the dancing body by a trained subject through the screen versus the live performance questions gendering of music and dance, regionalism/nationalism agendas, and the interaction between the dancing body and the land, cultural identity, tourism, and neoliberal economy. The indigenous concept of *Sahrdaya* perseveres in this receptive domain visualizing two distinct vectors: 1. how the dancing body becomes the ground on which the interplay between traditional and neoliberal economy takes place, and 2. how spectatorship is disrupted through the use of screenic intrusions and how this is linked to the idea of democratization of high culture on screen.

Physicality of gestures, materiality of bodies, and the juxtaposition of aural-kinesthetic constructs allow the *Sahrdaya* to move away from the textually emotive to the *Angik,* or physical expression*.* This maneuver of attributing visual primacy to the physical domain is, in my opinion, a screenic intervention, one that is perhaps arbitrary, but nevertheless poignant in terms of presenting the dancing body— creating it in its grotesque or in complex maze-like formations, re-creating it in televised interviews and commercials, deconstructing the body through partial captures, and disseminating it alongside new-age faith-based cultural tourism. However, in the contemporary political climate, complete co-optation of this dancing body by the Hindu right diminishes its aesthetic or epistemological possibilities; a conversation that is outside the scope of this article.

Reception of the choreographic via the mediated adds an interpretative dimension between the receiver and the creator of the creative act. The secondary layer in the case of historical portrayal of odissi dance on television declares a gap between the convergence of the dance and its live appreciation. Odissi prioritizes and anticipates reception within the folds of its dancing body as well as its highly communicative face. Its frontal dimension distributes power between the dance and its reception, given the kinetic pauses, as if the dance itself has built-in check-in time with the viewer. The receiver is also acted upon by the varying patterns of the dance with its infinite layering of information—the creative, the poetic, the musical, the choreographic, the real-world resonances, and the imaginative. The receiver has the prerogative of meaning-making, although, remaining under the superior authority of the live act. With the televised, the process of reception is framed under the sway of camera work, studio scenography, discursive interventions, and neoliberal disruptions. The camera close-ups draw attention to the visually attractive and appealing or even the grotesque. Generic studio backdrops rarely address the subject

matter of the choreography presenting a distraction rather than aiding the dance. Sudden disruptions promoting tourism or commercial interests further disrupt attentive viewing. In closing, I suggest the complex interpretive lens provided by the television on dance puts more emphasis on visuality in the meaning-making process whereas the traditional *Sahrdaya* is perhaps able to stay within the conservative hierarchical worldview of the kinesthetic, the emotive, and the affective although the visual referent is woven away from verbal to a more physical materiality.

Biography

Kaustavi Sarkar, Assistant Professor, is a dancer-choreographer-educator-scholar. Sarkar has been performing and teaching *Odissi,* for over a decade while pursuing a career in US academia. She has taught at Kenyon College and holds a Ph.D. from The Ohio State University (OSU) in Dance Studies with interdisciplinary research interests in digital humanities, cultural studies, queer studies, and religious studies. Sarkar's first book 'Dance Technology Social Justice: Individual and Collective Techniques of Emancipation' published by McFarland Publishers explores the potential of Odissi in experimentation with dance-technology and as a mode of social justice. She is working on a second monograph in contract with the University of North Carolina Press called 'Shaping S Curves' which explores the theory, practice, and philosophy of Odissi dance. Sarkar is a leader in her field as the founder of the journal 'South Asian Dance Intersections' (SADI) and the 'Dance and Community Research Institute' (dNc), which is an arts-education, arts-consultancy, and arts-entrepreneurial project bringing artists, educators, and leaders together for systemic change. She also serves as a Regional Director for American College Dance Association.

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Chasing Manodharma: In conversation with Kamalini Dutt

Kamalini Dutt, Retd. Producer, Central Production Centre and Director, Doordarshan Archives
Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram, Independent Scholar
Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, Srishti Manipal Institute of Art Design and Technology, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India

Image 1: Kamalini Dutt

Kamalini Dutt (b. 1950) is nationally acclaimed for her enormous contributions to dance on Doordarshan, Indian national television as a producer and director and as a founder-director of the digitized Doordarshan Archives. In her career spanning 38 years, she is credited with envisioning and crafting over a thousand programs, both Indian music and dance. She established norms for recording Indian 'classical' dance and music, pushed the boundaries on camera technology in India and set new trends in televising these forms. With in-depth knowledge of texts in multiple Indian languages, the construction of musical elaborations to poetry, the conventions and logic of abhinaya as well its mastery involving a keen perception of how human emotions are revealed in the intricacy of layers of the human body, Dutt has captured the work of every celebrated dancer without missing the heartbeat of their improvisatory choices. As Banerjee, U.K. 2021, remarks, "In fact, the 'post-production editing' (both 'linear editing' of the simple 'cut and splice' kind and, more complex and far-reaching, "non-linear editing' with computer aid) is the crucial process in the third (and fourth) genres. An instance would be the memorable dance films produced especially for Indian Doordarshan Archives by its founder-director Kamalini Dutt in her time".

With great respect and admiration for the work and life experience of Kamalini Dutt in Indian dance, I submit this interview is an edited version collated from conversations conducted via zoom in Jan- Feb 2024 and her own notes and writings.

In this interview, Kamalini Dutt reflects on her career as a dancer, producer- director for Doordarshan, India's national television and educator, from her first foray in television in 1972 to the present. As Sharon

Lowen writes "Most of the quality programs that were created and are today preserved in the archives of Doordarshan, by far the largest archive on Indian dance in the world, have been made by her. While generations of dancers, musicians owe Kamalini a debt of gratitude for her documenting their art effectively, the nation owes perhaps a greater debt for her achievements in preserving, restoring and digitizing invaluable intangible cultural heritage from Doordarshan Kendras around the country. She has pioneered methodology for meta-tagging a huge library of materials so that entering any word, name, or identifier connected to any program will reveal it in any relevant search."

Kamalini Dutt is a key producer-artist in Delhi, who maintains creative contacts across generations of artists:

> "She had joined the organization as a producer in its infancy in 1972, when it only broadcast 2.5 hours of spartan, socially-minded programs in the evening – Krishi Darshan, school capsules, a little dance and music, all wrapped up with a news broadcast. Those were days of black and white television when the recording equipment was seven-foot high and each spool weighed around 12 kg, she remembers. In her three decades as a producer, she had transformed how dance and music programs were conceived and executed on television."

She is also the founder-director of the digitized Doordarshan Archives. In this interview, she also shares the vitality of the artists she produced-directed for television and using the camera to capture their bodies in space- time in her experimentations with recording through decades of the changing media technology.

Notes: 1. Manodharma is a composite of 'manah' and 'dharma', portraying 'mind' and 'in accordance', in that order. Manodharma relies on the performer's innate abilities that are dynamically created and displayed during the performance. In Indian traditional dance styles, the artist's prowess is revealed through their interpretations, rather than a strict adherence to textual content.
2. All images are courtesy of Kamalini Dutt unless specified.

Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram (SK): Kamaliniji, can you please share your earliest memory of television in India?

Kamalini Dutt (KD): Television service was inaugurated in 1959 by the then president Dr. Rajendra Prasad on 15th September as part of All India Radio's Research and Development project. The inauguration ceremony had a live Bharatanatyam performance by Vyjayantimala. That was the first dance performed for electronic media. Television broadcasting was then only an experimental service. Programs were aired for 30 minutes twice a week. I was an eight-year-old girl just shifted to Delhi from Tanjavur. On 21st November I was given a chance to perform Bharatanatyam for 10 minutes. Least did I know that I will spend four decades in the same institution!

SK: Can you share how to came to be a Doordarshan (National television) Music and Dance producer?

KD: When I joined Doordarshan in 1972, I came with some training to produce programs in a multi camera set up and single camera field production. The training was given by foreign experts. One of whom was a music program director. The knowledge I had gained under his training was based on his experience of producing western music and dance basically concerts, symphonies, ballets and modern dance. When I entered the studio to direct my first production which was Tyagaraja Kritis sung by Akhila Krishnan, the practical guidance given by my instructor did not work for Carnatic music. The way our musicians preferred to sit for a concert, the camera angles, the division of shots, the transition from one shot to

another, everything was of different orientation. I set aside my camera cards and sat on the hot seat trusting my intuition and my own knowledge of Carnatic music. The particular challenge was recording in the absence of notated rendering. Even though Indian music (Carnatic and Hindustani styles) is broadly preset at the raga level, the artist renders through spontaneous interpretation. For example, Pt Bhimsen Joshi sang Puriyadhanashree several times in his concerts. In Doordarshan we have got three recordings of this raga. Each rendering is unique in itself. This great quality of manodharma found in both Indian music and dance compelled me to re-invent the approach and technique of recording music and dance.

SK: Can you tell us how you made decisions when you recorded dance programs particularly from the point of view of capturing each artist's manodharma?

KD: Compared to music, dance is more dynamic. The subject – the dancer is always moving. The camera without interfering with the movement must capture the moments. Key aspects that I used for recording powerful performances were:
Knowing the dance form – its strength and limitations
- Knowing the individual strengths of the artiste

- Knowing the pieces chosen for recording

- Planning the camera angles and movements ahead of time based on whether it was a solo, duo or a group production

- Gathering a general idea about how much of the composition is choreographed and how much improvised

A lot of it was intuitive," "I knew when the vocalist's alapanai (alap) was drawing to a close and the violinist would be stepping in for an interlude. I 'learnt' every form of dance by watching, insisting on sitting in on every rehearsal.

Image 2: Kamalini Dutt in "muzhumandi" posture, 1968.

SK: Please share your experiences recording Bharatanatyam performances as you are an accomplished Bharatanatyam dancer yourself?

KD: Which shot is to be called at which point is to be broadly decided before rolling the camera/recorder. For example – a dance producer who is familiar with the *Varnam* format will instantly decide that *jatis* or rhythm sequences will be in a long shot and *abhinaya* sequences will be in mid shot (from face till the waist) or close-up. The transition is made according to the pauses punctuated by rhythm. At the end of the *jati* after the *teermanam* when *sama*, *ateeta* or *anaahata* is touched for the lyric to begin – a cut on the rhythm energizes the flow of shots as it matches the rhythm experienced and shared by the dancer and the viewer.

SK: As a television audience member through the 80s and 90s, one of my biggest aha moments in dance came from how transition points were captured. How did you conceive of recording these key moments?

KD: Most of the dance forms are driven by *taala*, *kaala* and *laya*. Like in life, these three factors energize our dances which, when matched with proper transitions, enhance the aesthetic experiences of the viewer. The content will decide where to change the shot. In our classical dances, cuts are preferred as the punctuations in the rhythm get highlighted by cuts. Dissolves can be used but with great discretion. The transition should add to the visual energy and not distract from it.

Another energy point is to identify proper close-ups. Strength of close-up shots are exclusive to viewing through the camera. This is essential for Abhinaya where the signs and symbols of bodily expression are minimalistic. The costume becomes immaterial as it does not have any role to play. The intense emotions pass through both artist and viewer- like swans swimming on the lake not getting wait by the water. It has been my pleasure to create this experience for the viewers through camera where the performer and the audience are deprived of each other's presence.
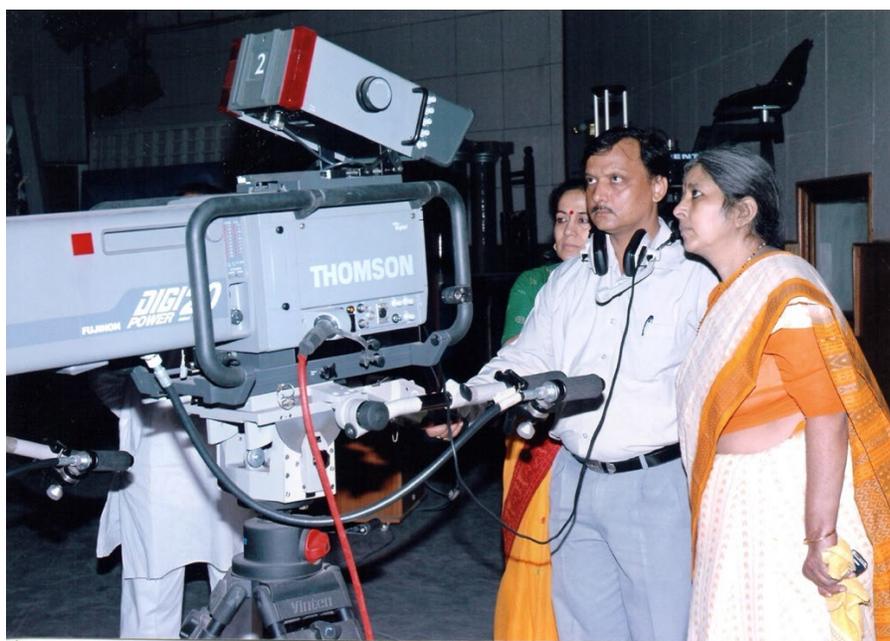

Image 3: Kamalini Dutt looking through the camera during studio recording

SK: Kamaliniji, how do you overcome space and time constraints to align with philosophical meaning while recording dance?

KD: Dance when seen through a camera happens in a virtual space. Camera sees what eyes cannot see. One sequence can be shot in more than one location *Jagadanandakaraka* in Kathak by Harish Rawat was shot in two locations. All the *swara* passages in north Indian temple and *sahitya* in a south Indian temple. This is an illustration of how a creative producer can break the requirement of one space and linear time for a dance performance. If the program producer discusses her camera positions in advance with the dancer, *nrtta* sequences can be choreographed to suit any one angle and the other sequences to another angle. This way there will be an interplay between dance and camera angles, composition and cutting between cameras. Such a choreography is meant only with a camera, creating an interesting energy of multiple dynamic images.
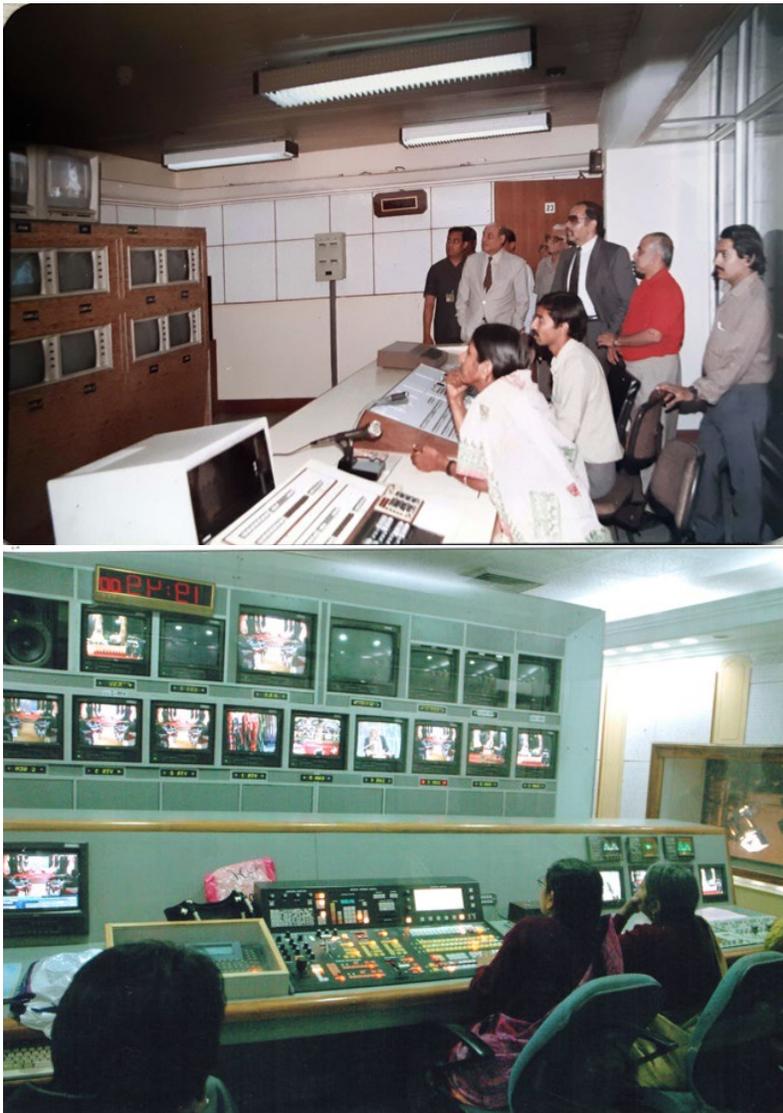

Image 4: Kamalini Dutt in multichannel recording rooms (1970s- 1980s)

Nayikas of Kalidas

SK notes: While a detailed description is not the focus of this interview, a slice of the video from 2.35 to 3.22 min (Ritu Samhara) is described to enable readers to understand and appreciate the nuances of how the camera and continuity editing are used by Kamalini Dutt to capturing the performer's inner and outer worlds. This [production](#) brings together five heroines (nayikas) from the works of the poet Kalidas (4th-5th century CE), Ritu Samhara, Shaakuntalam, Malvikaagnimitram, Meghadootam and Kumara Sambhavam. The production was a year-long collaboration between Kamalini Dutt, Sanskrit scholar Jeevan Pani and Odissi exponent Sharon Lowen. The production does not have a continuity in the story and the five segments represent moods and experiences of women in different stages of life. As part of the collaboration, the dance was choreographed and curated especially for the camera's eye.

The first segment, drawn from the Ritu Samhara metaphorically likens the quality of youthfulness to elements of nature such as the blossoming lotuses, purple- pink inflorescence of tall reeds in riverine environments, long necked swans gliding with their wings lit by the rays of the sun. The segment was shot on the banks of Yamuna at dawn with one camera in a sugarcane field recasting the dancing human body as an inseparable experience of the landscape for the audience. Sharon Lowen's sway of the body tantalizingly plays with the sway of the tall sugarcane and the camera's eye pauses between the Sharon Lowen's brow movements and the flicker of the feathery sugarcane panicles. Then the camera intimately, yet lightly (as if the camera were a zephyr), caresses the adorned waist in 'tribhanga', the raised foot, the painted fingers evoking the anklet bells resounding in harmony. Thrilled, the camera participates by gazing at the toes spinning into a rhythmic abandon of the body at 3.22 min.

Image 5a: Screenshot from Nayikas of Kalidasa by Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

Image 5b: Screenshot from Nayikas of Kalidasa by Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

SK: In your experience producing the work of artists across several dance traditions, how do you think manodharma subverts in the male-female binary?

KD: In dance, there is no binary. In our everyday lives, there is gender beyond the binary, our Narthaki Nataraj[1] is there representing genders beyond the binary, a great dancer, I love her art. I have shared photographs of working with the doyens of several Indian classical dance forms with you (see below). I have also produced several group choreographies. Several male dancers have had to overcome societal restrictions to fulfil their dedication and passion to dance!

In the traditional Indian dance forms, the philosophy and the performance are intertwined. The Ultimate is genderless and formless. Is what is dancing just the body? What is dancing is the soul in the Shivasutra of Vasugupta[2], we can see how this is elegantly described:

"*nartaka ātmā*" Sutra 9
   - The self (soul) is the dancer

"*raṅgo'ntarātmā*" Sutra 10
   - The innermost heart space is the performance arena

"*puṃrūpaṃ vā smaret devī strī rupaṃ vā vicintayet*
athavā niṣakalam dhyāyet saccidānanda lakṣaṇam
sarvatejomayaṃ dhyāyet sacarācara vigraham"
   - One may meditate on a male form or one may choose a female form
       Or, one may meditate on the formless, unmanifest, supreme consciousness,
       Meditate on the manifest Universe as the form of the nondual self-effulgent Being

As solo dance forms, the ekaharya mode implies that the male or the female performer almost always is required to perform 10 or 15 characters, many of which could be representing the other genders and they have to do it convincingly. When you dance, you perform life. In Kuchipudi, in those days, Satyanarayana

played Satyabhama, he was so beautiful as Satyabhama. For the audience, there was only Satyabhama on stage.

"*sadā ṣoḍaśodita aśeṣa devatā gaṇa sevitam*
evaṃ cittāmbuje dhyāyet
ardhanārishwaraṃ Shivam"
- Eternally youthful, the male-female fusion in one form (Ardhanarishwara) is worshipped by all Gods. Let This Auspicious form be invoked in the lotus of consciousness.
  This form represents oneness beyond binaries, unmanifest and manifest.

Image 6: Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Odissi

Image 7: Dr. Padma Subramanyam, Meenakshi Kalyanam, Bharatanatyam

Image 8: Kamalini Dutt with Vasanthalakshmi, N. and M. V. Narasimhachari, Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam before recording the Natya Veda dance drama.

Image 9: Dr. Kanak Rele, Mohiniyattam

Image 10: Dr. Sonal Mansingh before a Bharatanatyam performance.

Image 11: Kathak Group choreography with multi-channel cameras.

SK: Kamaliniji, you have also recorded modern choreographies, could you share about recording these modern and contemporary productions?

KD: I have recorded all of Narendra Sharma's[2] choreographies, I have also recorded Chandralekha's[3] Mahakaal and Sharira[4,5].

Antim Adhyay (The last chapter)- 31.34 minutes
SK notes: Antim Adhyay is Pandit Narendra Sharma's contemporary meditation on the rhythms of death and life set to Sushil Dasgupta's music and performed by his students at Bhoomika Creative Dance Center. While the description of the production below does not analyse the work in detail, the goal is to show Kamalini's innovations with the camera and dance on screen for a television audience in India from the 70s through the late 90s and range spanning Indian classical styles, regional folk dances as well as contemporary dance. The Antim Adhyay production reveals yet another layer of the camera that Kamalini explored through her intense engagement with the contemporary dancer, their choreographic process and the camera's eye witnessing the dancing bodies, offering both attention, provocation and meaning-making to the audience. The choreography's ability to draw upon vast exterior spaces while residing in an internal reflective time becomes the magical allure of this production. In this dimension of recording, the camera walks quietly alongside Pandit Narendra Sharma in a Mughal period cemetery reveling in the deep shadows, ancient trees, the sounds of birds, a dancing peacock and the casting of the dice in the game of life and death. Wandering onto a bridge, the camera like a good friend, leans into and watches the busy clamor of the city (Delhi's) roads beside Pandit Narendra Sharma. Unhurriedly, the camera reaches into his mindscape as he ponders the peculiar rhythms and begins inspired choreographic creation with a white shroud and a Balinese mask he unearths from an old trunk (starting at 3.05 min). With this, the

audience is seamlessly transported into the actual performance of Antim Adhyay as six dancers (in pairs) pace with the white cloth over their shoulders. Evocative, this shroud-like cloth envelops and layers the movements of the dancers as it tugs, reminiscences, and philosophizes through the multidimensional body both the acts of living and of death while the camera participates fervently (8.43) but respectfully as these bodies encapsulate the experience of being human and being confronted and contorted with mortality.

Image 12: Antim Adhyay, 0.34s, Pt. Narendra Sharma walking in a Mughal period cemetery, screenshot by Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

Image 13: Antim Adhyay, 3.11min, Pt. Narendra Sharma choreographing and improvising, screenshot by screenshot by Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

Image 14: Antim Adhyay. 23.52 min, Screenshot by Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

For the television audience, Kamalini offered an unparalleled watching dance experience as the camera breathes through the intricate interplay of movement and stillness, slowness and speed, radiating circles of power and resistance traversing both the mind of the artist, his improvisation and the performance on the reflective proscenium stage. Thank you for inspiring generations of dancers!

Biographies:

Kamalini Dutt retired as Director, Central Archives Doordarshan, New Delhi. She is a teacher and choreographer. Trained under great Gurus in three styles of classical dance forms, Kamalini Dutt has nurtured several young artistes who have acquired national repute. She is a scholar with a deep interest in Shastras related to dance and music. She continues to research in this area. She has given several lectures and also written articles and contributed to books on Shastras related subjects. Her significant work in the field of audio-visual archives, is the major digitization initiative of Doordarshan content. She had the privilege of recording performances of most of the great stalwarts in the field of music and dance in her career in Doordarshan as a producer spanning over four decades. Under her leadership, Doordarshan introduced a media asset management (MAM) solution for archiving which was first of its kind in the country. As part of the dissemination program, Kamalini has been responsible for releasing more than 100 titles as DVDs and CDs, of the precious archival performances.

Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram is a dance educator, choreographer and poet. Trained in Bharatanatyam, Butoh and Flamenco, Sandhiya has led and performed in several collaborative performances between dance styles, served on the Jury Panel for the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival and used dance therapy to work with survivors of domestic violence. Sandhiya enjoys working at the intersection of science, technology and art. Her current research and teaching interests lie at the intersection of cinema, performance, and philosophy, with a specific focus on environmental humanities.

Her works have been published in the Art and Perception, Nature, Sahitya Akademi's Indian Literature Journal, The Trumpeter, International Journal of Screendance, Scholar and Feminist Online, Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, Lens Network on Sustainability.

Dr. Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram (Srivi Kalyan): Srivi Kalyan is a multifaceted artist, designer and scholar. Srivi has authored and illustrated several books for children and adults and is an award-winning writer and illustrator. At Srishti Manipal Institute of Art Design and Technology (SMI), she is a Dean in the Cluster of Law, Environment and Planning and has pioneered several cutting-edge programs that bring social design, artistic practices, self-reflection and ecological consciousness together to reimagine our present and our futures. She is the Principal Investigator at Lila- Artist Research Studio and heads the Centre for Reimagining Transitions. She is an adjunct professor at the Consciousness Studies Program, National Institute of Advanced Studies and a trustee at the Trust for Environmental Education. Her personal work can be viewed at www.sriviliveshere.com.

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Terminology:
Taala: A traditional rhythmic beat pattern in classical Indian music.
Kala: Signifies time, duration, cycle
Laya: Laya is the tempo/pace at which a musical composition or performance is sung/played and determines the structure, dynamics, and expressiveness of a performance.
Swara: Polysemic word that can denote an accent, tone or musical note of an octave in Indian music.
Sahitya: definition of literature (also poetic verses sung in music) as aesthetic thought and expression
Muzhumandi: A full sit on the toes keeping the spine upright, while the core, rotators and quadriceps are engaged to provide a lift to the seated Bharatanatyam body.

Images Introduction: Legends of Indian Classical dance styles

Dr. Sharon Lower, Odissi, Manipuri, Mayurbhanj & Seraikella Chhau (Image 5a, 5b): https://www.sharonlowen.com/

Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Odissi (Image 6): Credited with restructuring and revival of Odissi- "I never find myself in a hurry to move on speedily with words and expression. The movement of expression must slip by and by, like a flower smiles in the very fine morning for the first time."

Guru Dr. Padma Subramanyam, Bharatanatyam (Image 7): Indologist, musician and dancer-creator of a new dance style, Bharatanrityam, she has carried out extensive research and reconstruction on the 108 Karanas.

Gurus Vasanthalakshmi, N. and M. V. Narasimhachari, Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam (Image 8): Guru Narasimhachari is a music composer, choreographer, mridangam player, concert musician and revivalist of the burra katha, a regional ballad style of Andhra Pradesh. Guru Vasanthalakshmi is a linguist, lyricist, veena virtuoso and nattuvanar (dance conductor). Guru Vasanthalakshmi has a unique expertise with the ancient "Simhanandana Tala Chitra Nrithyam" in which the dancer draws the image of a lion with her feet.

Dr. Kanak Rele, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam (Image 9): A lawyer and dance scholar, credited with re-envisioning Mohiniyattam using Sopana sangeetham and creating notation that with body kinetics and mnemonics. Dr. Rele created choreography using tradition and mythology to highlight social urgencies of her time.

Dr. Sonal Mansingh, Bharatnatyam and Odissi (Image 10): "A dancer is not just a dancer. She is part of this environment. She does not exist in a vacuum. Society and its happenings have an impact on all individuals, specially artists. If an art form does not reflect the existing milieu, it stagnates."

Pt. Narendra Sharma, Contemporary Dance (Images 12-14): Uday Shankar style, https://bhoomikadance.blogspot.com/2009/07/on-founder-director-narendra-sharma.html

The Resistive Gaze in Kuwaiti Screendance:
An Analysis of Women's Zar Dance in *Alsamt* (1979) and *Mohammed Ali Road* (2020)
Najat Alsheridah

Abstract
This article examines representations of women performing the *zar* dance in the Kuwaiti film *Alsamt/The Silence* (1979) and television show *Mohammed Ali Road* (2020). A review of scholarship overviews the history of the zar dance in Kuwait and examines representations of women's dance in Kuwaiti screendance. A comparative analysis of the zar dance scenes in *Alsamt* and *Mohammed Ali Road* considers the reasons why the latter exemplar was censored from Kuwaiti television. The analysis draws on Kuwaiti Islamic feminist perspectives to take up a consideration of multiple gazes that frame the cine-choreography of the zar dance and shape representations of women's dance in Kuwait. Expanding on these theoretical foundations, describe how patriarchal and resistive gazes influence the way the camera shapes representations of women's dance performances in Kuwaiti film and television.

In Kuwait, women are prohibited from dancing in public; however, dancing in private spaces is allowed [^1]. As a result of government censorship, representations of women dancing in Kuwaiti film and television are exceedingly rare. However, recently, Manaf Abdal's streaming television series *Mohammed Ali Road* (2020) included a scene depicting Kuwaiti women performing a zar dance [^2]. Although the scene was set in Kuwait, and shown in other countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, it was censored by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information. Following the censorship of the zar dance featured in *Mohammed Ali Road*, the actress, Hessa Al-Nabhan, who performed the dance noted that while she respected the decision to censor the scene, she felt that the dance "has nothing to do with ethics or moral issues" [^3]. Her father, a well-established Kuwaiti actor, Jassim Al-Nabhan, publicly expressed that the decision to censor the zar dance in *Mohammed Ali Road* was "a disappointment" and stated that, "not showing [the dance] means that we are not showing the historical events accordingly with credibility. Deleting zar dancing scenes that represent Kuwait's historical heritage erases the significant cultural contributions the nation has made to the MENA region." (my translation) [^4].

While there are a number of studies focused on dance in the Arab world, and several seminal works examining the zar in Egypt and Sudan [^5], there remains considerably less research about the use of the zar dance in the Khaleeji region. Notably, without mention of the zar dance, Campbell's work on the music and dance of the Khaleeji region serves as a cornerstone for understanding the history and culture of Kuwaiti dance [^6]. Additionally, without attention to film or television representations, Ahmad's, Ashkanani's, and Urkevich's studies stand out as rare examples of scholarly examinations of the zar that detail its performance in Kuwait [^7]. Although there are important works examining representations of Arab women's dance on television and in film [^8], there are very few studies that have thoroughly examined representations of women's dance in Kuwaiti film and television. Despite the paucity of research related to Kuwait, these existing studies serve to provide important contributions to understanding the significance of the zar. Additionally, the existing scholarship enables dance scholars to better recognize the regional influences of women's zar dance on television and film and contribute new knowledge as they illuminate distinctive regional contexts and important cultural considerations that influence the meanings of representations of women's dance.

In an effort to examine representations of women's zar dance in Kuwaiti film and television, this article compares one of the first representations of women performing the zar dance in the 1979 film *Alsamt (The Silence)* [^9] with the censored zar dance scene in *Mohammed Ali Road*. This addresses two identified gaps in the literature by examining the zar dance within its Khaleeji context and directing attention to its popular representations in Kuwaiti film and television. I begin with a review of the limited scholarship that examines the origins of the zar dance before then examining its ritualistic use in Kuwait. After reviewing literature related to the origins and cultural contexts of the zar dance, I draw on scholarship that explores women's representations in Kuwaiti film and television to better understand how depictions of the dance are constrained by a patriarchal gaze that influences both the camera's framing and the dancer's choreography. Directing attention to dance, I argue that the cine-choreography of the dance may serve to facilitate a resistive gaze that enables representations of women's zar dance to expand women's private sphere and empower their spiritual agency.

The Origins of the Zar Dance in Kuwait

Given the long history and cultural diversity associated with the zar ritual, it is important to note that the dance is not a distinctly Islamic religious practice. However, among Muslim people, its practice is rooted in the belief of *jinns* mentioned in the Qur'an. Jinns are considered a category of spiritual entities that are able to see humans while remaining invisible [^10]. Details about the origin of the zar dance ritual within Islamic religious practice are confounded by the wide range of spiritual practices associated with Islam. The earliest recorded observation of zar dance rituals emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Ethiopia where a description of a zar ceremony was recorded by two missionaries in 1839 [^11]. Emphasizing the contributions of African spirituality, several scholars argue that the contemporary zar dance ritual originated in Ethiopia and later spread to Middle Eastern countries through the slave trade [^12].

The performance of the zar dance is a collective experience that serves both the subject afflicted by the jinn and those participating in the ritual. Howells argues that participation in periodic zar ceremonies serves as a form of emotional cleansing for those involved [^13]. Eisler witnessed a zar ceremony in Egypt and conducted qualitative interviews with Egyptian zar participants and found that middle-class women often attended zar gatherings to relax, to enjoy themselves, and to listen to music [^14]. Drawing on the words of her participants, she describes the experience as very similar to "going to a disco" [^15]. During the zar ceremony, songs are sung, and dances are performed to call spirits and seek their kindness towards those possessed by jinn. Sengers studied Egyptian zar rituals and described the dance as an integral part of the ceremonial process conducted to appease the spirits that have taken possession of a woman [^16].

In Kuwait the zar is also referred to as *'mawjeb*,' a pacifying ritual led by a practitioner woman, the sheikha, conducted in dur. Dur are referred to as spacious rooms or courtyards which have a large flagpole at the center that the participants dance around during the ritual performance [^17]. The structure of the traditional Kuwaiti dwelling separates men and women into two different realms. In the private space of the dur, women may gather to perform their daily chores or share conversation with one another in isolation from the outside world. Alternatively, men gather in public spaces to meet other community members and discuss public and private affairs [^18]. During the pre-oil era, women had to wear an abbaya and a veil when leaving dur and there were strict rules against interacting with men. The veil was understood as a safeguard for women's honor and those who removed their veil in the presence of unrelated men could face serious consequences [^19].

The term *mawjeb* originated from the verb *'wajaba*,' which signifies that a ritualistic action was deemed necessary and obligatory, particularly as demanded by the jinn. Unlike other regional contexts, in Kuwait the *mawjeb* is not an exorcism but a ritual aimed at pacifying the jinn possessing the subject of the ritual. According to El Hadidi, zar possession is a permanent state; a zar can never be exorcised [^20]. Instead, the sheikha assists the possessed in reconciling with their jinn [^21].

According to Ashkanani, Kuwait recognizes six types of zar rituals: Qadri, Hibshi, Samri, Tambura, Laiwa, and Bahri [^22]. In the Qadri zar, participants engage with the *daf*, a frame drum as the exclusive musical instrument, creating a lively dance by turning their bodies left

and right while singing. Similarly, the Hibshi zar features daf, occasionally accompanied by a drum, *tabl*. In this zar iteration participants clap along to slow and staid songs [^23]. The Samri zar incorporates daf instruments along with a high-pitched hand drum, known as *mirwas*. As a result of its well-received rhythms, the popularity of the Samri has extended beyond zar performances [^24]. The Tamboura zar is from Nubia and was brought to the Khaleeji region by African slaves. It involves six instruments, including the *tambura*, a stringed instrument, and the *manjur,* a waist worn instrument that creates a rhythmic jangling sound when shaken. Additionally, in the Tamboura zar, four tabl are positioned on each side of the tambura player. This musical tradition is popular in Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, the UAE, and certain areas of Saudi Arabia [^25]. Both men and women participate, with women dancing at one end of the room, while men dance separately at the other. Reflecting the African origins of the zar, the songs are sung in Swahili. The remaining zar variations, the Laiwa and Bahri zar, have been discontinued from Kuwaiti zar performances. Many sheikhas claim that the Laiwa zar is no longer requested by jinn and is no longer included in Kuwaiti zar performances [^26]. Like the Tambura zar, the Laiwa zar featured songs of African origin but included a double-reed wind instrument called *sirnay* or *mizmar* in addition to a large and small tabl [^27]. The Bahri zar, also included a sirnay and a large tabl and distinguished itself with dancers performing in a unique style that often incorporated the graceful throwing of sticks into the air [^28]. The Bahri zar, frequently performed by both men and women, was often used to seek protection and alleviate loneliness. This tradition thrived during Kuwait's pre-oil era when men, involved in the pearl trade, had to travel away from home for extended periods. Each type of zar showcases a rich tapestry of music and dance, contributing to the diverse cultural and spiritual landscape of these rituals.

In Kuwaiti women's contemporary zar performances, the sheikha is often accompanied by a female band or *tagaggat* [^29]. The term 'tagaggat' derives from the verb 'yitug,' meaning 'to beat' or 'to strike,' reflecting the importance of the daf and tabl in Kuwaiti zar performances [^30]. The tagaggat consists of a primary soloist, frequently adept at beating, supported by a choir of women playing daf [^31]. The entire performance unfolds through complex rhythms played in rapid succession. Women encircle the dance floor, responding to pronounced daf beats played by the tagaggat. The sheikha orchestrates the dance steps, actively observing and encouraging participants to join. The rhythmic music induces trance-like states, and the dance, guided by the sheikha, responds to the musical preferences of the jinn. This continues until the possessed individual's body and spirit synchronize in rhythm, facilitating the pacification of the jinn's desires through cathartic movements which work to exhaust the spirit's hold over the affected woman [^32]. The songs and music associated with the zar play a crucial role in harmonizing spirits with their human hosts and serve as healing instruments that enable women to express their dynamic and collective spiritual agency.

Representations of Zar in Kuwait

In Kuwait, as film became more widespread and emerged as a form of mass entertainment, state censorship laws and regulations were introduced. Any film containing intense violence, sex, kissing, black magic, nudity, or strong language is censored or prohibited from production [^33]. Among the MENA region, "the rule-of-thumb estimation is that Kuwait is the strictest country." [^34] In a personal interview, Kuwaiti researcher and specialist on Arab feminist theory Alsharekh noted, in contrast to Egyptian or Tunisian cinema, "it is unacceptable for a woman to play the role of dancer." [^35] The examples of the zar performances in the film

Alsamt and television series *Mohammed Ali Road* serve as meaningful exceptions to this convention.

In a personal interview conducted with Kuwaiti dancer Haifa Alfuzaie, she noted that dance performances in Kuwaiti film are intended to represent the nation's history and traditions. "The dances being represented in the films reflect the nature of the society and its culture," adding "Even if they are meant to represent the feminine side of a woman, they are modified according to the society's point of view, not from a personal point of view." [^36] Given that contemporary performances of the zar in Kuwait are associated with women's dance and reflect their private practices associated with healing and communal connection, there is concern that film and television representations of the zar may overlook the significance of the ritual to Kuwaiti women. Moreover, given that Kuwaiti film and television is often produced by men, for men's viewing pleasure, the efforts to represent the nation's social and cultural traditions associated with the zar performance may constrain women's contributions to its spiritual meanings and reduce the feminist potential associated with women's collective agency.

Where Shafik describes a process of "Egyptianization" that sought to depict women's dance as a "nationalist icon" through several popular cinematic representations, the conditions of Kuwaiti censorship aim to shield women's representations from public audiences; consequently, examples of women's dance are much less frequent in Kuwaiti film and television [^37]. Although Egyptian films frequently depict women performing belly dances in close-up shots of the body in motion, Kuwaiti filmmakers must navigate their own cultural conventions when attempting to represent women's bodies in dance. In Kuwait, certain dance forms involving staccato movements, particularly those of the hips, are considered inappropriate due to the sensual nature of their performance [^38]. Moreover, while Shafik acknowledges the influence of Western media in Egypt, Kuwait endeavors to distinguish its unique culture and traditions from the West. The Kuwaiti government's Ministry of Information has sought to use film and television to represent its own nationalist agenda and differentiate itself from other Arab and Gulf countries.

Zar rituals are particularly meaningful to Kuwaiti women who use them as a way to gather together and create a shared collective space. Ashkanani reports that "zar rituals are not only curative and sacred occasions but also serve as social gatherings for the women concerned." [^39] Ahmad writes that "zar is a good example of the social bonds women built amongst themselves." [^40] Particularly in Kuwait, the association of the zar with dur has enabled women to use the private space of the home to connect with others, manage neighborhood affairs (*freej*) and strengthen communal ties. As Mianji and Semnani note, "in Arab countries like Kuwait, it has been reported that zar attracts middle-aged and middle-class women who have become isolated through the westernization of the society and who are looking for their familiar traditional world." [^41] For this reason, an examination of representations of the zar ritual in the Kuwaiti context may serve to identify how Kuwaiti women simultaneously circumvent westernized portrayals of dancing bodies and express their connection to tradition through the collective dance performance associated with the zar ritual. Given the historical significance of the zar in Kuwait, and the recent censorship of the zar in Kuwaiti television, an analysis of zar representations provides an important opportunity to analyze the cinematic strategies employed by the camera to create an 'acceptable' image of the dancing woman.

Bringing Feminist Theory and Dance Theory Together

Notably, feminist discourses in Kuwait are complex and evolving reflections of changing social, cultural, and political contexts. In the previous two decades, the Kuwaiti government has made considerable efforts to expand women's access to government, education, and the public sphere. In 2005, women gained the right to vote and run for office and women's enrollment in the nation's universities often outnumbers men. However, issues related to gender-based violence, restrictive social norms, and workplace discrimination remain concerns that Kuwaiti feminists have sought to address in calls for legal and social reform. In *Islamic Feminism in Kuwait: The Politics and Paradox,* Gonzalez writes, "Kuwaiti elites are reconciling feminism with Islam in a variety of ways" and notes that, "Islamic feminists are most successful when they present their arguments for women's rights as legitimately sanctioned from these indigenous and religious sources." [^42] By drawing on these indigenous sources and emphasizing Islamic tradition, feminism in Kuwait reflects wide-ranging and distinctive perspectives that may vary among individuals within the country and contrast itself from other iterations of feminism that have emerged elsewhere in the Khaleeji region and beyond. Toward that end, it is necessary to acknowledge that feminism in Kuwait is not a monolithic movement and may not be effectively characterized vis-à-vis opposition to the state.

While socio-political examinations of feminist agency remain crucial for understanding Kuwaiti's women's access to the public sphere, such approaches risk overlooking women's private sphere experiences. Moreover, while these approaches generate analytic critiques and amplify marginalized perspectives, they may ignore the relational structures that enable women to express solidarity with one another. The integration of dancefilm theory and attention to resistive choreographies is uniquely suited to examine how representations of Kuwaiti women's dance use the zar performance to articulate their distinctive collective agency. This approach foregrounds the spiritual and Islamic traditions that serve to empower their healing practices and communal expressions, while also directing attention to social, cultural, and religious dimensions that shape narratives of women's resilience and empowerment. In this way, the inclusion of dancefilm theory may serve to illuminate how representations of Kuwaiti women's zar dance work within the framework of Islamic tradition and Kuwaiti governance to empower women's self-expression.

In Albright's analysis of African American choreographers, she demonstrates how dance functions as a powerful means of self-expression and resistance that contributes to collective considerations of identity [^43]. Albright considers the capacity of dancing bodies to negotiate intersectional cultural identities tied to race, gender, sexuality, and physical ability in ways that actively challenge and destabilize rigid ideologies. Rejecting the contrarian impulse to capitulate to critique, she posits that dancers are simultaneously "objects of representation" and "subjects of their own experience." [^44] However, in the context of film studies, Foster finds that most scholarly analyses overlook dance theory [^45]. Zollar notes that while the haunting rhythms and colorful costumes of dancers often capture scholarly attention, the nuanced elements of technique, choreographic structure, and the aesthetics of dance are seldom discussed in detail [^46]. Like Albright, Chatterjea calls attention to dancers' embodied agency and situates their work in particular contexts marked by struggles against erasure and exclusion [^47].

Brannigan's dancefilm theory uses an interdisciplinary approach to direct scholarly attention to the use of gestures, the camera angle, lighting, and subject position in dance scenes included within film [^48]. Although other theorists consider costuming, the positionality of audiences, race, gender, sexuality, ability, and qualities of the image, this analysis focusses on the way the cine-choreography represents Kuwaiti women's zar dance in film and television. Given that women remain prohibited from dancing in public, and that public representations of Kuwaiti women must be approved by the government's censorship committee, the attention to cine-choreography serves to examine how women's private lives are exhibited to public audiences. Moreover, since both *Alsamt* and *Mohammed Ali Road* were directed and produced by men, an examination of the cine-choreography considers how the camera reflects a voyeuristic male intrusion into women's private space and communal rituals. The consideration of the resistive gaze, and the inclusion of Brannigan's dancefilm theory, serves to recognize how women's dance performances contribute to a film's meaning and problematize the presence of a patriarchal male gaze. Theorizing the male gaze, Mulvey argues that the narrative strategies of mainstream cinemas construct the spectator as male and heterosexual, and consequently, the tendency in cinema is to depict a woman as an object of male pleasure [^49]. As a result of this male gaze, representations of women in the majority of narrative films are framed from a male point of view which represents women as passive or inactive objects [^50]. However, returning to considerations of the dancers' agency, Chandralekha employs the powerful device of "returning the gaze," to detail how dance choreography facilitates compelling moments of direct encounter with the audience [^51]. Her work underscores the agency of dancers and demands attention to cultural specificities which suggest that not all dancing subjects are passive recipients of objectification. The juxtaposition between the two gazing perspectives invites a critical examination of how depictions of Kuwaiti women's zar dance are represented in film and television and calls attention to the cinematic and choreographic strategies available to both directors and dancers who lend meaning to the performances.

The Resistive Gaze in Representations of Women's Zar Dance

The representation of the zar in *Alsamt* provides a foundational exemplar from which to compare the representation of the zar dance in *Mohammed Ali Road*. Directed by Hashim Mohammed, *Alsamt* is one of the first Kuwaiti films that sheds light on the existence of patriarchal ideologies in Kuwait prior to the discovery of oil. *Alsamt* highlights the pressure put on women in Kuwaiti society to marry against their will at a young age and depicts the physical and emotional harm that accompanies such pressure. Women's performance of the zar dance in *Alsamt* provides a foundational example of dance representations in a conservative society that prohibits women from dancing in public. Although *Alsamt* was filmed decades before the television series *Mohammed Ali Road*, the zar dance scenes share several important similarities and include notable differences.

In both the film and the television series, the character performing the dance is a lead character named Maryam. Notably, in Islam Maryam is the only woman named in the Qur'an and the Surah Maryam reflects representations of motherhood and divine maternity, purity, and immaculate conception [^52]. For these reasons, Maryam serves as an exemplar for Muslim women, highlighting qualities of faith, modesty, patience, and submission to the will of God. In both examples of the zar dance analyzed, the performance of the ritual seeks to heal Maryam from a spiritual possession, or jinn, that is leading her to pursue a path different

from her family's wishes. In each example, the combination of bodies, space, and sound work to placate the jinn and alleviate Maryam's suffering.

In both zar examples analyzed, the sound of the daf drum indicates that the type of zar being performed may be classified as a Qadri dance. In a Qadri zar, the musical beats and melodies induce a trance-like state through repetitive and rhythmic patterns that include the body spinning and undulating in motions that are believed to weaken the jinn. The distinctive movements in zar encompass a range of intricate head gestures, including swaying from side to side and occasional full rotations. These head movements are not mere physical actions but integral to the embodied psycho-somatic experience, holding profound significance in the ritual [^53]. In both examples, the camera is directed toward Maryam and the dance is performed to heal her. Both scenes also include several other women; in each, one woman serves as a sheikha and the others act as members of the tagaggat to help release the jinn. With the voyeuristic presence of a male camera perspective, these dance movements may become fetishized objects of sexualized attention. As Ashkanani notes "The movement of the women, particularly in the more ecstatic Qadri rhythms, are thought to be 'caused' by the jinn…. Such disorderly writhings and tremblings characteristic of this stage is described as the patient is 'coming down.'" [^54]. Continuing, she writes, "In the term most often used, the jinn is being 'satisfied'. Once 'satisfied' in this manner, by the zar, the jinn is placated and pacified and will then stop tormenting the patient." [^55] In *Alsamt*, the ritual concludes with a close up shot depicting a tear rolling down Maryam's face. However, in *Mohammed Ali Road*, the ritual concludes with a depiction of Maryam's eyes turning white as they roll back into her head before she faints from the overwhelming sensation of the jinn's release. This representation of Maryam's sensorial experience may attract a male gaze that experiences pleasure in her ecstatic appearance.

In *Alsamt*, the sheikha is assisted by two women who hold Maryam as the sheikha burns incense to prepare the space and appease the jinn. As the ritual progresses, the rhythmic expressions of the daf form the background sound and create a ritualistic and spiritually charged atmosphere for pacification. In the film, the camera focus is directed on Maryam's face and the representation of the ritual reflects a more individualized and spiritual dimension. Alternatively, in the television series *Mohammed Ali Road*, the camera exhibits more movement and the representation of the ritual reflects the spiritual and collective facets of women's zar performance.

In *Alsamt,* a closed door signals to audiences that the zar ritual is occurring within a private space designed to contain the jinn and restrict its entry into the outside world. Moreover, the closed door indicates that the women are not violating any laws against women's public dance performance and suggests that they are acting in accordance with Kuwaiti social conventions. Like the locked door in *Alsamt*, in *Mohammed Ali Road* the walls of backyard garden space, *hawsh,* help to contain the energy of the ritual. In *Alsamt*, the assistants are only briefly depicted and are excluded from the camera's frame during the majority of the dance performance. Unlike *Alsamt*, the women in the tagaggat are depicted as participants throughout the zar performance in *Mohammed Ali Road*. Although set in the semi-private space of the hawsh, the space is occupied only by women. However, the healer's request for the participants to cover themselves indicates that the jinn is male. In Kuwaiti zar rituals the possession of the jinn is often reflective of the opposite sex [^56]. In both examples, women are depicted in a space free of a male presence; yet, the women adhere to the conventions

of attire that are expected in the company of men and are positioned as subjects performing to the ostensibly male gaze of the camera. In *Mohammed Ali Road,* Maryam's face is covered with a white cloth and the other womens' faces are covered with *boshiya*, a traditional veil worn by women in Kuwait to cover their entire face in the presence of men. As a male force, the jinn possessing Maryam requires the women to cover themselves and abide by socio-cultural customs that serve to ensure women's modest appearance.

In Kuwaiti zar performances, the pacification of the jinn, in contrast to its exorcism or eradication, may serve to reflect the complexities of a Kuwaiti-Islamic feminist perspective. This perspective does not seek to dismantle the patriarchal traditions of Kuwaiti society but, instead, strives to reconcile the presence of dissonant social and cultural values that limit women's access to the public sphere while espousing efforts to protect and honor women's contributions to society. As the women's zar dance functions to placate the jinn, the women's collective agency serves to circumvent access to public space and signify their capacity to oversee spiritual matters and manage neighborly affairs. In both performances, the sheikha, serves as the officiating leader and plays a pivotal role in ensuring Maryam's well-being. The sheikha exhibits her agency as she manages both Maryam's experience and the pacification of the jinn while orchestrating members of the tagaggat throughout the ritual.

In both *Alsamt* and *Mohammed Ali Road*, the camera emphasizes the privacy of the scene and the immediacy of the women's spiritual experiences in close-up shots of Maryam's face. Brannigan writes, "Characteristics specific to the close-up in dancefilm include … the dance-like quality of the micro-movements that create a micro-choreography." [^57] Brannigan's emphasis on the micro-choreography directs attention to the facial expressions of Maryam which explains how these camera movements function to influence representations of the zar dance [^58]. In *Mohammed Ali Road*, Maryam dances to appease the hostile energy of the jinn, she bends her upper body with convulsive twists and turns, maintaining a delicate balance while advancing her feet. A sudden forceful thrust of her breasts upward, accompanied by arching her head back on stretched-out shoulders, marks a pivotal moment in the dance. The zar dance scene climaxes with her throwing herself to the ground, covering her body with dust and earth, and rising to repeat the same ritualistic movements. The intricate procession of dance is reiterated multiple times and underscores the ritual's unique and profound nature [^59]. In *Alsamt*, the close up shot of the tear serves as an example of what Chandralekha characterizes as "returning the gaze" [^60]. Chatterjea describes this as occurring when subjects "direct their gaze at some point in the audience, focusing a moment of direct encounter and holding briefly, before they move into another sequence." [^61] As the camera frames Maryam's tear, a wistful smile signifies a final gesture of respect or deference intended to appease the jinn. The dissonant combination of tear and smile creates a powerful visual moment that captures the emotional complexity of Maryam's connection with the spiritual realm and conveys a sense of profound spiritual release and reconciliation. The resistive gaze not only captures the emotional complexity of her connection with the spiritual realm but it also serves as a poignant reflection of the broader Kuwaiti-Islamic feminist perspective that empowers women's spiritual agency.

Given that performances of the zar are intended to be held in private spaces, free of male viewers, the lens of the male gaze offers viewers a voyeuristic opportunity to witness the ritual. In *Alsamt*, the focus on facial expression rather than body movement serves to

constrain the choreography of the dancing body and comply with Kuwaiti censorship laws that prohibit representations of women's bodies dancing. In a media market where representations of women are regulated to ensure that they are portrayed with modesty, *Mohammed Ali Road*'s depiction of Maryam's full body quivering in resistance to the jinn's possession may serve to raise concerns from Kuwaiti censors. Although the zar performance in *Mohammed Ali Road* was permitted in many MENA countries, in Kuwait women's access to the public sphere is constrained by socio-cultural and religious discourses that demand women's subservience and modesty.

In both examples, the dance is represented by frequent camera pans and changing angles that create the illusion that Maryam's body is moving to the dance. It is important to note that the Qur'an acknowledges the sexualization associated with the male gaze: "tell believing men to lower their glances and guard their private parts: that is purer for them." [^62] In *Alsamt,* this 'lowered gaze' is represented by the use of close-ups that avoid depictions of Maryam's full body during the dance performance. In *Mohammed Ali Road*, the lowered gaze is represented by a birds-eye camera perspective that shows the women assembling to perform the zar dance. From this elevated camera perspective, the ritual is shown to be "judged" and kept at a critical distance that looks down on the dance. In both examples the camera conforms with the ostensibly 'religious' conventions and exhibits the modesty and purity necessary to structure and shape women's representations in MENA film and television. Where *Alsamt* only briefly shows the participants involved in the zar and directs the camera's attention toward Maryam's private experience, *Mohammed Ali Road* presents a more public display of the zar party and showcases the role of the sheikha and participants. The bird's-eye perspective showcases the spatial arrangement of the dancers and tagaggat and exhibits a kind of spatial choreography that enables the viewer to sense the distribution of bodies. In doing so, the shifting camera perspective frames a resistive gaze that expands women's private sphere and attempts to provide attention to women's collective movement without an objectifying focus on a singular woman's body.

Conclusion

While both *Alsamt* and *Mohammed Ali Road* are set in the pre-oil era when variations on Islamic religious practices emphasized spiritual rituals and elements of mysticism; in contemporary Kuwait, the zar ritual is forbidden. Examining the zar practice in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, Urkevich explains that authorities "have forbidden zar parties… because of the sorcery and lack of faith they entail." [^63]. The audiences' ability to witness the resistive gaze associated with the ritual performance of the zar enables them to empathize with the emotions of the characters and experience spiritual traditions that may no longer be permitted in Islamic practice. In the context of Kuwaiti film and television censorship, the spectacle of ritual performance conducted by a strong woman, may be considered a violation of social conventions. Moreover, the representation of a woman leading a religious ceremony that violates Kuwaiti religious customs may further serve as a reason for the censorship of the scene.

An examination of differences between *Alsamt* and *Mohammed Ali Road* served to identify reasons why the latter example was censored from Kuwaiti media. Moreover, a comparative analysis of the two scenes illustrates how the zar dance scenes contribute to women's representations in Kuwaiti film and television. In *Alsamt* the dance is performed in the private

space of an interior home while in *Mohammed Ali Road* the performance is set in the semi-private space of a hawsh. In *Alsamt* the camera is focused only on Maryam's face. Although viewers can hear the sounds of the tambourine played by the assistants, there is no exhibition of her body movement and the assistants are not shown in the performance. In contrast, in *Mohammed Ali Road*, viewers see Maryam's body perform the zar dance in a wider camera shot that includes the assistants using the tambourine and participating in the performance. In *Alsamt* low angles and close-up shots contain the expressions of Maryam's performance of the zar and restrict the physicality and sensuality of the dance to comply with censorship conventions. Alternatively, in *Mohammed Ali Road*, the use of wider shots and a high angle serve to highlight the communal and ritualistic aspects of the performance in ways that resist Kuwait censors' efforts to prevent the exhibition of women's dance performances in public spaces.

Biography

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NOTES:

[^1]: Alsheridah, 1.
[^2]: Mohammed Ali Road.
[^3]: Alelah, para. 4.
[^4] Al-Marsd News, para 1-2.
[^5]: For example, see: Abdelmohsien; Ashby; El Hadidi; Karayanni; Nagi; and Sengers.
[^6]: Campbell.
[^7]: Ahmad; Ashkanani; and Urkevich.
[^8]: For example, see: Armbrust; Dougherty; McCormack; Shafik; Shomali; and Ward.
[^9]: *Alsamt.*
[^10]: Nagi.
[^11]: Makris and Natvig.
[^12]: See: Cerrulli; El Hadidi; Lewis et al.; and Natvig.
[^13]: Howells.
[^14]: Eisler.
[^15]: ibid, 25.
[^16]: Sengers.
[^17]: Ashkanani.
[^18]: Alsuwailan.
[^19]: ibid.
[^20]: El Hadidi.
[^21]: ibid.
[^22]: Ashkanani.
[^23]: ibid.
[^24]: ibid.
[^25]: Al Rai Media, para 4.
[^26]: ibid, para 6.
[^27]: Ashkanani.
[^28]: ibid.
[^29]: Urkevich, 52.
[^30]: ibid.
[^31]: ibid.
[^32]: Saleh, 156-70.
[^33]: Al-Ajmi, 39.
[^34]: Mingant, 77.
[^35]: Alsharekh, personal interview, 2017.
[^36]: Alfuzaie, personal interview, 2018.
[^37]: Shafik, 9.
[^38]: Alfuzaie.
[^39]: Ashkanani, 225.
[^40]: Ahmad, 469.
[^41] Mianji and Semnani, 230.
[^42] González, 2.
[^43] Albright.
[^44] ibid, 13.
[^45] Foster.

[^46] Chatterjea, 18.
[^47] ibid, 23.
[^48] Brannigan.
[^49] Mulvey.
[^50] ibid, 30.
[^51] In Bharucha.
[^52] The Qur'an, 191-195.
[^53] Karayanni, 458.
[^54] Ashkanani, 222.
[^55] ibid, 222.
[^56] ibid, 225.
[^57] Brannigan, 46.
[^58] ibid.
[^59] Ashby, 77.
[^60] Chatterjea, 23.
[^61] ibid.
[^62] The Qur'an, 222.
[^63] Urkevich, 203.

Drawn to the light: Cinematic and Performative Ecologies in Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963) and Eiko Otake's *Night with Moths* (2019)
Tina Wasserman

Abstract:

The purpose of this essay is to explore the evocative use of moths within cinematic and performative contexts. To do so, two moving image works were chosen, each framed within in a comparative context to the other: the first, the historic and iconic masterwork of avant-garde cinema by the legendary filmmaker Stan Brakhage titled *Mothlight* (1963), and the second, a contemporary performance video titled *Night with Moths* (2019) by the interdisciplinary movement-based artist, Eiko Otake. With their attraction to light, along with their fluttering, nocturnal flights, moths seem to have a strong kinship with not only the moving images of cinema, but also with the movement focus of dance and performance. Indeed, the very presence of moths in both moving image works, invites us to witness compelling cinematic and performative collaborations that move across species and ecologies.

Key Words: cinematic, performative, ecologies, movement-based work, moths, botanicals, materialities, dance, bodies

Moths and cinema share certain expressive traits. Although such commonalities found across so great a divide as those between living biological beings and inorganic technical processes might appear outwardly implausible, each invites comparison to the other. Indeed, an essential attribute to both is darkness: moths are known to become active at night and, through much of its history, cinema was uniquely expressed by the illuminated projection of moving images inside darkened theatres. Nevertheless, while both are largely darkness oriented, each is animated by light. Although mostly nocturnal, moths are known to be drawn toward sources of illumination. Likewise, in both its historic photochemical form and its current digital configuration, cinema is twice reliant on light, both in the registration of its images on to light sensitive material–whether silver coated emulsion or electronic sensors–and in the subsequent screening or streaming of those images. Moths and cinema share another unlikely connection. Each is known for their ability to evoke captivating movement: for moths, it is the graceful flutter of wings, and for cinema, it is the illusionary quality of moving images that travel across a phantasmagoric screen.

With these similarities established between such seemingly dissimilar phenomena, the purpose of this essay is to explore the evocative use of moths within cinematic contexts. To do so I have chosen two moving image works–one historic, the other contemporary–each framed within a comparative context to the other. The first is the iconic masterwork of avant-garde cinema *Mothlight* (1963, 16mm, silent, 3 minutes, 13 seconds). Uniquely constructed by the legendary filmmaker Stan Brakhage (1933-2002), it has often been described as having more similarities to collage than to the dominant narrative focus of cinema during the era in which it was made. Indeed, Brakhage himself wrote about the work that he had planned it as a "purely collage film."[1]

The second more contemporary work is the performance video titled *Night with Moths* (2019, sound, 17 minutes, 34 seconds) by the "movement-based interdisciplinary artist" Eiko Otake (b. 1952),[2] The piece was created and choreographed by Eiko in collaboration with Joseph Scheer, an artist who works extensively with moths and, additionally, with Rebekkah Palov, who provided the camera work while assisting Eiko with the choreography and editing of the piece.

I use the term "ecology" here in several expansive and generative directions. In general, with reference to the environment itself, I am perhaps most closely aligned in my thinking with the Greek etymological origins of the word itself, *"oikos,"* which translates to "dwelling," "habitation" or "house." Using the term as such, I mean to imply communities of living organisms–whether animal or botanical–and their relatedness, interaction and interconnectedness to one other, as well as to the physical environments in which they reside. With reference to the particular focus of this essay, I use the term "ecology" more broadly to describe imaginative eco-systems that are engaged in, or engaged by, artistic production and reception. In this sense *Mothlight* and *Night with Moths* become, respectively, cinematic and performative artmaking ecologies that are engendered through the energetic, creative and innovative interaction between human-animal-botanical beings and the environmental-mechanical-structural elements which surround them. Participants, witnesses, viewers, beings, structures and mechanisms are all implied in these ecologies.

While both artists use moths as their primary material, and within a moving image context, it is critical to note here that each work comes out of distinct artistic practices and eras. Although born decades apart, and with Eiko's artistic practice extending more deeply into the twenty-first century (Brakhage died just at the outset of the twenty-first century), I would nevertheless identify both artists' work as occupying similar concerns that gripped numerous avant-garde practices during the second half of the twentieth century. More complex to explore in depth here, it is nevertheless important to underscore that much avant-garde practice of this era was noted for dismantling and disassembling classic, realistic and traditional modes of narration and artistic expression in order to hybridize traditional concepts of art but also, importantly, to explore stripped-down ontologies of various artistic genres–whether performance, sculpture, cinema, painting and more–and to interrogate, in part, deep, existential ontologies of being, seeing, moving, living and more. In addition to their use of moths to structure each work, perhaps the most significant connection I can make between these two artists is the relevance of their chosen mediums to *movement* itself. To be sure, cinema itself is often described as an art of movement: its name is derived from the Greek word "kinema" (movement). Logically then, the moniker of cinema, as an art form of moving images is simply, "the movies." Similarly, movement is a foundational element in performance and dance. In defining herself as an artist and dancer, Eiko has emphasized movement as one of the essential attributes in her work, writing: "There are many ways of being an artist. I like movement of mind, of myself, of others. I like movement in wind, trees, animals, waves and mountains."[3] It is easy to see why both artists would be drawn to using moths in their perspective works as they are not only resonant with the moving images of cinema but also with the movement focus of dance and performance. Indeed, all three subjects included in this inquiry here–that is, moths, cinema and performance–engage in various expressive incarnations of movement, a phenomenon that equally binds them all together.

Nonetheless, movement itself, as articulated in each piece functions in decidedly different ways. For the most part, except for the minimally perceptible movement of trees and the agitated motion of the hyacinth branches Eiko holds in her hands, it is human and insect movement that animate the performance in *Night with Moths.* This is apparent whether it is the expressive movement of the human body or the environmentally influenced movement of the moths. Quite oppositely, although *Mothlight* is a film that is constructed with insects as its subject matter, movement is enacted entirely through the driving force of cinema itself. Thus, the mechanical movement-making function of cinema must be distinguished from any kind of human or insect derived movement.[4] Yet it is important to point out here, that whether or not a film is assembled out of the static photo-chemical frames of historic emulsion-based celluloid or out of the coded digital pixels of newer technologies, cinematic movement is always an illusionary construction.[5]

Indeed, one of Brakhage's goals was to liberate cinema from its entanglement with illusionism, whether it was related to cinema's formal elements or to Hollywood's escapist content. Born in 1933, Brakhage came of age during the seminal years associated with the North American avant-garde film movement, becoming one of its most prodigious forces between the 1960s and early 1980s. His work illustrates the experimental energy that would inhabit avant-garde film at the time, exemplifying the seismic changes inaugurated across various art movements of the mid-twentieth century. Described by the film critic J. Hoberman as a "would-be poet, shameless visionary, self-dramatizing expressionist,"[6] Brakhage was, nonetheless, one of the most important avant-garde filmmakers of the second half of the twentieth century. Insisting that cinema was something much more than commercial entertainment and storytelling, Brakhage focused on the specific visuality of the filmic medium. At the time, composed as it was from photochemical, emulsion-based celluloid strips, cinema's ontologies and materialities became, for him, a crucible for seeing, for vision and for perception itself, in all its incarnations whether internally or externally formed.

Working from a place of artisanal singularity and hands-on tactility, Brakhage not only worked with the filmic medium by traditionally recording moving images with a camera, but he also used the film strip itself as a material surface on to which he painted, scratched, drew, incised and more. It is important to stress that he did not invent this practice. In point of fact, many such techniques had already been used and tested in cinema. One thinks of Georges Melies' hand-processed application of vivid color to his film *Trip to the Moon,* made in 1903, or Len Lye's experimental 1935 film *Colour Box,* in which he painted directly on to 35 mm film stock. Brakhage, however, added a new dimension to this kind of practice: he used the film strip as a surface on to which he attached the physical fragments of organic matter itself. Remarkably, *Mothlight* (1963) is a film constructed out of the biological remnants of moth wings, flower petals, spliced blades of grass, twigs, leaves, and seeds. The process by which Brakhage constructed his film signaled a radical shift in the way one could think about cinema. As a camera-less, hand-processed film made without any photographically recorded footage, *Mothlight* profoundly altered cinema from a medium primarily constructed out of recorded photographic images to one that accommodated any kind of imprinted physical matter, virtually "turning celluloid into a plastic medium."[7] Hoberman would write of Brakhage that he "was neither the first filmmaker to eschew the camera nor the first to scratch patterns into, or glue objects to, the film emulsion. He does, however, seem to have been the first to fashion a movie entirely from actual flora and fauna."[8] Because of its profound departure from standard filmmaking practices, many legendary anecdotes have circulated about the making of this extraordinary film. Perhaps the most pointed, is that the film was born out of the impoverished economic situation in which Brakhage found himself in the early 1960s. Film scholar P. Adams Sitney writes:

> When he had no money to buy film stock, he conceived the idea of making a film out of natural material through which light could pass... Brakhage collected dead moths, flowers, leaves, and seeds. By placing them between two layers of Mylar editing tape, a transparent, thin strip of 16mm celluloid with sprocket holes and glue on one side, he made *Mothlight* (1963).[9]

Watching this astonishing film, the viewer witnesses cinema as truly artifactual. As the projected strip of imprinted matter unravels on the screen, the viewer marvels at the fleeting yet evidential quality of the images. Earthy tonalities of browns, burgundies and greens create a vivid palette. Translucent moth wings flicker by as if in flight while the botanical traces of seeds, twigs and petals create an ecology of matter. Flattened floral silhouettes flash as verdant shapes of webbed wings and leaf veins shimmer past. Luminous grasses pulse across the screen. Everything moves at once, incongruously abstracted and recognizable at the same time. The work is not only significant in the history of film, but also gorgeous

and intoxicating as well. Brakhage himself recognized *Mothlight*, as a film "of indescribable beauty and perfection" further claiming, that it was "what is easily the most perfectly formal work I have yet made."[10]

Made almost six decades later, but also with "flora and fauna," Eiko's piece *Night with Moths* (2019) is a striking nocturnal performance that provides us with a worthy comparison to Brakhage's earlier work. Eiko is known for her decades-long interdisciplinary work that engages the performative body. Beginning in the 1970s, and for more than forty years thereafter, she was known with her partner Koma as the interdisciplinary performance duo "Eiko & Koma." Their performance collaboration was noted "for works that were slow and austere, using a minimal degree of movement"[11] and "treasured for their stark, startlingly slow excavations of stillness and shape while time gradually passes."[12] At an important point in their career, recorded media began to figure in their performative pieces, as dance historian Rosemary Candelario points out: "Eiko & Koma began to make and screen what they call media dances or dances for camera in the early 1980s."[13]

In the last decade, particularly since 2014, Eiko has continued on as a solo artist while also, at times, collaborating with numerous other artists. In one of her most extensive series in recent years, *A Body in Places,* Eiko has engaged her performative self within more than seventy diverse sites that range from the quotidian (Philadelphia's 30th Street Station) to the haunting (Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetery during the Covid pandemic). Perhaps the most arresting ongoing project she has engaged with since 2014 is *A Body in Fukushima,* "the extensive and expanding collaborative project"[14] between herself and the historian and photographer William Johnston. Travelling to the disaster ravaged site in Japan more than five times since 2014, the project has not only engendered Eiko's emotionally raw and grief-stricken on-site performances, but also a film, book, photographs and music, all of which trace, witness and mourn the ruins, remains and results of the 2011 Tōhoku region earthquake, tsunami and subsequent Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

Eiko and Koma were both born in post-war Japan. With their focus on slow, measured movements and the sometimes twisted distortions of their bodies, it is easy to see the scarred traces of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in much of their work. Eiko's interest in the social and cultural effects of the atomic bomb on postwar Japanese society was academically formalized in 2007 when she received a master's degree from the Individualized Study Graduate Program at New York University's Gallatin School. Her concentration was in postwar Japanese Literature writing a thesis titled "Atomic Bomb Literature."[15]

One senses this continued concern and interest with particular acuteness in Eiko's performances at Fukushima where she provides on-site acts of mourning and movement that address the wounds humanity has inflicted on the environment, on other species and on itself since the splitting of the atom in the 1940s and the dawn of the nuclear era in which we now must live. Dance critic Gia Kourlas writes that she uses "her slender, seemingly vulnerable body as a vessel to embody trauma, fragility and desolation" within "sites of suffering or turmoil.[16] Eiko's performances in these damaged locations trace the remains of trauma that linger in places and in bodies across generations. Eiko underscores this when, in an essay titled *Why I Dance,* she writes: "Massive violence shakes us.... and the upset caused by it lingers in the space. That is history."[17]

Night with Moths, is presented as a "two screen video installation,"[18] Vertically layered, with one screen above, the other screen below, the work appears to be one long take that is cut into two segments, with the top screen appearing to be the later part of the single take and lower screen, the earlier part.[19] This appears to be so because in the top screen, Eiko's white shirt is always open, but in the bottom screen her shirt is closed, then torn open toward the end of the piece. The vertical screen configuration challenges

one's sense of linear chronologies. Appearing stacked like this, the simultaneously depicted double screens alter the foreword moving, horizontal vector of "normal" time, shifting it more clearly into the space of a preternatural temporality. Performing in a wooded setting at night while grasping white hydrangeas as she moves, it is only Eiko's face and upper body that appear framed before the camera. The deep darkness of the forested night, however, is powerfully transformed into an otherworldly space by the presence of a large light bulb placed upon a tripod. Drawn to the illumination the light creates, a throng of moths flock to the scene.

Almost translucent against the incongruously lit nocturnal scene, the moths appear spectral. While Eiko strikes at the night air with the hydrangeas, moth wings and flower petals mirror one another in a ghostly dance. Darting about or settling into stillness, Eiko seems, at times, to be aware of the moths' presence, while at other times, she appears to move past them into quiet meditative poses, as if she is emotionally feeling the space rather than outwardly seeing it. A few minutes into the piece, on the bottom screen, a moth lands on the side on her face. Settling there, the moth spreads its wings like a fan. They perform a kind of inter-species pas de deux for several minutes until Eiko turns her head slowly, and then almost touching the moth with her finger, it flies away. Her movements appear simultaneously expressive, distressed, agitated, and anguished. Throughout much of the performance, the lighted tripod is mostly offscreen, although the emanating light it creates is clearly visible. At other times it is depicted as slightly onscreen, with Eiko making contact with it during the performance. In this way, the obvious artifice of the situation–that is, the presence of artificial lighting, used to draw in the moths–is never made to be invisible.

While the presence of "flora and fauna," and, in particular, the presence of moths resonates across these two moving image works of art, there are significant differences between them as well. Perhaps most significant is the fact that while Brakhage's film was constructed from the remains of dead moths, Eiko's performative video features living moths. Before making *Mothlight,* however, Brakhage had expressed an interest in filming live moths to include in his work. In a letter he wrote to his friend and colleague, the poet Robert Kelly, he outlined how this curiosity began. While working in his studio one day, Brakhage discovered a large moth flying about. Describing it to Kelly as a "a gigantic multi-colored beauty," he wrote he was intrigued by "the moth itself, its movements, particularly when it began settling first on one then another strip of film hanging beside me."[20] Continuing in the letter, he related how he later "photographed this moth in extreme close-up as it fluttered against the window glass, with the specific idea in mind to use those images in *Dog Star Man*."[21] Brakhage further explained to Kelly, that he was not only interested in filming live moths, but that the construction of movement in his work since the late 1950s had been inspired "by moth flight" and that he had always been engaged more generally in "thoughts, observations, and study....on the flight of the moth and moth sight."[22]

In spite of his wish to film live moths, the reality of doing so proved to be too difficult for Brakhage. However, just as the idea of recording living moths came to him while he was working in his studio, so too did the idea of filming dead moths.[23] This occurred while working on his film at night when Brakhage noticed the moths' deadly nocturnal attraction to the light sources in his studio space. Brakhage would later recall in an audio recording that "these crazy moths [were] flying into the candlelight and burning themselves to death."[24] In a painstakingly laborious and exceptionally inventive process, Brakhage then collected the moth carcasses for the film he envisioned. Writing to Kelly, he explained: "all moths whose wings were being used in the film had been collected from enclosed light boxes and lamp bowls."[25] Thus, instead of shooting footage, as would normally happen in the production phase of filmmaking, the unusual production process for *Mothlight* consisted of collecting moth remains that were left at the illuminated source where they had died.

While the behavior that drew moths to his studio lights was described somewhat scornfully by Brakhage as "crazy," it is scientifically known as "positive phototaxis." The explanation for this activity remains somewhat mercurial, especially since proximity to bright light sources often lead to moth fatality. However, many biologists now believe that this behavior may be related to the moth's own evolutionary development. It is likely an evolutionary adaptation, as well, that moths mostly function in nocturnal settings, a behavior developed, in part, to avoid diurnal predators. As nocturnal beings, moths' most likely use the brightness of the moon and stars to navigate their flight patterns in a process known as "transverse orientation." As geographer Matthew Gandy writes, moths are "effectively compelled towards light by their neural networks."[26] Moths, therefore, instinctively move toward any kind of light, whether it is the moon or stars, as part of their evolutionary history–which biologists guess to be around 190 million years– or toward the newer artificial lights of the Anthropocene–which some scientists believe began during the Industrial Revolution, around 200 years ago, others that it began around 1950. Millions of years of evolutionary behavior has, in this sense, altered into new movement patterns predicated on shifts in the moth's environment.

Thus, whether because of lightboxes and "lamp bowls" placed in a studio workspace or because of a bright bulb placed on a tripod within a nocturnal forest, moths appear in both Brakhage's film and in Eiko's performance precisely because they were drawn to illuminated light sources. In each work, however, the moths appear in two distinct forms: that is, as vivid but dead matter in Brakhage's film, and, oppositely, as living participants in Eiko's performance.

Yet, creating a clear distinction between the dead matter of Brakhage's film and the living movement of Eiko's performance is perhaps too simplistic. Indeed, set at night, the ghostly palette of Eiko's performance suggests something more complex. The shrouded tone is set, in part, because the color white is threaded throughout the work. The white hydrangeas, the white shirt she wears, and the lit, whitened, bodies of the flickering moths as they congregate into the frame all create a spectral, even deathly aura to the performance. The very darkness of the woods, as well as the mute trees that appear like silent witnesses also contribute to the elegiac quality of the performance. At times, Eiko's melancholic movements seem to articulate a tragic sense of loss, whether it is the loss of habitat, the loss of indigenous knowledge of the woods, or the loss of women themselves, who were historically persecuted and burned as witches for their long association with the forest and its healing medicinal plants. The anxiety of environmental degradation resounds as well in this pensive performance, reminding us we may be posed to lose these wild and beautiful spaces as we move deeper into the human-made era of the Anthropocene.

At the same time, however, the piece invites a kind of joyous wonderment. This has to do, in part, with the use of sound in the video, which records the lively acoustic diversity of the nocturnal forest. Nighthawks, owls, crickets, frogs and the rush of night breezes abound, powerfully contradicting the assumed hush and repose of night into an ensemble of sound, movement and liveliness. Eiko's piece seems to suggest that while sacred forested spaces are vulnerable, they are still clearly alive, teeming with animate activity. This kind of contrast between trauma and endurance reverberates across Eiko's work, as historian Andrew Szegedy-Maszak has written, for example, of her performance in *A Body in Fukushima*, that it stands as a testament to "fragility but also resilience."[27]

One might argue that a similar contrast echoes across Brakhage's film *Mothlight* as well. Known for choosing to work without sound throughout much of his career, the film is significantly silent. Working with dead moths, the silence of the film underscores its connection to deathliness. Silence is itself often associated with death. As film theorist Christian Metz once noted, the prominent attributes of the

photograph, "immobility and silence....are not only two objective aspects of death, they are also its main symbols, they *figure* it."[28]

However, Brakhage's work is not photographic: it is cinematic. And cinema powerfully reproduces the illusion of lifelikeness through its very structuring of movement and moving images. Thus, although he worked with silence and used dead moths, *it is the living force of cinema itself* that brings his film closer to Eiko's living performance. Indeed, working with the biological remains of the moths, Brakhage true wish was to "reanimate" them. As an artist working with the medium of film, Brakhage understood that there was no better mechanism to do this than through the animate, moving images of cinema. Of the process, Brakhage stated:

> Here is a film that I made out of a deep grief....Over the lightbulbs there's all these dead moth wings, and I ... hate that. Such a sadness; there must surely be something to do with that. I tenderly picked them out and start pasting them onto a strip of film, to try to... give them life again, to animate them again, to try to put them into some sort of life through the motion picture machine."[29]

Hence it was precisely through the moving images of cinema itself that Brakhage believed he could resuscitate dead moths into animate creatures again, writing that "the simulation of life" would occur through "the eventual unwinding of this film."[30] It was a process Hoberman would call "radiant mummification," writing that, "If cinema is primarily the art of animation–restoring or creating movement, conjuring ghosts, and bringing inert matter to life–then little *Mothlight* is pure cinema: life transmuted into light and motion."[31]

Returning to the comparison with which we began this inquiry, between moths and cinema, Hoberman evocatively writes of *Mothlight:* "Don't these onrushing moth wings signify the very ephemerality of the cinematic image?"[32] With their attraction to light and their fluttering, nocturnal flights, moths have a strong kinship with the movement focus of dance and performance and, indeed, the moving images of cinema. What better creature to use in these two richly poetic moving image works than moths? Their presence in both invites us to witness compelling ecological collaborations across species, environments and mechanisms, whether they are used as organic remains that are revivified into cinematic movement, or as living collaborators that are invited into a nocturnal forest dance.

Biography
Tina Wasserman, Ph.D. is a full-time faculty member in the Visual and Material Studies Department at The School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University. She has published articles, essays, and book chapters in various journals and presses including *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, *Afterimage*, *Streetnotes, Wallflower Press* and *Intellect Books* among others.

Notes

1. Brakhage. *Metaphors on Vision:* n.p. (See also, for example, descriptions of Brakhage's collage process by J. Hoberman in "Direct Cinema" and P.A. Sitney in *Visionary Film.*)
2. Eiko Otake Web Site. Accessed August 2, 2023. https://www.eikootake.org
Going forward, I will refer to her as "Eiko" as she prefers being identified professionally by her first name in order to create continuity with her long performance history in the duo "Eiko & Koma." This preference was articulated in email dated August 14, 2023

3. Eiko. "Why I Dance.": 72.

4. An interesting connection between insect movement, and movement such as it is implied in pre-cinematic recording devices can be found in the early experiments of scientist Étienne-Jules Marey, who, in 1868, "gilded the wing tips of a wasp....[which] would leave a luminous trace" across a blackened cylinder in order to indicate the successive flight pattern of its wings. The following year he constructed a mechanical insect to augment his understanding of insect wing movement. This would eventually lead to Marey's interest in photographically documenting animal movement and the invention of his chronophotographic gun in 1882, a pre-cinematic device that could record up to twelve frames per second. (see Marta Braun *Picturing Time,* pp 31-32.)

5. Theories and scholarly discussions around the issue of cinematic movement are complex and beyond the scope of this essay. I have addressed them more in depth in my essay: "Still Lives: Tableaux Vivants, Moving Images and the Digital Uncanny," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video,* Volume 40, Issue 5, 2023.

6. Hoberman. "Direct Cinema.": 482.

7. Frye. "Stan Brakhage."

8. Hoberman. "Direct Cinema.": 482.

9. Sitney. *Visionary Film:* 174.

10. Brakhage. *Metaphors on Vision:* n.p.

11. Szegedy-Maszak. *A Body in Fukushima:* n.p.

12. Kourlas. "Eiko Steps Away."

13. Candelario. "Bodies, Camera, Screen.": 80.

14. Eiko Web Site. Accessed August 3, 2021.

15. Eiko also holds an Honorary Ph.D. from Colorado College, which she received in 2020. Eiko Web Site. Accessed August 3, 2023.

16. Kourlas. "Eiko Steps Away."

17. Eiko. "Why I Dance.": 72.

18. *Night with Moths* was viewed through a private password on Vimeo. The information on Eiko's Vimeo page states: "This video shows how two different parts of videos are composed as a two-screen video installation." In my email correspondence with Eiko on August 14, 2023, she noted that the piece can also be viewed in a single channel/single frame context.

19. That the structure of the video is one long take cut into two segments was later confirmed by Eiko in an email on August 14, 2023.

20. Brakhage. *Metaphors on Vision:* n.p.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. In a strange coincidence, just as Brakhage found filming live moths too difficult, opting instead to film them after they were dead, the famous "naturalist," James Audubon also found drawing live birds too difficult. Consequently, he could only draw the birds after he killed them. Using a particular buck shot he invented (one that would pierce the skin of the animals without creating too much blood) he then staged them in "natural" settings to make them appear alive.

24. Brakhage. *By Brakhage.*

25. Brakhage. *Metaphors on Vision:* n.p.

26. Gandy, *Moth.*, 93

27. Szegedy-Maszak. *A Body in Fukushima,* n.p.

28. Metz, Christian. "Photography and Fetish.": 126.

29. Brakhage. *By Brakhage.*

30. Brakhage. *Metaphors on Vision:* n.p.

31. Hoberman. "Direct Cinema.": 482. In using the word "mummification" Hoberman is, of course, referring to Andre Bazin's famous theories about the essential imprinting and preservationist properties

of photography and cinema, famously writing that the photograph "embalms time" and that cinema was "change mummified." (See Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1:14–15).
32. Hoberman. "Direct Cinema.": 483*.*

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The Noise My Leaves Make: Black British Women and Surrendering to Belonging

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Interview notes: Harmony first became aware of Tia-Monique's film "The Noise My Leaves Make" during their shared time on the research project *Dunham's Data: Katherine Dunham and Digital Methods for Dance Historical Inquiry*. Upon first viewing, Harmony knew this was an important film for the screendance community and invited Tia-Monique to reflect on her experience of the process and the completed film. Their conversation initially took place over Zoom in December 2022, and they edited and updated the transcript in 2023.

Image 1: From left to right: Chevon Edwards, Natifah White, and Shanelle Clemenson, in "The Noise My Leaves Make." Image courtesy of Tia-Monique Uzor.

Harmony Bench (HB): When I first saw your film "The Noise My Leaves Make," I was really excited by the imagery, the intensity, and the felt experience. It's a powerful film, which you created under the auspices of a research project *Creative Approaches to Race and In/security in the Caribbean and the UK* (CARICUK), led by Pat Noxolo.[1] How would you describe the film, and what you were interested to convey?

Tia-Monique Uzor (TMU): "The Noise My Leaves Make" is a contemporary dance film that follows three dark-skinned Black women as they use movement to search for pleasure and belonging in the British countryside. It's my first film, after being exclusively interested in choreography for the stage. I think the three main areas that are most important to me within my work are Black geographies and culture, Black identities, and how these intersect with African and African diasporic dance. The title of the film

comes from Derek Walcott's essay "Isla Incognita."[1] He's talking about the land and the people both experiencing the same kind of violence against them. In the end he is trying to reconcile this violence. He talks about claiming and being one with the land out of necessity and desperation—not choice— because he has to find somewhere to belong. And so, my reading is that he has to <u>take</u> belonging, because where else will he find it? I'm Black British Caribbean—of Jamaican and Bajan heritage. I grew up in a town in Essex, which is a county just outside of London, where historically, there has been a large concentration of British National Party membership. It's really quite a harsh environment, to grow up Black in. I spent a lot of my childhood watching my mother defend us against racists who would egg our house and torment us. She, in turn, taught my sister and I how to recognize danger and how to defend ourselves. So, what does it really mean to be Black British Caribbean in this country? How can I begin to repossess my body in this space? Because I felt so disembodied in so many ways. I couldn't show up with my entire self. So, the film is about claiming the spaces from which I—and others like me—have been denied.

HB: You're representing specifically Black British experiences and perspectives. For those of us who don't have much awareness of the lived experiences of Black women moving through the UK, could you help us understand what it means for Black British women to be in the English countryside, and maybe by extension, how that informs your investment in Black geographies? What's that dynamic? What's that history? What are the politics and tensions of being in that space?

TMU: The film is very specific to the English environment. Around ninety percent of the countryside in the England is owned privately, and then access is granted for people to be able to walk through or use.[1] So for example, the scene in the film of Shanelle [Clemenson] in the green dress was filmed on an estate called Bradgate Park, and that's owned by a trust that grants public access to that space. This often means that there are huge racial and class tensions. Because who gets access to that space? When do they get access? How do they get access? There isn't a history of Black people finding belonging in the rural areas of the country in the same way as they have in towns and cities—the views held there are often very conservative. As a consequence, the British countryside is considered a "hostile space," not just for Black people, but anyone considered "other than," including white working-class people. I was interested in exploring this space because Black British women in particular are underrepresented in the countryside. A lot of people from the USA that have seen the film say, "Oh, this could be somewhere in the US." But for me, knowing that it was filmed in Leicestershire, England is like "Oh, it really looks like the UK." The bends and sight lines of the country roads, the reservoir—as a Black British person, it speaks of England. We already get a lot of images of Black people in rural environments from the US, but we don't get these same images for Black people in the UK. It's actually a strategy that gets used. We're watching things in a globalized perspective, and by amplifying African American voices, we don't have to deal with the politics here. So, I really wanted to center Black Britishness. At the same time, I appreciate how the sensibility of the film transcends time and space into mysticism. I am aware how our local experiences also pull-on diasporic threads across global Black geographies. Black Britishness is never just about Black Britishness! My Black Britishness comes from a trajectory of the Caribbean—specifically of the English-speaking Caribbean—actually, most of the people in the film are of Caribbean heritage. That wasn't a choice, it just happened!

The film came from a place when I was thinking about the disconnect that many Black British people experience between the British countryside and their own ancestral practices. I always find that when I go to Jamaica, Senegal, Nigeria or other majority Black countries, that I experience more freedom with the natural environment: jumping in the rivers, climbing up trees, hiking, I am able to really embody the space in many ways that I can't in England and particularly in relation to the environment. My identity is

tied up with being in the natural world—not just because of the dance and food cultures that are part of my heritage, but also the significance of being able to run down to the river as the generations before me did. In the Caribbean and Africa, these kinds of natural sites are more accessible. In the UK, we are faced with barbed wires and people watching. There is always a question around your presence. "Why are you here?" "What are you doing here?"

HB: Given what you've said, was this film for you a kind of healing process, a repair to the disconnection that you're talking about, or did it lead to an even greater rupture in your experience?

TMU: I hope the film give does give some of that reconciliation or spiritual healing, but the process was actually very, very difficult. For example, when we were filming in the reservoir, which is open to the public, a white man approached us and started questioning us, "Why are you here?" We have a whole camera crew, it's clear we are filming something. He then came back later with more people and a dog. And he was very confrontational because he didn't want us to be there. My director of photography, Nick [Hamer], is also a white man and he was able to engage that farmer in a way that I couldn't as a Black woman. I wouldn't have been able to protect my crew in the same way, or confront those people in the same way. I realized how vulnerable I was. It was quite a traumatic experience. It was a rupture of the process where we had to acknowledge, "Oh, yeah, it is really dangerous about. It's really hostile." But at the same time, there were some moments that were completely magical. Like Natifah [White]'s solo at the reservoir was shot in one take—the first take—and it was almost as if time and everything stood absolutely still. Everybody was holding their breath and she just did it, she just did what she had to do, and it's so beautiful.
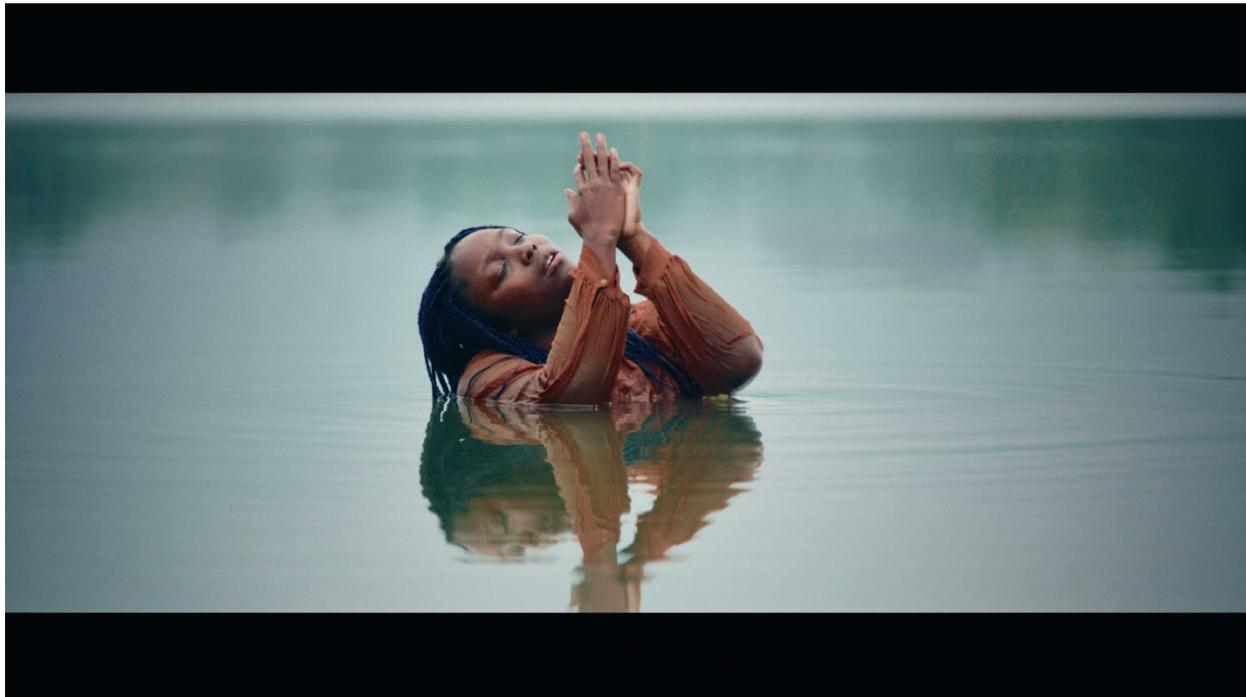

Image 2: Natifah White in "The Noise My Leaves Make." Image courtesy of Tia-Monique Uzor.

HB: You're trained as a dancer and choreographer, but then you entered into this filmmaking process. How did the shift of medium change your creative voice, if at all?

TMU: I choreographed the film as if it was for stage, really. And so I learned a lot in that sense. I spent a lot of time thinking and considering pathways, which probably doesn't come across so much in the film. But as far as dance training, I really see my encounters with Acogny Technique, specifically Alesandra Seutin's approach to Acogny Technique, as the beginning of my training. Not necessarily the form, but the approach to movement as a place of pleasure and self-discovery, and understanding that every movement we're doing has an ancestry, a history, a heritage. Of course there's the cliché that diasporic people don't know where they belong—I'm not British, I'm not Caribbean, I'm in the middle—so reconnecting, and embodying it in a form that I feel most at home in, is really important.

So for the film, we're working from the inside out. It's not just about doing the choreography. It's also about how people feel. It's also about their experiences. We started in nature: mud, trees, and bodies of water before we took it back to the studio. It took a lot of time to explore and to rehearse the feeling of it. I asked the dancers questions like: How can you dance with a tree? How do you draw this movement out? How do you indulge? How do you *sit* in this movement? The toes in the mud. How can we really dig in? It was less about the movement itself and more about how it was done. I wanted the dancers to be seen, and I chose each dancer because they had a quality in their dancing style that I was interested in. We reflected on possession, and what it means to be possessed. Not in a colonial way, not possessing to be possessive. Possessing to survive, to be able to hold on.

The process of choreographing the film was very collaborative—until it came time to shoot. That time was highly pressured. We had previously rehearsed in each spot, but when it came to shooting, the conditions were completely different. We spent a lot of time on the first shot, trying to create that really safe space we had in the studio, but on this country lane. But then it was like—let's just get this. It's raining. People are chasing after us. We hadn't planned for the mud—it looked good, but we hadn't planned for it. I learned a lot, including what to do for the next film. I need a bigger team to support the kind of process I want.

HB: Clearly the filming itself was a fraught process. I'd like to come back to the question of intention from earlier, particularly in the post-production phase. How did you conceive of your relationship to the material, and to the film as it was unfolding?

TMU: I approached the film as research. I was reading so many things! *Belonging*, by bell hooks, and a lot of Kamau E. Brathwaite. I tried to answer the questions I originally had. My research is focused on Black British Caribbean identity and experiences, but it isn't really race-centric—by which I mean I'm not assuming or catering to a white audience or white gaze. I'm more interested in how Black women are presented in their complexity. Does what I am creating present the nuance of Black experience? Does it invite pleasure and joy? I would question every choice that Nick and I would make during the edit. We would get into these deep conversations over a cut. I would ask, "why did you edit this scene this way," and he would answer, and I would think about the perspective from which that edit was made and whether it communicated what I needed it to. Key for me was: Where is whiteness in this film? Are we centering the indulgent, pleasurable actions of these women? Or are we centering a hostile racist environment? Because even though that's part of the understanding of the film, I really didn't want it to be the center. Nick was editing the film from his positionality as a white man and I was very aware of that and so would question some of his choices. Equally, there were ideas in the film that I was not articulating clearly or able to resolve, and that is what Nick was able to recognize and question. Approaching the edit as a dialogical exchange where we both questioned each other's choices was integral to achieving the final edit.

Image 3: Chevon Edwards in "The Noise My Leaves Make." Image courtesy of Tia-Monique Uzor.

Another key part of the research was the feeling of it. Each scene has a feeling. In the beginning, Chevon [Edwards] is in a white dress in a field, which is reminiscent of images we get from narratives of enslavement. I wanted that sensation and a kind of breathlessness with power when Chevon is dancing down the hill. The scene with Shanelle in the tree with this huge dress is much more about softness. She has such a strong look—she's bald and has all of these muscles—and is an amazing performer. The perception might be that she's a "strong aggressive Black woman," so I wanted there to be that feeling of being very soft and indulging in self-pleasure. Natifah's scene was supposed to be more of this sacred, holy moment. We called the end scene a baptism. We cut out a section, "rituals of care," that led up to and prepared everyone for the final scene in the water. It was important for it to be there in the process, but it didn't work for the film. There is a real feeling of care, which you won't necessarily get just by seeing those two hands pushing her down. Those scenes are supposed to feel quite heavy. Not sad, but heavy like a Jamaican sound system where it's just a wall of sound, a wall of feeling. In *Sonic Bodies*, Julian Henriques talks about sound as a healing thing, because it's so loud that the bass goes right through your body like a vibrational healing. It's a powerful thing but also a heavy thing. That is what I was holding when choreographing the feeling of each scene. For each edit, we referred to our guiding questions. That meant post-production was slow and considered. The process was intense. It was the same with the accompaniment—I worked closely with each collaborator on the film. Elliot [Popeau-George] and I went back and forth about the music. I wanted things to be dark and heavy without being "horror." Heavy as in rich, heavy as in full—like you've just eaten. Elliot was able to capture the balance perfectly.

Image 4: Shanelle Clemenson in "The Noise My Leaves Make." Image courtesy of Tia-Monique Uzor.

HB: "The Noise My Leaves Make" was a Festival Finalist at the 2023 Dance Camera West film festival, and won Best Experimental Short at the 2023 Cannes Short Film Festival. Congratulations! I'm sure that more accolades are to come for this powerful film.

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Biographies

Tia-Monique Uzor is a lecturer in Contemporary Caribbean and African Diasporic Performance at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. As an artist-scholar, she critically engages Africanist dance as a vehicle for creating and interrogating African and African Diasporic worlds through interdisciplinary approaches and embodied research. Her current practice is interested in exploring the intersections of ecological and social injustice experienced across Black geographies through digital performance. For this, she has been awarded a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for the project *Digital Black Dance Ecologies* (AH/Y002326/1 2023-2024). In 2022, she produced, directed, and choreographed the short dance film *The Noise My Leaves Make* which explores Black British women's intimacy and pleasure in the English countryside. This film was funded during her tenure as a postdoctoral research fellow on the AHRC project *Creative Approaches to Race and In/security in the Caribbean and the UK*, led by Professor Pat Noxolo. *The Noise My Leaves Make* has been showcased at festivals worldwide and has received multiple accolades, including being a finalist at Dance Camera West 2023 in Los Angeles, winning the jury award for Best Experimental Short at the Cannes Short Film Festival 2023, and receiving Best Director and Cinematography awards at Black Lives Rising in New York, along with a special mention in the international competition at Cámara Corporizada, Buenos Aires. Tia-Monique has also presented and taught her work internationally, and has published in the fields of Dance, Geography, and Black feminism.

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Harmony Bench is author of *Perpetual Motion: Dance, Digital Cultures, and the Common* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020) and Associate Professor at The Ohio State University. Her research addresses practices, performances, and circulations of dance in the contexts of digital and screen media. From 2014-2019, she co-edited *The International Journal of Screendance* with Simon Ellis, and in 2021, she guest-edited the special issue *This Is Where We Dance Now: COVID-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen* with Alexandra Harlig. Bench and long-time collaborator Kate Elswit work to bring the digital humanities and dance history into greater dialogue through computational analysis and data visualization with projects such as *Dunham's Data: Katherine Dunham and Digital Methods for Dance Historical Inquiry* (Ref: AH/R012989/1; https://www.dunhamsdata.org/), winner of the 2021 ATHE/ASTR Award for Excellence in Digital Scholarship), *Visceral Histories/Visual Arguments: Dance-Based Approaches to Data* (https://visceralhistories.wordpress.com/), and *Radical Accounting: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Data as a Framework for Historical Imagination* (time-based interventions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, September 2024). Independent and collaborative work includes affect and kinesthesia in screendance spectatorship, and critical and practical engagements with motion data and machine learning.

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Review of *An Evening of Film* at Siobhan Davies Studios, London 19/10/2023
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Abstract
A review of three films by Siobhan Davies, *All This Can Happen (2012)*, *The Running Tongue* (2015) and *Transparent* (2022), and discussion of her shift from live performance to working with the still image and film. Davies's work is described as a kind of archaeological practice with long-form choreographic projects which are underpinned by a 'poetics of responsibility'. Offering a reservoir of images and relations and allowing for innumerable different viewing experiences, they invite audiences to see for themselves and to grasp what embodied liveness is within each instant.

Keywords: *All This Can Happen*, *The Running Tongue, Transparent*, Davies, Hinton, poetics of responsibility, archive, spectator, body, dwelling, liveness, long-form choreograph

Image 1: Siobhan Davies, *Transparent* (2022), Transparent Still-11.jpg, Credit: Siobhan Davies Studios.

> Here engages a carefully woven relationship with democracy, with a general assembly of looking, with a full spectrum priority: all things carry and convey; all things bear witness and must be borne witness to; everything is illuminated, whether seeding burst or animal, woman or the weather, business or a building, worker or such woodland, gesture or the book.
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> Gareth Evans, "Mundane: Thinking through All This Can Happen." *The International Journal of Screendance*, Vol *7* (2016). [1]

An Evening of Film[2] presented for the first time under one roof the trilogy of films *All This Can Happen* (2012), *The Running Tongue* (2015) and *Transparent* (2022), which choreographer Siobhan Davies made in collaboration with filmmaker David Hinton, Hugo Glendinning and numerous others since she moved from making live work to choreographing for the screen in the early 2010s. The event also marked the handover of the artistic leadership of the Siobhan Davies Studios, an investigative contemporary arts organization and base for independent dance artists, which Davies envisaged and directed since 2006 and which has facilitated ground-breaking work in bringing choreographic practices into conversation with other art forms and research practices.[3] An ongoing questioning of her creative approach has been part of Davies's practice since she started dancing and choreographing in the late 1960s and *An Evening of Film* was an opportunity to look across the most recent body of work.

Described by Davies as "cinematic collages choreographed into a web of images, sounds and ideas," the three films span a decade of investigation and also draw on a vast body of live work.[4] They broadly explore the experience of living from the perspective of moving bodies, and they make the case for choreographic practices on and off screen to be much more expansive than the performance of dance. At stake is the notion that dance is not just a transient celebration of the moment, but that it includes long-form choreographic work which is based on extensive periods of gestation and maturation, constituting bodies of work that have potentially long-lasting impact.

At the time of the screening in October 2023, London's arts scene was framed by two major gallery shows, *Women in Revolt* at Tate Britain and *RE/SISTERS* at the Barbican Gallery, both extensive surveys of the work of women artists and feminist practices over a good six decades, celebrating their protesting and protecting and their demanding that things should be different. In a catalogue essay for the Barbican's *RE/SISTERS*, curator Alona Pardo reflects on the work of the artist Helène Aylon and her project *Terrestri: Rescued Earth* (1982),[5] for which she collected contaminated radioactive earth in an ambulance and delivered it to various institutions in the US. Pardo writes: "Aylon's performance was rooted not only in human-nature relations but, more importantly, the 'poetics of responsibility'."[6] The notion of a 'poetics of responsibility' as proposed by Greg Garrard as part of an examination of ecocriticism is an alternative concept to the rather outdated 'poetics of authenticity', according to which one could go 'back to nature' for a redemptive experience and unmediated encounter.[7] Instead of a binary concept of nature versus human society, the 'poetics of responsibility' envisages a constructive engagement with the world in all its facets whereby human activities and labor are accordingly re-evaluated beyond capitalist economics. Perhaps a 'poetics of responsibility' permeates the work of many of the artist visionaries in *RE/SISTERS*. It also appears to underpin the complex tapestries of Davies's films, through their relentless examination of human experience in relation to the wider spheres of cultural histories and natural sciences, plant and animal life. The following review will discuss the three films in order to reflect on these intentions in Davies's oeuvre and on the creative processes involved. Secondly, the review will consider more broadly why Davies moved from working with live bodies to working on screen, considering her long-standing interest in photography and the still frame as well as her concerns with the trajectories, histories and potential futures of dance.

All This Can Happen (2012)[8] was the subject of an entire issue of *The International Journal of Screendance* (2016) as Siobhan Davies's first major screen-based project and milestone in her choreographic journey, and as an astounding, epic as well as tender, 50 minute audio-visual collage which draws on literature, the pre-history of cinema, film archives, and Davies's choreographic language.[9] The film offers a rich, sensorial encounter of screen space that echoes Davies's live performances but also intensifies the proposition of infinite possible pathways and relations: here the continuous time and space of live events has splintered into multitudes.

The film was the first artistic collaboration between Siobhan Davies and filmmaker David Hinton, their friendship having begun in 1984 when Davies was the subject of the *South Bank Show*, a British television arts magazine, directed by Hinton. Hinton's interest in challenging cinematic conventions and his passion for found footage was a perfect match for Davies's fascination with the details of everyday movements such as standing, walking and running. In a bookshop in London's Charing Cross Road Hinton chanced upon Robert Walser's novella *The Walk* (1917), which became the narrative framework for their first collaboration and examination of the physical, emotional and social act of walking.[10] The familiar activity provides the pace for the film and entwines Walser's reflections with moments from his every day and with a dramatic historical context. The film is entirely composed of archival footage from the early days of cinema, thereby deeply embedded in a history of picture-making. The many frames are woven into a kaleidoscopic split-screen edit which plays with, up to, fifteen frames simultaneously. Every inch of the screen is therefore alive and pulsing, forming a seemingly infinite tapestry of textures, shapes and gestures. The core of this choreographic work is an almost forensic study of the shapes, movements and textures in the archival filmstrips, described by Davies as a "kind of archaeological practice" for the exactitude with which she and Hinton proceeded in the edit room, working frame by frame.[11]

A desire to tease the audience's attention to detail led Davies and Hinton to freeze numerous clips, again and again pausing on a single frame and pairing it with other frames. This display of single frames leads to a repeated suspension of movement and time, set again into motion with short movement sequences which rekindle the sense of flow and potentiality of the ordinary and the everyday. The approach draws, for example, on Davies's and Hinton's long-standing fascination with the work of French scientist and chronophotographer Etienne-Jules Marey and his breaking down of movement into sets of still frames, a scientific matter-of-fact approach to movement in which a visual poetry and magic emerge out of the revealing of movement itself. In *All This Can Happen*, the hands of an office worker are suspended in mid-air as they sort through a draw of index cards, and the jump of a child is temporarily arrested along with the movement of its shadow. Infinite details become visible in each single frame, providing a surprising feast for the eyes while an equally detailed and textured soundscape by Chu-Li Shewring indulges the ears. Even the texture of the grainy, faded film frames becomes part of the sensorial experience. As Gareth Evans wrote in his review of the film for *The International Journal of Screendance* (2016), this is a democracy of relations and a "general assembly of looking", whereby every detail counts as does the plurality of elements presented side by side.[12] This plurality does not assign status or determine value; instead it obliges the viewer to make choices in how and where to look, when to associate or move on, allowing for innumerous different viewing experiences and audio-visual impressions. As Evans notes:

> These frames rarely hold for long; image and energies spill, redirect themselves, breed, split, stutter, surge. Everyone and everything is multiple. Possibility outruns probability.[13]

Furthermore, *All This Can Happen* begins with a startling set of shots, in which bodies of WW1 soldiers tumble uncontrollably down a ravine to the sound of battle while a traumatized, bedridden body is locked into pathological repetitive shaking of the head. The charms of the everyday are entangled in the film with scenes from WW1 which testify to the violence of war and to the trauma done to the bodies and souls of

those who are caught up in the machinery of war. Throughout *All This Can Happen,* contorted and traumatized bodies appear and reappear, broken, staggering and locked into convulsions. All of this happens in this film where relations are provocatively contiguous, indeterminate, and where meaning is not a given. The opening scenes were not lost on those watching the film in October 2023 in a Europe marked by Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, and by the brutality unleashed in the Middle East through the attack on Israel and the relentless bombing of the Gaza Strip, all of which bring back terrible specters of history. Reflecting on the screening of the film with Siobhan Davies a few weeks after the event, we both recalled noting the intensity of these images of contorted figures and how much the film resonated with the topical avalanche of terrifying media images.

A more hidden and culturally embedded form of social violence underpins Davies and Hinton's next collaboration, *The Running Tongue* (2015) [14], a film installation for which they draw on a collection of international proverbs about women entitled *Never Marry A Man With Big Feet* (2004), many of which are decidedly cruel.[15] These proverbs, however, do not feature directly and were given instead to twenty-two dance artists as material to respond to. Expanding on the collaborative nature of their first film, Davies and Hinton limited their own creative direction in this project to providing an overall structure and the setting of detailed guidelines for the selected dance artists. The artists were invited to compose two scenes or 'visions' each, both of which had to be contained within a single frame, have a duration of 10sec, may contain an object that responds to the chosen proverb, and contain the briefest of movements sited somewhere in London.[16] Structurally, the forty-four collages are connected through a female figure who is running continuously through landscapes of different kinds, always leading to the next 'vision'. The sequencing of visions is, however, controlled by a computer and devised to be random, thereby providing an ongoing reservoir of scenes rather than a final edit. Collaborating with several animators, in particular Magali Charrier and Noriko Okaku, the visual language of *The Running Tongue* is largely animated and composed of cut-out landscapes and collaged scenarios, further exploring the single frame as an aesthetic object in which every detail counts. The collaged nature of each of the visions furthermore challenges the notion of a unified or natural space, state or relation. Everything here is visibly put together and arranged, implying that other constellations would be just as possible.

Most notably the female runner is naked while all other figures in the 'visions' are clothed. "Why a woman, and why naked?" I ask Siobhan Davies. She muses whether she would have made the same choice post *#metoo* and adds that, at the time, she wanted to work with the performer Helka Kaski rather than necessarily working with someone female, adding that clothes also seemed a distraction which would only lead to complications given the changing landscapes and seasons through which the figure was running. Furthermore, Davies notes that she is always keen to see "the body at work", a theme that runs through all her films, be they walking and working as in the first film, running in the second, or being animal as in the third film, when we see either herself or the dancers Lauren Potter and Linda Gibbs performing nude, exploring groundedness in deep crouching positions. [17] Davies is keen to resist the sexualizing of the body and wants the body to be itself, at work with mind, imagination and ideas. In *The Running Tongue* the naked runner is a sort of archetype, traversing different landscapes which at times look like a forest in winter and at other times are reduced to mere lines of color like an imaginary space. The interludes with the runner also function as a kind of relief to the viewer, if not as an escape from whatever happens in the "visions"; some of these visions are quite everyday while others come across as positively bewildering or tense. For example, dancer Lauren Potter's chosen proverb "The she-cat is on the roof and the old woman with blackened eyes is dancing" is devised as a still image in a warehouse kind-of space in which there are many black cats alongside multiple versions of an old lady who is wearing red headphones and dancing. The book would explain that this proverb is Algerian and that the woman wants to prove that she is as agile as a cat, but viewers of the film are left to speculate.[18] Artist Simon Ellis chose the possibly more familiar proverb "Women will always be blamed for everything", for which he walks into a still image

in which a floating gun points at the frozen runner Kaska, placing himself behind the gun and firing, but he himself falls into the grass.[19] The different 'visions' and their gestures are unlike one another and surprising, and, like the frozen stills in *All This Can Happen*, offer the possibility of seeing a whole story in an instant.

Kaski's strong and wonderfully strident running in the intervals meanwhile suggests an embodied state that connects everything, even though she tends to freeze into a mere image or ghost in each of these scenes, at times half faded into the background. In Charlie Morissey's 'vision' the figure almost runs into the Thames but hovers on its edge, her semi-transparent body merging with the city scape around her which itself merges with another view of the city's skyline. A live body can never be transparent to us, even though it may feel as such to the one who is dancing and sensing, immersed in a moment in time. On screen however, everything is possible: half present half absent, the faded figure of the runner recalls the realm of the imaginary where inside and outside sometimes only differ in tones or shades. As a viewer, we look through the figure and through the buildings onto other buildings and back at the runner in a circular motion that echoes that of the runner. In the process, the solidity of the familiar world gives way to the process of looking, probability meets uncertainty, memory, and fantasy.

The third film in the trilogy, a collaboration with David Hinton and Hugo Glendinning, *Transparent* (2022) turns towards Siobhan Davies's own research process which she developed over decades and which she has compared to shining a torch into fog, a metaphor which embraces both the uncertainties of such a process and the intensity of moments of recognition. Having started many years ago with research notes on random scraps of paper that were lying around, Davies developed a system of postcards which later turned into tracing paper and acetates onto which she would photocopy images of anatomical drawings or ancient figurines as well as snapshots from rehearsals and any other relevant matter. The acetates allowed her to layer images on top of one another over a lightbox much like the crossfading of images on screen, and to look at as well as through them, observing the shifting of shapes, the emergence of continuity across images, bodies and lines as well as their differences. The film camera in *Transparent* observes Davies as she moves the acetates, studies and compares, following her eyes, her hands and the shifting images to form an "unfixable archive of movement and experience", but an archive nevertheless.[20] Davies was adamant during the making of *Transparent*, that this was not an autobiography but it became nonetheless a deep look into her own learning and choreographic thinking, commented on and narrated by herself. Woven into these explorations are glimpses of work from those she has worked with and admires – the dancers, choreographers, and visual artists.

Having undergone several versions during its production, the final edit of *Transparent* is composed of three parts, the first one going back to her own beginnings with dance and her fascination with studying the working body. Entitled *Animal Origins,* it places photographs of herself in this and that pose alongside anatomical drawings and images from the natural world while the voice-over speaks of her sense of herself as made up from disconnected parts. Images of historical figurines with dangling limbs further echo the idea of the body as a composite. The section leads up to a moment of insight, "as if my body became known to me, and then disassembled again."[21] More Greek sculptures, torsos in relief, the bronze hand of the *Charioteer of Delphi* holding the reins of something, a red chalk drawing of a horse on its hind legs by painter George Stubbs and dancer Charlie Morrissey echoing that move of bending, reaching and folding.[22] Variation after variation of gestures and poses, sometimes a shape echoes across cultural traces. This is an archive compiled by a desire to learn and to connect while a pared-down electronic soundtrack leaves space and time for the viewer to also engage in study. "I am attempting to draw a figure into my body, to allow a physical memory to well up from my pre-human past (...) to become what I needed to be, rather than what I had trained to be," says Davies in the voiceover.[23] The body in service, in other words, the inner workings of muscles and bones over form and ingrained aesthetic

expectations, a quiet but firm statement and conclusion to this first part and journey of Siobhan Davies as dancer and researcher.

The second part, *A Lived In Circle,* dives into a specific choreography, *Rotor* (2010), in which four dancers form the spokes of a wheel and walk or run to set the wheel in motion, gradually changing speeds and directions and weaving around each other in a *perpetuum mobile* that is both a human endeavour of keeping up with one another and a cosmic swirling of astronomical bodies.[24] Just watching this makes the viewer dizzy, but the contextual material on screen, the drawings, the images of planetary trajectories and swirling scribbles, give a hint of the precise order and choreographic decisions behind the work. Part 3 is entitled *Transparencies* and is different again, making it explicit that this is Davies's own journey, with the camera following her through London along a busy Liverpool Street or along the quiet canal of Camden Town, the voiceover reflecting on the fact that the more extensive part of her journey is behind her. Nevertheless, Davies herself continues to be a body at work, striding out and imagining that there is a mirror image below her reaching down into the ground as she treads the pavement. As a whole, the film *Transparent* narrates her story but is also a manifesto about what dance on and off screen can be, through reaching back into antiquity and very different cultural spheres, through engaging with the sciences and other artists' practices, through the visualization of choreographic thinking and the articulation of its propositions. It is a testament to dance on and off screen as a long-form enquiry, documenting its labyrinthine nature but also taking the viewer on a journey where they can study for themselves that which informs and shapes and moves us all. As with Davies's earlier films, *Transparent* is a cinechoreography of possibilities and tensions in which the bodies are always in process and in conversation, each encounter giving way to the next. Also consistent throughout is the sense that understanding ourselves includes—or even necessitates—understanding of what is other, in a sort of ongoing moebius process where the other folds into the inner and the inner folds into the other.

Davies's trajectory from dancing and choreographing live bodies to working with the screen places her into a long genealogy of choreographing filmmakers past and present; each had their own motivation for this shift from one creative practice to another. For Davies the shift had a long trajectory, beginning with an early fascination with photography and the daguerreotypes of Henry Fox Talbot. These had never felt like still images to Davies as they always needed time to come into being. On the other hand, the documentation of dance had rarely worked for her, be that recording of her own choreographies using early video technologies or the camera at the back of an auditorium, nor publicity photographs and clips. Davies was more interested in what she called scratch tapes, old video cameras that recorded onto cassette tapes and which she gave to each dancer to work with during the choreographic process to record the movement phrases they liked. As Davies recalls, these scratch tapes caught something personal of the dancers, for example when they were switching things on and off or waved to camera to indicate they didn't like the version they had just performed. A first shift came when Davies moved from performing in theatres to working in galleries and other spaces, where she could work more closely with the dancers' minds and imaginations. But film offered something more specific: "Maybe with film," Davies says "you could find those moments, which one can neither see in the theatre or in the gallery space, because you can dwell on moments by stilling them, by concentrating on them for a period of time."[25] The notion of dwelling suggests residing within an instant as in a dwelling or a house, but 'dwelling' is often used negatively in that one is not supposed to dwell because we are always supposed to move on and get on. "I like a good dwelling," Davies muses, and the frozen archival frames in *All This Can Happen*, the 10sec composite images or 'visions' in *The Running Tongue*, and the slow shifting of acetates in *Transparent* are all a testament to this endeavor to allow us to dwell, to become a more attentive and pensive spectator than we might otherwise be.[26] Davies's pensive spectator is also indicative of the kind of responsibility the choreographer imparts on her audience, to see in and through for themselves and to grasp what embodied liveness is within each instant, so utterly marvelous and intensely delicate.

But how to dwell in movement without also distorting it? Davies had generally refrained from manipulating movement, rarely intervening as, for example, in *Portrait* (part of *Two Quartets*, 2007), where she broke down the catching of a ball into nine sections and altered the order of the nine moves, so that it would take on a more disorganized quality. When making *All This Can Happen*, Hinton understood that Davies liked the figures to be themselves and therefore suggested not to manipulate the archival filmstrips beyond the changing of speed and freezing of images, and to work with them as they were. Davies recalls that the aim was to "look at movement as if we were looking at it for the first time, which is what the early photographers and filmmakers were doing," such as Vertov's recording of everyday movement, Buster Keaton's visual cinematic humor or the suspension of action in the bell scene in Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*.[27] Working with multiple frames of the same instant meanwhile came out of Davies's own experience with live work, where every moment seemed to have many multiples contained within it. In live performance, Davies noted, this sense of multiplicity emerges across several performances as each one is always different from the next, but on screen this can be built into and played out within the filmic space.

Further reflecting on the legacies of dance-based work Davies adds that this quality of dance of being in the moment "is only of that moment because of years of research by that dancer and the ability to fully engage with the arc of the whole process, so that they perform the all of it within that moment." [28] Dance as an embodied history and trajectory which is brought to bear on a moment, or a moment that speaks to an embodied history and trajectory. To exemplify this, Davies refers to a split-second in *All This Can Happen* in which the edit captures the look of a boy who is selling newspapers which, she says, moves her every time. For Davies, everyday movement is dense with history, memory, and learning and her desire is to push dance forward, on and off screen, so that it is seen differently, as a long-form enquiry that senses and correlates and bears witness, and whose audiences become eyes and ears, advocate and witness, subversive player, and compatriot.

Biography

Dr Claudia Kappenberg is an artist, writer, curator and Honorary Fellow at the University of Brighton, UK. She led the International Screendance Network and co-founded the International Journal for Screendance in 2009. Her more recent writing has been published in *Lo Tech Pop Cult: Screendance Remixed (2024), Roland Barthes in/and/through performance* (2023), *MIRAJ* (2021), *Performing Process: Sharing Dance and Choreographic Practice* (2018), *Syncope in Performing and Visual Arts* (2017) and *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies* (2016). In 2020 she co-curated the online Screendance season "grounded" with Fiontán Moran.

Notes

[1] Evans, "Mundane: Thinking through All This Can Happen," 2016, 15.
[2] *An Evening of Film*, Siobhan Davies Studios, St. George's Road, London, SE1 6ER, Thursday 19 Oct 2023, 5.45pm - 10pm.
[3] For general information on Siobhan Davies Studios see:
https://www.siobhandavies.com/about/history/
[4] Home page *Siobhan Davies: An Evening of Film*. https://bookwhen.com/siobhandavies/e/ev-spcb-20231019174500?utm_source=Siobhan+Davies+Studios&utm_campaign=7536fee2f4-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_08_18_03_19_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-38081c54b7-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D&mc_cid=7536fee2f4&mc_eid=e3e3068122
[5] Helène Aylon, *Terrestri: Rescued Earth* (1982)

[6] Alona Pardo, "Reweaving the Webb of Womanist Ecopolitics," 2023, 19. Note: The notion of 'poetic responsibility' is referenced as follows: Greg Garrard cited in Martin Royle and Kate Soper, Introduction: The Ecology of Labour, *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 20, issue 2: 'The Ecology of Labour' (2016), 119.

[7] Garrard, 2004, 168 – 169.

[8] Davies and Hinton, 2013.

[9] Kappenberg, 2016.

[10] Walser, 2013.

[11] Davies in conversation with Kappenberg, 2023.

[12] Evans, 15.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Davies and Hinton, 2015.

[15] Schipper, 2004.

[16] For an in-depth discussion about this creative process and the extensive negotiations between Davies, Hinton and the selected artists during the making of the film see: Davies, S., Hinton, D., & Ellis, S. The Running Tongue: Collaboration, Choice and Community. *The International Journal of Screendance*, Vol *5*. (2015), 91.

[17] Davies and Kappenberg, 2023.

[18] Schipper, 2004, 202.

[19] Ellis, 2015.

[20] Siobhan Davies Studios, Notes on 'Transparent' (2022), https://www.siobhandavies.com/transparent/

[21] Davies, Voice over for 'Transparent' (2022), 01:50 – 2:15min.

[22] George Stubbs, *A Prancing Horse, Facing Right* (C. 1790)

[23] Davies, Voice over for Transparent (2022), 08:00 – 08:30min.

[24] Davies 2010. Note: *Rotor* was presented both as live work and as film, and Davies also invited other artists to respond to the work and exhibit their responses at the Siobhan Davies Studios. For a review of the dance and exhibition see: Sanjoy Roy, *Siobhan Davies: Rotor* (2010).

[25] Davies and Kappenberg, 2023.

[26] The term 'pensive spectator' was coined by Laura Mulvey to describe the impact which moments of stillness within a cinematic narrative might have on the spectator, and which might allow them to become more reflective. See: Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 2006.

[27] Vertov, 1929; Keaton, 2027; Tarkovsky 1966.

[28] Davies and Kappenberg, 2023.

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Book review
Behind the Screen: Tap Dance, Race, and Invisibility During Hollywood's Golden Age
Brynn W. Shiovitz, Oxford University Press, 2023. 375 pages.
Brandi Coleman, Assistant Professor, Southern Methodist University

In *Behind the Screen: Tap Dance, Race, and Invisibility During Hollywood's Golden Age*, author Brynn W. Shiovitz offers a detailed evaluation of the Hollywood movie musical era from 1927 to 1963. Through in-depth discussion and analysis of prominent movie musicals and specifically the performances of entertainers such as Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Cab Calloway, Fred Astaire, Eleanor Powell, and the Nicholas Brothers, Shiovitz unveils how less-visible forms of minstrelsy, blackface, and racial caricature were prevalent in the movies of this era, slipping past ethics codes to uphold economic, religious, and culturally moral standards supported by systemic Whiteness. The book "traces a history of blackface onscreen and the covert means by which it entered Hollywood cinema, despite the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America's (MPPDA) decades-long efforts to censor such racial caricature" (1), thus establishing layered and deeply coded practices and systems that diminished, demoralized, and erased the Black American presence and people at the origin of the art form.

While there are several notable books on tap dance and tap dance history, *Behind the Screen* is specific in that it acknowledges the not-so-visible ways that minstrelsy and minstrel themes, blackface, racial inequity, appropriation, and human indignity were present in many of history's most popular movie musicals. Shiovitz references the scholarship of Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Robert Farris Thompson, Jacqui Malone, and Lindsay Guarino, and outlines Africanist traits and sensibilities as a framework for viewing the musicals. She notes, "*Behind the Screen* builds on minstrel scholarship of the last thirty years and hopes to reroute the path along which current conversations around blackface are headed" (6).

Shiovitz defines covert minstrelsy as having four identifiable guises – the sonic guise, the protean guise, the tribute guise, and the citational guise – that "work together to obscure the inner workings of an entertainment industry that thrives on racial caricature and masks an even more concealed infiltration of an Africanist aesthetic into the White mainstream" (11). She establishes three main arguments that are fundamental themes when examining covert minstrelsy and that are ever-present throughout the text. First, the author notes how "race performance, and specifically blackface minstrelsy, need not be visible to be effective" and that "blackface performance has been a part of the American narrative since the 1820s, and accordingly, the imagery, music, and dance linked to the minstrel stage might carry an element of nostalgia for Americans who were never directly hurt by its portrayals; sometimes this nostalgia is confused with patriotism" (10). Lastly, she notes, "Africanist aesthetics have pollinated American entertainment in such a way as to mistake blackface performance for lived experience and furthermore to write Black artists out of the equation in favor of White bodies who utilize Black sensibilities" (10).

For example, in chapter four, "Bon Homage: Female Figures, the Tribute Guise, and Pre-War Departures, 1934-1939," Shiovitz outlines how the tribute guise became the prominent means of covert minstrelsy in screen performance. She emphasizes how the "tribute guise involves someone using the 'tribute' label in conjunction with burnt cork and various stereotypes within an integrated backstage musical to convince the audience that their makeup merely acknowledges a historical moment or honors a particular

individual" (175). Through the employment of the tribute guise, the racial caricature "invited audiences to read blackface as something unifying and patriotic rather than differentiating and shameful" (175).

Through the lens of covert minstrelsy, Shiovitz also weaves in discussions of race and gender pertaining to the presentation and commodification of White and Black female moving bodies in the movie musicals. In chapter one, "Integrating the Screen: Sound Synchronization, Sonic Guises, and Pre-Code Blackface, 1927-1930," she notes that "'suggestive movement' was unlawful when performed by White people, and yet presenting Black people as overtly sexualized…was a way of delivering sexual content in an agreeable manner. That is to say, fewer people took issue with distributing 'forbidden' material via the Black performer" (53). She goes on to note that "presenting the Black body as a vessel of demoralizing movement reinforced stereotypes that had long been in place; popular dances that stemmed from Black culture (e.g., the Black Bottom and slow drag) were still perceived to be as dangerous as the cakewalk was in 1903" (53). She revisits this theme throughout the book in an analysis of the Busby Berkeley movies and performances of Eleanor Powell.

Shiovitz suggests navigating the book from start to finish, reading each chapter in order as presented. This guidance was helpful while reading for a contextual understanding of the issues central to the text which are complex and layered in nuance and historical, socio-political, and cultural meaning. As the book progresses, Shiovitz skillfully builds upon each concept with helpful repetition and reapplication of thematic ideas, detailed examples, and a thorough examination of each point she presents. She notes, "Reading this book as presented will engage you in the process of layering, allowing you to reflect on all iterations of covert minstrelsy in each of its guises and variations" (xvi).

A unique feature of the book was the descriptive and detailed interludes between each chapter. Shiovitz includes a sing-along, a cartoon short, a Vitaphone short, which she categorizes as a dance break, a travel ad, and a war bond ad. She notes that these "would have been common additions to any feature film seen by this audience; their presentation unfolds in a time-specific manner within a book that is organized chronologically with some temporal overlap between chapters" (xvi). The inclusion of these interludes added a dynamic element to the text and felt interactive in nature. Following the final chapter is a Coda which includes a series of correspondence letters between Director of the Production Code Administration Joseph I. Breen and Twentieth Century Fox's Director of Public Relations, Colonel Jason S. Joy. The letters are an undeniable illustration of covert minstrelsy in action which has greater meaning and impact after reading the text. The Appendix includes excerpts from the actual Production Code referenced throughout the book. Another helpful feature was the visual reference of a descriptive diagram that outlined the intersectional nature of the four guises of covert minstrelsy. Shiovitz notes that "covert minstrelsy is not linear, and its four guises often bleed together. The sonic, protean, tribute, and citational guises comprise covert minstrelsy; each guise is influenced by a set of attributes and variations designated by the map's short descriptors and bullet points" (xvii).

It is easy to watch the virtuosic dancing and songs of Hollywood movie musicals and to appreciate, applaud, and acknowledge the skill and artistry of the performers. The movies are an excellent tool for sharing embodied examples of the origins of jazz and tap history. However, as educators, practitioners, scholars, and enthusiasts of tap, jazz, movie musicals, and other rooted dance forms, we must uphold a responsibility to engage in twenty-first-century dialogue that uncovers the history from "behind the screen." I consider this text an essential tool in teaching this history as it identifies, names, and then dismantles the deep structures of systemic Whiteness embedded in this history. As I read the book, I could imagine ways to incorporate the text into my dance history course to support conversations of identity, culture, erasure, appropriation, narrative, intent, othering, and gaze. This book is a way to move the

conversation forward, acknowledge the history, and then consider the ways covert minstrelsy still exists and is ever-present in popular culture and the current socio-political landscape.

Biography

Brandi Coleman is an assistant professor of dance at Southern Methodist University. She was a long-time performing member, rehearsal director, and associate artistic director of Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, founded and directed by Billy Siegenfeld. She has led more than 40 choreographic and teaching residencies at universities throughout the US and internationally and received an Emmy award for her performance in the documentary *Jump Rhythm Dance Project: Getting There.* Her writing, "Performing Gender: Disrupting Performance Norms for Women in Jazz Dance Through Gender-Inclusive, Human-Centric Choreography" is included in the book *Rooted Jazz Dance: Africanist Aesthetics and Equity in the Twenty-First Century* (University Press of Florida, 2022).

Book review
Todd Decker, *Astaire By Numbers: Time and the Straight White Male Dancer*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).
Crystal Song

23,690 seconds across 932 shots, connected by 778 cuts, making up 324 musical numbers, covering 35,500 feet of film— "by Hollywood standards a genuine epic." Musicologist Todd Decker's *Astaire By Numbers: Time and the Straight White Male Dancer* reconceptualizes Fred Astaire through this singularly meticulous approach to the artist's body of work. Setting aside familiar images of his fleet-footed ease or romantic charm, the book introduces Astaire not simply as dancer but as choreographer, producer, and special effects creator—one who, as a straight white man, exercised unique control over the making of his "screen dance body." Employing digital humanities methods, Decker offers a new perspective on a dancer often defined by his "genius" and "consummate ease." The book's comprehensive accounting of shots, sounds, and composition limns the technical allowances and constraints that shaped the production of Astaire's image; as such, it works to quite literally measure, rather than take for granted, the qualities of "white male 'genius'" as captured on camera.

Decker's quantitative approach is exceptionally thorough: he accounts for all 23,690 of Astaire's filmed dances in "countable units." These include shots, cuts, camera movements and frames, types of dance and non-dance actions, number of participants in a dance, and presence (or lack) of foot and body sounds. This multitude of data points informs Decker's close readings of particular dance scenes, and provides material for graphs and tables throughout the text as well as three detailed appendixes. The purpose of this rigorous documentation is to propel Decker's analysis of Astaire's career "beyond preconceptions or clichés" that animate a certain aura of effortlessness. Indeed, Decker argues, "It is disingenuous to call Astaire's dancing simply dancing." Rather, it is the assiduously assembled product of specific choreographic, filmmaking, and editing strategies. A digital humanities approach to Astaire's screen dance body, Decker contends, "force[s] the viewer to slow down," to "see both production and spectacle."

As the book's title suggests, Decker is also attentive to how Astaire performed race and masculinity via these strategies, and how his white heterosexual maleness was vital to his success on screen. Without those qualities, "his career would have been impossible"—in particular, the authority he had over his presentation as a performer, from his self-choreographing to his use of Black expressive forms like jazz and tap to his hours spent in post-production. Rather than take these forms of privilege as a given, Decker is interested in how Astaire curated his image "with intention, care, and close attention to the dangerous edges of these identity categories," such that "his negotiation of the edges of whiteness, straightness, and maleness proves as important as his definition of a refined and idealized version of each category." He locates Astaire within the "fraught category" of "being a 'man' who sings and dances," and thus potentially undermines his own masculinity. Simply put, then, "how exactly did this particular cis-het white man get away with dancing"? It was precisely the illusion of ease that Astaire's choreography and cinematography conspire to sustain, Decker argues, that enabled him to walk that line. Drawing on everyday rather than "trained" gestures, as well as methods of framing his dancing body so that it appeared to be a "fully disclosed object"— "There is apparently no mystery here"—contributed to a dance style that managed to simultaneously look virtuosic and "like nothing."

Each chapter elaborates on a different unit of measurement and the part it played in crafting Astaire's screen dance body. Chapter 1, "Numbers," offers an overview of how Decker approached the 324 musical numbers in Astaire's corpus, and how he came to his categories of quantification. The next chapter, "Shots," categorizes and analyzes the 932 shots in that corpus, arguing that while the presentation of Astaire's dancing body is "ostensibly" done in as "direct a fashion as possible," its apparent continuity actually "carries its own ideology." In particular, his frequent use of "Vitruvian" framing—which places the entirety of the dancing body at the center of the frame—is "a nuanced cinematic creation, far from a camera simply recording a dance done in front of it." Indeed, Decker argues, it is a *racial* cut, presenting the white dancing body as "whole, centered, a (male) agent around which space accrues, a unified subject in control of self and the world." Chapter 3, "Days, Hours, Minutes," looks to production notes that reveal Astaire as studio employee, and asks how metrics like length of workdays and shooting efficiency inflect our understanding of the screen dances his creative team produced. A short interlude, "I Just / Won't / [Don't?] Dance," probes the idiosyncrasies of Astaire's so-called "outlaw" movement style. Decker continually emphasizes how the qualities of Astaire's unaffected, walk-like dancing "demand examination as themselves expressions of his straight white male identity."

Chapter 4, "Frames, Sets, Cuts" continues to explore the mutual imbrication of choreography and cinematography. The camera frame, Decker observes, "acted as a third partner in all duo dances"; such "triangulations" were crucial to Astaire's screen dancing. This chapter leads into "Partners," which examines the bulk of Astaire's dances (78%) that he shared with other dancers, a majority of those (59%) with female romantic partners. Decker carefully counts instances of physical touch and types of relationships between dancers, while also attending to outliers, such as Astaire's partnerings with other men. In the sixth and final chapter, "Noisy Masculinity," he analyzes a class of Astaire dance moves that "mark a strain of demonstration rather than assumption of masculinity." These are designated "noisy" because they often rely on the "potential of the body to make noise," particularly through tap dancing, which required many "dedicated hours" on Astaire's part to the production and layering of foot sounds in addition to dancing itself.

All in all, these efforts—as exposed through Decker's meticulous quantitative analysis—remind us that Astaire's screen dance body is "always the result of collective labor." Digital humanities methods, then, advance rich possibilities for parsing the concrete qualities of (white, male) artistry, and exposing the dominant social categories that are mobilized in their making.

Biography

Crystal is a dancer and PhD candidate in Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation explores Asian American competitive ballroom dance cultures, with a focus on how model minorityness is negotiated and reorganized through embodied practice. Her work has been published in *TDR, Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies*, and *The Black Scholar*. In addition to her research and practice, she serves as co-coordinator of Five Borough Ballroom, an organization dedicated to community-powered ballroom dance in the Greater New York area.

Film Review *Ad Parnassum – Purapurawhetū* by Daniel Belton (New Zealand)
Claudia Rosiny

Daniel Belton's latest 30-minute dance film, *Ad Parnassum – Purapurawhetū,* had its World Premiere at The Arts Centre Christchurch Te Matatiki Toi Ora for Matariki Festival as an expanded cinema outdoor projection installation in 2022 and was re-created for the summer 2023 exhibition at Gallery OUT of PLACE in Nara, Japan. Originally the film was planned to be a live work. Due to the pandemic, production schemes were changed. The filmic format that *Ad Parnassum - Purapurawhetū* set now shows a unique signature in its artistic construction that combines movement, music, and graphic artistry. With a background in both dance and filmmaking, Belton and Good Company Arts, based in Dunedin, New Zealand, have crafted their own cinematic experience. Their way of creating choreography for the screen is different from that of many dance films in that they use the two-dimensional screen instead of shooting, for example, in outdoor locations. However, Daniel Belton works with few camera movements to create depth–the screen is his canvas. As a flat 2D-work, *Ad Parnassum - Purapurawhetū* alludes to spatial depth in scenography design and offers multiple scenes through which the digitally recorded dancers move.

Ad Parnassum - Purapurawhetū unfolds as a visual poem, in which the use of animation adds a layer of surrealism to the narrative, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. The film is a collaboration between Belton's direction and the music composed by Gillian Whitehead. The title, *Ad Parnassum*, refers to the famous painting of the same name by Swiss artist Paul Klee, known for its rich symbolism and intricate details. Daniel Belton saw it ten years ago at Bern's Kunstmuseum. The picture from 1932, painted in the pointillist style, shows an abstract mountain. Klee painted it after a trip to Egypt and its pyramid shape is also reminiscent of Mount Niesen in the Bernese Oberland. Belton draws inspiration from Klee's work, like the motif of the orange sun next to the triangular mountain, using it as a springboard for his own artistic journey. In responding to Paul Klee's painting, where patches of color (his pointillist-like brush marks) emit subtle grid cells forms, Belton created his own cells as handheld props which were used by the dancers as a choreographic device to suggest flight, and the movement of wings. The objects were designed to relate to key linear aspects of Paul Klee's *Ad Parnassum*. And this supports that the dancers become part of a shared visual and digital language. The use of animation, created by Jac Grenfell, adds this extra layer: the cross-like motion graphics also draw inspiration from tukutuku Māori weaving techniques.

Daniel Belton, together with his partner Donnine Harrison, chose nine dancers that refer to the Muses of Antiquity, as well as Māori Goddesses. Both of their backgrounds in contemporary dance shine through in the intricate and fluid movements. Knowledge of Māori folklore amongst the team linked their research to the mythology of the 9 Muses of ancient Greece. The latter occupy a distinguished position in Greek culture, as beauties and as embodiments of music, song, dance, poetry, history, astronomy, tragedy, harmony, and love. In Māori mythology, there are also the nine stars of Matariki. Pōhutukawa, mentioned in the title of the work, connecting Matariki to those who have passed from the physical world and who is the star that carries the dead across the year. So, the *Ad Parnassum - Purapurawhetū* project refers to the Mediterranean and to the Muses of Antiquity. Bauhaus artist Paul Klee alluded to the mythical home of the Muses, to Mount Parnassus, which was regarded for many years as a metaphor for perfection in art.

In some passages it remains unclear whether the dance formations are graphically duplicated in post-production or represent the whole group. This impression is reinforced by the two-dimensionality of the images and Belton's artistic play with proportions between dancers and animations. The long white robes

and the movement style can be seen reminiscent of the early modern dance of Isadora Duncan. And yet the screen is not a stage, but allows for layers, different levels of perspectives that can mirror each other.

The film's music, composed by Gillian Karawe Whitehead and performed by the New Zealand String Quartet, is an integral element of the experience. Whitehead's contribution to the work combines a classical string quartet with taonga pūoro, the traditional musical instruments of the Māori people, and embraces significant indigenous elements. The strong relation between the dancers' movements and the music that underlines the atmosphere of the whole work is a testament to the meticulous attention paid to all details of the film's production.

After *Line Dances* (2013), in which Daniel Belton explored the concept of digital line drawings, transforming the dancers into moving, living lines on a canvas and *Time Dance* (2012), in which he continued the exploration of the interplay between movement and time, *Ad Parnassum - Purapurawhetū* is a visual treat: Daniel Belton's personal style is again characterized in this work by simplicity, slowness and traces of movement already used in his other works. In *Ad Parnassum - Purapurawhetū* the reduced use of color and graphic [MOU2] [CR3] animations and lines further deepens its connection to Klee's painting. Belton's keen eye for composition is on full display, turning every frame into a work of his unique screen dance art. Even if individual artistic approaches such as the strobe effects are reminiscent of *Pas de Deux* (1968) by Norman McLaren, rotoscoping animation such as *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) by George Sidney, or the works of Kathy Rose since the 1980s, Belton has created his own, almost abstract-painterly style in his dance films, which fits well with the works of Paul Klee, whom he appreciates. The film won among others an award as best Art/Dance Film at Athens International Art Film Festival in 2023 and was winner for Best Female Composer at Paris' Elles - Women Composers Festival in 2023[MOU4].

The film can be seen on the company's Vimeo account: https://vimeo.com/770632708[MOU5]

Biography

Dr. Claudia Rosiny has been responsible for the performing arts at the Federal Office of Culture, Bern, since 2021, and was previously responsible for dance and theatre from 2012. In addition, she teaches and publishes, among others: *Tanz Film, Intermediale Beziehungen zwischen Mediengeschichte und moderner Tanzästhetik*, Bielefeld: transcript 2013, *Zeitgenössischer Tanz. Körper, Konzepte, Kulturen*, Bielefeld: transcript 2007. Recently she was a jury member at the Cinedans Festival 2024 in Amsterdam. She finished theatre, film and television studies in Cologne and Amsterdam and completed her doctorate at the University of Bern with a thesis on video dance, published as: *Videotanz. Panorama einer intermedialen Kunstform*, Zurich: Chronos,1999. She directed the dance festival Berner Tanztage from 1991 to 2007 and established a forum for media and design at the Kornhaus Bern from 1998 to 2007. After a fellowship stay in New York City in 2008-2009, she was a consultant and project manager at the Swiss Dance Archive, now SAPA (Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts), from 2009 to 2012.

**Maya Deren: Choreographed for Camera Presented by San Francisco Cinematheque June 18, 2023.
Gray Area/Grand Theater**
Clare Schweitzer

Maya Deren's first film screening in the San Francisco Bay Area dates back to November 1st, 1946 [1], and was presented as a part of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's (SFMOMA) Art in Cinema series. The curated film series not only laid the groundwork for developing an audience for experimental and avant-garde film but also catalyzed the creation of similar work in the Bay Area. Artists such as James Broughton, Stan Brakhage and Sidney Peterson cite Deren as an inspiration in the creation of their work, further aided by lectures and handouts of writing on the films that accompanied her screenings. These artists not only incorporated Deren's ideas into their own work, but were also key to implementing these ideas into higher education curricula, inspiring new generations of artists in the process. One of these students, Mark Alice Durant, recalled his fascination upon seeing Deren's work.

Durant relayed this anecdote during his introductory speech for the San Francisco leg of the launch of *Maya Deren : Choreographed for Camera,* a book that he purports is the first official biography of the artist [2]. Presented by San Francisco Cinematheque, an organization that cultivates and presents experimental and avant-garde film in the San Francisco Bay Area, the event was comprised of a screening of three of Deren's films - *Meshes of the Afternoon*, *At Land*, and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* - with Durant reading excerpts from his book concerning each film preceding its screening.

From the beginning of the event, Durant acknowledged that much of the book's content (and introductions of the films by extension) was derived from speculative treatments based on Deren's notes and images, framing her life in a manner similar to the way Deren framed her work; the events of Deren's life are conveyed chronologically but images and text from Deren's work and moments in her life are imaginarily elaborated. This frank admission from Durant offered the audience an inspired frame through which to view Deren's work and sowed the seeds of key provocations that were revisited later during the event.

The three films shown span the years 1943-1946, covering Deren's transformation from an unknown poet to an internationally renowned artist. Durant's introductions to the film painted a picture of an artist in pursuit of developing a visual language spurred by curiosity and enthusiasm, her relationships with collaborators and their roles in the work. It also illuminated how Deren's ambitions began to press against her resources, resulting in many incomplete (or as Deren termed, "abandoned") films. As such, it is worth bearing in mind that the most circulated of Deren's work came during a short (and certainly formative) time in her practice, one that would expand to modes of research and writing, but whose completed output was limited in the decade and a half that followed.

The films themselves, screened from reels jokingly described as "well-loved", offered a sense of what Deren's work was like to watch when it was first created. Deren's work is not particularly difficult to find,

one can simply look up both films (completed or not) on YouTube and watch technically competent restorations of her work, some of which are complete with interpretive sound scores. However, the experience of sitting with Deren's work in a dedicated screening space accompanied only by the sound of the projector rolling allowed for a clearer and more resonant reception of the work. As is the case with other "silent" work, the mechanism of the screening machinery provides a rhythmic layer of a sound score with which the images interact.

Furthermore, the print of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, while still screened without additional accompaniment, featured a music credit for Teiji Ito referring to the music he composed for the film a decade after its release. Following the screening of the films, Durant noted that Deren was partial to reworking her films to reflect shifting tastes and incorporated Ito's score into Meshes in the mid-1950s in order to make the work more contemporary to the era. Considering this, the reorientation of Deren's work to online environments, complete with reworked scores, can be seen as extensions of Deren's curiosities and interests.

Indeed, some of the more resonant provocations emerged following a question-and-answer session following the screenings of the film. There have already been discussion in the screendance community on the minimization of Katherine Dunham's influence on Deren's work, especially considered in relation to Deren's participation in Dunham's research in Haiti, as well as the casting of two of Dunham's dancers (Talley Beatty and Rita Christiani) in her film work. Durant's screening postscript placed this omission in focus as a "personal and professional lapse" on Deren's part and noted his attempts to rectify this by devoting an entire chapter to Dunham. Furthermore, Durant's mention of the many artists in Deren's orbit places a pall on discussions of Deren's work as auteur films and places her writing into question. Indeed, much of the emphasis placed on Deren in terms of her role as a major figure in both experimental film and screendance needs reevaluation, which could allow for new histories and lineages of film to emerge.

While presenting the films provided the event with a rich contextual lens, the approach to curating the films resembled approaches taken by multiple screendance festivals in that it highlighted Deren's work, but did not connect how it contributed to the development of screendance or experimental film. Presumably, it is up to the viewer/audience to explore these connections on their own (or read the accompanying book and make those connections), but the result is an inadvertent siloing of Deren's work and reduction (or even total loss) of that which resulted.

However, it's clear that the work must have a continued presence via screenings and the enthused responses of the audience members showed the value in its presentation. The Cinematheque's director Steve Polta noted in his introduction to the program that this event constituted the first screening of Deren's work in 20 years in the Bay Area. Granted, the screening served a somewhat utilitarian purpose in service to a book release, but it also raised the idea that more showings of the work are necessary.

Furthermore, the situation of preservation and archival access is nearing a state of crisis, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2021, SF MOMA terminated its film screening program after almost 75 years of presenting experimental film work. Mills College, one of the US's first dance programs and home to early multidisciplinary dance & film collaborations, was acquired by Northeastern University which

eliminated the arts degrees at the school. In addition to this, the San Francisco Art's Institute (SFAI), home to one of the country's first experimental film programs, closed in 2021. Several SFAI alumni started a non-profit organization to manage the archives, but the buyers of the SFAI grounds are in the process of contesting their ownership.

With educational institutions and archival initiatives struggling, the onus is on independent organizations (with limited funds & personnel) to curate and educate audiences.

Biography

A native of the San Francisco Bay Area, Clare Schweitzer (she/they) is a wearer of many hats at the intersection of dance and film. Clare graduated from Mount Holyoke College with a B.A. in Dance and Mathematics, then moved to London and completed an M.A in contemporary dance in 2015 at London Contemporary Dance School, focusing her dissertation research on screendance festivals and the cultural production of screendance through its presentation. Now based in Oakland, Clare has performed as a dancer around the SF Bay Area and her films have screened at festivals worldwide. She has also presented research at events such as the Light Moves Festival of Screendance and the Screendance State of the Art Symposium. She currently works as a Programming Assistant with Dance Film SF (which presents the annual San Francisco Dance Film Festival), as a videographer/editor for Rapt Productions and as a co-host on the podcast Frameform, a podcast that discusses the intersections of dance and film.

Notes

1- The screening was the West Coast premiere of *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, which took place a little over ten days since the film's world premiere in New York

2-Other authors have produced biographical work on Deren's life, such as *The Legend of Maya Deren* from VeVe Clark, Millicent Hodson and Catrina Newman, as well as the documentary *In the Mirror of Maya Deren* directed by Martina Kudlacek which features interviews with many of her collaborators. An addition title to consider is Barbara Hammer's hybrid documentary *Maya Deren's Sink,* using Deren's film locations and personal spaces as frames through which to view her work.

References

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"SFMOMA Cuts Film, but Bay Area Alternative Scene Is Doing Fine on Its Own." KQED, 5 Aug. 2021, www.kqed.org/arts/13900656/sfmoma-cuts-bay-area-alternative-film