

THIS IS WHERE WE DANCE NOW

COVID-19 AND THE NEW AND NEXT IN DANCE ONSCREEN



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Editorial: This Is Where We Dance Now

Harmony Bench, *The Ohio State University*

Alexandra Harlig, *University of Maryland, College Park*

Keywords: Covid-19, dance onscreen, dance online, dance film, screendance, Zoom, pandemic-era screendance, internet screendance, online audiences

We write in May 2021 from the ancestral and contemporary territory of the Shawnee, Potawatomi, Delaware, Miami, Peoria, Seneca, Wyandotte, Ojibwe, and Cherokee (Harmony) and Lenape (Alexandra) peoples. We write approximately a year and a half into the global Covid-19 pandemic. Some members of our global community are experiencing the hope of a world opening back up as more people become vaccinated, while others continue to experience economic devastation and personal catastrophe. We wish to acknowledge both the many lives lost to Covid-19—an estimated 3.5 million individuals as of this writing—and the ongoing struggles for racial justice in the United States and around the world that have gained new urgency during the pandemic. We recognize that the uneven ways the global health crisis has unfolded reveals anew how the unjust legacies of colonialism and enslavement perpetually shape inequality on a global scale.

This special issue of *The International Journal of Screendance* addresses how the Covid-19 pandemic rapidly shifted where, how, why, and under what conditions we dance. As lockdown orders swept across much of the world in early 2020, closing down the theaters, clubs, studios, and community centers where dancers practice, we found ourselves in awe of a collective refusal to stop dancing, and indeed, what seemed to be the emergence of a whole new era of dance onscreen. In 2019, the screen was just one among many venues where dance artists and enthusiasts might view and participate in dance. In 2020, the screen was seemingly the only venue, and its logics of geography and access to movement communities across the globe suddenly shifted in ways that will likely reverberate for years to come. This journal has always maintained the position that screendance encompasses more than dance film, and this issue reflects a renewed insistence that, even while accounting for their different legacies, affordances, and inheritances, there is something both useful and urgent about gathering together the various projects of dance onscreen and considering them alongside each other.



This Is Where We Dance Now: Covid-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen arose in part to document and account for how amateur, artistic, and academic communities pivoted to reimagine what it means to practice dance and screendance under what for most of us were unprecedented circumstances, when all dance became screendance. Further, the multiplicity of the screen itself was narrowed during Covid to primarily computer and mobile screens and online content, since theaters were largely closed and gatherings prohibited. A running theme of this issue, then, is how well our existing understandings of screendance—and indeed of our world as a whole—held up under the pressures of a heavily mediated and mediatized pandemic. The intense and collective (though not universal) turn to screendance and to the internet has revealed and accelerated extant politics, platforms, norms, and genres in dance, while also opening up space to reconsider the values attached to each of these.

Much of what we saw emerge from pandemic-era screendance had important precursors in such forms as online tutorials for both specific movements and pieces of choreography, magazine-style YouTube channels like Dance On, battle footage or event documentation such as the World of Dance competition series, and recordings of social dance occasions like weddings. Participation in dance challenges and viral trends were already visible on social media,¹ as were “react” videos, mashups, and recreations.² Commercial content such as excerpts of TV shows, movies, and live performances, music videos,³ advertising campaigns that also run on legacy media,⁴ as well as more conceptual YouTube-exclusive advertisements like Puma’s “Dance Dictionary,” or Diesel Jean’s “A to Z of Dance”⁵ had also carved out space online. Dance films, the genre of screendance most associated with the big screen, circulated through YouTube and especially Vimeo, alongside possible festival showings. For the most part, elements that defined internet-based screendance during the last year—dancing in homes, using outdoor spaces, sharing video on free platforms, and a strong “instructional force”⁶—all already existed.

All of this pre-pandemic dance online shows that in some ways, what has changed the most during this time is our perspective. We have long danced at home—in the US context, we can point to rent parties, dancing in front of television screens to *American Bandstand*,⁷ *Soul Train*,⁸ and MTV⁹; countless sleep-over basement choreographies, house parties, and of course dancing filmed for YouTube,¹⁰ Vine, Instagram, Dubsmash, and TikTok before the pandemic.¹¹ But home is a different place now, as the authors in this issue demonstrate. We have also long danced with, via, and through the screen, but the screen, too, may be a different place, now that being on both sides of the screen is a familiar and embodied experience. Indeed, as the pandemic wore on and what we learned to call “Zoom fatigue” set in, we were also reminded in ordinary and extraordinary ways that we are bodily beings. Thus, opportunities for further research into the detrimental effects of screen use on the body arose, as well as investigations of how the screen can activate and convey deep, embodied realities.¹²

In addition to these continuities, there are some important pandemic-specific trends that the authors gathered in this issue highlight. First is the sheer volume of participation and offerings, by lay people and organizations alike, made possible in part by the removal of travel as a barrier to access. Second, large, established dance institutions (such as Alvin Ailey, Martha Graham, the Cunningham Trust, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane, and Jacob's Pillow, to name only a few based in the US) opened their video archives to various degrees for asynchronous online viewing, live-streamed performances to synchronous online audiences, created new screendance works by reimagining existing or yet-to-be-premiered repertoire, and developed other online content to maintain their audience connection. Third, in what may prove to be a prominent hallmark of pandemic-era screendance, is the impact of and visual reference to video-conferencing platforms in the arrangement of material, for example, the suturing together of choreography undertaken in multiple locations, individual bodies bounded by their own frames, and use of a static camera.¹³ Fourth, and one of the most significant trends for dancers, was the mass migration of studio movement practice classes to synchronous online instruction via Zoom and Instagram Live.¹⁴ In the early months of the pandemic, such classes were often made available for free, at a reduced cost, or on a donation basis, as studios recognized that performing artists were financially hard-hit by closures and were in need of the community that dancing together provides. Additionally, people facing restricted movement outside the home turned for the first time or returned to dance as a way to connect to their bodies and mobility. Accessed online, these classes were newly available to participants from anywhere on the globe with a decent internet connection, and not only those who lived nearby or who had the financial resources to travel.

As the end of the Covid-19 pandemic pushed ever into the future, with rolling lockdowns and return to quarantine with the emergence of new virus variants and subsequent waves of infection, it became clear that this particular gift economy, established through a recognition of mutual indebtedness and shared precarity,¹⁵ was not sustainable over the long-term. Yet, gift and market economies are not mutually exclusive,¹⁶ and while the economically precarious volunteered their time and labor to sustain each other during times of uncertainty, extractive capitalism remained largely unhindered during the pandemic. Turning to pre-pandemic models and developing novel approaches to re-establish some economic security, perhaps with a newly expanded audience of supporters, schemes for funding have re-emerged. Well-known Hip-Hop and Funk Style dancer-teacher-choreographers like Ian Eastwood and Mr. Wiggles finally adopted the audience-patronage platform Patreon, becoming the first major dance-related creators to do so, and festivals and studios began selling membership subscriptions for limited-access streaming content. Dancers who were working for free have returned to paid performance positions or, like Katherine Disenhof, who created and ran the widely used information hub Dancing Alone Together based only on donations until late 2020 when it ceased operations, have accepted administrative positions.

The academic world was also impacted by Covid-19, and we, too, shifted how we go about our business. Noting both the cancellation of academic conferences and the speed with which the Zoom video-conferencing platform became normalized as a way of gathering when physical co-presence was impossible, as editors of this journal issue, we decided to hold a symposium so that our contributors could share their work in progress. The symposium, held at no cost to presenters or attendees via Zoom on March 12-13 and 19-20, 2021, marked what for many of us was a one-year anniversary of living with Covid-19 quarantines and lockdowns as part of our new reality. As organizers,¹⁷ we were blown away by the response: nearly 300 registrants from around the world for the symposium's events. In addition to panels representing the articles and provocations gathered here, we also organized some roundtable discussions on specific topics of interest: TikTok and Short-form Screendance, Screendance Festivals and Online Audiences, and The Future of Screendance, which we have included in the journal in edited and condensed form (full-length videos are available on both the journal and conference websites: <https://screendancejournal.org/> and <https://u.osu.edu/thisiswherewedancenow/>). We are excited to introduce the roundtable format to the journal and hope that it will be a recurring feature where artists and scholars can gather around emerging trends and urgent topics. As a global community, it is difficult for the screendance field to regularly gather in person, and the burden to travel usually falls to those in the Global South. We hope that this symposium was the first of many more to come, and that the new possibilities and infrastructures that arose to support the pivots necessitated by the pandemic will enable us to continue to sustain an expanded vision of dance onscreen, one that is accessible across ability, economic status, and geography.

Not knowing in advance how everyone would experience the pandemic from their distinct locations and situations—how long it would last, how humanity might be changed by it, what dance would look like in a post-pandemic world—we determined to use our position as editors to represent as many voices and perspectives as we could under the auspices of this issue. The journal opens with several articles that address dancing, dance-making, and screendance-making during the pandemic. Archer Porter offers a historical perspective on what she calls the “domestic stage” to contextualize the sudden influx of home-dancing due to Covid-19. Porter takes the “homebody” out of the current pandemic moment to consider the ways that this dancing figure has always been in crisis. Francesca Ferrer-Best's critical phenomenological autoethnographic account likewise unpacks domestic spaces to consider how “dance-space” impacts practices of dance, and what participation in dance classes via Zoom may portend for the future. Dara Milovanovic also offers an autoethnographic reflection on the experience of taking dance class in one's home, and while she appreciates her ability to participate in far-away classes that social media platforms have made accessible, she troubles the rapid emergence of studio dance practices within online spaces where popular dance forms had laid the groundwork. During the pandemic, we have seen both dance classes and dance works adapted for screen when dancers could

no longer share physical space. Hetty Blades thinks through how scoring practices facilitated some of these adaptations to screen, and simultaneously supported a shared commitment to dance together. Callum Anderson proposes that such events, which have proliferated over the past year, might warrant a new category of analysis, which he terms “screened dance.” At the same time, he advocates for a greater investigation of possibilities for audience interaction within screendance practice. Siobhan Murphy historicizes some of the now-familiar ways that Zoom has become incorporated into artistic practices, and the kinds of relationships that can form at the interface. Claire Loussouarn further challenges the default static relationship to the Zoom screen and opens up new practices of moving with and for the camera in what she calls “moving selfies.” Rather than merely adapt existing movement practices to the Zoom platform, Loussouarn encourages us to develop “somatically informed” screen explorations that keep us connected to bodily experience. Kate Mattingly and Tria Blu Wakpa draw our attention to the possibility of employing digital tools to undo colonial patternings and amplify the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples, which they articulate as “screendance as survivance.”

The Provocation and Viewpoints section begins with a collaboratively authored forum of questions that came out of regular meetings among Elisa Frasson, Marisa Hayes, Marco Longo, Ariadne Mikou, and Katja Vaghi as they navigated their own dance and screen projects during lockdowns associated with Covid-19. Several contributions then focus on shifts in teaching movement and camera work. Maïko Le Lay reflects on the difficulties of adapting her culturally relevant pedagogical practice to reach online audiences via a commercial online platform, and Kathryn Logan offers the metaphor of “unboxing” to consider affective dimensions of dancers’ relationships to cameras and the political stakes of capturing and sharing images. Supporting the remote-learning of her children during lockdown, Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram engages them in screendance explorations to learn concepts from science, ecology, and environmentalism, and Diane Busutill works with a population of senior adults to keep them moving in small spaces and combat social isolation for this vulnerable group. Catherine Cabeen similarly emphasizes the importance of continuing to move to counter the traumas of the pandemic and as part of an anti-racist somatic practice of undoing cultural conditioning. Elena Benthaus reminds those of us who have only just turned our attention to participatory dance practices taking shape online during the Covid-19 pandemic that we should not elide the histories of the popular dancing publics that have been dancing in these spaces for “quite a while.” Rebecca Salzer similarly urges dancers and choreographers to learn the histories of the video practices into which they have suddenly stepped out of necessity rather than out of a guiding aesthetic vision. Offering a manifesto for the “secular” in screendance, Sumedha Bhattacharyya problematizes the exotic Indian dancer fixed in a colonial gaze and advocates for greater diversity of representation in dance films and festivals. Staged as a dialogue, Melissa Blanco Borelli and madison moore offer a tour of TikTok videos centering Black, Brown, and queer perspectives as they evaluate projects of critical

worldmaking within and alongside the problematics of algorithmic bias and caricature. Finally, in rhymes, Omari 'Motion' Carter asks where we go next as educators, artists, practitioners, and scholars.

We have two interviews in this issue. Laura Vriend discusses the Zoom piece *Being/With: Home* with creator Nichole Canuso, and issue co-editor Alexandra Harlig engages with artist Tsiambwom Akuchu about his pandemic use of Instagram as a site of bboy practice and sociality. To conclude this special issue, Jo Cork offers a review of *TOM*, a work originally intended as an installation and reimaged as a dance film, and which captures the feelings of isolation and sometimes desperation that many of us felt during the pandemic.

As we draw these introductory remarks to a close, we are struck by a need to articulate just what screendance practice and scholarship contribute to our understanding of bodies and screens after a year and a half of experiencing their pandemic-normalized confluence. In her influential essay "Choreographies of Protest," Susan Leigh Foster poses questions to the scenes of protest she analyzes, which she suggests a dance scholar might ask, including "what are these bodies doing?; what and how do their motions signify?; [...] what kind of relationship do they establish with those who are watching their actions?; [...] and] how is the body of the researcher/writer implicated in the investigation?"¹⁸ In a similar vein, we might pose questions of the pandemic-era proliferation of bodies across small screens from the position of critical screendance studies, which takes the relationships between bodies and screens as a central concern¹⁹: whose point of view is represented in what is seen?; who is in front of the camera and who is behind it?; how is being onscreen both an act of self-expression and surveillance?; how are bodies framed and edited, and what are the implications of that framing and editing for how the images are interpreted?; how are images parsed so as to make bodies or bodily movements legible, and how is this legibility marked by perceptions of race and ethnicity, gender presentation, apparent class status, and so on?; what do environments, as *mise-en-scène*, reveal about people onscreen?; what is intentionally obscured from viewers, and what is the balance between privacy and transparency?; what bearing does that which is obscured or out-of-frame have on what the audience sees?; what is the interplay between the representational and the experiential for those onscreen?; how is the body of the viewer physically and even ethically implicated in the scene?

In a conversation with the editorial board, Claudia Kappenberg offered that "even though we are images, we are still bodies."²⁰ And we are in the midst of a period of deeply acknowledging embodiment, from human vulnerability to disease; to the uneven distribution of precarity along the lines of the violent legacies of colonization, enslavement, and genocide that continue to expose some to harm for the benefit of others; to the stakes of negotiating the freedom to move and the freedom to remain in place;²¹ to the use of motion tracking, surveillance, and artificial intelligence to aid governments, corporations, and institutions in interpreting, predicting, and managing

on- and offscreen actions. As the pandemic recedes, how will we critically analyze the body and screen practices that were normalized during 2020-21,²² and what new awareness will we bring to the practices we choose to retain, return to, or abandon? What do sustainable screendance practices look like post-pandemic?

We thank the Global Arts and Humanities Discovery Theme at The Ohio State University for providing support for this journal issue and symposium, and we thank The Ohio State University Libraries, especially Maureen Walsh, for their ongoing support of *The International Journal of Screendance*. Special thanks also go to current *IJSD* editor Kyra Norman and the editorial board for the enthusiasm with which they received this issue topic and their valuable input, direction, and camaraderie.

IJSD's volume 13 will combine an open call with a curated theme, *Choreographing the Archive: Interfaces Between Screendance & Archival Film Practices*, which will be guest-edited by Marisa C. Hayes and Luisa Lazzaro. The full call for contributions can be found online: <https://screendancejournal.org/announcement/view/70>. As a volunteer publication, we continue to seek sustainable and meaningful ways to serve the screendance community with timely provocations and rigorous scholarship. We hope that combining the open call and the curated theme will enable deep, focused discussion while continuing to make space for the important contributions that do not fall under a specific call.

We close with final words of gratitude. The pandemic is not yet over. Throughout, medical professionals have worked tirelessly to preserve human life, at great risk and cost to themselves. Activists protesting injustice have drawn collective attention to the many fronts along which struggles for liberation continue. And in moments of deep despair, artists and creators of all varieties have sustained us and given us joy. We thank all of those who dedicate themselves to world-building and imagining otherwise to create more equitable, more accessible, more inclusive futures—both onscreen and off.

Biographies

Harmony Bench is Associate Professor in the Department of Dance at The Ohio State University. Her research addresses practices, performances, and circulations of dance in the contexts of digital and screen media. She is author of *Perpetual Motion: Dance, Digital Cultures, and the Common* with University of Minnesota Press in 2020, and is at work on a new book on affect and kinesthesia in screendance spectatorship. For several years, Harmony has collaborated with Kate Elswit on bringing the digital humanities and dance history into greater dialogue, most recently with *Dunham's Data: Katherine Dunham and Digital Methods for Dance Historical Inquiry* (Ref: AH/R012989/1; www.dunhamsdata.org). From 2014-2019, she was co-editor of *The International Journal*

of *Screeendance* with Simon Ellis, and is excited to be guest editing the special issue *This Is Where We Dance Now: Covid-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen* with Alexandra Harlig.

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Notes

¹ See Bragin "From Oakland Turfs to Harlem Shakes" for a critique of the racial politics of viral dance videos.

² For analyses of dance fan production, see Bench, "'Single Ladies' is Gay" and "Monstrous Belonging"; Blanco Borelli "You Can't Outdo Black People"; Pullen, "If Ya Liked It, Then You Shoulda Made a Video"; Thomas, "Single Ladies, Plural; Kraut "Reenactment as Racialized Scandal."

³ See Jackson, "A Rhizomatic Revolution?" and Edmond, "Here We Go Again."

⁴ See Dunagan, *Consuming Dance*; Blanco Borelli, "Gadgets, Bodies, and Screens"; and Huntington, *Black Social Dance in Television Advertising*.

⁵ See Harlig, "Fresher than You."

⁶ For explanations of instructional force, see for example McAllister, *Game Work*; Miller, *Playing Along*; and Harlig, "Social Texts, Social Audiences, Social Worlds."

⁷ See Harlig, "Communities of Practice."

⁸ See Defrantz, "Unchecked Popularity."

⁹ See Blanco Borelli, "Dancing in Music Videos" and Bench, "Monstrous Belonging."

¹⁰ See Peters and Seier, "Home Dance."

¹¹ Popular internet-based genres of screendance that preceded the pandemic include: concept videos, which are non-music video popular dance-centric videos that have a theme, narrative, or strong visual aesthetic; class videos which render presentational end-of-class combinations shot at popular dance studios; street-based freestyle videos such as those pioneered by YAKfilms, which frame a dancer of any improvisational popular form freestyling in an aesthetically-interesting public place (See Bragin, "Shot and Captured"); and comedy or sketch dance videos which became popular on Vine and now also appear on TikTok and Dubsmash. See Harlig, "Social Texts, Social Audiences, Social Worlds," for a fuller elaboration. For histories of internet-based dance onscreen prior to the advent of social media, see Popat, *Invisible Connections* and Bench, *Perpetual Motion*.

¹² See Weber, "Moving Embodied Dance Practices Online."

¹³ A now-classic example is the music video for "Phenom" by Thao & the Get Down Stay Down, which was touted as the "first Zoom music video" (See Berkowitz, "The First Music Video"). Aesthetically, however, such Zoom choreographies are preceded by similarly structured screen layouts and static camera angles from late 1990s and early 2000s online hyperdances that displayed dancing images on a grid. See chapter 1 in Bench, *Perpetual Motion*.

¹⁴ Because classes offered through Instagram Live were only accessible for 24 hours, they leveraged digital media's "complex temporalities" to control access in a manner that retained an ephemerality resonant with the scarcity model of an in-person experience. On temporalities of digital media, see Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral" and Bench, "'Complex Temporalities.'"

¹⁵ Bench, *Perpetual Motion*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Many thanks to Lyndsey Vader, who also helped with event organization.

¹⁸ Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," 397.

¹⁹ Katrina McPherson in conversation with *The International Journal of Screendance* editorial board, 6 May 2021.

²⁰ Claudia Kappenberg in conversation with *The International Journal of Screendance* editorial board, 6 May 2021.

²¹ In a message to Dance Studies Association members in March 2020, Executive Director Lizzie Leopold reflected, "We began this year by publishing a [Statement on the Inviolability of Movement as a Right](#). 'As scholars and artists in dance we investigate, theorize, and practice movement in all its expansive meanings and possibilities. Therefore, this statement expresses our deep concern for those moving across borders who seek safety from violence, slavery, military occupation and poverty resulting from colonialism, disaster capitalism, and trans-border exploitative economic policies.' The realities of the COVID-19 pandemic force us to re-examine this statement and to understand anew the right to movement and the privilege of a safe stillness." <https://mailchi.mp/fee10d93cf87/reminder-malta-early-registration-deadline-may-1354608>

²² Ann Cooper Albright in conversation with *The International Journal of Screendance* editorial board, 6 May 2021.

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ARTICLES

The Homebody During/In Crisis

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic ushered in a new paradigm of domesticity that manifested in and through the body. The complexities of domestic corporeality, however, predate this particular crisis. The inhabitation of the domestic realm is inherently riddled with contradictions of space, subjectivity, and sociality. In this article, I consider the many paradoxes imbuing the homebody both before and during the onset of the pandemic, arguing that crisis exacerbates the existing tensions that the homebody engenders, but it does not produce them. I examine the case of home dancer Marlee Grace and her Instagram activity prior to and during the quarantines, lockdowns, and stay-at-home orders of 2020. Grace's performed contradictions for her new media audience demonstrate that the homebody—though its complexities are amplified by the pandemic—has always been in crisis.

Keywords: home, homebody, intimacy, Instagram, domestic, new media, social media

Eliza grooves to a pop song in her living room; Miguel jams-out in his bedroom to a new album by his favorite musician; Cam rehearses a piece of choreography in the kitchen. Self-produced home dance videos such as these circulate through new media platforms in abundance. Together, they reflect the extraordinary ordinariness of domestic life, the outward expression of intimacy on new media, and the slippages in private and public space that are now characteristic of contemporary digital culture. At the crux of this phenomenon is the home dancing body. This body—the *homebody*, we might say—straddles worlds of the familiar and unfamiliar, near and far, interior and exterior, personal and social. The home dance videos that appear online not only capture this body, but also exacerbate its inherent paradoxes of space, subjectivity, and sociality.¹ We might imagine, for instance, how Eliza, Miguel, and Cam take care to capture their private selves and express their interior thoughts. Their spaces, too, represent their intimate worlds. A photo of Eliza's grandmother hangs on the wall behind her; Miguel's dog hides under the bed next to him, possibly frightened by the thunderstorm; and Cam's still-damp mop rests against the oven, perhaps from an earlier cleaning spree. Yet, once posted to the internet, these media acquire a new dimension that is often antithetical to their semiotics of intimacy. That is to say, although they typically remain tethered to personal accounts, they are also thrust into public visibility and mass



circulation, accumulating views and likes, inviting reposts and shares, and collecting comments and hashtags.

Home dance videos such as the ones of the fictional Eliza, Miguel, and Cam frame the homebody for innumerable viewers to consume. Of course, this phenomenon is not novel, but may be linked to the rise of new media, and along with it, the cultivation of what I term the “domestic stage”—a phenomenon wherein individuals record their home performances to be shared online. Associated with platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, productions on the domestic stage borrow from genres like autobiography and self-portraiture, and extend the logics of antecedent media like home movies and closed-circuit television.² The homebody may appear through these media, choreographing its interior for the exterior, expressing its privacy for the public, and harnessing the personal for the social.

Despite its genealogies across history, genre, and media, the homebody and the domestic stage upon which it performs have been re-framed by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Accompanying the global movement toward quarantining and staying-at-home throughout 2019-2021, home dance videos not only proliferated in number, but also prompted an intensification of the homebody. This article examines the transformations and new offerings of the mediatized homebody during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. By analyzing the Instagram account of dancer Marlee Grace, and the videos she posted before and during quarantine, I argue that this global crisis has exacerbated the existing paradoxes and complexities of the homebody, while also re-charging this figure with an overt criticality. Before I consider the ways in which Grace’s home productions demonstrate this argument, however, it is necessary to first introduce the notion of the homebody and its place in digital culture.

Homebodies on the Domestic Stage

The homebody—more than merely a person who finds pleasure in staying at home—is the product of the dialectical relation between the *habitat* and the *habitus*. That is to say, the home is a space where individuals cultivate and rehearse the habits they inherit from, and carry out into, the world. Subtly, over time and space, the homebody embodies social structures while also ultimately contributing to those structures. This give-and-take process results in a body defined through what Pierre Bourdieu terms the *habitus*, or a “system of durable, transposable dispositions.”³ Drawing on Bourdieu, I define the homebody as a corporeal manifestation of social constructed-ness—the everyday, micro-developments of gender, class, race, sexuality, etc. that are cultivated through domestic space and expressed through the body. However, the homebody also re-imagines itself in the confines of its space, testing its limits and tweaking its habits. This figure moves in and through the home, secured by the familiarity of its surroundings, yet excited by the world beyond its walls. Though it is subject to normative patternings, it is also compelled by the possibility of deviation. In this way,

the homebody is not only public/private, personal/social, but also reiterative/subversive.

The homebody is indeed paradoxical. Not only does it embody the structures of its environment, thereby enmeshing itself into social fabrics, but it also interfaces with the public through screens. For the 21st century homebody in particular, screens have become an apparatus of habituation: the homebody maneuvers itself in front of screens, just as it becomes the image on screens. In fact, we may argue that *it is only through screens that the homebody may appear in the first place*—since, once it physically exits its domestic world, it becomes evacuated of its defining characteristics. In other words, the homebody cannot *be* outside of the home. However, by remaining in its habitat, positioning itself in front of a camera, and pressing record, it may mediate and transmit itself and its choreographies. Through screens, then, this figure comes to know the world, just as the world comes to know it. Its production and consumption of screen media then comprise its habitual exercises—voices, bodies, and scenes from afar are drawn into her habitat, and they shape her habitus. Though this figure indeed “stays at home,” she is shaped by, and expressed through the various screens that enable her to interface with the wider world—broadcasting herself out to that world, while also bringing the world to her, in her home.



Donte grooves in his home while eating pizza in a post on May 5, 2018. This video exemplifies the slippages in privacy and publicity, personal and social, and interior and exterior that is characteristic of the homebody. Donte makes external an experience that one might conceive as a private activity. In a casual manner, and while wearing relaxed attire characteristic of that which one might wear in the home, Colley nourishes his body with food while improvising to a pop song, as one might do in front of a mirror while home alone. Credit: @dontecolley

The contemporary homebody’s relationship to screens demonstrates how it is defined by what Wendy Hui Kyong Chun calls “habitual new media,” a paradigm of network society in which the individual is compelled to constantly change, so much so that *updating* becomes the only constant. “Users have become creatures of the update,” writes Chun. “To be is to be updated: to update and to be subjected to the update.”⁴ However oxymoronic it may seem, habitual change, Chun suggests, has come to define how people operate in the age of new media. Perhaps digital culture’s imposition for all is to make a habit of change. Drawing on Chun’s conceptualization, I find that the

homebody is embedded in a landscape of habitual change. This body symbolizes the desire for an impossible stability in the fluid conditions of digital culture. Reaching toward the unfamiliar as a way to reify the familiar, turning toward the exterior as a way to harness the interior, the homebody continually “updates to remain the same.” Its habits, of course, manifest through corporeal movement, through patterns and sequences, through choreographies of both an ordinary and extraordinary variety. In this way, dance enables the homebody to perform its complexities, as its movements are choreographed, framed, captured, circulated, and screened for others—who reside beyond its intimate environs—to see and experience.

The homebody's affinity for screens means that it is also the *subject* of consumption through those screens. Viewers situated in locales across the globe may power-on the homebody, watch it move, and marvel at its quintessential snapshot of intimacy. That is to say, the homebody may not exist outside of its habitat, as discussed above, but it may offer its audience illusions of an interior, unseen authenticity of human form: exclusive access to the seemingly unchoreographed natural body. This manner of aestheticizing intimacy—or engaging in what I call *intimaesthetics*—cultivates a sense of closeness with the viewer through the homebody's choreographies of body, space, and media.⁵ Forging such a connection may satisfy in the viewer a desire to see what is otherwise unseen, exoticize the familiar, and relish in the camera's capturing of what is otherwise not able to be captured—all while reaffirming the existence of some natural, authentic body.⁶

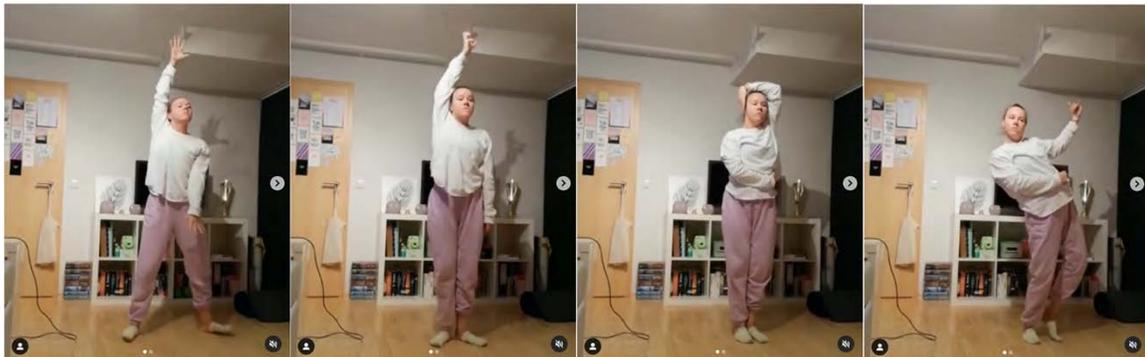


Pradeep doing the moonwalk in his living room in an Instagram post on October 26, 2016. While this dance is indeed a home dance, it demonstrates the screen-oriented quality of the homebody. Michael Jackson's moonwalk has been screened for a global audience: individuals who then learn the dance and screen it for an audience of their own. Credit: @deepu_d_navigator

Evident in this understanding of the homebody is how, even without the stresses of a global crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, this figure is already imbued with contradictions, ambiguities, and paradoxes. It is the subject of both work and leisure, commerce and craft, social interaction and intimate engagement. Then, in 2020, as millions of people across the world receded from public spaces and closed themselves in at home, the homebody was propelled into a global public consciousness. Everyone, it seemed, was cognizant of, if not experiencing on a personal level, the complexities of

the homebody. This movement, however, not only cast a brighter light on the homebody, but also intensified its already inherent paradoxes. The ways in which this figure stretches across spheres of inside and outside were exacerbated by the nature of the pandemic: concerns for the health of the body; feelings of both confinement and refuge; new rhythms of work, family, and leisure; and desires for, yet an uncertainty around, social engagement. Because these changes compounded on, around, and through the body, testing it beyond its limits and twisting it in new directions, the homebody became the site of much attention and tension. With the turn toward the home during this time, and the concomitant exacerbations of the homebody, came an intensification in cultural production. Domesticity, it turned out, became a prevailing paradigm of 2020; and the homebody became the instrument through which to navigate that paradigm, including myriad forms of cultural activity, artistic expression, and social interaction. In order to express, create, or otherwise communicate with others, individuals across the globe turned toward their screens.

Many used those screens to cope with the social, cultural, economic, and political demands of the time; some used them to cathartically express their frustrations; while others were looking to merely pass the time in quarantine. Regardless of the emotional register of their use, screens filled many voids that developed from the sharp pivot toward the interior, and a sudden, intense engagement with domesticity.



An Instagram post on November 12, 2020 of Nina, a member of German dance collective Female League, dancing in her home as part of a weekly challenge where members choreographed to the same song because, as the post states, they could not meet in person. Credit: posted by @female_league, performed by @nina__rsh

It was within this field that home dance videos began to circulate with greater frequency and fervor. Like the shifts in the homebody during this time, the general character of these videos also shifted. Specifically, they tended to acquire a greater sense of urgency, a marked dissonance, and an express politics. Marlee Grace, whose videos I explore in the following section is no exception to this trend. While Grace was previously recognized for the home dance videos uploaded to her Instagram account, @personalpractice, her homebody in a particular post in April 2020 performs the exaggerated complexities that developed during the pandemic.⁷ An in-depth consideration of this post, followed by a discussion of Grace's pre-pandemic home

dance productions, will demonstrate the shifts in the mediatized homebody and gesture toward the unique role that dance has played during this crisis.

Now and Then with Marlee Grace

The square frame, capturing a nondescript domestic space with white walls and ample natural light, is suddenly broken by two arms thrown into view, fingers landing on the table in front of the camera as if to stand on their own. Marlee Grace then pulls the rest of her body into the space, but only her upper body is in view, as the table in the foreground blocks the rest of her figure. She sways right-left-right-left as she lip-syncs to the 1990s pop song, "Boom Boom Boom Boom, I Want You in My Room" by the Vengaboys. Stepping back away from the camera, Grace does a paddle turn, and tosses her arms up and forward. Now gazing at the camera with a light, contemplative expression, she bounces side-to-side while opening and closing her elbows in front of her face. With the next "boom, boom, boom, boom," Grace moves closer to the camera and strikes her right elbow across her body ("boom"), crosses her forearms in the shape of an "X" toward the camera ("boom"), opens both arms back up to form two sharp right angles ("boom"), and then tosses her right arm across her body ("boom"). This sequence of movements is performed with a calm vigor.

As Grace continues dancing, wisps of hair flutter beneath her denim baseball cap. Her white overalls and black tank top reveal her tattooed arms, which she continues to toss and strike to the rhythm of the music. Mouthing the lyrics, "let's spend the night together, together in my room," Grace moves closer to the camera with her left arm wrapped across her torso. The dance ends with her grinning at the camera as she softly circles her head with her arms raised. Beneath the frame of the video is the caption:

DANCING IS A SPELL - a spell to pay attention to grief, to move it through your body, and that to continue the fight for justice we must dance

i feel sad bernie dropped out of the race

i feel sad that i'm far away from my parents

i feel sad that john prine died

i feel sad that this virus disproportionately affects black folks and communities of color and the media isn't showing us that

i feel sad that people i love aren't been taken care of by their employers

i feel sad that incarcerated folks aren't being treated with the care they deserve, set them free

i feel sad i can't go to the coffee shop

i feel sad i can't hug my neighbors

I ALSO FEEL THAT ACCEPTANCE AND HOPE AND ACTION WILL CARRY US THROUGH.



Marlee Grace dancing in her home to Vengaboys. Credit: @personalpractice

This 17-second video was uploaded to Instagram on April 8, 2020—the same day that the United States (Grace’s country of residence) reported 200,000 confirmed cases of Coronavirus, and just days after the country announced a record number of filings for unemployment benefits. Upon initial viewing, Grace does not appear to be cognizant of these current events. That is to say, when first considering the video, her homebody seems to be insulated from its social, cultural, and economic context. However, reading into her post reveals the complexities of her homebody and indicates the ways in which dance may be positioned as a critical practice in times of crisis, particularly compared to its “social life” on new media prior to the pandemic.⁸ While Grace’s post does not capture the breadth of home dance videos circulating during the pandemic, it serves as an exemplar of the homebody at this time. Thus, a close analysis of this post alongside her vast repertoire of home dance productions on Instagram will gesture toward the wider representations of the homebody during crisis.

Most notable about this post is its seemingly contradictory semiotics, particularly the mood of the video compared to the message of the caption. As suggested above, Grace’s dancing does not read as solemn, grim, fearful, or angry—sentiments commonly expressed during the height of the pandemic (in the US and in 2020, at least).⁹ Instead, the quality of her movements, her choice in music, and her countenance throughout the dance all suggest effervescence. This characterization may be gleaned in how she jauntily bobs to the upbeat rhythm of the song, sings along to the lyrics with ease, and strikes her arms with an upbeat, light-hearted energy. Specifically, the manner with which Grace enters the frame, as if she’s introducing her hands first, then the rest of her body, expresses playfulness. Her choice in wardrobe—clothes that suggest around-the-house activity—also seems tranquil and bright. Together, these facets of

her performance articulate a light-hearted sensibility that encourages the viewer to dance and sing along.



Grace smiling at the camera as she dances. Credit: @personalpractice

The effervescence and ease of Grace's dancing stand in opposition to the statements she makes in the caption of the post. While the mood of the dancing is lively, that of the caption is melancholic. There are a couple of key features of Grace's language in this text that are worth noting in this regard. First is her use of the lowercase "i" in the list of things that make her sad. The pronoun "I" is not only written in lowercase in the middle of a couple of statements, but also at the beginning of each line. While this aspect of the caption might seem merely stylistic, its juxtaposition with the all-caps text suggests a certain intentionality of its use. To disregard the grammar of capitalization, especially for the first-person voice, conveys a humbled or otherwise diminished sense of self. Perhaps Grace is demonstrating a displacement of her ego during a tumultuous time. Whatever its message, the repeated appearance of the lowercase "i," particularly on a platform that propagates selfie-ism, reflects a more grounded sense of Grace's self.

A second feature worth noting in this caption is the repeated use of "i feel sad that..." The device of repetition here functions not only to underscore Grace's sadness regarding a series of activities that she can no longer engage in, but also to reflect through language the apparent exhaustion that she feels with the state of the world. In other words, she linguistically exhausts this phrase to reflect her physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion with the pandemic and its wider effects—its mandates of social distancing, its exacerbations of systemic racism, and its widening of class disparities, for example. Of course, Grace's dancing does not capture this exhaustion, rather it channels a sense of levity as opposed to gravity.

The contradictions evident in this post are not coincidental, but reflect the complexities of the homebody, exacerbated by the pandemic. Grace's dancing, though it seems to transcend, or otherwise remain ignorant of, the events and sentiments expressed in the caption, is perhaps dealing with those events and sentiments in a non-obvious, non-superficial manner. As she recognizes in the post, dance is a mode through which she may acknowledge and navigate grief, and most of all, to "move it through [her] body." Her experience of grooving to a pop song, then, is perhaps an exercise in moving that grief through her body, so much so that the result does not appear to be grief at all. Considering this view, perhaps the stark contrast of seemingly divergent sentiments turns out to be a co-mingling of those sentiments—the channeling of grief through the body, as a way to recognize it, live with it, and to momentarily transform it into something else. The homebody during crisis, as Grace teaches us, can simultaneously find both pleasure and despair, rhythm and quiet, levity and gravity.

Reading Grace's mid-pandemic homebody as contradictory not only manifests in the post itself, but also in the public comments responding to the post. All comments express support for her performance and/or her message about the role of dance; however, they range from the seemingly flippant to the more contemplative. For instance, one user writes, "I used to hate this song, but you just made me like it 🙌💕", while another says "cried after reading this post because today was such a hard day for good people. It's so unfair ❤️." Though both comments are generally positive and supportive of Grace's performance, they reflect varying sentiments: the first, a more upbeat if not superficial one, and the second, a more somber one. This range of readings is not uncommon in the comment sections of new media content, yet when considered against the already-complex homebody, further demonstrates how this body is imbued with contradiction, and thereby makes those contradictions available to its viewership.

The home dance videos that Grace posted prior to the pandemic tend to express a more cohesive, non-contradictory homebody. Captions of videos contextualized the dancing in the video, or explained a sensibility that was already available in the dance. While numerous home dance videos that Grace posted across several years demonstrate this pre-pandemic homebody, we might consider just a few. On June 21, 2019, for example, Grace posted a video in which she attempts to do "the floss"—a "viral choreography" that emerged in 2016 and became popular among school-aged children and teens.¹⁰ The caption under this video reads: "really just trying to figure out the moves everyone is into i know i'm late i'm doing my best." Earlier that year, on February 16, 2019, Grace posted a video of her softly, casually doing floor exercises. The caption reads "just laying on the ground listening to camila cabello a normal saturday night." In a post on February 9, 2019, she is dancing to a Selena Gomez song, bathed in natural light from a nearby window. The caption reads "good sun today." About a month earlier, on January 3, she posted a video of her jamming out in the living room to a Taylor Swift song, with the caption, "home alone." And then in a post from October 28, 2018, Grace grooves to The Flying Lizards wearing Carhartt overalls and a matching cap. Below the video, she

writes, “what’s with today, today?” While these posts are not bereft of meaning or criticality, they channel a homebody that is more at ease—at ease with the world, at ease with the interior, at ease with domesticity. Grace often remarks on her impression of a particular musical artist, song, or album. She will also occasionally reflect on the weather or an item of clothing. Dissonance, however, is not a theme available in these posts, and dance does not need to be deployed to cast any “spells,” or otherwise cope with the events of the outside world. Instead, dance functions as a pastime, a leisure activity, and a pop culture currency; and the homebody presents itself as in balance and at peace.

Digging a bit deeper into Grace’s archive of home dance videos, however, reveals a slight antecedent to her pandemic post that is worth considering. On September 27, 2018, Grace posted a video of her casually improvising to the outro of Whitney Houston’s “I Wanna Dance With Somebody” in the bedroom. The video begins with Grace, her eyes down, fidgeting with her shirt while rocking side-to-side. Her hands, already gathered at her waistband, softly rise toward her chest in alternating ascension, matching the rhythm of the repeated lyrics “Don’t-cha wanna dance?” Her palms lift and arms open as if to perform a “welcome” gesture, though her face is without expression. All in one fluid motion, she draws her hips back and to the right as her arms move forward, and then she softly thrusts her pelvis forward as her arms pass back. She repeats this gesture to the right. Then, lightly rocking on her balls of her feet, Grace rotates her torso from side to side as her arms follow, flailing with the weight of their own movement—her eyes now closed. She remains in the same spot throughout the video: just behind a bed that has been stripped of its sheets and comforter. Pillows are stacked on the floor next to Grace, and another pile of clothes sits on the other side of her. The video ends with Grace, situated amongst her laundry, in mid-twist, and face still expressionless. The caption below reads #cancelkavanaugh #dancingisaspell.

Like her pandemic post, the dancing in this video does not allude to any strife. Instead, it seemingly captures a young woman taking a break from laundry to meditate to the sounds of Whitney Houston, perhaps in hopes of gathering the energy required to fold the piles of clean clothes on the floor. Despite this illustration, the caption of the video indicates a separate message, thereby framing the dance in a different, more politically charged light. Specifically, Grace’s use of #cancelkavanaugh points to her disappointment with a particular political event: the nomination of Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the United States Supreme Court. The incorporation of this hashtag effectively aligns Grace’s interests with a protest movement to prevent Kavanaugh’s confirmation due to evidence of sexual harassment. In addition to this information that Grace offers, she also suggests the role of dance in participating in that protest. By including the hashtag #dancingisaspell—which, unlike #cancelkavanaugh, was *not* a viral movement—Grace suggests that dance allows her to transform her state, or perhaps the situation at large, and to “move it through her body.”

Two aspects of this video align it with Grace's pandemic homebody: the seeming dissonance between her dance and the caption that frames the dance; and her suggestion of dance as a transformational practice that allows her to navigate some outside conflict. The character with which she conveys both of these messages, however, lacks the fervor of her post on April 8, 2020. Instead of articulating a number of personal, social, and political blows that affected her, the semiotics of this post suggest a casual, if not convenient, participation in a wider movement. Ostensibly, #cancelkavanaugh could be replaced with some other social justice movement circulating new media, and the meaning of the post would remain virtually the same. Nonetheless, its inclusion in a post that frames Grace's laundry-break jam articulates a subtle dissonance in Grace's homebody. Here, we see how Grace has captured the complexities of the homebody prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, but does not necessarily demonstrate the degree of intensifications that occurred as the world turned toward the home in 2020.

Analyzing Marlee Grace's Instagram activity both during and before the Covid-19 pandemic illustrates the complexities of the homebody, and how the pandemic both reveals and exacerbates those complexities. Although her case exemplifies this point, it does not exhaust the myriad twists, turns, and protractions that the homebody exercises on new media. In fact, the complexity of this figure acquires a meta status (a complexity of complexity) when considering how identity plays into its choreographies—how race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nationality, and other social categories define its dealings across the private/public, personal/social, and interior/exterior. The nuances of the homebody during the pandemic may be gleaned, for instance, by sifting through hashtags like #quarantinedance, #socialdisdancing, and #danceathome. Aggregated by hashtags such as these are videos of individuals dancing in their bedrooms, living rooms, and kitchens, in homes across continents, in a variety of dance styles, and with a range of sentiments: a twenty-something Latinx woman dances salsa in her bedroom in Brazil; a tall white guy performs hip hop in a dimly lit corridor of his home in Russia; a South Asian adult man wearing a "US Air Force" shirt does Bharat "popping" in the living room of a home in Pakistan; and a Black teenage girl performs to an American pop song in front of her bathroom mirror in South Africa. Indeed, the homebody is not universal, rather it reflects the particularities of its environment and the identity position of the dancer. Then, with the pandemic, each individual may have experienced shifts in their homebody—shifts that are also unique to that dancer's situation and identity position. The complexities of Grace's homebody are thus situational and may not be isolated from her gender, age, race, class, sexuality, nationality, and education, along many other factors. In other words, her example demonstrates the complexities of the homebody during crisis, but it does not suggest a universal homebody. Instead, Grace is merely one pixel in a larger moving portrait.

Conclusion

Although an analysis of Grace's homebody during and before the pandemic indicates the homebody's intensifications during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to reiterate how this body is already paradoxical, already complex, already contradictory—even outside of the social, cultural, economic, and political constraints of the pandemic in 2020. As discussed throughout this article, the homebody may be defined through its embodiment of paradoxes like private/public, personal/social, and interior/exterior. Its habits are structured by the social codes that govern the world outside its walls; so, its characterization as private, personal, and interior is thus determined by the public, social, and exterior. In other words, the homebody deceptively represents interiority, yet its habitual make-up is cultivated through and defined by its engagement with its social surroundings.¹¹ Moreover, this figure embodies dualities of a more corporeal nature as well: it works and plays, moves and pauses, laughs and cries—all within the confines of the domestic environment. These traits characterize the homebody with or without a crisis, with or without a camera capturing its image.

If the homebody is already defined by its own complexities, then neither its mediatized image nor its stresses during a crisis can completely redefine its contours. These developments may illuminate or intensify those contours, but not redraw them. So, while the widespread pivot toward the home in 2020 indeed placed added stress on the homebody, prompting individuals across the globe to experience domesticity in a new, amplified way, we might also argue that, to some extent, *the homebody has always been in crisis*. As I have shown, this figure deceptively represents interiority, yet its habitual makeup is cultivated through and defined by its engagements with its social surroundings. Then, once it leaves the home, it can no longer exist, further complicating its ontology. Its mediatizations subsequently exacerbate these qualities, since the reproduction and circulation of its likeness catapults it into the public imaginary, thereby betraying its ethos. In her home dance videos on Instagram, Marlee Grace performs these paradoxes of the homebody. Although her April 2020 post indicates her homebody *during* crisis, a wider perspective indicates the more fundamental complexities of this body. Indeed, the homebody has always been in crisis.

Biography

L. Archer Porter is a scholar, artist, and purveyor of performance on new media. She is currently a Doctoral Candidate in Culture and Performance at UCLA and holds a Masters in Dance Theories and Practices from UNC-Greensboro. Porter's research plumbs the economic, social, and cultural intricacies of dance in digital culture. Her dissertation, "The Domestic Stage: Dance and Intimacy in the Age of New Media" examines the

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Notes

¹ Notably, Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier analyze home dance videos on YouTube as technologies of the self in "Home Dance."

² This concept of re-fashioning antecedent media is a form of what Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin call "remediation." Defining this concept, Bolter and Grusin write, "New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural context, and they re-fashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts." *Remediation*, 16.

³ Bourdieu, "Structures and the Habitus," 72.

⁴ Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 2.

⁵ My conceptualization of intimaesthetics relies on Lauren Berlant's call to reframe intimacy. Specifically, Berlant wants us to disabuse ourselves of a diffuse, amorphous sense of intimacy, as it is typically deployed without criticality. "Rethinking intimacy," Berlant writes, "calls out not only for redescription but for transformative analyses of the rhetorical and material conditions that enable hegemonic fantasies to thrive in the minds and on the bodies of subjects." "Intimacy: A Special Issue," 286. Following Berlant, I deploy intimacy as a way to uncover the mechanisms through which it is produced and rendered into an image.

⁶ The mechanisms by which domestic intimacy is aestheticized, via the homebody's imaging, rely on the power of the camera to illuminate existing and produce new paradoxes. Susan Sontag aptly reflects this characteristic when writing, "Like a pair of binoculars with no right or wrong end, the camera makes exotic things near, intimate; and familiar things small, abstract, strange, much farther away. It offers, in one easy, habit-forming activity, both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others—allowing us to participate, while confirming alienation." *On Photography*, 131. The homebody gets caught in this bind with the camera and the screens to which it

links. Even its self-produced image blurs sensibilities of near and far, close and distant, familiar and unfamiliar, effectively assuring its own alienation.

⁷ Siobhan Burke discusses the personal dimension to Marlee's practice in "A Graveyard?"

⁸ My use of "social life" borrows from Arjun Appadurai's generative work on the "social life of things" in *The Social Life of Things*. Notably, scholars Anthea Kraut and Susan Leigh Foster apply Appadurai's thinking to the circulation of dance "in and out of the commodity state." Most relevant to my concerns here, Harmony Bench conceptualizes *digital dance* in terms of its circulation through new media. In *Perpetual Motion*, Bench addresses how digital dance "[becomes] positioned within a corporeal common that ostensibly can be mined by anyone" (142). This notion of the commons qualifies my understanding of dance's "social life on new media prior to the pandemic," as it emphasizes how dance on new media is susceptible to commodification and, what Bench terms, "infelicitious acts of transfer" (142-156). In these terms, the pandemic then prompted a sense of urgency and a desire for digital belonging among denizens of new media that initiated more gift-like exchanges of dance. See Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright*; Foster, *Valuing Dance*; and Bench, *Perpetual Motion*.

⁹ A report published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* analyzed global sentiments expressed on Twitter and detected a range of emotions and identified a shift from fear to anger over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Along similar lines, an article in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* investigated news headlines concerning the COVID-19 disease and reported that 52% of headlines evoked negative sentiments, 30% positive, and 18% neutral. The primary emotions found in these headlines were fear, anticipation, sadness, trust, and anger.

¹⁰ I borrow the term "viral choreography" from Harmony Bench, who defines this concept as a that which "requires ongoing performance in order to sustain itself as a shared cultural object." "'Single Ladies' is Gay," 133.

¹¹ Such a deceit is anchored to popular conceptions of the home as diametrically opposed to the world outside, and thus the figure occupying that space is characterized in a similar manner. Writers like Gaston Bachelard propagate this conception, arguing that the home protects its inhabitants and, in turn, fosters their imaginative wanderings. As Bachelard writes, "the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dream, the house allows one to dream in peace." *The Poetics of Space*, 6. The subtext of Bachelard's statement here is that the public does not protect one's imagination, and the public does not promote daydreaming. Instead, the world outside the home betrays the homebody's natural inclination to dream, create, and express.

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The Virtual Ballet Studio: A Phenomenological Enquiry into the Domestic as Dance-Space During Lockdown

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Abstract

The paper is based on an autoethnographic study of dancing via Zoom over the Covid-19 lockdown in Sydney, Australia. Its theoretical framework takes up Iris Marion Young's critical phenomenology and work on domestic space to think about certain focal points of the experience, such as having a room to move in, the floor, and the screen. The aim is to examine how important dance-space is to the experience of dancing, and what the specifics of our current situation have revealed about dancing that were obscured to a greater extent before: for instance, the embeddedness of a dancer in their context and what this means for thinking about privilege, as well as the curatorial work that goes into making domestic space an aestheticized dance-space. In this way, I propose that Zoom classes, as well as being a distinct new phenomenon, also have much to teach us about 'conventional,' pre-Covid dance practice.

Keywords: Autoethnography, ballet, dance-space, domestic, phenomenological, Zoom

It is common for dancers to travel across the world, leaving family and friends, to dance; they will go wherever the jobs are, or wherever they need to be to train in a specific technique. Until now, I had never questioned the possibility of training somewhere without being there in situ. Training at the Vaganova Ballet Academy, in St. Petersburg, Russia, for example, is not just about the teaching method, it is also the huge, high-ceilinged, beige studios; another Russian school in Moscow, the Bolshoi, is about the raked (slanted) floors; in London, training at the Royal Ballet School is about being at White Lodge in Richmond Park. Although I am not a professional dancer, travelling can be about what kind of dance I can explore in a place: if I go to New York I can take class at Steps on Broadway, or Alvin Ailey; if I go to Tel Aviv I could try Gaga, Ohad Naharin's movement language. Yet, in lockdown things changed; I took class from three different cities in three different countries, just in the space of a week, and all from my living room. Clearly, space and place are integral to my dance practice at a variety of scales—in different registers and temporalities—from the macro scale of global imagining to



the sensory immersion in an immediate present. The feel of gripping the wooden ballet barre in my hands, the clean but sweat-tinged smell of dance studios, imagining the possibilities of dancing around the world, and fondly recalling the summers I would dance away from home—all of these bear witness to the significance of places, space and body to dance practice.

Dancers' bodies are anchored to the spaces they work in, are shaped by, and mutate with. Their being-in-the-dance-world is a knot of place-based relations, between studios, mirrors, stages, wings, dressing rooms, and the actors that dwell among them. This worlding of dance is so strong that when you pluck a dancer out of their context, as did New York photographer Dane Shitagi's *Ballerina Project*,¹ which photographed them on city streets, the result is striking. The dancer appears as a more-than-human figure inhabiting the everyday. I am thinking of Francesca Hayward, a Principal Dancer at The Royal Ballet, photographed on an empty overground train platform in London. She is *en pointe* in a low *attitude* position (supporting leg straight and right leg raised behind her with a bend at the knee). Her arms are in a free kind of *first arabesque* position (left arm stretched out in front of her eye line, and right arm stretched too, but down and behind). Her weight-bearing toes are placed just behind the platform's yellow line, and she wears a calf-length black coat over a black leotard with bare legs. The image is both uncanny and beautiful, blurring the boundaries of the daily commute, where people shuffle along, heads down, faces reflecting the light of their phones, with the ballet body—taking up space, dancing along the platform's edge.

Today, the dance world itself is balancing on the edge. It has been placed under enormous financial pressure by the pandemic, along with all other arts communities, institutions, and organizations. During Covid-19 the dance world has appeared to move cohesively and quickly in response to its visceral shutting down by putting everything "out there," online. This great opening-up of content and resources has included the streaming of performances by renowned dance companies on platforms like YouTube and Facebook, and the shift of onsite dance classes and training programs online. The latter, the virtual dance class, is the topic of this paper, which asks how it feels to dance at home and in what ways dance-space has folded over into the domestic—which is historically and discursively constructed as feminized space.²

To address these questions, during lockdown I conducted an experimental autoethnographic study of my experiences partaking in virtual dance activities. To analyze the data collected, I engage with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Iris Marion Young's responses to this, as well as her work on the domestic, aiming to provide a critical phenomenology of the domestic as dance-space. I have chosen the combined approaches of critical phenomenology and feminist work on domestic space to engage with how the dancing body operates under these conditions without neglecting the underlying histories and that frame domestic space as feminized, and the real impact this has on an embodied experience of such spaces.

For Merleau-Ponty, the body has boundaries, but it is also open-ended.³ The value in drawing from his position at all, given that I am also using Young, is their combined capacity for exploring a range of phenomenological states; Merleau-Ponty for an expansive insight into the body and space, and Young for her critical and situated understanding of what social constructions, like gender, mean for occupying and moving through those spaces. Before developing my analysis, I situate this research in reference to elements of the existing screendance literature, provide some methodological reflections, and then some contextualization on the positioning of domestic space as proximate with feminized space.

In titling this paper “the virtual ballet studio,” I use the term “virtual” as Kiri Miller does,⁴ following anthropologist Tom Boellstorff, suggesting that “our ‘real’ lives have been ‘virtual’ all along. It is in being virtual that we are human: since it is human ‘nature’ to experience life through the prism of culture, human being has always been virtual being.”⁵ He goes on to clarify that virtuality can exist between the perceived gap of what is, in Aristotelian terms the “actual,” and what could be; that is to say, the manifold possibilities of experience.⁶ Miller’s case studies of virtual play provide valuable examples of how screen-based activities occupy this in-betweenness in different ways, at times becoming actual, as virtual imagining and exploration transform into embodied practice.⁷

The ways that virtual dance classes have proliferated as a result of Covid represents a genuine break from what existed before, if we are considering classes that operate in a strict pedagogical sense—in a top-down direction from qualified teachers to students. This shift was reflected broadly by a “boom” in working out online.⁸ As Virtuagym (2020), an online fitness technology provider, reports, since the onset of Covid they recorded a “400% increase in engagement and a 300% increase in the use of online workouts.”⁹ Although innumerable forms of screen-based, digital, and online dance practices predate Covid and have been extensively discussed by scholars, those which I will draw from here, to position this work within the screendance literature, relate specifically to examples that consider the capacity for learning and the transmission of embodied knowledges in online contexts.

Pre-Covid, a burgeoning part of the dance world’s online presence was geared towards showcasing classes and choreographic combinations through videos on YouTube and social media platforms, but not strictly as a pedagogical tool. Alexandra Harlig has explored these class videos as screendance texts, developing a system influenced by Ken S. McAllister’s work on game play impacts and Miller’s virtual play studies, to account for the multivalent ways in which these texts are consumed and responded to.¹⁰ Harlig uses the concept of “forces” as a framework to engage with this multivalence, and among other types, she discusses “instructional force,” which “notes the pedagogical setting of a video as well as the movement, music, and life values transmitted,” and “documentary force,” accounting “for the informational value of a

historical record.”¹¹ With reference to class videos, Harlig notes the ways that instructional force operates diversely, not just in the sense that by watching the video it is possible to learn the choreography. For instance, class videos can show “how to be an audience member in a Hip-Hop dance environment: throwing shoes, cheering each other on, or hand-propping,” and “for budding filmmakers there is information through the site of production about useful shots or successful angles, and how to interact with dancers.”¹² Harlig’s approach promises a breadth of ways in which it is possible to conceive of the impacts of virtual dance classes and could be utilized in further scholarship on the topic—especially through consideration of the confluence of documentary and instructional forces, and what this could mean for thinking about how recorded classes might be used.

In *Perpetual Motion: Dance, Digital Cultures, and the Common*, Harmony Bench theorizes that “dance circulates as a gift in digital cultures,” but not unproblematically, as underlying power structures and appropriative practices become apparent when “dances travel beyond the communities that provide them with context.”¹³ Given the ways that Zoom dance classes proliferated during initial and successive lockdowns globally, it is an interesting notion to consider how these classes may also be conceived as gifts, whose “content . . . belongs to a common”¹⁴—that common being communities of dancers in need of them as alternative, virtual modes of practice. But as Bench notes, there is “no single common” with universal accessibility.¹⁵ While this holds true, Covid-era Zoom classes have undoubtedly changed the scope of accessibility for students to partake in learning, and for amateurs and professionals alike to engage with forms of dance that were previously inaccessible to them, often because of geography, but also because of finances and simply not having the spare time. Almost paradoxically, a welcome departure compared with pre-Covid forms of virtual dance is that Zoom classes occur on a schedule, disrupting a sensation of lockdown that speaks to the interminable flexibility of time. Indeed, the gift that is the transmission of dance via digital modalities post-Covid, looks as though it will have a long-term impact on the future of how dance training is provided. For ballet in particular, the spread in popularity of Zoom classes also has the potential to debunk the elite status of the studio. As many dancers will be coming to know, as alien and taxing as it might feel, it is possible to stay in shape and explore new, productive ways of moving without the specialized spaces that dancers are accustomed to.

Perhaps most comparable to what we are seeing in Zoom dance classes in the time of Covid comes from the world of web-native dance-fitness videos. Born of the 1980s trend for dance-fitness from the comfort of your own home, and largely interested in appealing to housewives (who were short on time and/or had young children to care for), aerobic dance-fitness videos have maintained popularity through concurrent decades as a fun and engaging way of exercising at home, with an emphasis on aiding weight loss.¹⁶ In examples that range from “Jazzercise” tapes from the late 1980s, to 2000s “Pump it up” aerobics DVDs, to the online Zumba classes that are widely available

on YouTube now, a consistent feature of dance-fitness videos is that the teacher interacts with the participant by talking to them, offering encouragement and reminding them to enjoy themselves despite the fact that the medium is unidirectional.

The similarities of these to Zoom classes are that a) they are home-based activities and b) they offer a notable level engagement from teachers, irrespective of whether that engagement is superficial. There is a consistency of body and space relations between dance-fitness video classes and Zoom dance classes, which feature a pedagogical figure who has a sense of presence emanating from the screen. A further element that makes dance-fitness videos relevant to the broader aims of this paper is that, as I alluded to earlier, dance-fitness videos are represented as a feminine form of exercise, which is something I will take up later in relation to ballet.

As Leslea Haravon Collins suggests “aerobics is one of the few physical activities in which women are encouraged unequivocally to participate,”¹⁷ and its participants are overwhelmingly women. Although Collins does not consider how the function of aerobics happening at participants’ homes contributes towards its feminization, she makes it clear that the dance form itself has essentialising and oppressive notions of what it means to be a woman built into it, i.e. being motivated by the drive to lose weight rather than feel strong.¹⁸ Considering the home- and screen-based dance practices of dance-fitness/aerobics and Zoom ballet classes together is productive because it emphasizes their shared underlying themes. These themes include the transformation of domestic space into dance-space, and the converged space as being inherently feminized.

Methodological reflections

In order to explore my own situated insight into what it was like to dance during lockdown, and specifically how domestic space functioned in the experience, I conducted a phenomenologically oriented autoethnography of my own practice of taking virtual ballet classes during the onset of the pandemic. For four months, from April through to July, I used a dual system of fieldnote-taking to document my experience of dancing via Zoom, having one journal record my initial experience of the class (always recorded immediately after participation), and the other to record my critical and analytical thoughts about the process and experience.¹⁹ In doing so, I have attempted to draw a theoretical line between an immediate, physical mode of enquiry and a more self-reflexive way of thinking about virtual dance class. As Heewon Chang has suggested, conducting an autoethnography is about using self-observation and self-reflection as data, arguing that performing rigorous autoethnography requires systematic fieldnote-taking or journaling.²⁰ My intention was to find out what this change means for the individual and collective experience of dance, which has previously been so bound to specific, specialized sites of dance-space.

During the Covid lockdown and minimized but prolonged restrictions in Sydney, Australia, I danced at home between two to three times a week, and for the purposes of this paper I will draw from the data I recorded from ballet classes only. In Sydney, the initial lockdown instituted between March 23rd and 29th involved a travel ban, restrictions on gatherings of more than two people, and the closure of eat-in dining, “gyms, indoor sporting venues, cinemas, casinos and entertainment venues.” These restrictions were then loosened on May 1st.²¹ The dance classes were conducted on the videoconferencing app Zoom, which has been used extensively by organizations of all sorts over lockdowns to maintain communication between workers when they are staying at home. Its popularity may be explained by its many useful functions, including the ability to mute yourself, turn off your video, screenshare, send text messages, and its innovative display of the current speaker on your screen.

The domestic as feminized space

The role of the home seems particularly relevant to current discourses because of what “working from home” has come to mean during lockdown. Pre-Covid, scholars like Melissa Gregg were already thinking through our increasing cultural propensity to allow for the bleeding of work and home life, pushed along by our proximity to technologies that promote the possibility of intimacy with and access to our work lives from home and vice versa.²² Yet, during lockdown, this proximity has been pressed further, forcing non-essential workers to find ways of working from home for extended periods of time.²³

As Young argues, for many feminists the concept of home is deeply ambivalent.²⁴ The home, as representative of the domestic sphere, has been analyzed as a spatial domain that traps women in the drudgery of housework and relegates them to an existence of supporting the subjectivities and transcendence of others, namely men—while depriving them of their own pursuits and growth.²⁵ Yet, as Young points out, such analyses of the home forgo the idea that there might be meaning-making potential in the practice of homemaking.²⁶ While I am certainly not claiming that the domestic can only be figured as a prison-like space for women, underlining the ways in which domestic space and the feminine are collapsed is relevant to delving into what it feels like to be confined to home spaces and work within them, and all the connotations this yields with regard to the kinds of work that are positioned as feminine by virtue of their being based within the home.

In light of Covid, wherein the home has become barely distinguishable from the spaces in which we construct ourselves outside of it—for white collar workers in particular, but also for those like dancers, who have physical jobs that take place in specialized spaces that they were barred from—a provocation to take forward is: how does the domestic’s construction as feminized space impact its quality as phenomenal space? Drawing this back to my study, there is an interesting layering of notions of women’s work at play

here, relating specifically to ballet as a feminine dance practice.²⁷ Ballet is coded as feminine, particularly in public spheres through popular culture; stereotypical signifiers for ballet being “romantic, pink[ness], feminine and attractive.”²⁸ Further to this, as a historical and culturally dominant institution, ballet can be argued to facilitate ideological hegemony, leaving little room for any challenge to the representation of gender as essentialized and binary.²⁹ Despite this strict upholding of the gender binary, male ballet dancers often face ridicule from the outside world for partaking in such a feminized practice; as Angela Pickard notes in her interviews with young male ballet dancers, peers who are not involved in dance tease and bully boys who do ballet, calling them “gay” with derogatory intent.³⁰

As such, an investigation into the overlap of the domestic and dance-space seems particularly embroiled in how home spaces and dance practices are gendered. The following analysis reflects this bind, acknowledging both the restrictive and freeing potentials of dancing during lockdown. It is concerned with the ways that the folding of these spaces can challenge how we think about what matters in dance practice and how different it was, and continues to be, to dance in these times. My analysis is divided into three parts, exploring how different dimensions of material domestic space “showed-up” in my practice of attending virtual ballet classes.³¹

I. (A) room to move

Compared with the extensive, wide-open studio spaces dancers are used to frequenting, attempting to dance in domestic space can be hard. Indeed, for ballet dancers, an array of exercises, namely travelling steps, are made nearly impossible. A theme that stood out from the entirety of my autoethnographic journals was how my limited space impacted my ability to dance “full-out.” The notion of dancing full-out is important to understand because it is the apex of what ballet dancers consider dancing to be. Going full-out is dancing with every inch of yourself, using all of your energy, dance-space, and expressive capacity. The modality of dancing in this way—taking up space and using one’s own bodily capacity to its greatest extent, is comparable to what many of Merleau-Ponty’s critics, including Young, have argued his phenomenology relies upon: a “universal” and “transcendent” experience of being in the world.³² Particularly with the confluence of music and dance, as an embodied experience going full-out can speak to the elevated states dancers often reference when they are asked about why they dance, including the pleasurable sensations of bodily liberation, flying, and the rush of adrenalin.³³

Being enclosed by domestic space and attempting to go full-out, but feeling impeded and restricted by my home-setting, I feel as though an appeal to Young’s seminal essay, “Throwing like a Girl,” is relevant in two senses: in the way she details how girls restrict the use of their entire bodies in the performance of movement;³⁴ and that this results in part due to their lived social experience which places them inside the walls of a home,

when boys are encouraged to go out “yonder.”³⁵ The impact of how the domestic is feminized is felt palpably here, imprinting a closed-offness in the bodily comportment of women who were raised to work in their homes. But this need not be constructed as a decidedly negative experience in reference to dancing indoors, an attentiveness to Young’s explication of “feminine comportment” is a helpful way of theorizing movement in limited space,³⁶ and, disrupting normative ideas that suggest achieving “flow” and expansiveness in dancing are intrinsic technical goods.³⁷

Despite the axiological understanding of dancing full-out as dancing proper, when professional or trainee dancers take their daily class, going full-out is not necessarily required or even encouraged. This is because to get through an hour and a half of non-stop physical activity, plus the rest of the working or school day, you have to pace yourself; and in a way, fine tuning this is one of the hardest things to achieve. Yet, in dance world discourse and dance scholarship, there is still an emphasis on the transcendent ideal of achieving a state of going full-out.³⁸ Engaging with the state of resisting that, however, is something that became particularly noticeable when I took class on Zoom, and urged me to consider how, to draw on terms used by phenomenologists, my (historical and habitual) body-schema was in conflict with my (current) bodily “I can.”³⁹ Since my ballet body history was repeatedly coming-up against trying to practice as it always has, with plenty of space, a dialectical conflict was occurring with my learned manner of dancing and the lack of space that I had to do it in.

For Merleau-Ponty, the body’s relationship to the world is intentional, informed by its history, acquired habits and a milieu of other factors, along with human beings’ pre-conscious systems of bodily movements.⁴⁰ He calls that the “body-schema.”⁴¹ The present body, the “I can” body,⁴² inhabits space in a way that is dictated by the body-schema, and depending on what kinds of space it is inhabiting, the body-schema can show-up for, or conflict with, the material world in different ways. Consider the feeling of having spent some time on a boat and then stepping back on land. The rocking sensation, having sea legs, is a result of the body-schema clashing with the body’s habitation of space at that moment.

I have never been a good turner, so the sense of there being a lack of space felt especially visceral during turning exercises. Even in dance studios I become more aware of my surroundings when turning, for instance if someone is dancing close to me. When I took ballet classes on Zoom, it was often a toss-up between having room to move and having access to a hard floor. For *pirouettes*, a hard floor is fairly important, but as I mentioned, space is key for me to feel confident about turning. When I chose to dance on a hard floor, this meant being in a strange room that was connected to, but was not quite, the kitchen. In this almost-kitchen room I was acutely aware of the surfaces that were jutting out at me where I danced. This is where all my appliances live, and as I turned, trying to focus on a spot, I could see them blur around me in a disorientating

way. Despite being a bad turner, I know that tightening up is not helpful, but doing so was my ingrained bodily response to trying to move in a space crowded with impeding obstacles. It was evidence of my dancer's body-schema confronting its newfound domestic habitat—as such, I would flinch and snatch myself away from intrusions like the corner of a bench or my bathroom door. Any claim I had to fine-tuned proprioception felt decidedly diminished, having to account not just for the positioning of my own body but for the many material bodies that enveloped me.

Yet, as time went on and I continued to take class, my turns in the almost-kitchen room improved. I realized that going full-out here was not only impossible given the spatial restrictions, but trying to do so was also throwing me off. Engaging with that state of embodied resistance, of not quite giving it everything, but instead directing energy in controlled and specific directions, was helpful. I would turn with as little force as I could and focus on the sensations of my supporting foot on the floor, turning into it like a screw, my working leg turning out from the heel of that foot and my knee pressing backwards. Mitigating my momentum came slowly, not just because I was learning to manage my dancing body in a reduced space, but also because I started conceiving of my dancing as part of the materiality, rather than a separate entity bouncing around in it. Conceiving of my dancing in the domestic as being part of a material landscape was like imagining a change in my proprioception, inching it out to encompass the space I danced in.

Of course, the meeting of bodies can end in an opposite way causing significant ruptures and collision. In his ontology of flesh, Merleau-Ponty considers how we experience the world through touch, which is in essence the meeting of different bodies; he used the term “chiasm” to evoke the “crisscrossing ... of the touching and the tangible.”⁴³ Merleau-Ponty contends that the ways in which bodies and beings experience and perform touch is in fact the way that they incorporate themselves into, and come to know of, the world, which is important because of the emphasis it places on the site and boundary of touch, the “chiasm.”⁴⁴ In coming to know of and act within the world like this, there are undoubtedly moments of collision, where the meeting of bodies causes rupture, as there always are in learning experiences. Indeed, in April 2020, when lockdowns were fairly widespread globally, Instagram videos of dancers accidentally clashing with their surroundings while immersed in movement were popping up frequently: one dancer touches a freshly painted wall with the tip of her *pointe* shoe in the middle of a *promenade*, and one has an ongoing battle with the ceiling fan in her living room that she clips with her fingers and feet.

II. Carpet

My home's extensive carpeting caused another clashing of body-schema with domestic world, which was particularly pronounced in my attempt to execute fundamental ballet steps such as *tendus*. A *tendu* involves the dancer's supporting leg remaining still and

straight underneath them while the working leg extends out and the foot almost comes off the floor—heel first, then arch, then metatarsal until just the toes are connected to the floor and the foot is fully stretched in a pointed position. Then everything happens in reverse and the working foot joins the supporting one in a closed fifth or first position. *Tendus* are performed early on in class at the *barre* to warm up the feet and legs, but they are also a fundamental part of almost all other ballet steps, much like the *plié*. I recall dance teachers telling us to “lick the floor with your feet,” and to “push the floor away from you” as we practiced *tendus*. Such directions are part of a pedagogical language allowing teachers to convey embodied sensation, to let their students know what something should feel like if they are doing it correctly, promoting thinking with and through the body. Having done *tendus* for upwards of twenty years, I enjoy that sensation of my feet pressing against the floor to form a pointed position. I love to feel the articulation of the muscles and bones working in succession to resist the destination, prolong the movement, but arrive at the end position nonetheless.

Doing a *tendu* on carpeted floor is unsatisfying. Whether you are barefoot, wearing socks or ballet shoes, nothing feels right. Dancing on carpet during Zoom classes left me with burns on my feet and a profound sense of frustration. Mainly because carpets create friction—so *tendus*, *pirouettes*, and *chassés* are all made much more difficult—doing anything that requires your body to be in contact with the floor while moving is hard. This experience of dancing in domestic space was consistently annoying. Over the four months I journaled when dancing on carpeted floor, I recorded feeling “pent-up,” “frustrated,” and “generally unsatisfied” with class. In bodily terms I felt as though I was “sticking,” “jarring,” and “tripping over myself.” My underwhelming experiences of ballet-on-carpet appear to have been felt by professional dancers too, who sometimes have the added difficulty of attempting to dance on carpet *en pointe*. One female dancer posted a video on her Instagram of a montage of her at-home exercises *en pointe*, on carpet, accompanied by a caption that reads “Pointe shoes on carpet,” followed by an “emoji” icon displaying gritted teeth. In fact, I remember the sensation of going *en pointe* on carpeted floor from when I used to visit my grandparents’ house to take audition photos. It is a spongy sensation, and feels as though the flat end of your *pointe* shoe is rounded, making it harder for your ankles to stabilize.

It does not escape notice that carpets are designed to maximize comfort and retain warmth in domestic contexts. As Young contends in her essay “House and Home: *”:

Home is the space where I keep and use the material belongings of my life. [...] The home is not simply the things, however, but their arrangement in space in a way that supports the body habits and routines of those who dwell there. The arrangement of furniture in space provides pathways for habits—the reading lamp placed just here, the television just here, the particular spices on the rack placed just so in relation to this person’s taste and cooking habits.⁴⁵

What Young suggests in this passage is that the material practice of homemaking bears witness to the sediment of our lives, acting as a physical reflection of lived experience.⁴⁶ Her intention is to grapple with the potential for meaning making in the feminized practice of homemaking, but mine is to consider what the impact of colliding with this sediment might be, and how doing so can displace the elite status of the studio. Because carpets are made to caress our bare feet in the morning after climbing out of bed—not to allow for a *tendus*, jumps, and multiple turns—when these challenges to dance practice brought by the sediments of our domestic lives are confronted, and navigated (albeit imperfectly), there is an opportunity to debunk the almost mythologized pre-eminence of studio space.

Through this account of carpeted floor told through *tendus*, I have been able to examine the ways that the domestic conflicts with and rubs-up against my ballet body-schema. In a phenomenological sense, everything about my classical ballet training makes me resistant to the way dancing on carpet feels, because so many of the pleasurable sensations of body-meets-world are missing: the pressure of my foot moving against the smooth floor in a *tendu*; the reverberating rebound of jumping on sprung studio floor; and the satisfying squeak of my shoe on tarket as I *pirouette*. Also due to the failure of my body to “cope,” as Dreyfus says, with these new circumstances.⁴⁷ Dreyfus’s phenomenological sketch of “skillful coping” works to fill a gap that Merleau-Ponty leaves in his discussion of skill, relating to the early stages of skill acquisition.⁴⁸ In regard to my body’s failure to cope, then, I am positioning myself as an amateur in the specific context of dancing on carpet, which can only be altered by repeating the activity so that my body develops sensitivities to the texture of the carpet, developing skill to manage in the situation.

While I am not claiming that most dancers are not wishing for a return to pre-Covid normalcy, where they can enjoy specialized dance spaces, the ways in which dancers have managed, and excelled, at carving out dance-space in domestic settings is a gesture toward the notion that dance can happen in non-dance spaces productively. As Young notes, because our homes as a reflection of our lives suggest some things—that these spaces mirror the body’s need to rest and recuperate in,⁴⁹ with regard to carpeted rooms more specifically—does not mean there is no scope for repurposing them and appropriating them for exactly the opposite. The intent of displacing the elite status of the studio is to increase accessibility to an artform that constructs a certain gravitas around itself and its privileged spaces. It is also not surprising that an investigation into layered notions of, and assumptions about, feminized work and the spaces this occurs in, has provided insight into how it may be possible and productive to dispute the primacy of specialized work spaces such as a dance studios, where the assumed “real,” transcendent business happens.

III. Screen

The definitively “new” aspect brought into dance training by Zoom classes is the presence of the screen as the point from which dancers are directed. Resultantly, the screen takes on a role within the assemblage as an actor. It is a human-tech hybrid, as the physical screen works like a prosthesis for the dance teacher on the other end, who is then able to communicate with their students or dance company members to facilitate training.⁵⁰ When one partakes in these virtual classes, the screen can feel like an odd presence out of which emanates the voice of whoever is teaching you that day. Although it is possible to see the teacher, due to the nature of dancing you are forced to stand back, away from the screen, so having a voice direct you from an inanimate object feels strangely disembodied. Thinking of the screen as an actor was important for me in three senses: (1) it allowed me to consider the ways in which I was orienting myself towards the screen, (2) it allowed me to consider the ways in which I was curating my space for the screen, and (3) it allowed me to imagine the phenomenal space on the “other side” of the screen.

In terms of orienting myself, I would feel most comfortable attending classes when I had spent some time before ensuring that I would appear well on screen. Elements of this included having my whole body visible and ensuring the angle from which I appeared was not unflattering. This also tied into my broader curation of the domestic space around me that would appear on screen. Generally, I developed a habit of simply rearranging any mess so it sat just behind my screen. I also tried to ensure that the setting I appeared from was not too distracting for the teacher viewing it. Corroborating this, I found that many other participants appeared to replicate this kind of aesthetic curation by tuning in from white-walled spaces with minimal decoration. The organization of these two elements, the way that my background and I appeared on screen, was an attempt to organize the phenomenal space on “my side,” and how I would appear primarily on my teacher’s screen but also on that of other participants. Although this may appear to have a narcissistic grounding, over the lockdown period I found it was increasingly important to me as I invested more of myself into my screen time. Much as going out to take class at a dance studio in situ feels like an expression of my identity and the development of my own particular subjecthood, as we were restricted from moving and being freely in the outside world, more of this subject-building was tied entirely to my expression of myself through Zoom.

In some ways, the screen took on the role of dance studio mirror, much like I would orient myself towards the screen during Zoom classes, in a dance studio I would use the mirror to tweak my appearance and adjust my body. Without wanting to make assumptions regarding what Young might think about the mirror’s role in ballet, it might be fair to predict that she would be at least suspicious of it, particularly for its impact on women dancers. As she puts forward in “Throwing like a Girl,” by virtue of their positioning as object as well as subject, women are socially conditioned into

internalizing their objectification, which causes them to watch themselves and police their own bodies, and consequentially has the impact of inhibiting their movements.⁵¹ As many scholars, including Jill Green, Anna Aalten, and Angela Pickard,⁵² have claimed in a multitude of ways, the mirror in dance studios can represent this internalized external gaze, and suggests that this gaze is inherently pathologizing. Although I do not wholly agree with this critique, since the mirror always felt like more of a tool than anything else for me, the absence of the mirror might be productive for dancers in variety of ways.

Due to the nature of most personal device screens, such as laptops, being relatively small and their associated cameras providing less than high-definition pictures, combined with the fact that when you are partaking in a Zoom dance class you need to be relatively distanced from the screen to execute movements, the screen does not make a very good substitute for a mirror. As such, rather than considering the screen as a replacement mirror, it is more interesting and fruitful to think about the screen as a virtual embodiment of the teacher, who establishes a vocal, even physical presence in whatever room you are dancing in. Without the mirror, but with the guidance of the screen/teacher, it is arguably easier to focus on the correct sensations, of bodily placement for example, and learn through those, than by self-correcting through the mirror, which can result in those sensations coming secondarily to visual cues of proper alignment. I have a tendency to “get lost in the mirror,” so dancing without one was a liberatory experience. I was able to focus on engaging with any corrections and guidance teachers offered and simply enjoy dancing without the temptation of glimpsing toward my reflexive tool.

Any “personal” experience is, of course, formed within larger social contexts. As I noted earlier, the potentially equalising effect of the workplace, in this case the dance studio, is lost, and felt quite intensely when partaking in virtual activities. Being able to afford an expansive room to dance in at home is quite a luxury, and other elements of material space are pronounced too, such as the access to specialized objects participants had in their homes. Some professional dancers had squares of tarket or linoleum flooring while others did not, and struggled along on carpet or slippery wood. But even in the virtual classes that I did—which were generally not of a professional level because of the implications of offering advanced classes that anyone could sign up for and the possibility of injury occurring—participants had objects like ballet *barres*. Having a purpose-made ballet *barre* is an extreme advantage, as opposed to grabbing a kitchen countertop, chair, or door handle—all of which I tried and all of which resulted in my hand cramping or having an awkward support for the first half of class. The finding here is that although bodily pursuits like ballet present themselves as inherently favoring those with natural elite potential and inherent talent, the same material inequalities exist for dancers whether they are working at home or in a studio space. Spending copious amounts of time in the studio, however, gives the appearance of a level playing field, without accounting for the advantages or disadvantages of home space.

Yet despite this stratifying effect, the Zoom space also produces experiences of some sort of communality, if not commonality. By the “other side” of phenomenal space, I imagine the screen as its own virtual two-dimensional plane, but also how others participating in Zoom classes might perceive me as a part of their screen. Although it is hard to watch other participants during a Zoom class, if you do flick to tile mode where you can see multiple squares on your screen, a patchwork fabric of dancers manifests itself. It is as though each dancer has their own box; sometimes they mirror one another, seemingly dancing together, creating patterns organized by whatever algorithm Zoom uses to order the boxes on participants’ screens. The planes of space, from one’s own screen, to an imagined intermediary virtual plane, to somebody else’s screen, suggest an inhabitation of domestic space in new kaleidoscopic ways. Since it is possible to be both in your own living room and simultaneously feature in a Zoom square on stranger’s screen, who is also inhabiting their own domestic setting, we can destabilize the construction of “I” as a singular and whole identity, understanding our virtual iterations as multiples of ourselves. Indeed, in the phenomenological sense, I certainly felt as though my own box on the screens of others had agential capacities. For example, I was unsure if I would unwittingly dance in the wrong direction and it would be apparent on other participants’ screens but not my own, as the automatic “mirror” function on Zoom applies to your reflection of yourself, but not to your box on the screens of others.

This also contributes to the notion of a participant imaginary. There are moments, always at the end of class, when the dancing is over and everyone comes forward towards their camera, and thanks the teacher, and sees who they have been dancing with. It is often an emotional moment, particularly when there are a significant number of dancers—the largest class I danced with featured 103 participants. As people are “unmuted” at the end of the session, faces flash up on your screen saying “thank you” to the teacher, all looking tired and flushed and grateful. As this happens, you get just a brief idea of that person’s context, and sometimes you can tell a little about where that person is in the world; whether it is day or nighttime, the interior design of the room, and occasionally people would place a small flag to indicate where they were from in their Zoom name (which appears with your box at all times). Getting an idea of the breadth of places people were tuning in from to attend class made me feel such a strong sense of a global community. And to think that across the world a seemingly random group of people were all doing the same dance in their living rooms, kitchens, bedrooms and garages, at the same time, felt like a genuine expression of multiplicity but also communality and connection, echoing into our homes through our screens.

Conclusion

The aim of this critical phenomenology of taking virtual ballet class during lockdown, has been to investigate the folding over of dance-space onto the domestic, and particularly what it feels like to dance in the time of Covid. In my analysis of the stand-out elements of my virtual dance experience—the lack of room to move, the carpet, and

the screen—I have attempted to unpack the ways that my classically trained ballet body-schema collided with and adapted to its mapping onto domestic space. On a personal level it was a frustrating and chaotic, but altogether valuable experience.

This study has helped to unearth, in conjunction with an appeal to the ways that Young analyzes and interprets the domestic, how the domestic as dance-space is gendered, how it might be possible to rethink the specificity of domestic spaces to make them work for us, and how we might shift our understanding of dance as a placed-based practice. In a small way, as I do not believe my experiences can be representative of anyone else's, it has shown that through the moments of conflict and rupture, there can be technical, creative and emotional gains. It has also made clearer the extent to which the home as a site of privilege can impact on a dancer's training, and in doing suggests we should continue to challenge the ways that classical ballet as an institution constructs itself as a pure meritocracy of natural talent.

From the perspective of a minutely detailed, under-the-surface scale, this autoethnographic exercise has illustrated the possibilities for remaking the home as space that can facilitate physical training and artistry, while recognizing the multitude of difficulties that can accompany this with regard to affordances of material space and the labor time of those who are confined to their home spaces. I have suggested there are also benefits to questioning the primacy of the dance studio as the only place in which "real" dance work can happen. I am hopeful for myself, that in returning to the studio, I will retain the sensitivity I developed to my domestic space in taking up future dance spaces, and that the dance world as a whole will not forget its tenacity and adaptability. There is something magical about performing a dance you know is happening across the world, in many homes, in many rooms, by many bodies; distant and separate, but in time with your own.

Biography

Francesca Ferrer-Best is a PhD candidate with the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney. She commenced her vocational ballet training in London before deciding to pursue an undergraduate degree in Modern History and Politics at the University of Manchester. Her broad academic interests include phenomenology, movement cultures, embodiment and drinking. Francesca's doctoral research is motivated by academic feminism's tendency toward pathologizing ballet dancers, and aims to unearth and communicate dancers' experiences in an in-depth, embodied analysis of how ballet dancers interface with the world. She employs phenomenological, sense-based thinking to get at the different scales and situated nature of dance experience. Outside university, she is happily involved in the

independent dance-making community in Sydney. She works, writes, and dances from the unceded, stolen land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

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Notes

¹ Shitaghi, *The Ballerina Project*.

² Young, *On Female Body Experience*, 123.

³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

⁴ Miller, *Playing Along*, 7.

⁵ Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life*, 5.

⁶ *Ibid.* 19.

⁷ Miller, 8.

⁸ Toffoletti, *The Conversation*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Harlig, *Social Texts, Social Audiences, Social Worlds*, 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 17-18.

¹² *Ibid.* 19.

¹³ Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 119.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 156.

¹⁶ Collins, "Working Out the Contradictions," 85.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 95.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 89.

²¹ Wahlquist, "Australia's Coronavirus lockdown."

²² Gregg, *Work's Intimacy*, 2.

²³ Non-essential workers are those who are not essential to the basic functioning of society in the midst of a pandemic, some essential workers included: doctors and nurses, supermarket workers, and transport workers.

²⁴ Young, 124.

²⁵ Ibid. 124. Young is grappling with a formidable feminist canon here, citing Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, and the argument she makes can be taken further now, which is that de Beauvoir was thinking about the home as a bourgeois "commodified home," and Irigaray was conceiving of home as the "maternal home"— and that these critiques are embedded in their own distinct contexts and temporalities. De Beauvoir's criticism was of consumerism in the 1950s, and Irigaray's was strongly influenced by psychoanalysis in the mid-1970s and early 80s. Though surely apt and relevant, they no longer exactly, or only, apply. Indeed, they only ever directly applied to some middle-class women.

²⁶ Ibid. 147.

²⁷ It should be noted that I am relying on gender essentialising terms to appeal to what is socially constructed as a settled binary of gendered performance.

²⁸ Pickard, *Ballet Body Narratives*, 58.

²⁹ Novack, "Ballet, Gender and Cultural Power," 42.

³⁰ Pickard, 71.

³¹ Dreyfus and Wrathall, *Skillful Coping*, 235. Hubert Dreyfus was an American philosopher who was strongly influenced by Merleau-Ponty's work; using it to challenge early developments of artificial intelligence based on certain ontological and epistemological assumptions. I have relied on Dreyfus' expert application of Merleau-Pontian theory to enrich my use of his thinking.

³² Young, 35-36.

³³ Paskevka, "On Zen, Flow, and Being in the Dance," 102; Wellard, Pickard and Bailey, "A shock of electricity," 79; Pickard, 125.

³⁴ Young, 28.

³⁵ Ibid. 39-41.

³⁶ Ibid. 32.

³⁷ Paskevskaja, 103.

³⁸ Ibid.; Pickard, 145-46.

³⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 131.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 133.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Young, 139.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 140.

⁴⁷ Dreyfus and Wrathall, 232.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 234.

⁴⁹ Young, 139-40.

⁵⁰ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 588-89.

⁵¹ Young, 44-45.

⁵² See for example, Green, "Foucault and the Training of Docile Bodies"; Aalten, "The Moment When it All Comes Together"; Pickard, "Ballet Body Belief."

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Coming Together by Moving Apart: Contemporary Dance Scores and Communities During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This paper discusses *Roof/Roof Piece*, an adaptation of Trisha Brown's *Roof Piece* by Trisha Brown Dance Company and *perch* a dance made by Amy Voris and adapted by Voris and Katy Coe for Coe to perform in her home and online. Both these adaptations began during the Covid-19 pandemic, in contexts when the artists could not meet in person. I consider the role that the scores played in facilitating these shared practices, asking how they allowed for the development and continuation of bonds between members of dance communities during this period.

Keywords: scores, community, shared practice

A grid of nine small boxes fills my screen. In the box in the top left corner, a dancer raises both arms into a v before giving a small shunt and moving her arms to shoulder height, so they are parallel to the floor. She lifts her left leg and circles the hip before placing her leg back down and lowering her left arm. As the movement ripples through her body, it also travels across the screen. The dancer to her right follows each movement a pace behind. This is in turn followed by the next dancer along the top of the screen before snaking down to the dancer on the left of the row below, along that row and across the one at the bottom of the screen. The dancers are dressed in red. Each occupies a different place, and their surroundings are clearly visible. One dances outside on a wooden deck, with trees and fields in the background. Chairs, pictures, bookshelves and windows are visible in the rooms of other dancers, situating them within domestic spaces. They move together, despite being physically apart. The grid format is video calling platform Zoom's 'gallery view.' This organization of people in domestic spaces into a grid of boxes became an increasingly recognizable aesthetic during 2020, as Zoom and other video calling platforms became increasingly central to many people's interactions. The dancers: Cecily Campbell, Marc Crousillat, Kimberly Fulmer, Leah Ives, Amanda Kmett'Pendry, Patrick McGrath, Jamie Scott, Stuart



Shugg, and Jacob Storer, are all members of Trisha Brown Dance Company (TBDC) and the work is a version of Brown's *Roof Piece*, during which dancers dressed in red perform on rooftops. The work was first performed in New York in 1971 then renamed *Room/Roof Piece* and reworked in 2020 to be danced at home.¹

On another day, through the same screen, I watch as dance artist Katye Coe kneels on the floor of her daughter, Tala's bedroom and slowly folds at the waist. The camera zooms in on her hands as they trail across the floor and her torso moves towards the bed. In the background, Tala sits on her bed, looking at a laptop. Coe slowly pushes her own body onto the bed, folding smoothly into it and rolling across as she reaches for the wall. Here she pauses, her head resting against Tala's legs. During this moment of stillness, the bed clothes are in sharp focus in the foreground of the shot, with Coe's figure softened in the background. After the pause, she resumes movement, rolls swiftly off the bed and crawls backwards out of the room. I am witnessing *perch*, a dance made by dance artist Amy Voris between 2014-19 and adapted for Coe to perform in her house and online during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In many countries, much of 2020 was lived under 'lockdown,' or some form of restriction on in-person interactions. For example, under the strictest period of lockdown in the UK where I am based, face-to-face interaction was allowed only in exceptional cases and following this, only while following social distancing guidelines. One result of these rules is that dance artists, students, teachers and audiences had to develop and adapt ways to continue to train, make, perform and watch dance, often relying on the internet to facilitate exchanges. While internet practices for dance are by no means new, they have been relied upon, developed and adapted in new ways during this time. Both *Room/Roof Piece* and *perch* are versions of works that pre-existed the pandemic, but that were adapted and re-performed during this period. Although very different in many ways, *Room/Roof Piece* and the adaptation of *perch* both use scores as a means to share and adapt the works. In this paper, I analyze the role that the scores played in facilitating these shared practices during lockdown and in enabling the formation and continuation of bonds between members of dance communities while they could not meet in person.

'Community' is a term that has slightly different connotations in different contexts.² What a social group—including a community—is, whether it exists, how it comes into existence, how it is maintained, and its norms of practice are areas examined in the field of social ontology.³ In the UK, 'dance community' is a term that is commonly used to describe an amorphous collection of people associated with the form in various ways. Social groups can often survive changes to their membership⁴ and this appears to be a key feature of the dance community, as it is not defined by or dependent upon any particular person or people. Although the term 'dance community' is commonly used to refer to a single, albeit amorphous group, there are multiple communities within the over-arching group.⁵ Jasmine Hearn, a dance artist based in New York who I interviewed in 2018 described "a lot of communities that intersect with one another."⁶ For example,

these might revolve around certain fields of practice, geographical locations, shared social or cultural experiences, or particular institutions. Writing about the notion of community in relation to dance, Funmi Adewole suggests,

'[c]ommunity' is a complex and layered term, meaning different things in different places. A factor that seems to be common to most definitions of community is that a community consists of people [who] are considered to be a collective, but this could be on the basis of shared background, heritage, experience, or circumstances. I would like to add the caveat that my descriptions of community should not be taken as being a sociological proven fact but as a banner under which to discuss good practices.⁷

As previously mentioned, some communities arise through shared practices.⁸ Educational theorist and practitioner Etienne Wenger suggests such groups can be understood as 'communities of practice.' Wenger describes communities of practice as "formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour."⁹ This is a concept discussed by Adewole in relation to dance. Writing in 2011 she describes how the discourse surrounding African People's Dance (APD) and Black dance in the UK at this time had undergone a shift away from a focus on developing infrastructure and debates about terminology and that "[m]ore critical attention is given to the cultural and artistic value of the work being produced by dancers."¹⁰ She describes a conversation with Jeanette Bain-Burnett, who was at that time the director of Association of Dance of the African Diaspora prior to an event called African Dance Encounter:

She told me that one of the aims of the event was to encourage discussion and exchange between artists and promote a 'community of practice' within APD. For me this is an exciting proposition. Practitioners older than me might say this has echoes of how the sector saw itself when it first became visible in Britain.¹¹

In a more recent article, Adewole returns to the notion of community of practice, exploring three different conceptions of community: community dance, communities that dance, and communities of practice.¹² In relation to communities of practice, she writes: "Presently, we are witnessing a growing number of artists who run initiatives which promote this kind of community sharing,"¹³ and refers to dance artist Alesandra Seutin's workshop program for dance practitioners at Ecole des Sables in Senegal as an example of this. Seutin's program "brought dancers from several nations around the world who are invested in the dance of Africa and the Diaspora to learn, experiment, discuss and experience the practices of a cohort of internationally recognised teachers."¹⁴

In what follows, I consider how *Room/Roof Piece* and the adaptation of *perch* highlight communities of dance practice that were formed and/or maintained during the pandemic. I do not argue for the existence of a single dance community, but instead

focus on these two specific examples of community. Writing about her research into the “Brussels dance community” Eleanor Bauer describes how some interviewees suggested that “community does not exist in the Brussels dance field.”¹⁵ There is indeed some important thinking to be done about whether dance communities exist at all. However, full consideration of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, I analyze how movement scores functioned to underpin shared practice and therefore maintained community ties during a period of time while most interactions took place online. I draw on Harmony Bench’s articulation of the way that dance-media facilitates and makes visible acting “in common” to consider how it is that scores facilitate shared practice.¹⁶ Extending Wenger’s suggestion about the shared domain of communities of practice, I draw on Alessandro Salice’s reading of Dietrich von Hildebrand,¹⁷ to describe how movement “in common” can generate a shared axiological domain and propose that through shared practices, shared values play a role in the formation of dance communities.

Both *Room/Room Piece* and *perch* are positioned within the field of contemporary theater dance. The term ‘contemporary dance’ is loosely applied across a range of distinct but overlapping genres and styles of dance¹⁸ and talking about contemporary dance in general terms can be problematic. The term ‘contemporary’ when applied to dance has an association with the West and can therefore be a mechanism for exclusion.¹⁹ Dance and performance scholar SanSan Kwan reminds us that “it is important to remember the fraught nature of temporal terms such as ‘contemporary’ and ‘modern’ and the ways that they are often linked with the geographical and cultural, that is, with the West.”²⁰ Kwan discusses how the term contemporary applies in relation to concert, commercial and world dance. The examples I discuss originate from lineages associated with contemporary concert dance, also referred to as theatre dance.²¹ Kwan highlights how in this context, the term contemporary dance refers to a range of forms which “might include release technique and/or contact improvisation (sometimes considered the techniques of postmodern dance), floor work, various modern dance techniques (i.e., Graham, Limon, Horton, Hawkins, or Cunningham), and/or ballet. Increasingly, contemporary dance draws on non-Western forms (i.e., African and African diasporic dance, Asian martial arts, yoga) and street dance forms.”²² I use the term ‘contemporary theatre dance’ in this paper in order to situate the examples I describe as, broadly speaking from within this field but acknowledge that this term refers to a much broader array of practices than I discuss here.

Scores

In some areas of contemporary theatre dance, the term ‘score’ might refer to records of movement inscribed through codified notation systems such as Benesh, Labanotation or Beauchamps-Feuillet, or to a wider variety of mental, verbal or written entities which might be shared or private.²³ When scores are written documents, they might take the form of words, diagrams or drawings. Approaches to scoring are often idiosyncratic to

particular artists.²⁴ While some choreographers use scores to determine a work's specific movement, others utilise the potential ambiguity of language in order to develop scores that are consciously non-didactic. The latter approach is described by dance scholar Alison D'Amato as "indeterminate language scores."²⁵ She writes, "[t]he creator of an indeterminate score intentionally bends notation towards unpredictability, putting forward signifiers that effectively correspond to a multiplicity of corporeal signifieds,"²⁶ thus highlighting how scores can be generative and open to multiple different interpretations.²⁷

Anna Pakes acknowledges the breadth of the term score in relation to contemporary theatre dance: "Sometimes, the term *score* is used broadly in contemporary practice to mean the very structures or norms of a choreographic performance, rather than their representation."²⁸ Despite being a broad concept, scores have some unifying features. Bench includes scores in her description of embodied objects suggesting that these are "nonmaterial, corporeal objects that assume a bodily shape or sequence, and are transferable and transmissible across the bodies that are their primary medium."²⁹ She draws on Michel Serres' concept of "quasi-objects" to elaborate her account of "embodied objects," pointing out that a quasi-object is one that only makes sense when it is activated in movement.³⁰ A score then is a set of parameters which may or may not manifest as a concrete object, but even when it does, it is only truly manifest via activation through movement.

Pakes describes how: "Postmodern dance artists have developed and employed verbal documents, collections of images, diagrams, and other textual materials to communicate more 'objectively' with dancers, liberate performers' creativity, and encourage decision making in the moment of performance."³¹ This focus on the performers' autonomy that is facilitated through the use of scores offers a key distinction between a score and the sharing of a work or practice through physical demonstration and copying. For example, in online video tutorials such as *Re:Rosas*,³² in which Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Samantha van Wissen teach the movements of part of De Keersmaeker's work *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983) and *Learn the Nelken-Line*,³³ in which Julie Anne Stanzak teaches the movement for the 'Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter' line in choreographer Pina Bausch's work *Nelken* (1982), the movements from the works are demonstrated by performers for viewers to copy. While these sections of the works might be underpinned by a score, the video tutorial format demonstrates a different way of communicating the principles of the work, which relies on the person embodying the instructions copying movements, rather than interpreting a score.³⁴

While scores are important to many areas of dance practice and are by no means a recent phenomenon, the move online that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted their potential for instigating shared experiences through movement. Several companies, artists and organizations published scores online as a means through which to engage people in dance and movement. Examples include: *Perform It Yourself Scores*, published by iii³⁵ which is a collection of scores from various artists

working in different disciplines that people can perform at home; choreographer Yvonne Rainer's adaptation of part of her 1963 work *Terrain* renamed 'Passing and Jostling while Confined to a Small Apartment' and published by Brian Seibert in *The New York Times*;³⁶ Detour Dance's *Jukebox* which offered a series of prompts for artistic response.³⁷ 26 choreographic scores have also been commissioned by University of California Los Angeles' Centre for the Art of Performance as a way of investing in the future of dance. Choreographers have been asked "to create a dance score for a future project while they await their return to the studio and stage: each one a love letter to the future of dance."³⁸

Room/Roof Piece

The description that opens this article is of an excerpt of *Room/Roof Piece* which was released on YouTube. In the full version, published on the TBDC website, the audiences also see the start of the piece, during which the dancers each turn on their camera and step back, establishing themselves in place, at home. The dancers join one at a time. The first movement is a wave, repeated by each of the dancers. This movement establishes the logic of the work, during which one person leads a sequence of movements and each performer copies the dancer who precedes them.

The full-length version is edited so that the focus moves between dancers, rather than showing the whole grid for the entire time. As a single dancer fills the screen, the detail of the movement becomes more visible. The fluid articulation of body parts that characterizes much of Brown's work is foregrounded by the closeness of the camera to the dancers' bodies. As the screencast switches between viewing a single dancer and the group as a whole, my attention moves between the detail of the movement and experiencing the collective action and embodied logic of the score.

The dancing is accompanied by the sounds of each performer's surroundings and of their movement. I hear breathing, bird song, an engine passing. At times there is interference on one of the dancer's microphones, causing a wind-like sound. The image quality on the film differs between dancers, perhaps dependent on the effectiveness of their internet connection. The image is sometimes blurred and the pixelation causes me to exit full-screen mode, embedding the video back into the TBDC website to try and get a clearer view. Dance critic Brian Seibert points out that the dancers must face the screen and that adaptation required some new choreography related to the online transmission format.³⁹ The way that dancers must pick up their cues from their screens means that they don't look directly at the camera, but just below it, which keeps their gazes from meeting that of the spectator. The position of the screen seems to vary slightly between dancers, with some having a lower focus than others. This combination of the domestic surroundings, just off-camera gaze, sound interruption and pixelation create an aesthetic that arises through the use of screen casting video calling platforms as a means to record and transmit dance. In the case of TBDC's *Room/Roof Piece* there is

a layering that occurs between the aesthetics of the movement, the precision and fluidity of the articulations in the bodies of the dancers, and the disrupted, interrupted, pixelated and off-center aesthetics of the screencast. Furthermore, I witness a temporal layering, as the movement in the bodies of the dancers, enacting a work from the 1970s, makes me think about images of the work I have encountered in the past, reminding me of the consistency of practice through time and across geographical locations.

Describing the earlier version of the work, Brown writes:

Simple, semaphor-like movement (joint articulation and perpendicular and parallel lines) was continuously transmitted from one dancer to another, each stationed on separate roofs, spanning a nine to twelve block section of New York City [...]. After fifteen minutes, the sender ducked out of sight to indicate by pre-arrangement that she had finished. All dancers turned to face in the opposite direction and the receiver became the sender reversing the flow of movement across town for an equal duration of time. Part of the audience was placed on a roof midway between White Street and West Broadway (building 35). Another group was at the end of the dance (building 64), and a third audience was comprised of uninformed people in the neighborhood whose eyes stumbled accidentally upon one or more links in the event.⁴⁰

This description of the work as performed on the roof tops of New York City foregrounds the organizing principles of the work and the way that pre-agreed rules or cues structure the transmission of movement between the performers. According to Pakes,⁴¹ agreements between people have an important role in the making and instantiation of dance works. Sharing aspects of a work or practice via scores might allow for some of the principles to be enacted without verbal or physical direction from previous performers. However, it's important to note that scores are often used alongside other forms of agreement in the process of enacting a work or practice.⁴²

The adaptation of *Roof Piece* was reported on by Seibert in *The New York Times* on 7 April 2020. His article includes the following directions, offered by the company to enable people to make their own versions of *Room/Roof Piece*:

First, invite some friends to a meeting on a videoconferencing platform. (The dancers used Zoom.) Then choose the order of transmission: who is leader, who is No. 2, No. 3 and so on.

The leader starts with a simple greeting, a wave of the hand. The rest of the motions are up to you, whatever you think "semaphore-like" means. ("Joint articulation and parallel and perpendicular lines," Brown further specified.) A deep squat is the signal for the last person in line to take over as leader, reversing the flow. When that new leader wants it all to end, another squat is the sign.⁴³

This score comprises a short set of fairly loose instructions. The movement style is shaped by quoting Brown's description of the action, and the cue described by Brown of the sender ducking out of sight to signal that it's time to reverse the order has been replaced with a deep squat. While Seibert quotes Brown, the score is nevertheless his paraphrasing of the instructions from TBDC for the work. Seibert also invites people to post a link to themselves performing the work in the comments, stating that these might be featured in a future article,⁴⁴ thus the transmission and re-embodiment of *Room/Room* piece is mediated through Seibert's paraphrasing of the score and *The New York Times* site. However, to date there are no links to performances of the score in the comments on the site.

Dance artist Malaika Sarco-Thomas accepted the invitation to enact the score and instigated a version of the work through A Class for a Cause.⁴⁵ She interpreted the score in collaboration with Sara Reyes Acosta and Lucija Grbic. As the film starts, all three performers are close to the screen, turning on their cameras. They move back into position, waiting for the music they have chosen to start. Each moves subtly so that they are side-on to the screen but faced slightly towards it. The performer in the top left of the screen initiates the movement. As she turns away from the screen, free to look wherever she likes as she has no cues to follow, we see the two performers following her negotiate their own relationship to the screen. As they face directly away from the screen their heads rotate towards it in order to be able to see the next cue. The general aesthetic is similar to the TBDC film. The quality of the images is varied, with some pixelation. The camera angles are lower in this film, as though the performers' devices are placed on the floor and we cannot see the performers' faces clearly, but the sense of attention towards the screen, rather than the camera is noticeable. The domestic surroundings are clearly visible.

This version is posted on YouTube,⁴⁶ rather than submitted to *The New York Times*. YouTube also hosts versions by Dakini Dance⁴⁷ and Drouin Dance Center⁴⁸ as well as another version instigated by Sarco-Thomas with University of Chester undergraduate dance students.⁴⁹ Much of *The New York Times* is behind a paywall and the suggestion to post versions online raises questions about who stands to benefit financially from these renditions. The posting of the recordings on YouTube can be said to in part disentangle the renditions of the work from the mediation of *The New York Times*, although of course similar questions about potential revenue can be asked of YouTube.

The transmission of movements from one dancer to another demonstrates the connections between them and their shared intention to enact the score. I suggest that there is also a relation formed between these performers and the TBDC performers. Sarco-Thomas is dressed in red, although Acosta and Grbic are not, which forms a visual link to both *Roof Piece* and *Room/Room Piece*. Furthermore, through the enacting of the score the performers are entering into relations with others who have danced the work. In this example, the connection between Sarco-Thomas, Acosta and Grbic, and the

dancers of Brown's original work is facilitated through the sharing and enacting of the score online.

Bench proposes that dance offers "powerful physical articulations of how we act in common"⁵⁰ and that this acting in common is revealed and extended through the potentials of digital media. She writes that dance-media "not only make visible the ways we already move together and act in common in an era of computing and information globalization but also craft new possibilities through their specific combinations of bodily expression and digital cultural production."⁵¹ Bench's view of the commons draws together the associations of the term with both shared resources and as a shared orientation.⁵² For Bench, dance's circulation through digital media enables artists to make-common through participatory processes, and common dimensions of public spaces to be activated as well as facilitating "the sharing of a corporeal common of movement and gestural resources that circulate across dancers' bodies."⁵³ She draws on Jean-Luc Nancy's work to elaborate the nature of acting or being in common. Articulating Nancy's perspective, Bench writes:

that there is only a 'we,' and that this 'we' is not a question of 'cohabitation or contamination' and especially not of communion but of ontology. This being-with is not manifested in adjacency, proximity, or shared space but is a relation without relation, an in-common that is not a common being, as though community were identical to consensus. The in-common is a shared sense that links or 'enchains' as world.⁵⁴

The reworking, scoring and embodiment of *Room/Room Piece* offers a rich example of Bench's perspective by both enabling participation and contributing to the "corporeal common." Furthermore, the score's publication facilitates people moving "in common" and reveals relations that "enchain" people through dance without "adjacency, proximity, or shared space." Relations occur both in the moment of dancing and through time, as the score also enables people to enter into relation "without relation" as they act "in common" with those who have previously danced the work.

perch

Voris describes *perch* as "a solo dance about temporary states and locations and the movement in-between these things. It is about the process of homing while feeling haunted by the past. First and foremost however *perch* is a practice, performed regularly by one person, for a place."⁵⁵ It was made over a period of four years and approximately 120 practice sessions⁵⁶ and first performed in Voris's studio in Manchester, UK. Starting in March 2020, during the UK's first period of lockdown, Voris and Coe undertook a series of 30-40 rehearsals, primarily online, with the aim of adapting Voris's score for *perch* for Coe and her home in Kenilworth, UK. *perch* was later performed by Coe for one or two audience members at a time, who followed her as she moved through her house and garden.

The work was also adapted for online screening. Attending an online event, I wait on the Zoom landing page. After a few minutes the blank screen is replaced by a dark scene. Coe stands outside her house in the dark. The lit windows are visible behind her. It's hard to make out her features. Coe leads us into the house and sits down. She explains the history of *perch*, and what will happen during this performance. She then posts a link in the Zoom chat to a recorded film of the work shot by Christian Kipp in a single take, on a hand-held camera. Coe describes how if this were a live performance she would now put on a pair of pink earrings, taking them from a pocket and putting them into her ears as she speaks, playing with the distinction between this online version and the 'live' one. We are told to keep our Zoom connection running while we watch the recording and to come back together afterwards, turning on our cameras to signify that we have finished watching.

Coe moves through the different rooms of her house, starting at the top of the house in Tala's bedroom, as I previously described. Following this, Coe moves to the bathroom and her own bedroom before taking us downstairs to her living room, kitchen and garden. The focus of the camera moves between close ups of Coe's body parts as they connect with the surfaces of her house and zoomed out capture of the whole space that she inhabits. As with *Room/Roof Piece*, the adaptation of *perch* takes place in a domestic setting. However, rather than the house being a backdrop to the movement, it is a central part of the work. As Voris makes clear in the description of the work above, *perch* is performed "for a place," meaning that the relationship between the movement and the place it is performed is central to the practice. As my opening description shows, Coe's movement is entirely entwined with her surroundings.

The systematic way that Coe travels through the house from top to bottom and then into the garden appears to indicate a pre-defined structure for the work. It does not have the purely spontaneous feel of an improvised work, yet there is an emergent quality to Coe's movement that implies to me that the movements themselves are not entirely determined in advance of the performance. The fluid dynamics and focused quality of attention I witness from Coe suggests to me that the form of the movement is in a state of emergence, as opposed to being repeated exactly from previous performances either by Coe or Voris. However, when I later watch a footage of *perch* performed by Voris,⁵⁷ I notice that some movement content between Voris's and Coe's versions overlaps. It seems then that the emergent quality of the movement then is part of the practice of *perch* rather than indicating that movement is entirely improvised in performance.



Image: Voris (L) and Coe (R) performing *perch*. Photos by Christian Kipp. Used with permission.

The score for *perch* was developed iteratively over Voris's long making process.⁵⁸ She describes the score as being underpinned by a set of "processual qualities" which she articulates in her research in relation to the contemplative practice of Authentic Movement.⁵⁹ The score, published in Voris's PhD thesis, is titled a "poetic score"⁶⁰ and is perhaps indicative of such processual qualities in its written style⁶¹ that is akin to other forms of "indeterminate language scores"⁶² in the way that the prompts are non-didactic.

The score begins:

[seahorse sidestep]

sideways

stepping

mapping

internal

readying

listening to the

intricacies of

sound

deep

abdominals

responsiveness

in

legs

breaking

up

*ground*⁶³

While this version of the score definitely informed the adaptation, Voris suggests that the practice of *perch* itself rests on its changeability and adaptability.⁶⁴ Coe describes how the score for the adaptation has been “permeated” with the conditions, ways of relating and systems of working between her and Voris.⁶⁵ The score expanded through the process to encompass these aspects of working together.⁶⁶

Coe and Voris discussed with me how they undertook the adaptation and the role of the score in this process. Voris described how each rehearsal involved a “warm-up preparatory activity” prior to working on the score. These activities were concerned with creating a shared space between Voris and Coe and that once this had been established, she felt very connected to Coe. Following this process, they would start working on adapting the score.⁶⁷

While establishing the conditions for the practice was key, the score was also central to the project, in particular because of the conditions of lockdown. Coe describes how the existence of the score enabled the project to happen. They had been discussing working on something new, but didn’t feel that it was possible during lockdown, whereas adapting an existing score and methodology gave them something solid to work with.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Voris suggests that working only with processual qualities in order to develop a new work from scratch was too open for remote working,⁶⁹ so although the score had originally been intended only as a tool for her, it became key to enabling the adaptation.⁷⁰ The *perch* score then facilitated the adaptation between Voris and Coe, allowing them to enter into a shared practice.

When the recording finishes, I retrieve the Zoom window from the bottom of my screen and turn on my camera. Slowly the other audience members return to the call. Coe and Voris talk about their experiences of the adaptation and answer questions from the audience. The hybrid mode of sharing *perch* through both live interaction and a recorded film also enabled a sense of community between the audience members, as we were part of a shared experience. Furthermore, it facilitated a different connection to Coe in performance than I experience when watching the recorded version online outside of the performance setting. These observations echo Hearn's description of how through the shared experience of live performance, people can build community, networks or memory together.⁷¹ The online screening of *perch* is particularly interesting as it arose only out of the conditions of lockdown. Voris states that the work was made to be witnessed live but that they decided to try the online streaming and both she and Coe describe how they felt nervous about sharing the work online.⁷² It therefore offers a pertinent example of the way that the lockdown gave rise to the sharing and adaptation of offline practices in new forms.

As previously mentioned, scores can be externalizations of some of the principles of a work. However, when performers enact a score but there are likely other agreements that need to take place before the work can be fully realized.⁷³ Recent scholarship in dance has drawn attention to the role of these agreements,⁷⁴ as well as joint commitment in dancing together⁷⁵ and intention and action in dance.⁷⁶ Furthermore, prominent views in social ontology see shared intention or intentional action as central to the constitution of social groups.⁷⁷

However, Alessandro Salice explains how philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand draws attention away from the relevance of shared intention within social groups, in particular in relation to communities. He explains Hildebrand's position: "instead of looking for the internal and subjective conditions that regulate the group's constitution, he rather stresses an external one, i.e., the "'virtus unitiva' or the unifying virtue that *values* can exert over individuals and which might bring them to constitute a group."⁷⁸ Salice summarizes how values act in the constitution of communities:

if a number of persons is working on the same problem, feeling its value, then they are incorporated in the same value or the same axiological domain and, hence, they are already unified. Such constitution proceeds by means of ontological necessity and does not rest upon the individual awareness of being a member of a group (howsoever this may be conceived). If, due to some psychological circumstance, the individuals come to be aware of each other, then the objective existence of the group starts to be accompanied by such awareness, and the group can act as a group.⁷⁹

As with Wenger's description of communities of practice, a shared domain features in Salice's description. However, Salice stresses the role of values within this domain, how a shared goal has a particular value, and it is sharing the experience of this value, or

entering the same 'axiological domain' that unifies people, whether or not they are aware of each other.⁸⁰ The idea of being incorporated into a shared axiological domain helps us to understand more about how it is that communities might form. For example, we might think of the conditions generated through Voris and Coe's warm-ups, as the two of them cultivating a shared domain, not only of practice but also an axiological domain, leading to the sense of connection described by Voris.⁸¹ Furthermore, this explanation further sheds light on how the performers of *Room/Room Piece* might be drawn into relations with other people enacting the score or performing *Roof Piece* at different times, as they all can be said to share an axiological domain without necessarily being aware of one another.

According to Salice, Hildebrand "weakens the relevance that contemporary debate ascribes to the notion of shared intention and shared agency" by suggesting that values, rather than shared intention can constitute communities.⁸² In relation to these two examples, I suggest that the score offers a concrete focus for the shared intention to practice together, but that the practice gives rise to a shared axiological domain, meaning that the values that arise through enacting the score underpin the connections between people that arise when they dance "in common."⁸³ Because a score is an embodied "quasi-object,"⁸⁴ it is the enacting of the score, rather than the thing itself that incorporates people into a shared axiological domain.

Concluding thoughts

The online circulation of *Room/Room Piece* and *perch* resonate with Bench's articulation of the way that dance-media both enables and makes visible movement "in common."⁸⁵ Bench describes how reproducing gestures can "articulate a form of gestural belonging" and "offer a shared sense that gives meaning to a common world supportive of social or communal interaction."⁸⁶ These scores allow for the transmission and adaptation of dance works and practices through instruction that can be interpreted by each artist or group of artists who choose to enact the score. This process can be understood as giving rise to a sense of "gestural belonging," despite gestures not being replicated exactly between renditions of the works. Furthermore, these scores function as externalizations of some aspects of the agreements that can underpin dancing "in common."

The examples I have examined here demonstrate different ways of being in relation to others. The *Room/Room Piece* score enables people to embody this part of the work and for performers to dance "in common" with each other in the moment of performance, through the shared intention to enact the score and the copying of each other's movement. Furthermore, this process draws performers into relation with others who have performed both *Roof Piece* and *Room/Room Piece*. On the other hand, *perch* is a solo, but the adaptation involved a collaborative process in which Voris and Coe worked alongside. Through the adaptation and enacting of the score, Coe and Voris acted "in

common” and entered a shared domain even though they don’t perform together in the work.

Scores are frequently used in some areas of contemporary theatre dance. However, these scores played a particularly important role during the Covid-19 pandemic by enabling the formation and continuation of shared practices. I am not suggesting that it is only through scores that people dance “in common” or form dance communities, but that in these cases, turning to scores productively enabled artistic collaboration during lockdown. By “acting in common”⁸⁷ through the embodiment of these scores, the artists can be said to enter a shared domain of practice, or “community of practice.”⁸⁸ I suggest that, following Salice, this domain might also be understood as an “axiological domain”⁸⁹ in which people are drawn into relation through the value of a shared goal and that these relations might be understood as a form of what Benichou terms “gestural belonging.”⁹⁰ The value that arises through the adaptation and embodiment of these scores can be seen as key to forming and maintaining bonds between members of these dance communities.

Biography

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Notes

¹ The project was conceived, produced and edited by Amanda Kmett-Pendry and Jamie Scott. See: <https://trishabrowncompany.org/news/>

² Adewole, “The Concept of ‘Community’ and ‘Professional’ Dance,” 9.

³ See for example Thomasson, “The Ontology of Social Groups” and Salice, “Communities and Values.”

⁴ Thomasson, "The Ontology of Social Groups," 4833.

⁵ See also Bauer's discussion of sub-communities, "Becoming Room, Becoming Mac," 64.

⁶ Hearn, interview with author.

⁷ Adewole, "The Concept of 'Community,'" 9.

⁸ See Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 6. Bench cites Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities* in regard to the relationship between communities and shared practices.

⁹ Wenger, "Communities of Practice," 1.

¹⁰ Adewole, "More Conversations Please!," 10.

¹¹ Ibid. 12.

¹² Adewole, "The Concept of 'Community.'"

¹³ Ibid. 10.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bauer, 62.

¹⁶ See Bench.

¹⁷ Salice. To my knowledge, the Hildebrand text that Salice examines is not available in English, hence my decision to refer to it via Salice. Following Salice, I refer to von Hildebrand as Hildebrand throughout.

¹⁸ Kwan, "When is Contemporary Dance?"

¹⁹ Ibid. 38 and 47.

²⁰ Ibid. 44-45.

²¹ See Pakes, *Choreography Invisible*, 1.

²² Kwan, 40.

²³ See Millard, "What's the Score" who discusses the use of the term 'score' to refer to verbal prompts in her improvisation practice.

²⁴ See Burrows, *A Choreographer's Handbook* and Van Imschoot, "Rests in Pieces."

²⁵ D'Amato, "Performing Interpretation."

²⁶ Ibid. 53.

²⁷ Much of my previous writing has also considered the nature of dance scores. For example, "Scoring Choreographic Poetics," "Scoring Dance," and "Affective Traces in Virtual Spaces."

²⁸ Pakes, 137.

²⁹ Bench, 161.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Pakes, 137.

³² See *Re:Rosas*, accessed 31 January 2021: <https://www.rosasdanstrosas.be/en-home/>

³³ See "The Nelken Line by Pina Bausch," *YouTube*, uploaded 2 August 2016, accessed 31 January 2021: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZI4cgGRhzE>

³⁴ In a previous chapter, "Preservation and Paradox" I argued that *Re:Rosas* could be understood as a score. However, I have revised that view here and suggest it demonstrates a different mode of transmitting the work.

³⁵ See "PIY Scores – Active Home Entertainment for the Curious," accessed 31 January 2021: <https://instrumentinventors.org/production/diy-scores/>

³⁶ See Seibert, "A D.I.Y. Dance for Your Home, From Yvonne Rainer."

³⁷ See *Detour Dance*, "Jukebox."

³⁸ See UCLA Center for the Art of Performance, "The Choreographers' Scores 2020," accessed 31 January 2021: <https://cap.ucla.edu/calendar/details/scores>

³⁹ Seibert, "A Home Version of Trisha Brown's Roof Piece."

⁴⁰ Brown, "Three Pieces," 26.

⁴¹ Pakes, 134, 137.

⁴² Van Imschoot; Pakes, 137.

⁴³ Seibert, "A Home Version."

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ A Class for a Cause is an initiative led by Eleanour Bauer and Leah Landau through which artists can share practices and classes online in exchange for donations for social

causes or their own income. Petitions and actions can also be suggested instead of donations.

⁴⁶ See Sarco-Thomas et al., "Room/Roof Piece by Zoom."

⁴⁷ See Dakini Dance, "Room/Roof Piece by Dakini Dance."

⁴⁸ See Drouin Dance Center, "Drouin Dance Center's Version of Room/Roof Piece."

⁴⁹ See Sarco-Thomas et al. "Room/Roof Piece with University of Chester BA Dance Students."

⁵⁰ Bench, 3.

⁵¹ Ibid. 4.

⁵² Bench draws on the work of Ramsay Burt and Elizabeth Dillon to elaborate her position. Bench, 8.

⁵³ Ibid. 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 118. The quotes within this quote are from Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*, 43.

⁵⁵ Voris "perch": <https://www.amyvoris.com/perch/>

⁵⁶ Voris, "Forming , Returning and Deepening," 30.

⁵⁷ See Voris "perch."

⁵⁸ Voris, interview with author.

⁵⁹ Voris in written exchange with author.

⁶⁰ Voris, "Forming," 158.

⁶¹ Voris in written exchange with author.

⁶² D'Amato.

⁶³ Voris, "Forming," 158.

⁶⁴ Voris in written exchange with author.

⁶⁵ Coe, interview with author and Voris in written exchange with author.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Voris, interview with author.

⁶⁸ Coe, interview with author.

⁶⁹ Voris in written exchange with author.

⁷⁰ Voris, interview with author.

⁷¹ Hearn, interview with author.

⁷² Voris and Coe, interview with author.

⁷³ Van Imschoot; Pakes, 137.

⁷⁴ Pakes.

⁷⁵ Vidrin, "Reasoning in Relation."

⁷⁶ McFee, *Dance and the Philosophy of Action*. Pakes discusses the possibility that dance works are structures of action in *Choreography Invisible*.

⁷⁷ Salice, 238.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 237.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 252.

⁸⁰ Vidrin also considers the role of value and values in his study of partnering, but with a greater focus on evaluation and value systems.

⁸¹ Voris, interview with author.

⁸² Salice, 237.

⁸³ Bench, 3.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 161.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 4.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 161.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 3.

⁸⁸ See Etienne Wenger "Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction" and 'Funmi Adewole, "More Conversations Please!" and "The Concept of 'Community' and Professional Dance."

⁸⁹ Salice, 252.

⁹⁰ Bench, 161.

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Moving with the Screen on Zoom: Reconnecting with Bodily and Environmental Awareness

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Abstract

Rather than seeing Zoom as a replacement for practicing movement and dance in a shared physical space, I propose to consider our relationship with the screen on Zoom as a movement in its own right. Using my experience of teaching movement on Zoom, I ask how we can connect with another via the screen without losing awareness of our bodies and the space which we're in. I argue that Zoom is a place of 'moving selfies' in dialogue where we can engage critically with the screen by practicing seeing with the whole body and moving with diffuse awareness and where we can critically reflect on our own habits of framing the world and its biases.

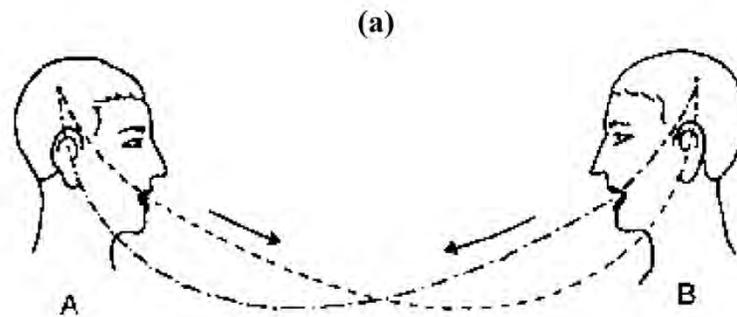
Keywords: embodied filmmaking, environmental awareness, body awareness, multi-sensory perception, embodied vision, screen technology, body intelligence, amerta movement, framing, eco-somatics

Mobile devices like tablets and smartphones along with communication software such as Skype and Zoom have made it easier to engage in social activities on the go or when physically attending is not possible. This made Zoom an extremely popular choice during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in early 2020. 300 million daily Zoom meeting participants were recorded in April 2020, a jump from 10 million at the end of 2019.¹ The changes happened quite quickly because for those with access to a computer or smartphone this was the only way to continue working, practicing a hobby or socializing with friends and family. This also meant that these technological alternatives were not always the first choice of interaction.

When I first tried Zoom I felt quite resistant to it. There was something very static about it that didn't feel right. It seemed to come with the implicit rule that, to communicate, we all had to sit still, gazing at each other in front of our screens. My body felt restricted, forgotten and instrumentalized by the looking and being looked at. When I attended an Authentic Movement² session where my body was able to move, it still felt restrictive because we were trying to do what we would normally do in a shared physical space, making it fit however we could, without acknowledging that this virtual space didn't



function like a normal in-person gathering. Obviously Zoom has not been designed with dancers in mind. Its focus is verbally driven dialogue and it is mostly used for that. In that respect, it relies on a simplified understanding of human communication where talking heads exchange words, as depicted by Saussure's famous diagram,³ forgetting how much we rely on the co-presence of physical bodies sharing the same time and space for its full functioning, which the diagram problematically leaves out.⁴ Most Zoom interactions follow Saussure's model and therefore are shaped by a truncated and distorted projection of the human body in communication.⁵ This made me aware of two common problems when interacting on Zoom: 1) the act of seeing was limited to the eyes and the screen, forgetting that the body and its other senses all play a role in how we see and communicate; and 2) the Zoom environment was used as a replacement for physical gathering without much reflection on how social interaction and body perception are distorted through the prism of the screen.



Talking heads, Saussure's model of the speech circuit. Credit: Saussure.

As a dancer, filmmaker, and screendance practitioner, I argue that it is helpful to look at Zoom not as a replacement for practicing movement and dance with others in a shared physical space but as a new way of interacting—a happy and coincidental convergence of dance and filmmaking, where we can learn to work somatically with the screen rather than ignoring it. Although this goes against existing research which demonstrates that the screen makes us more disconnected from our bodies,⁶ even for those who have developed body awareness over many years of somatic dance practice,⁷ I argue that this dissonance between the screen and the body can be reconciled by questioning our relationship to the screen as a movement practice in its own right: how can I connect with others via the screen without losing awareness of my own body and the immediate world around it? Through this article, I hope to start a discussion about the need for somatically informed critical reflection on our use of the screen, especially as the pandemic forces us to be more reliant on its use. By “somatically informed,” I mean that our bodies have an innate ability to engage critically with the limits imposed by new technologies, which can be brought to awareness by carefully investigating on its own terms “the act of awareness as a complex process”⁸ through movement exploration. I

believe those of us with a background in dance, somatic practices, and filmmaking, and those working within the field of screendance, are particularly well-placed to contribute to this conversation.

I shall be drawing on my experience of providing movement practice during the lockdown to support my argument. As a response to the unprecedented physical restrictions we were experiencing throughout 2020 and my bodily frustrations with Zoom, I decided to carry out an experiment by offering a movement class online which proposed that participants move together via the screen in its own right rather than as a way of replacing our previous experiences of moving together in the flesh. I wanted to offer a space where people could move with the physical restrictions of the lockdown, which Zoom is part of, and learn to adapt to them by finding opportunities in their limits. I invited my movement students, friends and members of the Amerta movement⁹ network to join. Each class was an experiment which built on the previous one as I adjusted my movement suggestions to reflect what I observed. At the beginning, the focus was on moving with the screen and our framed self-images in movement. As I observed how participants' attention shrunk more narrowly into what they could see within the screen, I moved away from this focus and decided to awaken participants' awareness of their environment and their body senses first. Then, and only then, I wove the screen in as just one element among others to move with.

I was guided in my exploration by my two main practices of embodied filmmaking and ecological somatic movement. As a dancer and filmmaker who engages with filmmaking not just as the act of looking with my eyes but with my whole body,¹⁰ I believe that the use of Zoom and screen technology is posing a similar question to the one I've been asking myself since I started filmmaking: how can I engage with the screen through which I'm connecting with another and remain connected to what I'm experiencing in my body? And as a Vipassana meditator¹¹ and an Amerta Movement¹² practitioner who has witnessed how my self-awareness is in constant motion and interdependently connected to an ever-evolving environment,¹³ I find myself asking the same question in relation to technology as I would when moving in a field or forest: how can I become more somatically aware of what this (virtual) environment affords and how my body receives it?

'Moving selfies' in dialogue

While Zoom liberates our communication from the constraints of time and space, it also limits it by depriving us of bodily presence with other bodies.¹⁴ Our projected image can travel through space and time but "[our] body [simply] cannot be in two places at once."¹⁵ Video-chat does a great job of allowing us to be more present in each other's lives as if we were there together in the same physical space, and therefore provides a viable solution to social distancing. German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels refers to this as "telepresence." Ironically this likeness or "representability" to in-person social

interaction also makes the very act of presence more difficult or rather impossible, which Waldenfels refers to as “tele-absence.”¹⁶ The more immediacy the technology allows, the more we experience withdrawal in accessing this shared synchronicity of time and space. Although Zoom doesn’t function like an in-person gathering, this doesn’t mean that communication on Zoom is necessarily impoverished. As demonstrated by Lisa Naugle in her telematic performance *Janus/Ghost Stories* (1999), synchronous communication within a video-conferencing environment can be shaped into a new form by merging performers’ bodies onto a fourth screen and layering choreography, visual imagery, sound, and real time video interaction.¹⁷ In a similar vein, I explore with my movement classes how Zoom offers an “entirely new situation of communication”¹⁸ which is mediated by the screen and images of ourselves in addition to verbal speech.

Although verbally driven communication is the main purpose and use of Zoom, its technological mediation inadvertently provides a new form of interaction articulated via the screen. This unintended use of the platform becomes particularly evident when practicing movement. On Zoom, we are not only dancers and performers but also film directors as well as camera operators framing and presenting our own movements on screen, with the significant difference that the film we are watching is being both made and watched at the same time. This is articulated by the self-view feature which reflects back to us and in real-time our own images, as captured by the camera of our devices, like a mirror, with the important difference that our image is not just reflected back to us but also to others who are also able to see themselves as we see them. This scenario echoes the modern phenomenon of the ‘selfie’ where self-images are digitally shaped within a frame knowing that they will be seen and mediated to others in this way. The Zoom self-view, like the selfie, reminds us that the making of our self-images is inherently relational and “disclose[s] not a self pathologically turned in on itself but one in which intentionality is necessarily directed elsewhere.”¹⁹ On Zoom, the screen doesn’t just allow us to look at others; it also looks back at us. Ian,²⁰ one of the participants in my movement class, expressed that feeling after a witnessing/moving session with Emily, another participant, when suddenly she looked at the screen:

Suddenly [I] realize I’m here and I’m being addressed. The fact that it’s live, there is a realization that you’re in dialogue with them. It’s like breaking the fourth wall in a film but more intense.

The Zoom environment, I argue, offers the unusual experience of ‘moving selfies’ in dialogue where filmmaking and dance converge, opening a new way to practice screendance in a more immediate and interactive manner, where the way we are framing ourselves, whether it is intentional or not, inevitably shapes how others experience our own movement and how we experience theirs. By choosing to position the screen at one angle rather than another, by deciding how to move ourselves or parts of our body in and out of the screen, or away from or closer to the screen, any participant in a movement Zoom meeting can modify the composition of the frame and therefore

affect how their movement is perceived on screen. The Zoom self-view is, however, more immediate than the selfie. It is seen by both parties simultaneously (unless the user decides to turn their video and/or self-view off) which also means that there is no possibility to retouch and edit, or even delete, the image before it is posted online. Editing takes place through framing, what the mover decides to show within the frame, and how s/he decides to do this.

When I started the movement classes, I wanted participants to engage directly with the screen and realize that how we are seen by others and how they see us is inevitably mediated by the screen, whether we actively engage with it or not. First, I invited them to explore through movement how the screen offered a way to communicate that is similar to the language of cinema. This started with the simple exercise of choosing a frame and an angle of framing and exploring what it offers in terms of movement, i.e. how a wide shot offers the opportunity to move in the distance while still being in the frame, and how a close-up offers the possibility to move more specifically with a body part. Building up from that, participants were then invited to observe how their own movement within the physical space affects what happens on screen. The idea was to get them to somatically experience that there is a conversation going on between their self-images projected on the 2D frame of their self-view and their movement within the frame of their 3D space. For this movement invitation, I drew on my own practice of moving with the camera as an extension of my body,²¹ and extended it to that of moving in relation to a fixed camera angle since it is the most frequent scenario of Zoom interactions. Because I am not behind the camera and/or holding it on Zoom (unless I intentionally do so as part of my movement), it is not so much about developing a sense of where the eye of the camera is pointing,²² but more how it is projecting towards me within the 3D space. Instead of inscribing on film what I'm sensing through how I move the camera,²³ I'm inscribing it with the movement of my body in and out of the frame. Moving in the space I'm in and observing how I come in and out of the frame allows me to map out my camera's field of view and how my 3D space relates to my 2D screen. In addition, I also wanted participants to understand that what is left out of the frame—which elements of the room or body parts are excluded from the frame, or when one's body is totally off screen—also colors how others receive what is left visible on screen. In that respect, the exploration of the frame was extended to what Deleuze calls the "out-of-field," which creates meaning in relation to what is on screen.²⁴ Participants were asked to map out the edges of the screen with their movement in order to feel how moving in and out of the frame becomes part of what they are communicating and how this also affects how they experience and move within their immediate physical space.

By getting participants to become more aware of the screen and its role of mediation on Zoom, they also became more aware of being seen and therefore that they are shaping and performing an image of themselves to others as Andrew, another class participant, reflects on:

The class was electrifying for my introverted self. Moving in a hall, I can be certain of my indifference to audience/witnesses. Moving on Zoom with self-view on, I am immediately aware that every turn, gesture and placement of my body is both chosen and presented by me to the others watching. For, if I have not chosen and presented those things, then who? In that moment I have become, technically speaking, an unconditional extravert.

However, unlike the photographic selfie which is intentionally created as a performance of the self to be shared on social media, the moving selfie on Zoom is an unintended byproduct of the platform that not everyone is enthusiastic about or comfortable to interact with and share with others, especially since there is no room for editing or deleting one's image before it is seen by others. Its use is more ambiguous. When I invited participants in my classes to engage with the screen, I noticed a disparity in how they responded: some were quick to adapt and play with the frame, and clearly enjoyed its performative aspect to the point of getting totally sucked in. Others preferred to ignore it entirely or just shied away from it, avoiding being seen. Some just couldn't stop looking and/or engaging with the screen in a mesmerized and awkward way, somehow amazed, somehow paralyzed by it. The two pitfalls of overperforming or shying away from being seen are not uncommon in in-person movement classes, but on Zoom the screen amplified how self-conscious participants felt.

The idea in getting participants to be moving selfies was for them to become more aware of their reactions to the screen (i.e. completely absorbed or hiding from it), how this affects how they move, how it differs from other contexts in which they normally move and communicate with others and therefore how they can make a more conscious choice as to how and when, or if at all, to engage with the screen. What I hadn't anticipated is that engaging directly with the screen in this way overemphasized vision as the primary sense, and a narrow understanding of vision as focal and fixed made participants more oblivious to the way that other senses also shape their visual perception and the way they move.

It is the whole body that sees, not just the eyes

When I started the online classes, moving with awareness of the frame felt necessary to acknowledge what changes when we move virtually together in this way as opposed to within a shared physical space. However, after a few sessions it became obvious that the movers' attentions narrowed to what they could see on screen away from physical sensations and the materiality of their space. Moving primarily with the screen made participants more reliant on focal vision within the frame of the screen, as if their bodies, the surrounding space, and objects only existed on screen. In that sense, the somatic engagement with the screen that I was encouraging on Zoom echoed current research on the topic which demonstrates that the use of screen technology distracts our attention away²⁵ and makes us less likely to be aware of what is happening around us.²⁶

A dissociation seems to happen between what I'm focusing my attention on visually on screen and what my body is sensing, what I'm experiencing in my body and around it. Sokolova observed in a group of authentic movement practitioners who were asked to use the smartphone to record how they witnessed someone else move that "the majority of participants do not succeed in maintaining their bodily presence in the process."²⁷ Participants in my classes were no different when asked to engage with their self-view. As mentioned above, in that respect, the use of Zoom and screen technology posed a similar question to the one I've been asking myself since I started filmmaking: how can I engage with the screen through which I'm connecting with another and remain connected to what I'm experiencing in my body? I draw on my own movement practice of embodied filmmaking to show that presence is not incompatible with the screen provided we widen our awareness of seeing to the whole body.

Because a lot is going on when we widen our seeing to the whole body, my movement invitations on Zoom aim to focus on one aspect at a time so that movers can slowly become more aware of the different elements at work and how they relate to one another. I use my own practice when filming with a camera in my hands²⁸ on Zoom for movers to become more aware of the role of the body when using the camera of their smartphone or tablet.²⁹ In this way, I encourage participants to develop a sense of moving with the camera as a body extension without any assumption of how it should be held, and a sense of seeing what the camera is filming without looking at the viewfinder. The idea is to develop a sense of sight without relying on the eyes or focusing and therefore to trust our kinesthetic ability to see. I also argue that holding the camera is holding the future audience in my hands and that therefore I'm transmitting much more than a visual experience, that is to say, I am transmitting a kinesthetic experience via touch, movement, and framing. This means that how we hold and move the camera is equally important to what can be seen within the frame. To help participants engage with that idea I suggest that there is a little person inside the camera, and I ask them how they want this little person to feel as they're moving with their camera.

This somatic approach to the screen that I build upon here echoes and follows up on the work of dancers, performers, designers, and architects who have critically reclaimed the use of other senses in redefining our interaction with—and design of—objects, technology, and buildings, and therefore challenge the primacy of vision.³⁰ In the West, vision is "seen" as the primary sense, underplaying the role of other senses, and therefore the whole body, in the act of perception.³¹ This Western and modern understanding of vision, known as "ocularcentrism," isolates "the eye outside its natural interaction with other sense modalities" and therefore "increasingly reduce[s] and restrict[s] the experience of the world into the sphere of vision."³² When working with the frame, this bias is amplified. The frame, with its restricted field, reinforces what is already a narrow understanding of vision as a fixed and focal gaze directed outward with the eyes. In the movement classes, I wanted participants to experience that this

understanding of vision is reductive and that vision cannot be separated from the other senses. In addition to the exercise of moving with the camera without looking at the viewfinder, I therefore use simple eye movement exercises to show that the eyes find it hard to remain static or move slowly and that they, in fact, like to move very quickly and constantly, jumping from one point to the next: eye movements which are known as saccades.³³ I also guide them to practice unfocused and peripheral vision when moving and to generally become more aware of their tendencies in seeing, i.e. whether they tend to look close, midway, or in the distance. Beyond the eye movements, they are also invited to experience that vision involves the whole body in motion and not just the eyes, which Gibson refers as “ambient” and “ambulatory vision.”³⁴

Once they have a more kinesthetic understanding of seeing and the eyes, I then introduce the role of the others senses in their experience of perception and how those senses are not separated from the act of seeing. I do this by inviting participants to move with one sense only, i.e. touch, sound, or proprioception, to really develop their awareness of it, and then I introduce sight while asking them to keep awareness of the other sense at the same time. This helps participants to be more aware that their seeing is inherently synesthetic, that is to say, how it is intertwined with other sensory information in the act of perception and vice versa. At the end of a movement session focused on touch, one of the participants, Dominique, enthusiastically exclaimed “I suddenly felt my eyes at the end of my fingertips!” Each participant is therefore invited to experience in their own way how their senses connect with each other, what their sensory habits are—notably which senses they tend to rely most on when moving—and how to work with them. As these one-off exercises build on each other, I also complement them with a regular practice of witnessing³⁵ another mover, a technique developed by Sandra Reeve³⁶ as part of her teaching of Amerta Movement. The technique requires participants to adopt a non-judgmental intention and positive welcoming which is akin to the listening of a trained counsellor.³⁷ It is carried out in pairs: each person witnesses the other move and then moves in front of the other, being witnessed by them, for the same amount of time. Because it is separating the role of mover and witness, this allows each participant to become more comfortable with being seen as well as with how their body informs their seeing. Eventually, by observing another move and our experience of witnessing at the same time, we learn to become “involved witnesses” and can apply those qualities of witnessing to ourselves when we are moving.³⁸

The focus on vision demonstrates how much objective knowledge is culturally valued in the West³⁹ since vision refers to the mind and the ability to acquire such knowledge through detached observation. The act of seeing is associated with a strong desire to make sense of the world and the object of our sight, to define it and fix it.⁴⁰ In that sense, “vision separates us from the world.”⁴¹ The practice of seeing with the whole body aims to challenge this Cartesian dualism of mind and body and therefore the idea that we can separate ourselves from the object of our perception. Peripheral vision, for example,

enables us to broaden the role of being mere spectators (associated with focused vision) as the practice of peripheral vision “integrates us more with space.”⁴² Because “the dominance of the eye [has suppressed] the other senses [...] to push us into detachment, isolation and exteriority,”⁴³ being more aware of how other senses shape our seeing is crucial to understanding that we are not separated from the object of our seeing but part of it. “We learn to trust our vision of the table as being there, for instance because we can always go over and touch it.”⁴⁴

Acknowledging that we see with our whole bodies is acknowledging that seeing is not separated from the world; it is not fixed and is much wider than focused vision. It is subjective, multi-sensory, three-dimensional, and relational. I see through the lens of my whole body in a constant evolving relationship with the environment and with what I’m seeing. It is therefore more accurate to say that our use of the screen for communication does not make us disembodied *per se* but accentuates an existing lack of awareness of the role of the body in seeing stemming from a narrow understanding of vision as fixed and focal. In the next section, I will argue that acknowledging the role of the body in seeing and consciously moving with the screen in this way critically questions the dissonance between body and mind that we experience when using screen technology. As we adapt our movement practices to the Zoom environment, it is therefore useful to keep this question in mind: how can I keep the body actively involved in the act of seeing when moving with the screen?

Recognizing our framing

When we see, we are always seeing from a perspective.⁴⁵ We are receiving and making images through the lens of our whole body, its senses, its memories, its social and cultural conditioning. The screen, by constraining what we receive and communicate to a frame, is not so different from how we are always seeing and being seen through the lens of our perception. By adding another layer and making us also the filmmakers of our self-images, which are projected to ourselves and others, the Zoom environment brings more forcefully into awareness the act of framing that is already at work, but which is not as consciously visible without the use of the technology. In that sense, as Uzlaner argued about the selfie, the screen does not so much transform human nature as it reveals more fully how it works.⁴⁶ While his argument focuses specifically on the gaze of the other and our desire to control it, here I am more concerned with how we cannot escape seeing through a lens despite our desire to see reality objectively.

In cinema, the frame is a “point of view.”⁴⁷ In that sense, it is not so dissimilar to how we see in everyday life. Although we experience what we see as fully-fledged three-dimensional objects (unlike a screen which gives us a 2D flat image) we can only see them in space from the perspective of where we are at any moment: “because vision is *everywhere* [...] we as perspectival beings are able to see things from *somewhere*.”⁴⁸

Therefore, when we frame in filming we are already selecting and imposing a perspective on what we see, whether we acknowledge it or not. As Jean Rouch, a French ethnographic filmmaker, has argued quoting Dziga Vertov, film editing doesn't start in the editing room with the editor; it starts with framing:

The producer-cameraman of direct cinema is his own first spectator thanks to the viewfinder of his camera. All gestural improvisation (movements, centerings, duration of shots) finally leads to editing in the camera itself. We can note here again the notion of Vertov: "the 'cine-eye' is just this: I EDIT when I choose my subject [from among the thousands of possible subjects], I EDIT when I observe [film] my subject [to find the best choice from among a thousand possible observations...]."⁴⁹

The role of our subjectivity is not always fully acknowledged in filmmaking and especially in documentary making where there is a common myth of objectivity which assumes that one can represent others realistically without acknowledging the subjective lens of the filmmaker. For example, framing other cultures through an inevitably biased Western lens has wrongly led some scholars to objectify them as exotic in the name of objective knowledge.⁵⁰ On Zoom, there is nobody behind the camera deciding how to frame. It is up to the Zoom user to frame herself/himself or not and therefore there is no separation between the image maker and the subject. The mover has more agency over her/his own framing provided s/he wants to engage with this role and is able to articulate this within the remit of the technology and the features of the platform. Although this takes away any potential power imbalance, it doesn't take away the fact that we are still observing ourselves and each other through our own lens.

Moving somatically, that is to say with awareness, with the screen on Zoom gives us the opportunity to recognize how we frame ourselves and others in everyday life and the role that the whole body plays in it. At the same time as the frame of the screen restricts our seeing (as I discussed in the previous section), ironically it also offers the opportunity to expand our vision and therefore to reconnect with the idea of seeing with the whole body, not just with the eyes. Cinema and its language of the frame is not just visual, it is also a somatic experience based on bodily perception.⁵¹ By constraining our vision, framing invites us to reconnect with the multi-sensory experience of seeing. In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura Marks demonstrates how working with close-up images appeals to a haptic or tactile visuality and therefore invites a more intimate, embodied and sensory reception of the images.

The same process happens with filmmaking: we are receiving an image through the lens of our body when making it. Any images that we make carry "the imprint of our bodies."⁵² There are "corporeal images [...] not just images of others' bodies [but] also images of the body behind the camera and its relationship to the world."⁵³ To acknowledge this is to acknowledge that filmmaking is inherently embodied and therefore that the way I'm holding and moving my camera in partnership with my body

reflects how I'm experiencing what I'm seeing through the lens of my body and how I'm transmitting this experience, through my body in movement (or stillness) and the way it is holding the camera, to a future audience. In my own work, I've described how I've used my whole body and its kinesthetic ability to listen and sense the moving body that I'm filming while inscribing my sensing through the act of filming in movement.⁵⁴ As explained earlier, I invited participants in my movement class to develop their sense of seeing with the whole body when moving with the camera without looking at the viewfinder or without preconceptions about how to hold the camera. In another exercise following on from that, I helped them to experience that seeing with the whole body still applies *without* the camera. Moving as camera bodies is a useful practice and metaphor to understand that we are moving-sensing frames ourselves which are not separated from what we are framing. The practice helps us to become more aware of our part in a wider composition and that we are in constant dialogue and co-creation with the environment. In order to guide participants to experience how they are such moving perspectives, I use body structure as a focus to start with. I invite participants to feel the shapes their bodies can make using different body parts, arrangements, and tensions. The aim is to get them to experience that the body is a shape-shifting frame which shapes what they see not just from the perspective of their eyes but also from the three-dimensionality of their whole body, which receives the world through different directions and sensory inputs. This exercise is inspired by the teaching of Suprpto Suryodarmo, who developed Amerta Movement, and more specifically his "framing practice" which asks movers to make frames with their own bodies to become more aware of their selection in seeing without losing the experience of their body in context.

While our receiving and making of images all happens simultaneously, when practicing movement on Zoom it is useful to break those two roles down: practice moving while being watched, and practice receiving movement by observing someone else move. The practice of witnessing another move described earlier allows us to become familiar with each role by focusing on one at a time with the ultimate aim of being able to combine both and therefore being able to witness oneself and one's perspective as part of a bigger composition. In turn, we are able to notice when our seeing is disconnected from the body and our surrounding environment and therefore to be more aware of this when we are moving. As I will discuss next, witnessing oneself moving is particularly challenging on Zoom where the reflection of our self-view tends to disconnect us from our body and the environment. This is why it is important not just to remain focused on the screen, our self-image, and the images of the others, but also to move with a sense of diffuse awareness that gives equal importance to our body; its sensations, thoughts, and feelings; and everything else that is around us in the environment and shaping our experience and sense of self, including the screen.

Practicing diffuse awareness with the screen

The awareness of the gaze and its judgment about how we move on Zoom can make us self-conscious⁵⁵ and/or can encourage us to over-perform in front of the screen. Focusing on the self-view, whether by performing or feeling self-conscious, creates a situation where our preoccupation with how we are moving within the frame (and therefore are being perceived by others) makes us oblivious to the environment where our own body is grounded. We might be aware of our body's reflection as an image within a frame but not actually feel our body and its physical connection to the environment it is located in. As when taking a selfie, by focusing on my self-view or others' self-views, "I remain partly oblivious to my body's role in disclosing the world around me."⁵⁶

This is because the self-view, like a mirror, reminds me that I am always the object of someone else's gaze, that "I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I cannot in any case escape from the space in which I am without defense—in short, that I am seen."⁵⁷ The mirror, as Lacan argued in his mirror stage theory, plays a similar role to the gaze of the other: it helps me to recognize myself as an ego, it gives shape to my identity.⁵⁸ Ironically, this process of reflection creates a division between, on one hand, my image—the idea I have of myself, how I look and what I should look like—and, on the other, my body—its physical sensations and what it feels like to be that body. It privileges a Cartesian idea of seeing and what my body looks like over physical sensations, separating the idea of myself from my body. As Merleau-Ponty describes, "a Cartesian does not see himself in the mirror; he sees a dummy, an outside, which, he has every reason to believe other people see in the very same way but which, no more for himself than for others, is not a body in the flesh."⁵⁹

Self-view on Zoom echoes the use of the mirror in some forms of Western dance training which objectifies the dancer's body into something that should be corrected to conform to an ideal image and proper dance technique,⁶⁰ creating a dividing tension between what is seen and what is felt. This becomes a situation where we focus so much on being "self-in-relation to others" via the screen that we forget that "we are [also] self-in-relation to the environment,"⁶¹ a body that feels its presence in the context of its location, a body that is among the seeing. One of the class participants, Dominique, reflects:

At the beginning, I was in love with my image and it felt narcissistic but afterwards it became less important. The image of myself that I wanted to project, my avatar, wasn't so seductive anymore, it was integrated.

I'm interested in how we can experience seeing without feeling disconnected from our own bodies and the environment around us, and therefore how the two can be reconciled in our use of screen technology as Dominique describes experiencing throughout the class. As I have articulated throughout this article, my starting point is that the screen narrows down our awareness of the world to something that is focused

and visual to the detriment of an awareness that is more encompassing of the whole and body-oriented. The screen requires a visual, focal attention, but not being able to focus *visually* on my body or the world around me doesn't mean that I cannot be aware of them. As Prettyman argues, "attention is a much more varied phenomenon than visual focal attention" and the concept deserves to be enriched by the less researched phenomenon of "diffuse attention." Prettyman continues:

There are numerous examples that point to the phenomenon of diffuse attention in vision and across modalities – watching a landscape, feeling the whole body, listening to the sound of a noisy room. Yet diffuse attention is difficult to operationally define, and it is not clear that it should be considered a way of attending at all, rather than a way of being diffusely aware.⁶²

The idea of "mov[ing] with a sense of diffuse awareness—awareness of different sounds, tastes, sights and sensations; awareness of other people; awareness of our impact on our surroundings and their impact on us; awareness of our skeleton, our thoughts, our feelings, our movement ... all at the same time"⁶³ is at the heart of Amerta Movement practice. Developing this embodied awareness of my own body, the environment, and their interconnection is the first step toward noticing my habitual patterns of movement, how they are limiting me, and therefore opening myself up as a mover to new possibilities where "I can practice initiating through choice rather than the compulsion of habit."⁶⁴

By acknowledging that we see with the whole body, we become more aware of our assumptions about vision, how they restrict our relationship with the screen, and how reconnecting with other body senses critically questions this limitation. Moving with a sense of diffuse awareness is the step that follows, when we embrace the vastness of our seeing, where the screen is just one element among many others, and when we can see and choose new possibilities of movement. By encouraging participants to "move with a sense of diffuse awareness," I want them to give equal value to the screen, our bodies, and our immediate environment, and to remind ourselves that we move *among* what we see and experience—neither externally to it nor at the center of it. Trying to keep these all in our awareness, noticing our attention's fluctuations and preferences, all form part of the practice. That way, the screen and what happens via the screen just becomes one of the many things that is happening in the environment. At times, I might give it more attention as I might give more attention to a corner of my room while remaining aware of what's around me and my body. For that purpose, it is useful to move with the self-view off and/or to switch between the two modes on and off and to notice the differences and our tendencies in either mode. I have also run a number of movement sessions in which I invited participants to vary their modes of attention: at first, ignoring the screen and focusing on awareness of their own body and movement; then gradually integrating awareness of their own movement in relation to the environment; and lastly bringing in an awareness of the screen while still keeping in

mind awareness of the body and of its interaction with the environment. The intention here is not so much to value one more than the other but to become more aware of our preferences and of how our movement changes, if it does, when self-view is on or off or when I now bring the screen to my attention. This allows me to become more aware of how I move with the screen, how I'm limiting myself in this way, and what are the other choices at my disposal that I am less aware of. "By experiencing our changing bodies as part of a changing environment, we diminish the sense of a rigid boundary between the experience of self and that of the environment,"⁶⁵ which is accentuated by the screen. Through the practice of moving in this way, participants experienced a much more porous and fluid boundary between self, the other, and the world. Ian observed:

The process of feeling my own body or something in the room as I was witnessing Emily move became more about the experience of what she was feeling rather than what it looked like. I was in somebody else's shoes.

Andrew likewise observed:

When I moved in the greenhouse, with the camera outside, framing myself in the partially reflective glass of the greenhouse—I suddenly dissolved. Not only was there a visual 'hall of mirrors' effect but I experienced in my solar-plexus a visceral sense of dissolving. In that moment, my idea of myself also seemed to dissolve.

In summary, there is generally a narrowing of our attention to the screen, allowing us to forget that the screen is only a part of our immediate environment that serves to mediate our connection with others. Because of this, a somatic engagement with the screen, I argue, requires a refinement of "eco-somatics" as a practice which not only "encourages an equal alertness to both the inner reality of the participant and to their external environment"⁶⁶ but also to its interconnection and extension into others' environments via the screen. Although Suprpto Suryodarmo didn't extend his own teaching to include screen-mediated movement, he certainly liked to weave digital and physical worlds in this way. He famously spent much of his time on his smartphones (he often had more than one) while holding workshops. At first, one could not help but think: how can such a master of his own body be distracted in this way? The response is that he was not because he didn't make a separation between being on his phones and holding the workshop. He would find a way to attune, to recognize synchronicities, and to weave whatever was happening on another continent via his phone with what was happening in the workshop.⁶⁷ For Suryodarmo, the two could not be separated and were considered to be part of the same reality. They needed to be woven together in the same way that he would recognize the importance of the physical environment in how we move. This weaving of physical and virtual environments, I argue, is fundamental to a movement practice on Zoom which reconciles the screen and bodily awareness.

Conclusion: building a somatic relationship with new technology

Whereas, at first sight, transferring our dance practices to videoconferencing software like Zoom can feel like a second best that can never fully replace moving together in the flesh, it also offers, I argue, an opportunity to move with the screen with more awareness and to critically question our physical relationship with it. Because of the challenges it presents in limiting our connection with the body, Zoom forces us to question and redefine our bodily interaction with the screen so that becoming aware of our own body and its interaction with the environment, of which the screen is just one element, is crafted at the heart of it. First, it is important to bring to awareness and experience through movement how the act of seeing is grounded in the whole body and its senses, especially when working on Zoom where a biased and restricted understanding of vision is reinforced by the screen. Second, seeing is not just visual and focal, it is also diffuse and multi-sensory. It is therefore particularly useful to practice diffuse awareness when moving with the screen as it allows us to remain equally aware of our body, the environment we are moving in, the screen, the other environments we are connecting with virtually via the screen, and how we are in constant flux, shaping and being shaped, dialoguing with and weaving together all these different elements.

I have shown that bodily presence and the use of screen technology are not incompatible *per se*. This requires us to see that moving with new technologies is a movement practice in its own right. With my movement classes on Zoom and a discussion of this exploration of the screen through movement, I am responding to Kolcio's call for "encourag[ing] physical engagement and awareness"⁶⁸ when bringing new technology directly into practical application. I argue, using Zoom as an example, that our movement practices need to acknowledge and reflect what the screen affords as much as what it limits. My work therefore connects to and affirms how artists and performers question the limits of technology within the context of performance, while expanding the question outside the performance context. The field of telematic dance is particularly relevant to the context of my argument as it explores how videoconferencing environments such as Zoom offer new forms of communication and being together by extending our experiences of space and time. MacCallum and Naccarato's concept of "critical appropriation" emphasizes the value of critically questioning the use of objects and technology outside the remit of their intended use.⁶⁹ And lastly, the work of dance artist Isabelle Choinière, who is purposefully imposing limits with new technologies in choreographic propositions to expand the performer's perception by forcing her/him to reorganize it, is particularly relevant to my approach.⁷⁰ While Choinière intentionally destabilizes the body with the use of technology to enhance the potential for corporeality in performance, her aim has much in common with what I am advocating here: that there is a creative opportunity in asserting our bodily intelligence when engaging critically with the physical constraints imposed by new technology.

While this work is directly relevant to how we adapt performance and dance practices online, it also allows us to question and redefine our use of the screen in everyday life. Emily, one of the regular attendees of my classes, felt inspired to re-explore video-chat and suggested to her friends that they have 20-minute non-verbal video calls with her: “video calling felt like we were always trying to find enough to say, while never being truly present with each other or able to be vulnerable.” In that respect, the increased use of screen technology in lockdown is an opportunity for us dancers and screendance filmmakers to offer a critical reflection on what the screen affords and limits not just in the context of performance and dance practices, but also beyond, within our daily movement and interaction with others via the screen. What’s more, seeing creative opportunities in the limits of technology also invites us to challenge the way dance and technology are often opposed⁷¹ and therefore to reassert the relevance that “the present body that we live has an ‘intelligence’ of its own”⁷² which already has the necessary tools to learn to adapt to new technologies. The idea of my movement classes on Zoom is in that respect not to create a specific set of techniques that allows us to work within the specificities of this virtual environment. It is to help movers to reflect on their sensory and movement habits with and without the screen as two contrasting modes and therefore to reconnect with their body intelligence when moving via the screen to find their own way to remain embodied with it.

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Biography

Claire is a social anthropologist, filmmaker and movement artist. She is a Visiting Research Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she researches on ecological movement, mindful movement, embodied filmmaking, screen technology and the feral body. She is co-founder and co-curator of Kinesthesia, a moving image festival which focuses on the multi-sensory experience of filmmaking and watching films. She is currently working on a durational visual art installation in collaboration with

filmmaker and researcher Dominique Rivoal which explores ecological dialogue with the non-human by moving every month in the same spot in Hackney Marshes in London over the course of several years. She is writing a book about the feral body as a radical tool of being and thinking beyond the limits of our anthropomorphic and anthropocentric view of the world.

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Notes

¹ Daily meeting participant is different from daily active user as they “can be counted multiple times: if you have five Zoom meetings in a day then you are counted five times.” Zoom doesn’t provide daily active user statistics. <https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/30/21242421/zoom-300-million-users-incorrect-meeting-participants-statement>

² Authentic Movement is a somatic dance practice where the mover has his/her eyes closed and focuses inwardly, observing body sensations, images and feelings that arise, while being witnessed.

³ Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique Générale*.

⁴ See Meyer, Streeck & Stock, *Intercorporeality*; and Thomsen, “From Talking Heads to Communicating Bodies.”

⁵ See Lanier, “Virtually there”; Lee, “A Psychological Exploration of Zoom Fatigue”; Friesen, “Telepresence and Tele-absence”; and Wiederhold, “Connecting Through Technology,” 437.

⁶ See Gazzaley and Rosen, *The Distracted Mind*; and Hyman et al., “Did You See the Unicycling Clown?”

⁷ Sokolova, “The Smartphone as Witness.”

⁸ Kolcio, “A somatic engagement of technology,” 104.

⁹ Amerta or Joged Amerta movement is an ecological somatic practice developed by Suprpto Suryodarmo, a Javanese movement artist and teacher. One of its characteristics is that it “pays attention to environmental embodiment and attaches crucial importance to the mutual interdependence and co-creation of organism and environment.” Reeve, “Reading, Gardening and ‘Non-Self,’” 190.

¹⁰ Loussouarn, "Dancing with Nature Off the Leash" and "Dancing with the camera."

¹¹ Vipassana is a meditation technique which focuses on observing sensations, scanning carefully each part of your body with equanimity, that is to say without giving more importance to pain or pleasure.

¹² See note 9 above.

¹³ Reeve, "The Next-Step: Eco-somatics and Performance."

¹⁴ See Lanier; Friesen, "Telepresence and Tele-absence."

¹⁵ Friesen, "Telepresence and Tele-absence," 22.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Naugle, "Distributed Choreography."

¹⁸ Ferencz-Flatz, "Ten theses on the reality of video-chat," 219.

¹⁹ Bollmer and Guinness, "Phenomenology of the Selfie," 169.

²⁰ All quoted participants gave permission to the author to be referred by their first names.

²¹ Loussouarn, "Dancing with Nature Off the Leash"

²² Ibid.

²³ Loussouarn, "Dancing with the camera."

²⁴ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 18.

²⁵ Gazzaley and Rosen.

²⁶ Hyman et al.

²⁷ Sokolova, 132.

²⁸ See Loussouarn, "Dancing with Nature Off the Leash" and "Dancing with the camera."

²⁹ Or even laptop, which offers some degree of mobility.

³⁰ See Loussouarn, "Dancing with Nature Off the Leash" and "Dancing with the camera"; Kozel, *Closer*; Loke and Pohl, "Engaging the sense of touch"; MacCallum and Naccarato, "Critical Appropriations" and "The Touch of the Stethoscope"; and Schiphorst, "Soft(n)."

³¹ See Belova, "The Event of Seeing"; Jay, "The Rise of Hermeneutics"; Marks, *The Skin of the Film*; and Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*.

³² Pallasmaa, 39.

³³ See Jay, 311; Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World*.

³⁴ Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*.

³⁵ Although the practice of witnessing shares much with Authentic Movement, I discuss it more specifically in relation to the way Sandra Reeve teaches it.

³⁶ Sandra Reeve is a movement artist and teacher who studied extensively for many years with Suprpto Suryodarmo and has been a well-known and accomplished teacher of Amerta Movement for more than 30 years. She has developed her own unique style of teaching Amerta.

³⁷ Sandra Reeve refers to Carl Roger's concept of "unconditional positive regard."

³⁸ Personal communication with Reeve, 7 August 2020.

³⁹ Ingold, 283

⁴⁰ Pallasmaa.

⁴¹ Ibid. 25.

⁴² Ibid. 13.

⁴³ Ibid. 19.

⁴⁴ Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World*, 223.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Uzlaner, "The Selfie and the Intolerable Gaze of the Other."

⁴⁷ Deleuze, 15.

⁴⁸ Suhr and Willerslev, "Can Film Show the Invisible?" 286.

⁴⁹ Rouch, "The Camera and Man." Emphasis and brackets in Rouch.

⁵⁰ Trinh, "Documentary Is/Not a Name."

⁵¹ See Barker, *The Tactile Eye*; Luke Hockley, *Somatic Cinema*; and Marks.

⁵² MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, 3.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Loussouarn, "Dancing with the camera."

⁵⁵ This is more the case with less experienced movers and beginners. With time and through the experience of being witnessed in a safe and non-judgmental manner by other movers, this lessens. This is also one of the goals of the practice of witnessing as

taught by Sandra Reeve: to invite us to move without feeling petrified or that there is an expectation of having to perform.

⁵⁶ Bollmer and Guinness, 168.

⁵⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 259.

⁵⁸ Uzlauer.

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, "The Eye and the Mind," 170.

⁶⁰ Green, "Somatic Authority."

⁶¹ Reeve, "The Next-Step," 6.

⁶² Prettyman, "Attention and Conscious Perception," 51-52.

⁶³ Reeve, "Reading, Gardening and 'Non-Self,'" 200-201.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 195

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 194

⁶⁶ Reeve, "The Next-Step," 6

⁶⁷ Personal communication with Reeve, 7 August 2020.

⁶⁸ Kolcio, 122.

⁶⁹ MacCallum and Naccarato, "Critical Appropriations."

⁷⁰ Choinière, "For a methodology of transformation."

⁷¹ Kolcio.

⁷² Parviainen, "Bodies Moving and Moved," 30.

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Two-way Mirrors: Dancing in the Zoomosphere

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Abstract

Dan Graham's work with mirrors and installation from the 1970s provides an unexpected launchpad for understanding the structures underlying perception in Zoom interfaces. The article explores the intricacies of Graham's two-way mirrors as a means to articulate perceptual experiences of dancing in the Zoomosphere, with examples from teaching, choreographing and performing via Zoom during Covid 19 isolation conditions.

Keywords: Zoom, dance, performance, choreography, mirror, two-way mirror, Dan Graham, perception, Covid-19, "End Meeting for All", "The World's Smallest Stage"

The phenomenon of experiencing performance online via video conferencing platforms is very much a 2020 experience, be it for teaching, learning, choreographing, performing, or as an audience member. However, some of the structural properties of experiencing performance via Zoom can be glimpsed in earlier decades. In this article, I compare Zoom experiences of performance with visual artist Dan Graham's work with mirrors from the 1970s, which he describes as situations in which audiences experience their own "perceptual processes."¹ Graham's work from the 1970s is hauntingly prescient of the structures underlying perceptual and performative experience in Zoom: his use of two-way mirrors lays bare the intertwining of multiple perspectives in perception. I discuss Graham's work in the context of performance because the structures of perception that he reveals are currently being experienced in an intensified mode during the Covid-19 crisis, with performance being shifted to online conferencing platforms: we are dancing in the Zoomosphere, a word I use to designate the virtual space created by video conferencing interfaces.

I use examples from Graham's oeuvre to clarify perceptual experiences in Zoom scenarios, so as to point towards some of the ways in which performing artists have harnessed Zoom's strengths and sidestepped its shortcomings. The Zoom scenarios I explore range from my own experience of teaching dance students, student responses to choreographic tasks, choreographers' observations while transitioning to virtual rehearsals, dance works created via Zoom and bearing traces of the medium, and finally



a theatre performance that utilised Zoom tropes as performance material and as a platform. These different scenarios have vastly different aims, but all share some perceptual similarities through their varying degrees of enmeshment in the Zoomosphere. I unpack various ways that each Zoom scenario relates to the perceptual structures laid bare in Graham's experiments with two-way mirrors.

Perceptual challenges in the Zoomosphere

As I will describe, Graham uses two-way mirrors with the overt aim of challenging the audience's perceptual habits. When dancing in the Zoomosphere, the same perceptual habits are unsettled, but this is not always the *aim* of the experience. The final Zoom scenario I analyze in this article, that of theatre company Forced Entertainment's Zoom-based performance *End Meeting for All* (2020) does indeed set out to challenge viewers' perceptual and spectatorial habits. Other examples I discuss in this article have different aims, such as developing and rehearsing material together through the digital interface. Trying to focus on such tasks while one's perceptual habits are constantly unsettled by the structural properties of the medium can be baffling, frustrating, and plain exhausting. While Zoom has provided a lifeline for some semblance of continuation of embodied practices during the Covid-19 crisis, it is useful to explore the particular communicative difficulties it brings so as to elucidate ways forward.

Zoom fatigue is of course not exclusive to performance experiences conducted through the internet. Workplaces in many parts of the globe have shifted to working from home via Zoom or other platforms since the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in early 2020. The abruptness of this change in workplace habits provided a sharp perspective from which to notice the surge of fatigue experienced by workers and students alike. Andrew Hines, a computer scientist specializing in speech, audio, and video signal processing, notes that some of the fatigue comes from the crude quality of the audio signal reaching our ears in a Zoom conference.² Rather than the dulcet tones of a radio presenter, voices in Zoom can sound scratchy, and this is often combined with unexpected, high-pitched frequencies from the squeak of a chair or sipping a cup of tea. Without the spatial context of a physical room where we can make sense of sound through its location, high-pitched sound intrusions signal our brain to be on high alert, making us stressed.³

Hines also notes we miss the meta-information supplied by body language in conversation that would help us intuitively know when it is our turn to speak, for example, so our brains work extra hard to fill in the gaps.⁴ Noise gates (technological devices deployed by software systems to prevent audio feedback), mean that only one voice can be heard at a time, so when multiple participants attempt to speak at once, segments of speech get cut off, leaving meaningless fragments floating in the void. Organizational behaviorist André Spicer similarly points to the information that is missing in a Zoom situation such as smell and spatialization.⁵ As our brains are partially

occupied compensating for what is missing, we absorb less of what is actually being communicated.

Jeremy Bailenson, director of Stanford University's Virtual Human Interaction Lab, suggests that the excess of mis-matched communicative cues in video conferencing is overwhelming and makes it hard to achieve synchrony—and yet we are hard-wired to get 'in sync' with one another and our brains work overtime to achieve it.⁶ The physiological and emotional toll is greater the poorer the internet connection is. Spicer notes that if the line is glitchy, involving lags and freezes, this activates unconscious bias. For example, even a very short lag creates the perception the presenter is less friendly. If the video quality is poor, we become more cautious in our communication.⁷

In an interesting amplification of Graham's experimentations with two-way mirrors, seeing ourselves replicated in the Zoom 'mirror' while attempting to communicate personal content has been shown to reduce confidence and cause stress.⁸ Organizational psychologist Marisa Shuffler notes that it is difficult not to look at one's own image when in a Zoom conference, and seeing oneself on camera brings a requirement to perform which is stressful for many.⁹ Organizational behaviorist Gianpiero Petriglieri suggests that larger group conferences exacerbate performativity, commenting that a large video call "is like you're watching television and television is watching you."¹⁰

Petriglieri also draws attention to the way Zoom conferencing in isolation causes a collapse of zones that were once discrete: home, work, and social spaces. Different contexts draw out different aspects of the self, and the difference is healthy. Collapsing the different aspects of self into the one virtual zone has been shown to induce negative feelings.¹¹ In some circumstances, the domesticity of dancing in Zoomosphere provides useful informal connection at a time of anxiety and crisis. In an article for the *Washington Post*, veteran choreographer Mark Morris chuffs, "It's so nice to see everybody's crap that they have," while directing a new work via Zoom, his dancers dancing in their living rooms while using bathrooms and hallways as stage wings.¹²

In my own Zoom teaching with dance students at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, pets on laps became a motif that provided humorous continuity from one session to another. Concurrently, amid the general overwhelm of trying to scan across 27 faces, I would also notice with a pang the vastly different socio-economic circumstances in which students were attempting to learn. Some would receive a cup of tea mid-way through a lecture, lovingly delivered by a parent. Others were perched on the end of their bed, the only private space in a busy shared house. Others were alone in blank rooms in tiny apartments, international students who had not had a chance to furnish their dwelling before isolation restrictions began. The Zoom grid both brings people together and underlines their separateness. In a later livestream of his company's work created via Zoom, Morris commented that during rehearsals, seeing all the dancers in their own distinct rectangular squares on the Zoom grid accentuated his

sense of them as individuals—unlike his prior perception of them as a group in the physical studio.¹³

The potential complications studied by behavioral psychologists and communications experts are real for those dancing in the Zoomosphere. Video conferencing is nevertheless currently a vital platform for financial survival, group experience and artistic development for performing artists, much as we may long for the resumption of 'live' or 'real' kinesthetic interaction. I will now outline Dan Graham's experimental perceptual processes as a way to explore the structure of the two-way mirror, but also to move towards the idea that artists of various kinds are uniquely placed to experiment with the new medium of Zoom. Artists are experts, in their given modality, in experimenting with human perception.

The perceptual structures of Dan Graham's two-way mirrors

In her volume *Mirror Affect: Seeing Self, Observing Others in Contemporary Art*, art historian Cristina Albu analyzes visual art works that contain mirrors, live video feedback, and sensors from the 1960s onwards, as situations that provoke consideration of the interpersonal nature of perception. Albu argues that in the 1960s, mirrored surfaces, live video feedback, and sensors were used to challenge the autonomous materiality of the art object, an aim shared by other art movements at the time such as Fluxus and happenings. For Albu, in the 1970s the use of mirrors shifted, to instead critique the supposed privacy and neutrality of aesthetic experience, literally showing viewers that they were in fact part of a collectivity: "An increasing number of artists, including Vito Acconci, William Anastasi, Judith Baca, Daniel Buren, Peter Campus, Dan Graham, Lynn Hershman, Bruce Nauman, and Peter Weibel, designed visual systems that incorporated competing reflective surfaces that would vie for participants' attention and enable critical distance from the all-engulfing conditions of the society of the spectacle."¹⁴ Albu provides a Foucauldian critique of the operation of power in mirrored environments, detailing the duality of surveillance and agency. However, this aspect of her analysis is beyond the scope of this article, in which I largely focus, in a more basic way, on the processes of perception at play in Graham's work.

Dan Graham's 1975 performance work *Performance/Audience/Mirror* illustrates the impossibility of maintaining a neutral standpoint during perception.¹⁵ Instead, his performative actions cumulatively show a constant intertwining of multiple viewpoints, brought about by the operations of social dynamics made manifest through the formal device of the mirror. The work comprises a mirror on one wall, with viewers facing it, and Graham performing between the mirror and the viewers. The work proceeds through four stages, each containing unrehearsed observations of small physical actions. First, Graham describes his physical stance and minute actions while directly facing the audience. Next, he shifts to describing the audience while facing them. Third, he turns to face the mirror and describes himself while observing himself in the mirror.

Finally, while still facing the mirror, he describes the audience as he observes them in the mirror. Proceeding from the proximal observation of his own movement to the more distanced observation of others' reflections, Graham appears as a vector through whom observations pass, rather than as a performer who originates the event. The vocal cataloguing of movements has a quasi-scientific quality to it, inviting impressions of neutrality.



Dan Graham, *Performer/Audience/Mirror*, 1977. De Appel Arts Center, Amsterdam. Courtesy of Dan Graham and Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris.

However, on closer examination the work discloses the impossibility of neutral observation of others: what Graham notices and voices about himself and others' movements is necessarily laced with the particularities of his own subject position. Moreover, by the fourth stage of the work, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify who is the performer and who is the audience. It may be Graham who is noticing and naming movements, postures, and attitudes of others as he perceives them in the mirrored reflection, but by this point, the audience is accustomed to the performative set-up and can choose to be still or to contribute movement to be noticed and named. Graham's voiced observations are necessarily temporally offset from the visual experience: a lag emerges between vision and description. Audience members might observe themselves instantaneously through the visual medium of the mirror, then hear themselves described moments later through Graham's observation of them. This dynamic may start to sound familiar to those who have spent immense amounts of hours in Zoom conferencing in recent months.¹⁶ The correlations deepen in a subsequent work by Graham.

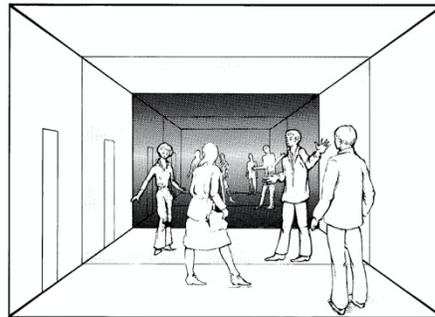
In his first architectural installation, *Public Space, Two Audiences* (1976), Graham used a two-way mirror, acoustically insulated and fitted snugly to the walls of the gallery space, dividing it into two rooms entered through each end. One of the rooms contains an additional mirror on the back wall. The audience sees a reflection of themselves, as well as seeing through the glass to the other side where other audience members are doing the same dual looking. Effectively the viewers on either side become performers for

each other, at the same time as they watch themselves watching. Graham describes it thus: "they are in a showcase situation, and what's on display is peoples' perceptual processes [...] people see each other in a group seeing themselves and seeing each other."¹⁷ Importantly, there is no vantage point on the work that sits outside this structure: one has to be in either room in order to experience it. This suggests the impossibility of escaping surveillance: in order to view, one has to be on view for others.

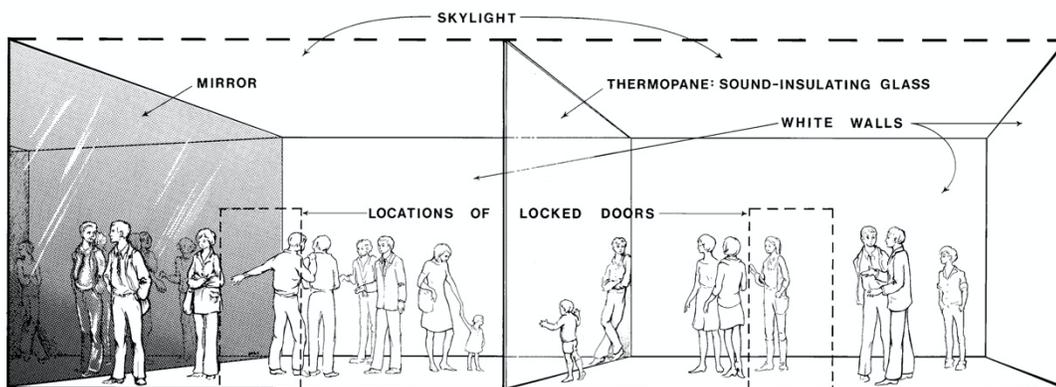
PUBLIC SPACE / TWO AUDIENCES

THE PIECE IS ONE OF MANY PAVILIONS LOCATED IN AN INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBIT WITH A LARGE AND ANONYMOUS PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE.

SPECTATORS CAN ENTER THE WORK THROUGH EITHER OF TWO ENTRANCES. THEY ARE INFORMED BEFORE ENTERING THAT THEY MUST REMAIN INSIDE FOR 30 MINUTES WITH THE DOORS CLOSED.



EACH AUDIENCE SEES THE OTHER AUDIENCE'S VISUAL BEHAVIOR, BUT IS ISOLATED FROM THEIR AURAL BEHAVIOR. EACH AUDIENCE IS MADE MORE AWARE OF ITS OWN VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS. IT IS ASSUMED THAT AFTER A TIME, EACH AUDIENCE WILL DEVELOP A SOCIAL COHESION AND GROUP IDENTITY.



Dan Graham, diagram of *Public Space/Two Audiences*, 1976. Courtesy of Dan Graham and Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris.

Albu notes that far from being enamored by mirrors, Graham was suspicious of them, considering them to be "symbols of stagnation and control."¹⁸ Rather than the straightforward narcissism implied by simple mirrors, Graham's two-way mirrors plunge the viewer into intense visual relationships with others, enmeshing self and other in a complex web of imagery. Albu argues that *Public Space, Two Audiences* promoted a sense of belonging to a "diffuse collectivity" generating "affective alliances" that served to reach through the mirror interface.¹⁹ Although there was no outside vantage point, the ambiguity of the two-way mirror allowed curious viewers to modify their images relative to others through proximity and distance, and to gain agency through instigating gestural threads of non-verbal communication. Viewers initially looked at

each other through the mirror and then started to creatively interact with each other's gestures. In the context of Graham's installation, Albu calls this movement impulse "affective attunement."²⁰ Precise accounts of the movement interaction are not available, but it can be surmised that an element of mimesis came into play. That is, the basic impulse to achieve synchrony with another person gives rise to imitation of gesture, posture, and facial expression. As discussed, in the Zoom situation the medium's imperfections frustrate our attempts at synchrony, resulting in fatigue. In the context of *Public Space, Two Audiences* the attempt at synchrony is reliant on a viewer on the other side choosing to play along, emphasizing the contingency of communication. In describing the quality of affective attunement, Albu cites Graham's own formulation of the experience: "While the glass-partition on one hand places a distance between opposing spectators, on the other hand, the co-presence on the mirror of the two groups' bodies and the visual image of their process of looking make for an extreme visual inter-subjective intimacy."²¹



Dan Graham, *Public Space/Two Audiences*, 1976. Courtesy of Dan Graham and Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris.

In *Public Space, Two Audiences*, the two-way mirror created two white zones that were identical except that one housed an additional mirror. Dancing in the Zoomosphere, Graham's two rooms become the living rooms or even bedrooms of performers, directors, choreographers, teachers, and audience members. Gone is the supposed neutrality of the white-walled gallery space: instead, the Zoom interface opens directly onto intimate private spheres. As I will explore below, this casts Graham's "extreme visual inter-subjective intimacy" in a new light.

Performative interactions in the Zoomosphere

When using Zoom for dance experiences, the video interface has some structural properties similar to the two performative installation works of Graham's I have described thus far. I suggest that the Zoom interface becomes something like Graham's two-way mirror: we see the other performer(s) at the same time that we see ourselves seeing them. Take for example, the situation of a choreographer working one-on-one with a dancer via Zoom. If the dancer wants to remain in the camera's frame so that the choreographer can see her, she needs to dance in relation to the image of herself dancing, in a sense dancing *to* her own image at the same time that she sees the image

of the choreographer observing her. Of course, trained dancers are accustomed to moving with equal attention to sensation and form, but the crude mirror mechanism of Zoom heightens the dual operation.

In a conversation on 11 September 2020 about the communication of choreographic ideas via Zoom during lockdown, Melbourne choreographer Sandra Parker noted that the experience prompted her to ask: "What do you need to know? Not everything." She was referring to developing a new piece with dancers she has worked with extensively over many years. If she gave a task, and the dancers slipped out of the camera's frame in the act of responding to the task, she filled in the information that was missing:

I am so practiced at looking at the moving body that I can tell, from the angle of a shoulder, for example, where the arm might be emanating into the off-screen space. This practiced way of predicting bodily movement driven by rhythm, space and the body's weight was coupled with my memory of the movement already set. I can just keep going because I don't have to worry that I need to see everything. [...] how much of the material that we're working with is actually visual anyway?

I wondered if Zoom perhaps forces this re-alignment of perceptual priorities, if, in the absence of visual information, other perceptual modes come to the fore to allow the choreography to continue. Parker agreed: "yes, otherwise you'd be constantly asking the dancer to re-orientate, to put themselves in the center of the frame." Perhaps Zoom here functions as a two-way mirror as in Graham's work, but also as a container for holding an embodied situation in place, in the way one might speak of 'holding the room' in a group improvisational context.

The situation Parker describes is very much predicated on knowing the dancers well, on a shared prior history that informs the Zoom encounter. The situation of being plunged into teaching via Zoom with students one does not know well, if at all, provokes a different set of priorities to emerge. In teaching choreography to first year students at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, who had only had two weeks of face-to-face learning prior to going into isolation and remote learning, Parker focused on problematizing the idea of the visual when copying movement. Given that students were spending so much of their time looking at dance on screens, Parker asked them to interrogate what they were looking at and how it could be put to work choreographically, opening up expectations of what could be derived from the flat visual plane.

Working in pairs via breakout rooms in Zoom, some students chose to incorporate the lags and glitches brought about by their variable internet speeds and insert these artifacts into their choreographies. This is a potent example of Susan Broadhurst's claim that mediated contexts spawn alternative ways of constructing meaning.²² Students Aimee Raitman and Samakshi Sidhu described their approach thus:

Our short video piece reflects our surrender to the volatile and unpredictable cyberspace we have inhabited over the past 6 months. When we first began working together on this we found that many of our choreographic and movement choices unintentionally mimicked the frustrating glitches we often face on zoom during our daily practices in uni. Rather than trying to fight these impulses, and imagine ourselves back in a studio setting, we wanted to embody our new reality, and find comfort in the perfect, yet sometimes frustratingly imperfect, pixels on our screen. Often we see a glitch as being a difficulty that needs to be overcome during zoom rehearsals, so, through filming our piece [...] we transformed these chance occurrences into deliberate and considered events, reimagining them as vital to the choreography.²³

The students' experience resonates with Kerry Francksen's descriptions of mediated environments from the perspective of the dancer. She discusses a situation in which the dancer improvises live in relation to a projected image of that same improvisation, digitally manipulated or treated. It is clearly a different set-up to working choreographically via Zoom, but the insights are strikingly resonant:

the dancers were not watching their screened presence, they were moving with the sense that their fleshy bodies were enveloped in a strange duet, which happened to cross between the live and the digital. In this way, the digital was not only informative of how and why the dancers made certain movement choices, but it also became entangled into her experience of moving.²⁴

Francksen notes that over time, the continued experience of performing in this intertwined way—this 'strange duet'—developed in the dancers a sense of subjectivity that inhabits the virtual and the material simultaneously.²⁵ Francksen is referring here to Matthew Causey's concept of the biovirtual.²⁶ Biovirtual kinesthesia is an apt description of the skill developed by dancers like the first year students Parker worked with, who spent large parts of every day learning dance technique and composition via Zoom from March to November 2020, constantly in a 'strange duet' with their virtual selves imaged via the Zoom camera.

Working with the same group of first year students some months later under renewed conditions of lockdown and curfew, Parker began their choreographic process by asking them to look anew at the world they were in. They cataloged the spaces in which they were choreographing, their bedrooms and living rooms, in the style of Georges Perec's auditing of the contents of his desk, to derive material that could be sampled, re-contextualized, and repeated in duet format. Similar to the students' approach of incorporating video artifacts into their choreography, this task recasts or subverts the difficulties of the medium. The confined physical spaces of lockdown, and the Zoomosphere's collapsing of the discrete spaces for learning, sleeping, eating, and

dancing, are countered by the expansive, generative task of rigorously auditing one's surroundings, mining it for content. This information is then offered to a partner as material in the creation of a duet to be performed together via Zoom.

Thinking back to Graham's "extreme visual inter-subjective intimacy" brought about through the two-way mirror, Parker's deliberate use of the intimate rooms of the Zoomosphere resonates with Robert Enright and Meeka Walsh's description of Graham's pavilions of glass and mirror. They describe the "double hook" operating in his perceptual structures, noting that the viewer is simultaneously "accessing information and being information."²⁷

In conditions of lockdown, dancers in the Australian Dance Theatre (ADT) were paired up with independent choreographers and musicians to create new short works via video conferencing.²⁸ *The World's Smallest Stage* matched 10 choreographers with 12 dancers and 10 composers for the new works, made in living room sized areas of 2m x 2m. The works were later converted into live performances at the Odeon Theatre in Adelaide in October 2020, but their initial public outing was as pre-recorded single shot videos made available through the company's Facebook page several months prior, and it is this earlier public sharing that is of interest here.

The videos display a range of traces of the video conferencing platform that was their mode of production: to varying degrees, these traces have been incorporated into the aesthetic of the works. ADT is renowned for the athleticism of its dancers, so one of the primary traces of the Zoom mechanism was the tight and often tense physical confinement of the dancers. Additionally, these are not dances shot from multiple angles and edited into screendance works. The single point of view for most of these videos echoes the choreographer's perspective of viewing each dancer from the mutual position of social isolation via Zoom or other video conferencing software. The point of view is that of a computer's camera propped on a chair, angled to capture all the action. The use of available light, or choice to restrict natural light by closing blinds or curtains, is similarly an aesthetic familiar to those who have spent many hours on Zoom during the health crisis.

Theatre scholar William Peterson interviewed some of the dancers and choreographers involved in the project to understand how choreographic communication shifted in the transition to the remote situation.²⁹ From the dancers' perspective, a common theme was that working remotely via video conferencing honed a sharper experience of what was happening 'on the inside,' meaning the feeling of the movement rather than the look of it. Ultimately what stood out to Peterson was the impact of the reduced scale of movement. Peterson recounts dancer Rowan Rossi's comment that when he moves, he usually tries to take up as much space as possible. Working in a confined space meant he had to occupy space differently, shifting the scale of communication by "embellishing smaller gestures."³⁰

Rossi, in “Shapeless/Formless” by Felicity Boyd, dances with rosy velvet cushions in the shape of spheres and a pyramid.³¹ These enigmatic, domestic objects become unlikely dance partners and a means of extending the reach of Rossi’s gestures, in the absence of large-scale movement. As with many of the pieces in *The World’s Smallest Stage*, the camera’s point of view is that of the absent choreographer: we see the dancer’s interior domestic space as though in rehearsal, and with it comes a hint of voyeurism, recalling Graham’s claim that two-way mirrors engender an extreme visual inter-subjective intimacy. As if to counter this effect, Boyd and Rossi have attempted to neutralize or clean up the domestic a little, hanging a white sheet like a theatre scrim across a wall that may have been too domestic, distracting, or simply private.

By contrast, Matt Shilcock’s choreography “Preliminary” with Kimball Wong utilises the ready-made aesthetic of an emptied-out garage, a space used by others across the globe as a makeshift studio during the health crisis. Wong unpacks worn, tessellated foam tiles to create the requisite 2m X 2m space, and to allow movement that a concrete surface would inhibit. Accompanied by electric guitar, his movements are reminiscent of a caged animal pacing and raging against its restriction. Yet he is complicit in his restriction, shown in the compliance with which he folds up his tessellated squares at the end of the piece, reducing his available space to a messy pile of foam tiles on which he squats, energy spent for now. As Peterson noted in Zoom conversation with me on 9 December 2020, the muscular tension within some of these performances of restriction “speaks to our own experiences of containment” during recent periods of lockdown.

End Meeting for All, by UK theatre company Forced Entertainment, similarly speaks to the viewer’s own experiences of containment, but in an entirely different way. The project took shape in the early days of lockdown in the UK in the form of three short, improvised Zoom meetings, streamed by PACT Zollverein from 28 April until 30 June 2020.³² With the company’s planned rehearsals and performances put on indefinite hold, the company members dialled into Zoom meetings from London, Sheffield and Berlin. Although the meetings were not initially intended as creative developments, director Tim Etchells soon realised that company members were “slowly starting to understand the Zoom grid as a kind of stage.”³³ The work trades on viewers’ familiarity with the vagaries of the Zoomosphere, using its perceptual structures as primary content. The three episodes are Zoom meetings recorded in one take in gallery view, each performer occupying a rectangle in the grid.

The episodes appear as rehearsals for a work that never quite arrives. Some performers spend entire episodes on the periphery of the action, waiting for a signal from the others that they can be seen and heard. Claire Marshall, on the other hand, has worked up some melodramatic content to try out, donning a messy grey wig and telling the others she is using it to indicate that she has been in quarantine a very, very long time. Claire’s desire to get some dramatic content up and running and her frustrated attempts to find an audience for it is the through line of the fragmentary episodes. However hard and by

whatever means Claire tries to reach through the Zoom interface towards her co-performers, Cathy Naden thwarts her, declaring that her screen is frozen or that she (Claire) cannot be heard at all. Regarding Graham's *Performance/Audience/Mirror*, I described how by the fourth stage of the work, the roles of performer and audience became productively ambiguous and intertwined. In *End Meeting for All*, Cathy's usurping of Zoom's communicative failures to thwart Claire's melodrama begs the question of whether a performance exists at all if the attendees of one's Zoom meeting cannot or will not bear witness to the event.

Theatre scholar Barbara Fuchs comments on the work's use of Zoom for metatheatrical purposes: the various narratives carried forward by the performers provide the opportunity to comment on how performance communicates and miscommunicates, and the Zoom medium's glitches, lags and tedium are used to explore this. Further, Fuchs notes:

The metatheatricality is in fact enhanced by Zoom, as the fourth wall is multiplied several times over. In their windows, each performer becomes a separate audience for the others, with varying degrees of engagement. In addition to thematizing the technological failures of communication, the grid reminds us that some participants are just not interested or simply unable to engage with the shared project.³⁴

A recurrent theme of the work is sadness, with Terry O'Connor drinking gin for the duration and commenting that it is good to let the sadness out. Cathy says she is feeling sad and splashes water under her eyes to let the other performers know just how sad she is. While the work's claustrophobia and pathos undoubtedly speak to others' experiences of lockdown, the strong emphasis on these emotions paradoxically highlights the privilege involved in being able to socially isolate.

Etchells commented that "the grid of screens brought together different partially connected realities in different cities, the screen a kind of membrane or imperfect portal between worlds" (2020). Regarding Graham's *Public Space: Two Audiences*, I discussed Albu's concept of affective attunement as a descriptor of the relationships between viewers provoked by Graham's two-way mirror. Albu suggests that affective attunement with others across the mirrored interface is the means by which the work gives rise to a diffuse collectivity. In *End Meeting for All*, the collectivity enacted by the performers in the Zoom situation is particularly diffuse. At times, performers attempt to tune in to another's state of mind by reading each other's facial cues and posture, noticing when someone seems distressed, for example. At other times, communicative cues are deliberately ignored, calling to mind the fact that in Graham's installation, affective attunement relied upon another viewer choosing to join the kinesthetic conversation from the other side of the mirror.

Conclusion

In this article, I have given some examples of ways that artists have experimented, in their given modalities, with structures of perception. Graham's oeuvre seeks to expand perceptual awareness beyond passive, introspective contemplation of the art object. Instead, his installations oscillate between multiple perspectives and only come fully into being through the viewer's participation. As Albu suggests, such work frames "contexts for seeing ourselves seeing and acting as part of precarious collectivities."³⁵ The kinesthetic collectivities of the Zoomosphere are both urgent and precarious: we are driven to join Zoom meetings at the same time that our perceptual systems struggle with them. The two-way mirrors of both Zoom interactions and Graham's installations invite reflection on the interpersonal nature of perception: ultimately, they also invite reflection on the ways subjectivity itself is sourced from and is responsive to a plethora of shifting cues and interactions. At times, they do so through failure, such as when no one responds to one's gesture in *Public Space, Two Audiences*, or the Zoom interface fails, leaving one's utterances stranded in the void. As Enright and Walsh remind us, in Graham's stripped back perceptual scenarios, the "process of shifting apprehension is one way of measuring the loss and rediscovery of self and other that is central to the experiential impact of Graham's pavilions, whether they are inside a gallery or outside in a garden or a sculpture park. You are involved, willy-nilly, in an architecture of self-consciousness."³⁶

Graham's two-way mirrors and Etchell's characterisation of Zoom as an imperfect portal between two worlds recall developmental stages long since incorporated into tacit understandings of being in a world with others. Lacan's theorisation of the mirror phase as constitutive of the infant's understanding of their relatedness to others is of course a developmental structure vastly prior to any engagement with the perceptual structure of two-way mirrors via visual art or Zoom interfaces. Two-way mirrors and Zoom are thus not only experiments with perceptual structures: they are also an invitation to remember our constitutive enmeshment with others. In the deep midwinter of lockdown, a friend messaged me a short video of her three-year-old son who was squatting in the grass looking at a chicken. Boy and chicken were both stock still, locked in each other's gaze. She asked him, "What are you doing, Ned?" to which he replied, "I'm looking at a chicken looking at me."

Biography

Siobhan Murphy is a dance artist and academic based in Melbourne. Her practice focuses on screendance works for single channel and gallery installation outcomes, with works screened in festivals and museums in cities throughout Australia and New

Zealand, as well as London, Tokyo, Buenos Aires, Lisbon and Edinburgh. Her recent scholarly and artistic research centers on dance portraiture, with her portrait of Joanne White screened at the London International Screendance Festival in 2019, and her portrait of Alice Cummins at Melbourne's DanceLens in 2021. Her article on [screendance portraiture](#) examines the productive counterpoints of the portraiture tradition and builds toward an emergent framework for understanding how screendance portraits function. Siobhan is a Lecturer in Dance at the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, where she teaches and supervises dance theory and practice-led research.

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Notes

¹ "Dan Graham: Beyond."

² Andrew Hines and Phoebe Sun, "Zoom fatigue."

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ André Spicer, "Finding endless video calls exhausting?"

⁶ Bailenson in Betsy Morris, "Why Does Zoom Exhaust You?"

⁷ Spicer.

⁸ Matthew K. Miller, et al, "Through the Looking Glass."

⁹ Shuffler in Manyu Jiang, "The reason Zoom calls drain your energy."

¹⁰ Petriglieri in Jiang.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Morris in Sarah Kaufman, "Morris, one of the world's leading choreographers"

¹³ Morris in Mark Morris Dance Group, "Dance On!"

¹⁴ Cristina Albu, *Mirror Affect*, 110.

¹⁵ See https://youtu.be/RjiLZ_AOtOA for footage of Graham's 1975 performance and <https://youtu.be/Gi7y5vDErZI> for footage of the Body Cartography Project's interpretation of the piece at the Walker Center in 2009.

¹⁶ Temporally offsetting experience and perception was minutely explored by Graham in a 1974 work, *Opposing Mirror and Video Monitors*, though his work with video feedback is beyond the scope of this article.

¹⁷ "Dan Graham: Beyond."

¹⁸ Albu, 111.

¹⁹ Ibid. 138.

²⁰ Ibid. 149.

²¹ Graham in Ibid. 149.

²² Susan Broadhurst, *Digital Practices*, 15.

²³ Aimee Raitman and Samakshi Sidhu, "Presentation of student work."

²⁴ Kerry Francksen, "The Implications of Technology in Dance," 74.

²⁵ Ibid. 60.

²⁶ Matthew Causey, "General Introduction."

²⁷ Robert Enright and Meeka Walsh, "Dan Graham: Mirror Complexities."

²⁸ Australian Dance Theatre, *The World's Smallest Stage*.

²⁹ William Peterson, "The World's Smallest Stage."

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ ADT kindly shared the videos with me that were made publicly available on the company's Facebook page. They are no longer available for public viewing.

³² Forced Entertainment, "End Meeting for All."

³³ Tim Etchells, "Falling into Place."

³⁴ Barbara Fuchs, "End Meeting for All."

³⁵ Albu, 1.

³⁶ Enright and Walsh.

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Screendance in the Wake of Screened Dance: Moving Forward Through Interactive Video

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Abstract

This paper argues that screendance has always had a potential for interactivity, looks specifically at interactive video, and tracks its history through video art and video games. Taking into account the higher volume of dance that is migrating to the screen as a result of the Coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic, it also suggests a new term, screened dance, to differentiate those dances and dance events which otherwise would have been live and co-present. Bringing together a transmedia screendance work that unfolded on social media, and interactive narrative works currently available to stream on Netflix, I argue that the innovations and adaptation in the delivery of dance content due to lockdowns imposed by Covid-19, have provided an opportunity for the possibility of interactive screendance.

Keywords: interactive video, video games, screened dance, Covid-19, social media

Screendance has always had a potential for interactivity, but this paper argues that this potential has rarely been realized and accessed on a mass scale. Departing from this idea I will look to argue that the higher volume of dance that is migrating to the screen as a result of the Coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic, and subsequent enforced lockdown, offers an opportunity for screendance to distinguish itself from other dance practices and enhance the practice via the inclusion of interactivity. For the purposes of this paper, lockdown will refer to the time between late March and approximately early June 2020 in the United Kingdom, although it is still ongoing in some form as this paper is being written.

Looking specifically at interactive video and tracking its history through video art and video games to its place in mainstream streaming culture, I hope to bring together the development of interactive performance and the ways in which these speak to interactive video specifically. I have included video games in this discussion as they developed parallel to interactive video and hope that this will aid in bringing together performance and entertainment theories and practices, situating interactive video and



the possibility of interactive screendance. By examining these other practices I hope to be able to provide not only a historical context, but as is often necessary when discussing emerging art forms, to also borrow their language to aid the discussion.

I would also like to suggest a new term to differentiate those dances and dance events which underwent mass-migration to screen space in the Covid era which otherwise would have been live and co-present; in this paper I refer to these performances, classes, and festivals as *screened dance*. I hope that this naming illustrates screened dance's relation and similarities to screendance practice, but still positions it as departure from existing understandings of the term. Additionally, labeling these works and events highlights their importance to the current screendance landscape.

In the final section of this paper, I will examine works from dance and film that take place across the web, social media and streaming platforms. Primarily, I will look at the 2015 transmedia work by Lea Anderson and Marisa Zanotti, *The Pan's People Papers*,¹ and consider two mainstream narrative interactive works, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*,^{2,3} and *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Kimmy vs. the Reverend*⁴ to examine how techniques used in them might be translated into a screendance space. By incorporating these techniques, I hope that it might be possible to differentiate screendance from other practices, and contend with the ever changing digital landscape by further interrogating the ways in which screendance works are presented.

Screendance or Screened Dance?

Defining and naming screendance is something that has been debated since the name's inception, but for the purposes of this paper I will be aligning my definition with Douglas Rosenberg's, as an "experiment with choreographic form as well as the formal structure of filmmaking itself, altering camera placement, shot composition, and visual space to find the most efficient and esthetic methods of framing movement."⁵ Screendance then, is the practice of creating dance explicitly for the screen, whereas I suggest 'screened dance' is something else. I would define screened dance as work that was not primarily intended for the screen, but which has migrated to screen space as a necessity.

This is not the first time that scholars have tried to explain the differences between what I am referring to as screendance and screened dance. Vera Maletic made the argument in the *Dance Research Journal* of Winter 1987-88, "that a distinction must finally be made between video dance and video taped dance."⁶ Maletic goes on to describe video dance as "a blending of structural and perceptual elements intrinsic to dance and the media," whereas video taped dance is shot as a "record tape in place of the dance score."⁷ As we have moved away from analogue video recording to a digital screen, I hope that the move from 'video dance' to 'screendance' can also be made from 'video taped dance' to 'screened dance.' In essence, I would say that screendance is made for the screen, and if you take the screen away the work would no longer remain. Screened dance is work

that has come to the fore in its migration to screen space because of the closure of theaters and dance settings and although it is currently prolific—as Maletic’s analysis shows it already existed in some form prior to the pandemic—this work can and likely will easily return to a live space.

To further parse the distinction between screendance and screened dance, I would like to highlight the first show on Sadler’s Wells’s ‘digital stage’: *BalletBoyz – Deluxe* (2020) launched on Friday 27 March 2020, in celebration of World Theatre Day. The digital stage gave a platform for Sadler’s Wells to stream recordings of a variety of work, available for a seven-day period. I am singling this show out in particular as it involves works of screendance and screened dance. The first work in the trilogy is a screendance work by Sarah Golding, *The Intro* (2020). The six ‘Boyz’ in white boiler suits, take over a black box space, vying for attention from each other and the audience. The proximity of the dancers to the camera, the cutting of camera angles to the movement and the music, the dancers interacting with the camera and ending by looking directly into the lens to meet the audience members’ gaze, are all techniques available when making a screendance work. Billed as a ‘short dance film,’ this work was never intended to be performed live, and was due to be shown as a film on the live tour. It is clear that producers Michael Nunn and William Trevitt have separated it from the two works that follow.

Ripple (chor. Xie Xin) and *Bradley 4.18* (chor. Maxine Doyle)⁸ are filmed versions of existing stage works and by my suggestion, are examples of screened dance. They both rely on two cameras recording simultaneously, one from the back of the auditorium and one from the front side stage. The cameras do not move, and are often out of focus or over-exposed, suggesting that these works were not primarily intended to be shown as films, but are rather what Maletic has described as a “record tape in place of the dance score” made available due to the imposed lockdown. By placing these works next to each other it is easier to see the distinction that I am making between choreography made explicitly for the screen, and work that was intended for the live stage that has migrated to screen space through necessity. As of the time of writing, *The Intro* is still available to watch on YouTube, whereas the other works that were screened as part of the digital stage are no longer available, further suggesting that these screened dance works were not intended to replace the live performance.

Screened dance, I suggest, has an inherent potential for interactivity and has already begun training audiences to interact with media, priming them for interactivity. Here I am referencing the dance classes available online, the ‘digital stages’ that some theaters have established to stream past productions, or even Zoom meetings dance communities have set up in order to meet digitally. These screened dance activities have to be searched out and searched for by audience members, but more importantly, perhaps through analogy of their co-present versions, they promote an active and interactive style of viewing and a base for more ‘devised’ interactivity, beginning to unpair interactivity and narrative. You are able to take a class (active) at a time that suits you

(inter-active). You can join a live streaming of a work from a theatre (active) or you can watch it later; pausing, rewinding or fast forwarding as you wish (inter-active).⁹ And in the case of Zoom meetings or live classes on other platforms, you can interact with other people on the call through your camera, microphone, chat functions, or reactions. These aspects of interactivity can be heightened when performances are only streamed for a short period of time, increasing the 'want' to search them out and helping to keep some of the ephemerality of live performance. As interactive works are predicated on choice, you might not watch the same work if you revisited it and chose a different path, just as a live work will not be exactly the same in every performance; as described by Matthew Reason, "performance passes in time; [...] it has no physical durability or permanence; [...] its existence is temporary."¹⁰ A film, on the other hand, will repeat without change to the footage or edit, so interactivity may bridge the gap between permanence and ephemerality.

I have already highlighted how screened dance lends itself to some notions of interactivity in terms of 'active' and 'inter-active,' however I would suggest that screendance does not share this relationship quite as intrinsically. You may have to search for a screendance work, perhaps find a screendance festival in the same way as you might search out any form of performance, but that is where I contend the interactivity usually stops. Screendance, especially in the gallery and festival context, like many forms of Western concert dance and theatre, often allows you to just sit and watch, and can be 'escapist,' inviting audience members to enjoy and be entertained.¹¹ In the next section, I discuss how streaming sites have developed interactive content and how screendance has begun to investigate interactivity, but I find that the majority of current screendance practice aligns itself with more traditional forms of film in terms of lack of simultaneous audience interaction.

Screened dance as such, I argue, has coalesced in light of Covid-19. Necessity and ubiquity have amplified the potential of screened dance, broadly normalized what has been community-level conventions, such as screendance festivals, and made people accustomed to a certain degree of interactivity, perhaps altering the trajectory of screendance practice. I argue that this amplifying and normalizing of screened dance has in turn increased the availability of screendance, making it more accessible to a wider audience base. It is my belief then, that with new and newly trained audiences, screendance practice is ripe for developing interactivity, as some streaming sites have begun to do with television and film. In other words, the trajectory of screened dance during Covid has opened up new creative opportunities for screendance. In the following sections, I discuss the possibilities of incorporating interactive video techniques to move screendance practices forward.

Interactive video and video games in a world of streaming

Interactive video is often described in relation to a choose-your-own-adventure book,¹² where the reader is able to make narrative choices by turning to different pages at key points in the plot. Similarly, interactive video allows the viewer to make choices at key points in the work which sends them down different 'branches' which in turn affects the story arc. Interactive video has developed since the 1908s along with technology, taking the form of gallery-based work, video games, and early YouTube videos.

It is widely believed that the first work of interactive video was Lynn Hershman's *Lorna* (1984).¹³ Developed out of a frustration with video as a "one sided discourse; like a trick mirror that absorbs instead of reflects,"¹⁴ the work encourages the viewer to make "surrogate decisions"¹⁵ for the titular character through a branching design of the video disk, which leads through to multiple endings as well as multiple treatments of the video footage (sped up, slowed down, reversed etc.). Writing six years later, Hershman acutely asserts the problems with *Lorna*, particular to the drawbacks of the available technology in the mid-1980s. She suggests "[*Lorna*] is generally inaccessible. It was pressed in a limited edition of twenty-five, of which only fourteen now exist. It is only occasionally installed in galleries or museums. Creating a truly interactive work demands that it exists on a mass scale, available and accessible to many people."¹⁶ In the near 40 years since *Lorna* was first pressed onto disk, technology has taken strides forwards in how interactive video is produced and 'performed,' particularly with the development of digital technologies. These developments have turned the inaccessible, small scale production into a mass market for anyone with a smart phone and an internet connection.

The narrative-led video game is a very clear form of interactive video. So named because of the live action video clips that link the stages of game play, narrative-led video games have become a staple of entertainment¹⁷ and have been further developed for game streaming services and platforms. They have developed beyond 'story mode' to a 'free play' where the player is able to make their own decisions in the world that their animated self (avatar) inhabits. This development from live action clips used to link sections to a fully realized CGI world has enabled many more 'branches' to emerge within a story, giving the player "considerable control over the text and its narrative."¹⁸ Taking into account the development of video games and how this has informed the establishment of interactive video through streaming services and multimedia traversable software,¹⁹ it is possible to see how by building on clear user navigation, it might play a part in interactive art and the possibilities of interactive screendance.

A strong narrative directed by video clips placed within game play, and a clear technique for the player to interact and affect the game play, it is logical to see the initial links between video games and interactive video. The first laser disk video game *Astron Belt*,²⁰ was released in 1982, around a similar time as *Lorna* was being developed. So popular was this style of video game, that it spawned further games through the 1980s

and 90s, with live action scenes linking together stages as you progressed through the game's narrative. Developing through VHS tapes, CD-ROMs as they were embedded into home computers, and on to DVDs and blu-rays (some as companions to board games),²¹ the way that these narrative style games were marketed, sold and mass-produced specifically for the home differentiates them from the interactive video art which relied on installation in galleries or museums.

YouTube has become a leader in video streaming since its inception in 2005. Championing 'indie creators' (content creators that are independent from big production companies) as well as being utilized as a vlogging platform, it had a brief stint as a platform for interactive video. In 2008 it developed 'annotations,' clickable images or text that would encourage audiences to make a choice at a particular point in the video.²² Using this feature, American filmmaking trio Chad Villella, Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Rob Polonsky, known collectively as Chad, Matt & Rob, created a series of five *Interactive Adventures* between 2008 and 2011.²³ Directly linking back to the idea of the choose-your-own-adventure book, audience members navigated through the story making choices that would then lead to a different video. In 2019 YouTube announced that they were bringing an end to annotations, and removing all annotations in previously published videos.²⁴ YouTube developed Cards and End Screens that had mobile functionality to meet with increased use of YouTube on mobile devices, as annotations were not accessible on mobile. Although they act in a similar way, they do not have the same in-video experience that annotations gave. Other platforms have since been developed; the most similar to YouTube in terms of free access to publishing is Eko.²⁵ Developed as a software for the construction of 'multimedia traversable video trees,' Eko streams in a similar way to YouTube, creating a software that is as accessible to indie creators and to broad audiences.

Mirroring Hershman's assertion that true interactivity comes with wide reach, video game popularity and interactivity accelerated with their availability in the home and on personal and mobile gaming devices, and video-sharing sites are attempting to follow the same trajectory. These other forms of interactive entertainment developed in parallel to screendance and its move to a digital format. I suggest that similarly there will be a wider audience for interactive video, and interactive screendance in particular, as works become more mobile friendly and more easily available, allowing audience members to create their own narratives and other more individual experiences of the work.

Interactivity, Performance and Social Media

In this final section I will discuss *The Pan's People Papers* (2015), a transmedia²⁶ work by Lea Anderson and Marisa Zanotti, alongside *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018) and *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Kimmy vs. the Reverend* (2020), two feature films, as mainstream examples of interactive video. While these are narrative works without

dance in them, they are worth analyzing in this context because audiences are likely to have engaged with them. Looking at the works for their formal and technical aspects allows for them to serve as models for how interactivity may be applied to screendance practice.

The Pan's People Papers (2015) is a multi-platform transmedia work by filmmaker Marisa Zanotti and choreographer Lea Anderson. It explores the work of Flick Colby and the 1970s dance group, Pan's People. Pan's People was a British all-female dance troupe who appeared on the BBC TV chart music show *Top of the Pops* from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. *The Pan's People Papers* imagines the Greek Gods, Pan and Echo, as choreographer and dancer alongside the fictional multi-national Pan Global. Coupled with videos on YouTube, it is now an online archive.²⁷ Taking place in real time over a three-day period, audiences were invited to search out the posts from across Pan's and Echo's feeds on Twitter, and discover how these characters were interacting, while piecing together prophecies and short screendance choreographies of "Pan's Revels at the Woods" as part of the first paper, "A Legion of Echoes."²⁸

From *The Pan's People Papers*, it is possible to see how the notion of choose-your-own-adventure has taken on a different form. Unlike interactive video or video games, the narrative is not set out for you, but rather there for you to discover. Although the posts and videos unfolded in real time, it would be unlikely that audience members would experience it in the same way if it was presented on a single platform or as a single screen work. It does, however, show what is possible in terms of breaking up a narrative form, and what this can afford to the practice of screendance. Although the work developed in real time, it was not 'live' in the literal sense as the posts and films had been planned and prerecorded, but it had a feeling of risk²⁹ and individual experience as each audience member would have discovered the work at a different rate. Had audience members missed a post, or seen a video not in the intended order, this may have affected the narrative that the audience member was constructing. Liveness is something that has often been argued is missing from film and thus impacts on its risk, or spontaneity. Philip Auslander argues that "liveness [is] the one aspect of theatrical presentation that film could not replicate,"³⁰ whereas interactive video re-introduces the possibility of risk, primarily by making 'mistakes,' something which is very much possible with live performance. I will return to the idea of making mistakes in interactive video when discussing the mainstream narrative interactive works below.

I have looked at this work, as it goes some way to distinguish screendance from other forms of dance and film, because although you interact with the work through text-based social platform posts, short films were also released over the three-day duration of the work and the final 'pay off' was a more traditional style of screendance with the work *A Legion of Echos*. In this way, it is possible to see how we might marry together known screendance practice of "experiment[ing] with choreographic form as well as the formal structure of filmmaking itself,"³¹ while using the intersection of digital technology to move the practice of screendance forward.

Many scholars have discussed the “myth of choice”³² in interactive video; with interactivity we are given a choice, however this choice is constrained by the options provided by the choreographer and/or director. Therefore, the choice carries an element of myth as the choices made have ultimately been predetermined. Despite the predetermination, risk may still be felt by users in an interactive video. An audience member’s choices can pivot the arc of the narrative or lead to an ‘out,’ one of many multiple endings which may lengthen or shorten the runtime. In interactive videos currently available, the way that audience member’s choices might pivot the narrative or lead to an out has been treated in a number of ways. An out is the point at which audience members can exit the interactive video, similar to the way you might end a video game by completing the story. Narrative pivot points, often presented as an A/B or A/B/C choice via on-screen text, are more reminiscent of reaching a save point in a video game. Save points are moments within long-form narrative video games at which your progress can be saved and then returned to, such as when your avatar is defeated, or after a break in gameplay; at a pivot point, a choice is made which leads to a different branch of the narrative.

Black Mirror: Bandersnatch and *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Kimmy vs. the Reverend* are both interactive episodes of previously successful series available on the streaming platform, Netflix. *Black Mirror* is a dystopian science fiction anthology series, and *Bandersnatch* follows Stefan Butler as he creates a video game based on a choose-your-own-adventure book of the same name. The narrative of the work matches and borrows aspects of the branching pathways and choices available to players of the fictional game, as well as audience members as they interact with the episode.

In *Bandersnatch*, the pivot points lead to five possible endings,³³ with some pivot points also working as outs. Any choice made which could be described as a ‘mistake,’ such as a choice which results in the death of a character, will allow you to either end the story at that point or go back to your last choice in order to amend your selection. These earlier choices, which are more like save points, allow audiences the chance to make ‘mistakes’ as a way of learning how the interactive video operates.³⁴ I previously suggested that these different outs could lengthen or shorten the run time, and this is true of *Bandersnatch*. At its shortest, it is reported to be around 40 minutes, with an average run time of 90 minutes.³⁵

Building on the success of *Bandersnatch*, Netflix released *Kimmy vs. the Reverend* in 2020 during the Covid-19 lockdown. Billed as the interactive finale to the story of Kimmy Schmidt who was held in a cult-esque bunker by the Reverend who tells her that life on earth has been destroyed, this is Netflix’s first attempt at a comedic interactive video. *Kimmy vs. the Reverend* treats pivot points and outs in a much simpler way. Each time you select an ‘incorrect’ answer, you are shown the effect of your choice, before being taken back to the moment the choice was made so that you can choose the ‘correct’ option. Television critic Jen Chaney refers to the work as “plot-driven in theory but joke-driven in reality,”³⁶ and this can be seen in the treatment of the pivot points. In one

choice, audiences are asked who Kimmy should ring, and although there is a 'correct' choice which will advance the narrative, the other choices allow audience members to see different character's reactions for comedic effect, before being taken back to the point at which the choice is made. *Kimmy vs. the Reverend* in effect does not use multiple outs, but rather utilizes techniques of interactive video to provide multiple punch-lines to jokes.

Chaney makes an interesting assertion that interactive videos are usually plot-driven.³⁷ The plot-driven idea is something that has been used widely throughout video games, as well as the interactive video, or video art that is available. *Kimmy vs. the Reverend* shares some similarities with video games in its construction. As well as the choices acting as 'save points,' and an ability to explore paths without detriment, an even clearer nod to its links to video games is the ending. If you successfully get to the end of the story then you are rewarded by seeing the first choice you made come to fruition, and the words "you won!" fill the screen recalling interactive video's links to video game practice.

Looking at these different works across screendance and interactive video, I hope that by identifying the use of interactivity across these varying pieces it is possible to link interactivity to the practice of screendance

Conclusion: Interactivity in and after Screened Dance

The examples of interactive video available on Netflix that I have mentioned push the boundaries of how audience members might interact with entertainment. Mainstream narrative interactive video also mimics the mechanisms and experience of video games, as audience members can see the narrative unfolding and can more clearly understand how their choices are affecting what is being played out, as with *Kimmy vs. The Reverend* when the first choice directly affects the final scene. The developments in the narrative works I have discussed lay out the possibilities for interactive screendance, too, in order to push the boundaries of how audience members interact with choreography.

In order to translate the mechanisms of plot-driven work into a movement- or theme-driven style for screendance audiences, some specific techniques can be utilized as-is, and others will require adjustments. For example, I have looked at pivot points and outs as techniques for controlling the narrative arc of a work, but also, as in *Kimmy vs the Reverend*, as a kind of formal exploration through the inclusion of multiple punch-lines that in fact do not impact the narrative. These could also be employed in terms of a choreographic theme or movement vocabulary, similarly to how audience members had to search out the posts and videos of *The Pan's People Papers* in order to piece together the narrative being built. I have noted how interactivity could bring about a sense of risk and agency, with choices leading to an active rather than escapist audience experience.

In contrast, I would argue that changes are necessary in the way that audience members are presented with a choice. In current interactive video, you are presented with an A/B or A/B/C choice as a word or short sentence which appears on the screen, which you can then highlight and select. For movement however, this text-based choice system would not easily translate, movement descriptions likely being too long. To combat this, one suggestion may be the inclusion of gifs at these choice points. I would like to suggest the use of gifs as an extension of the idea of aesthetic glitch offered by Peter Krapp. Although Krapp does not speak directly about gifs, he does suggest that “aesthetic expressions in digital culture seek to be recognized as entirely new and inheriting the legitimacy of any serious art that preceded it”³⁸ and goes on to assert that “since cut and montage and liner prediction code, cinema and new media have revolutionized our sense of time and space.”³⁹ A gif could be seen as a visual representation of a digital glitch, making interactive screendance work both part of a generic lineage and uniquely of this moment, while also actively playing with an audience member’s sense of time and space. By sectioning off the screen, and showing audience members short repeating sections of movement that they will see after making their choice, this may go some way to translating current interactive video practice into a 21st century screendance space. This change in how audience members are presented with a choice has also been explored by Alleyne Dance in their recent piece, *(Re)United*.⁴⁰ An interactive short dance film, the work presents a choice by splitting the frame in half and placing short pieces of text over the two dancers moving in isolation. These choices allow audience members to follow either of the two dancers before they are reunited in physical space, and onscreen. This combination of text and movement allows, in part, for both a plot-driven and movement-driven choice to occur.

Innovations and adaptations in the delivery of dance content due to lockdown imposed by Covid-19 have provided an opportunity to differentiate between screendance and screened dance practice in a way that introduces nuance into the discourse and that has important implications for the possibility of interactive screendance. First, as audiences are currently more used to streaming videos and dance into their homes, it could be possible to parallel the way video games—a highly interactive screen genre—gained popularity as they were placed directly into peoples’ homes, whereas this development has largely left interactive video to gallery installations. Further, given the way screened dance has required active participation and interaction through choice, scheduling, control of speed and replay, I argue that dancers and dance audiences are primed and practiced in a kind of interactivity. I suggested that now might be the time to implement interactive video practice into screendance using this new literacy from screened dance, as some are already interacting on various platforms as delineated at the beginning of the article. Covid-19 has affected dance in myriad ways, many of them negative. However as more people are getting used to screened dance, in combination with increased time viewing screendance, as well as potentially interactive modes like video game, choose-your-own-adventure narrative episodes, and various forms of social video, the impact of Covid-19 on viewing and entertainment habits may have a

positive effect on screendance practice, interactive video being just one way of bringing screendance further out of the gallery.

Biography

Callum Anderson is a Brighton-based contemporary dance artist and screendance director. As an independent artist-scholar, his practice is heavily influenced by video technology, and the development of digital and mediated dance performance. His work is predicated on making screendance accessible to a wider non-dance community, and giving dance communities the opportunity to experiment with video technology. Working across live and digital performance, he has made work for large scale screens, portable devices and installations. Alongside an interest in technological advances in video presentation, his research focuses on the representation of men in dance and on-screen, principally the representation of queer masculinities. In January 2021 he was awarded a commission from the Sussex Dance Network which aimed to address the underrepresentation of those identifying as LGBTQ+ in the dance sector, as demonstrated in Arts Council England's most recent Equality and Diversity report. He holds a BA (Hons) in Dance and MA in Performance: Dance, from the University of Chichester, and received the Valerie Briginshaw Prize 2018 for dance writing and academic excellence for his MA thesis *From big screen to screen dance; queering the heterocentric* (2017). Find Callum online [@CallumAnderson](#).

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Notes

¹ Anderson and Zanotti, "Glossary: Pan's People Papers."

² Slade and Kearns, "Black Mirror: Bandersnatch."

³ Written by Charlie Brooker (Dir. David Slade. Ed. Tony Kearns).

⁴ Fey, et. al. "Kimmy vs. the Reverend."

⁵ Rosenberg, *Screendance*, 1.

⁶ Maletic, "Videodance - Technology - Attitude shift," 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sadler's Wells, "BalletBoyz Deluxe Programme."

⁹ Cover, "Audience inter/active," 151.

¹⁰ Reason, "Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance," 9.

¹¹ Warmelick, Hartevelde, and Mayer, "Press Enter or Escape to Play," 2.

¹² Willis, "Choose Your Own Adventure," 52-53.

¹³ Hershman, "The Fantasy Beyond Control," 267-273.

¹⁴ Ibid. 267.

¹⁵ Ibid. 269.

¹⁶ Ibid. 272.

¹⁷ Cover, "Audience inter/active," 142-143.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Multimedia traversable software allows users to construct interactive videos by building a "video tree." This "tree" is then not visible to audience members viewing the work, and instead they are able to "traverse" it as an interactive video, following just one branch of the tree at a time.

²⁰ Perron, "Genre Profile," 128.

²¹ Squire, "Cultural Framing of Computer/Video Games," 4.

²² Gilan and Bingham, "Annotations Updates."

²³ Chad, Matt & Rob, "Interactive Adventures."

²⁴ Salem, "Keep fans engaged with Cards & Ends Screens."

²⁵ Block, "Eko."

²⁶ 'Transmedia' refers to a body of work that connects a story or narrative across multiple media platforms. In the case of The Pan's People Papers, this work incorporated videos uploaded to YouTube and posts on Twitter (and now as an online archive).

²⁷ Anderson and Zanotti, "Glossary: Pan's People Papers."

²⁸ Anderson and Zanotti, "A Legion of Echoes."

²⁹ Johnson, "Intimacy and Risk in Live Art," 122.

- ³⁰ Auslander, *Liveness*, 13.
- ³¹ Rosenberg, 1.
- ³² Gansing, "The Myth of Interactivity or the Interactive Myth?"
- ³³ O'Connor, "Black Mirror: Bandersnatch."
- ³⁴ Rezk and Haahr, "The Case for Invisibility," 183.
- ³⁵ O'Connor.
- ³⁶ Chaney, "Kimmy Schmidt vs. the Reverend."
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Krapp, "Noise Channels," xiv.
- ³⁹ Ibid. xviii.
- ⁴⁰ Alleyne Dance, "(Re)United."

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Virtual Democracy: Online Ballet and Contemporary Dance Classes During the Covid-19 Crisis

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Abstract

This article considers the politics and dynamics of online ballet and contemporary dance classes during the Covid-19 lockdown on geo-political, economic, and cultural implications of dance classes in digital media. Using a post-colonial lens and popular dance studies, this research analyzes the effect of the online ballet and contemporary classes colonizing digital spaces and the effect of this phenomenon on creating a more democratic and participatory access to dance that has built a more global and inclusive engagement with the arts for geographically peripheral spaces. This essay investigates the kind of common created by kinaesthetic experience of the dancers teaching and participating in the classes in digital media providing a key strategy to analyze the participatory embodiment of dancers as a radical, material, corporeal challenge to the hierarchies of the dance world, and furthermore, the economic dynamics that shape it.

Keywords: Online Dance Classes, Digital Democracy, Access and Inclusivity, Popular Dance

In our anxiety-stricken state and looming sense of loss of freedom, on March 18th of 2020 my husband and I took a Graham class in our living room in Cyprus with Martha Graham Dance Company dancers Marzia Memoli and Alessio Crognale¹ streamed directly on Instagram. We had both trained heavily in Graham in various conservatories and universities in the UK, Canada, and the US, and we were thrilled to be able to take a class and disrupt our everyday routine about panicking how to teach dance online and home school our child, our parents' exposure to the Covid-19 virus and mental health, and the overall fear that permeated 2020. We wore our Graham T-shirts with black trousers and positioned ourselves on the floor to start with the bounces and breathing. After struggling with technology and trying to figure out how to stream Instagram on a laptop, our frustrations grew as we were running out of time, we gave up and followed instructions from a small phone screen. The cats decided to join and swish their tails across our heads and chest with every contraction, spiral, and undulation of the spine. We filmed ourselves doing Turns Around the Back, having to constantly adjust our



positions to avoid hitting each other and the persistent cat. The experience helped us escape the uncertainty of the situation for a while, allowed us to finally look at each other and laugh, made us emotional, and happy to gain access into a world we had been missing since leaving the US after completing our studies a couple of decades ago. As always, Graham technique provided a familiar physical ground to be emotional with its glorious high lifts and indulgent spirals, which I had not allowed myself to feel or show to my family during this time. We posted different videos on Instagram and the Graham Dance Company reposted it, giving us giddy joy as we felt recognized and seen in our geographically remote position in comparison to the US.



Screenshot: The author (right) and Alexander Michael (left) taking a Graham Class in their living room in Cyprus, 18 March 2020. Credit: @alexander_michael_

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic crisis commanded lockdown across the majority of the world, bringing various sectors of the professional dance world to a sudden halt. In March 2020, the world witnessed closing of theaters, dance studios, and training centers that put dance artists, educators, and students out of their ability to continue to practice their art. In Cyprus, where I live and work, a strict lockdown was imposed only allowing us to leave our houses for essential reasons accompanied by an SMS text message sent to the government carefully monitoring the movements of the citizens. I teach and run the Dance Programme at University of Nicosia, which shifted all of its instruction online, challenging me to lead the faculty and students through an alternate pedagogical and

learning period. At this time, impromptu online dance classes began to appear in variety of dance genres by world-famous dancers and dance companies. As Laura Regensdorf writes in *Vanity Fair*, as schools, theaters, and restaurants had their last sittings, “there was a first: the debut Instagram Live class from the Merce Cunningham Trust, led by program coordinator Jennifer Goggans.”² I was delighted that dancers from some of the major dance companies began to offer free online dance classes on various digital platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. At a time when the performing arts are in an extremely precarious position,³ celebrity dancers, including Isabella Boylston and James Whiteside (principal dancers with American Ballet Theatre), Tamara Rojo (Artistic director of English National Ballet), Tiler Peck, Megan Fairchild, Ashley Bouder, (principal dancers with New York City Ballet), Adam Boreland (Orlando Ballet), dancers of the Paul Taylor company, Akram Khan Dance Company, dancers from the Graham company, Gaga people, and the Merce Cunningham trust,⁴ interrupted the stillness of lockdown imposed onto the dance world by introducing a new way to engage with movement practice, demonstrating the dance community’s resilience and ability to adapt.

While the strict lockdown in Cyprus took hold, the online dance classes by some of the world’s great dance artists offered relief and a way to engage remotely with the UK and US dance scene. Sometimes I took class, at other times I just watched classes trying to make sense of the new dance presence in online dance world. As a popular dance scholar with a particular interest in screendance, I am used to watching dance online, but the Covid-19 pandemic shifted what kind of dance exists online and how it is distributed and consumed. This essay seeks to discuss the phenomenon of online dance classes in ballet and contemporary dance during lockdown and its effect on politics and economics of dance. I purposefully focus on internet-based classes in ballet and contemporary dance, since this trend seems specific to pandemic culture, as opposed to social and popular dance, which has a strong presence in the media and digital landscapes. In particular, this article seeks to explore two junctures: the co-optation and implication of popular screendance aesthetics by concert dance forms, and the postcolonial positioning of the global North within living rooms and bedrooms across the world. The changing online dance scene prompted me to question the politics and economics surrounding the new dance presence online and what these online classes might signify during a pandemic in terms of democratization of dance through popular dance methods and aesthetics, and geopolitical implications of access to Western dancers and dance institutions for dancers in marginalized and peripheral places. The discussion centers the cultural, economic, and geopolitical effects of traditionally concert dance forms shifting to digital spaces, such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, skillfully occupied by popular dance practices and the new (more global) dance community emerging out of these generous offerings. Furthermore, I seek to explore the politics of access that have altered for geographically marginalized places, using my particular position as a dance educator and practitioner who resides in Cyprus.

Dancers in peripheral places or economically disadvantaged communities that had no access to dance classes have been learning dances from screen throughout history of dance on (home) screens. My first experience of learning American popular dance forms was by watching musicals and repeatedly rewinding them to learn the jazz choreographies from VCR tapes of Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* (1979) and Michael Bennett's *A Chorus Line* (1985). I grew up in Yugoslavia and Soviet Russia where I trained in ballet, which was the only style of dance classes available at the time, and learning jazz from musicals provided a fun experience that was vastly different from Russian training in ballet. Like Melissa Blanco Borelli, who discusses learning dance material from Janet Jackson's 1989 album *Rhythm Nation 1814*,⁵ I along with my friends learned dances from music videos and VCR tapes of various film musicals. In a similar vein, prompted by the pandemic, online dance classes in 2020 allowed me (and presumably many other people) to participate in classes with some famous ballet and contemporary dancers due to the fact that they shifted to digital spaces and employed similar methodologies that far-reaching popular dance has done successfully for decades.

Ballet and Contemporary Dance in Popular Dance Spaces

Prompted by the 2018 edition of Dance Studies Association's *Conversations across the field of Dance Studies* on how popular dance "is often *the* innovative site where so many of our everyday relationships with local, national and global politics gain visibility"⁶ and how the practice of corporeal politics acts as a mode of resilience, I seek to analyze the political effect of online ballet and contemporary dance classes during the 2020 lockdown. By engaging with popular dance scholarship, I am interested to explore the dynamics of geo-political, economic, and cultural implications of free dance classes by elite dancers and dance institutions. Dance forms, such as classical ballet, contemporary, and post-modern dance, ordinarily reserved for big theaters, dependent on large financial grants and donor support, and formal academies, shifted to digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube during the Covid-19 pandemic. Ballet and contemporary dancers have responded to pandemic-related loss of work by offering dance classes across various digital platforms in order to stay current, relevant, and physically active, employing popular dance tactics which Theresa Buckland argues exhibit a "tendency to innovation"⁷ to meet demands of the market. Inspired by popular dance, which occupies various digital media, ballet and contemporary dancers have been forced by the extreme social and economic situation to innovate new ways to work and attract an audience and keep the arts in the public eye. This allowed them to reach a potentially global audience through online spaces so often utilized by popular dance forms.

Online dance classes have created a new form of screendance that is particularly site-specific.⁸ The movement sequences for the online classes are created specifically for the camera that captures the instructor and for the home screen on which they are watched. Furthermore, they are created specifically for home practice and thus take into

consideration the constrained, furniture-laden environment as a site for the practice. The online dance classes in question, such as ballet classes taught by Isabella Boylston and James Whiteside, Graham classes by various members of the company, or by the teachers of the Merce Cunningham trust are mostly filmed on personal smart phones with minimal technical support, such as basic selfie ring lighting like the Spectrum Aurora used by YouTubers and Instagrammers. Most of the classes are taught from instructors' living spaces. For example, Jennifer Goggans of the Cunningham Trust taught the class from her living room, keeping time for the exercises that were sometimes interrupted by her young son. I followed her class, adjusted for the limited space that she had to move in, which made it easier to follow the class in my limited space. This called for a different kind of class in Cunningham technique, which was concentrated on complex footwork and back movement sequences, rather than delving into space exploration and large traveling combinations.

After many years of not taking ballet classes, I had chosen to do a ballet *barre* during the lockdown often late at night in my pajamas. I would hide in our bedroom, hold onto the moving office chair as my make-shift *barre* and mostly try to psychologically reconcile with the images of stunning dancers on screen and my fast-diminishing turnout. Given the lack of space and the inadequate *barre* support, much of my class experience was preoccupied with adjustments to the chair and myself in relation to surrounding walls, the desk, and pets. I tried a variety of the classes and observed some trends. The ballet classes offered online varied in style aimed at different audiences and adjusted to the aesthetics and demands of the social media, and thus popular dance. Adam Boreland of Orlando Ballet offered classes on Facebook that used social media catchphrases, such as Monday Motivation ballet and Sunday Funday ballet.⁹ In order to make ballet attractive and fun, he would introduce themes and wear various costumes encouraging his class participants to do so, such as Spiderman ballet. Isabella Boylston and James Whiteside employed multiple themes for their classes, including Star Wars, Vintage Ballet Looks, and Harry Potter, making their classes fun and relatable.¹⁰ In their attempt to keep dancing and working, some ballet and contemporary dancers offering online instructions employed certain aesthetics that characterize dancing in quarantine in home settings but also popular dance ideas, such as using well-known music in order to make the classes fun and having a peppy tone to their teaching style. Tamara Rojo, on the other hand, continued to teach a formal ballet class albeit from her kitchen.

As concert dance practitioners took to teaching dance online and numerous examples of choreographed video dance emerged from moguls of ballet and contemporary dance, it became evident that dance artists have responded to this crisis situation with the creativity and innovation that characterizes popular dance, which constantly has to present innovative models in order to meet demands of the market. Similar to popular screendance culture, the online dance classes signify an adapting site for cultural tension and struggle between formal institutions and individual artist, stillness of the lockdown for the dance community, and dancer' need to engage in physical activity.

These actions represent an active response to the surrounding issues of the pandemic allowing an instant transformation of the dance culture, collective, and structures.

The supposed hierarchy in dance, which divides concert dance forms, such as ballet and contemporary from various popular dance forms has been brought into focus during the pandemic as dance forms usually confined to theatre stages took to digital landscapes to show and promote their work. Ballet companies have created a strong online presence in the last few years and entered popular spaces, such as cinemas, to screen full live or pre-recorded performances reflecting the shifting marketing ideologies. However, the bulk of their work, labor, and existence is in studios and stages reserved for a select local audience with a particular budget. For example, New York City Ballet has created short videos entitled “Ballet Trailers” and “Anatomy of a Ballet” for their YouTube channel and Facebook page, which feature dancers speaking about their experiences of preparing, rehearsing, and performing specific ballets, intertwined with footage from the dances to instigate interest in the NYCB repertory.¹¹ Royal Ballet (amongst many other companies, such as the Bolshoi Theatre from Moscow) screens full-length ballets in cinemas in various locations, including Cyprus.

Online dance classes have increased the popularity of ballet and contemporary dance and brought them into mainstream, popular culture. Ballet exists on the periphery for majority of the people who are more likely to be exposed to 15 to 60-second dances on TikTok and dances in music videos rather than full-length ballets at large opera houses. The presence of ballet and contemporary dance on digital platforms during lockdown therefore brought these dance forms into the mainstream of popular and online culture as illustrated below with the number of views for the online classes. Isabella Boylston’s Instagram post showing a video of herself and James Whiteside doing a section of the ballet *barre* in her kitchen on March 18th, 2020 reifies social media’s reach as she writes:

Holy Cow! Over 15000 (!!!!) of you tuned into #theCindiesBalletClass just now (emoji) that’s almost 4 times the capacity of our largest theatre, the Met opera house! Just think what we could all accomplish together! Cindy and I will continue to give live IG ballet classes, and next time we will be asking for a totally voluntary donation that we will give straight to the Dancer’s Emergency Fund.¹²

Out of all of Graham dance classes uploaded to YouTube by the Martha Graham Dance Company, the Graham Basics (beginner) Class with Anne Souder has the most views with over 34,000 views as of May 29th, 2021. At the time of writing this essay, almost all of Tamara Rojo’s (for English National Ballet) ballet classes that she offered from her kitchen have been removed. The only one that is still on YouTube has almost 200,000 views. Pacific Northwest Ballet classes on YouTube have upwards of 100,000 views. Tiler Peck’s ballet classes #turnitoutwithtiler uploaded to IGTV have anywhere between 2,000-41,000 views depending on her invited guests, which appear to increase the popularity of her classes. Terry Lovell’s suggestion that, “cultural products are

articulated structures of feeling and sensibility which derive from collective, shared experience as well as from individual desires and pleasures,"¹³ offers an explanation for the explosion and popularity of the online dance classes responding to the individuals' needs to remain active, stay engaged, offer a charitable donation, and create a new corporeal collective. Taking into consideration Dominic Strinati's idea that popular culture is viewed as a genuine expression of the people rather than an imposition by institutions¹⁴ allows for an argument to emerge that online dance classes represent the real need for dancers to move, engage, and keep the art form going, and that their popularity is evident in these numbers, which are in sharp contrast to the availability and accessibility of classes in exclusive studios in which these dance celebrities may potentially teach.

Shifting into popular dance spaces causes a social and economic power move for ballet and contemporary dance that gives it the dynamics of popular dance aesthetics, which Sherril Dodds argues has "the capacity to destabilize and transgress cultural norms."¹⁵ As professionals occupied amateur digital spaces, they shattered the hierarchy of institutionalism, geography, economics, and concert versus popular dance. By colonizing popular dance spaces of digital platforms, elite dance companies and individual dancers escaped the confines of particular places and thus challenged the Western notions of dancing spaces, including proscenium theaters and studios, by reaching into living rooms and kitchens across the world. Company dance classes, which are normally reserved for elite dancers trained within elite institutions became web-native content and, therefore, disturbed ideas regarding locations to dance, access to training, and the geopolitical position of dance styles and genres.

Access, Economics, and Challenge to Hierarchies

As previously mentioned, I live and work in Cyprus—a small sovereign island in the Mediterranean—so as a contemporary dancer who was trained in the UK and the US, I was excited to be able to take dance classes during the 2020 lockdown. I was allowed a unique vantage point to consider the online dance classes during the pandemic, as ordinarily Cypriot dancers do not have access to taking classes from Western dance institutions. Cyprus is politically and economically European, yet it remains on the periphery of the Western world geographically. Cyprus has endured Ottoman rule and British colonial rule, gained its independence in 1960, and has been divided since 1974 following the Turkish invasion into the Turkish occupied North and Greek Cypriot South. The history and political situation have shaped the cultural make-up of the country into a distinctively post-colonial island with a strong pull toward Western trends and development, yet keen to hold onto traditions. Stavros Karayiannis points out succinctly that "one effect of these historic turns is a profound crisis in modern Cypriot (both Greek and Turkish) identity,"¹⁶ which also extends to dance. The dance scene consists of an over-saturated market of dance schools, which mostly teach ballet and modern dance, and more specifically British systems, such as Royal Academy of Dance (R.A.D.) and

Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (I.S.T.D.), clearly solidifying the cultural need of the island to receive international (particularly British) validation; and a great number of schools which teach traditional Greek and Cypriot dances alluding to the need to preserve the traditional culture. Before I went to study in the UK in 1996, I had taken only two contemporary dance classes—not because I was not interested, but because none were available. Contemporary dance has been developing with great strides since the late 1990s in Cyprus. Now, a few decades later, the contemporary dance scene is growing and thriving with local festivals producing contemporary dance, established dance houses, a university program offering a BA degree in dance, and over 200 dance schools that offer a variety of dance styles. Yet, for local professional dancers (most of whom have trained abroad), classes are not available. Therefore, access to online dance classes from the UK and US proved thrilling.¹⁷

As a post-colonial country, Cyprus is still deeply reminded of the British imperial rule evident in the infrastructure—road signs that feature Greek and English names, and British military bases—and its citizens are strongly attracted to the West. As prominent Cypriot scholar Zelia Georgiou explains, defining Cyprus as simply post-colonial fails to acknowledge its complexity. She states, “by addressing colonialism as a historical phenomenon and defining itself as a critical metadiscourse, it can be argued that postcolonialism denies both existing colonialism and its own discourse implication in current webs of knowledge and power.”¹⁸ Western understanding of post-colonialism does not necessarily apply to the Cypriot model,¹⁹ which Georgiou argues continues to privilege “the western subject as the subject of reflexivity and atonement.”²⁰ As an ethnically divided country, Cyprus exhibits a strong anxiety to its national self. The growing multicultural population in Cyprus is experienced as an effect of global socio-economic change “rather than as a question pointing to the re-appreciation of our [Greek Cypriot] historical ethnic diversity and ethnic divides.”²¹ If the local subject in Cyprus is not a migrant, or of a different race or ethnicity, then what is their position to the imperial colonialism and how does the dance scene respond to this? As Georgiou argues, the position of the Cypriot is between two cultures: the post-colonial subject and national struggle and anxiety, arising from the contact of the local population with the colonizers, thus making identities form in and by their relations. What is clearly evident in Cyprus and its dance scene is that what has been “essential to the machine of colonialism had been the hinge between western imperialism and local, internal colonialism.”²² For contemporary dance practices, this means that most local dancers and choreographer practice Western styles of dance, specifically Release, Graham, and Cunningham with post-modern compositional practices, and largely ignore traditional dance and music (with a few exceptions), thus the ability to take classes from the largely recognized Western dance centers appealed to the marginalized dance practitioners in Cyprus.

The shared practices of having live dance experiences halted, and then resurrected through an online presence, has provided access to training that is rooted in ideals of

openness and inclusivity that challenges privileges of geography, economics, and access. However, they still may exclude individuals with the disadvantages of not having personal space to take class in, leisure time, or internet access. Set against the political control of the lockdown and the loss of personal freedom in the name of public safety, the classes provide a new sense of freedom and virtual democracy by extending their reach into geographically peripheral spaces, such as Cyprus, and beyond major metropolitan cities that house well-established dance companies. Online dance classes open access to dance training to various geographical locations that may not be able to train otherwise. The fact that a new community was forged may be indisputably fortified by my experience of taking class from my remote location in the relation to the US, yet it seemed to represent a vastly Western experience of offering classes in white, concert dance forms that appealed to a marginalized demographic seeking Western experiences and approval. Although Harmony Bench critiques Ramsay Burt's romanticized vision of contemporary dance practices in Europe, she still presumes that Europe as a concept provides equal access to dance training and producing.²³ The geographical definition of Europe is vastly different to its political one, which is amplified for dance with countries in Western and Central Europe holding a monopoly on contemporary dance in terms of training and choreographic opportunities. Although ballet training is widely available in ex-Soviet countries, as well as those adjacent to the communist phenomenon, more peripheral countries (such as Cyprus, Malta, and Iceland), have gained access to ballet and contemporary training in the second half of the twentieth century. The phenomenon of online classes may have been particularly exciting for dancers in geographically remote places who ordinarily do not have access to training with New York- or London-based choreographers, dancers, and teachers. My mention of these two cities is purposeful, as they are often seen as the epitome of dance training and performing, particularly in Cyprus. However, even people within the US, UK, and Europe who live and engage in dance practice in remote, rural places would possibly have the same experience as someone living on an island in the Mediterranean. The post-colonial pull toward Western trends makes activities from these regions additionally exciting for Cypriot artists.

Additionally, online dance classes would have allowed various economically disadvantaged groups to gain access to training in elite dance forms that they may not have access previously. The pandemic has allowed a wider cast net for dance training and access for particular dance forms. Bench alludes to the importance of digital dance to ensure a more democratic access to dance as she states:

the digital media at the forefront of my own investigation reach farther and wider than the festivals and metropolitan theaters to which European dance artists might tour their stage-based productions. Furthermore, these media bring all possible dance forms into the flattening space of the computer screen, blurring distinctions among movement practices and communities and disarticulating them from their histories and cultural situations.²⁴

By shifting to digital spaces, ballet and contemporary dance allowed people to learn dance in the same way as many social and popular dance forms that appear in mainstream media. Free online dance classes disrupt the idea of who has privilege to train. Using Robert Gehl's idea of "YouTube's democratic, participatory nature" as a challenge to broadcast media,²⁵ I argue that free online dance classes may offer possibility to decentralize institutional dance instruction bound to studio presence and economic ability to pursue dance. Although streaming a class can in no way replace the experience of studio class with a teacher providing feedback and corrections, it does allow dancers with experience to continue to engage in daily practice. Some dancers offered instruction for beginner classes allowing access to a larger dance community. The disruption of privilege is crucial in the discussion of how to make strides towards more inclusive scholarship and curricula as it encourages participation in dance forms reserved for financially and geographically privileged people. Free online dance classes do not offer a long-term solution as dancers cannot financially and logistically continue to offer their skills for free, as well as the fact that "dance remains a social practice, regardless if one learns in a studio, on a street corner, or from a screen."²⁶

Online dance classes do not have an explicit function to promote, mediate, and circulate celebrity capital, yet they aim to keep the arts in the public eye, raise funds, and provide a social service in terms of free classes. They encourage a physical response to dance on screen and seek to engage the viewer to participate in an active way, rather than passively watch a performance. Through this engagement the dance landscape has changed as it has included geographically and economically remote dancers into a new community. Bench argues that "mobilized, dancing bodies reclaim and rechoreograph terrains that ought to exclude them"²⁷ thus by engaging with the online dance presence during the pandemic the dance world may have been altered to a more democratic and inclusive space. Ideally, online dance classes provide universal and democratic access to dance training, but I wonder if someone without training and background in ballet, Graham, or Cunningham could safely and effectively follow class, therefore continuing the disparity in dance training access. Isabella Boylston's ballet-inspired workout "My Bootylicious Workout" uploaded on April 28th to Instagram features a mixture of ballet- and Pilates-based exercises set to the music of Backstreet Boys, Destiny's Child, and No Doubt,²⁸ and is advertised as "no ballet training necessary" in the accompanying post. Although, Boylston tries to make the video entertaining with popular music choices, some of the exercises would be extremely difficult for non-trained dancers to do safely, such as the *en croix* series of *tendus*, followed by the lifting of the legs, whilst keeping the arms in high fifth position or single leg balances without the assistance of a *barre*.



Screenshot: Isabella Boylston in "My Bootylicious Workout ;)" 28 April 28 2020. Credit: @isabellaboyston

Digital circulation of dance classes created for participation, rather than choreography designed to be observed, alters the way that cultural capital circulates as participants embody knowledge, traditions, and practices creating a corporeal wealth independent of formal institution in the given moment. Through this process, the ownership of dance material is questioned. Jayna Brown argues that searching for the origins and inceptions of popular dance is a difficult project since "with gestural vocabularies there are no beginnings, only continuation"²⁹ pointing to its unwieldy history and belonging to groups of people and communities. Ballet and contemporary dance, on the other hand, have belonged to institutions, dancers who gain the right to perform and teach the repertory, and certification programs that allow teachers to disseminate these established dance techniques. Anthea Kraut argues that unlike other commodities in a capitalist system, dance circulates through body-to-body transmission,³⁰ therefore, it is perpetuated and dependent on people engaging in physical practice. By offering ballet and contemporary dance online for free, the dancers have bypassed institutions as holders of traditions and knowledge, and distributed dynamics and hierarchies of dance ownership and training.

Dance artists of various backgrounds and experiences mobilized with the act of moving, teaching, and dancing to resist the stillness of the lockdown forced onto the professional dance world and ended up challenging politics and economics of formal dance training, institutions, and access. Responding to their own need to practice their art, as well as the need to provide a social contribution, dance artists offering classes online became independent creators of their art, and, thus, asserted their independence. Online dance classes challenge the idea of institutions, formal training, and hierarchy of master and teacher. By responding to the pandemic situation, artists, as autonomous producers of their art, assert their independence, thus, disturbing class distinctions and arbitrary divisions between concert and popular dance. Boundaries between public and private spaces blurred as dance celebrities opened their homes to online audiences. By doing so, professional artists by-passed well-established and sponsored institutions and created an anti-capitalist approach to dance from their living rooms and kitchens.

The online classes required a collaborative practice as professional dancers offered free online classes with learners participating with comments and videos tagging the teachers. The issue with this is that collaborative practice feeds into neoliberal capitalist notions of individualism requiring uncompensated labor as dancers offering their knowledge and experience for free in exchange for tags, tweets, and re-shares. Although, online dance classes do not explicitly promote a particular product, such as a performance or work of a company, they are immersed in economics of art promotion that depends on individual artists and repertory to attract audiences and donors, which follows Alex Harlig's argument that much online commercial content has moved even further towards obscuring their marketing intention while promoting consumption.³¹ In some instances, dancers promoted fundraising during their classes asking for charities that would support funds for dancers, dance companies, and various social causes. However, these practices may be only short-term offerings and will prove difficult to maintain as dance artists become further challenged with ability to gain an income and may choose to charge a fee as the Graham school did a few weeks into the lockdown offering classes over Zoom as an institution, replacing live Instagram classes by individual dancers. Generosity of online dance teaching on Instagram and YouTube facilitated gift economy, which Bench argues causes "the slippage between gift and commodity" and has little possibility to bring financial gain to the creators.³² As Regensdorf writes in standard magazine fashion "sudden flowering of dance livestreams has been less a concession than a gift. It's for nurses working night shift who need to shake off stress at a later time; for bunheads in far-away Portugal, France, Hong Kong"³³ relegating dance to a stress relief and re-affirming the US view that they are geographically positioned in the center of the Global North, from which everything is far away. The dancers' inability to perform has resulted in a creative and generous offering of dance classes in order to promote their style of dance, company they dance with, and their own persona. In the neoliberal capitalist economy, the responsibility to keep dance relevant fell to individual dancers who took on responsibility to promote

their work, themselves as brand ambassadors for their companies, and dance in general, rather than having state support and prolonged economic support from various governments promising basic livelihood, similar to other industries. By shifting focus to actions taken by individuals, Bojana Kunst's idea that "the relationship between art and life is highly topical because their merger underlies the capitalization of human powers and their exploitation for the generation of profit"³⁴ has been solidified problematizing the relationship between art, dancers' labor, skill set and knowledge, and capitalist production.

The bold actions of dancers to offer online dance classes demonstrates the relationship between how the value of performers' labor and capitalism has formed. Like popular culture, which Andrew Edgar argues is surrounded by a distinct dichotomy which situates it within the capitalist system whilst simultaneously trying to resist it from within,³⁵ online dance classes present a contradictory economic system, whereby individual dancers express a neo-liberal responsibility to keep the economy going, yet present a strict challenge to the hierarchies of the dance world and its institutions. As Kunst articulates and online dance classes exemplify, "the capacities of human being, our cognitive, affective, and flexible abilities are part of the production of value and this is why the line between the labor and private time is disappearing,"³⁶ which was further exploited as dancers shifted from glamorous stage settings to their private residencies allowing a glimpse into the efforts needed to keep up the glamorous presentations on stage. In the time of classifying works and jobs into essential and not, artists found a way to make themselves and their professions "useful" by providing a "service" in the form of online classes revealing the materiality of their work by physically showing how hard dancers have to work to stay in shape. This corresponds to the Kunst's argument that the artist's relation to work "especially the usefulness and productive nature of that work, which affects every dimension of an artist's life (and therefore also comes across as a fusion of life and work)"³⁷ is essential to their ability to maintain a livelihood. The artist must continually update their skills and usefulness in relation to their productivity and thus capitalist network and with that "forever shift away from the possible nonproductive and non-useful site of work."³⁸ Even though the actions by individual artists to offer online dance classes clearly involve them in a capitalist web of productivity and usefulness, they also contest the idea that "the value of the labor of the performer is not residing in the labor of the performer herself/himself but it is only becoming visible through the institutionalized, economized, and highly managed initiatives"³⁹ as they assert their individual popularity, labor, and relevance.

New (More Global) Dance Community

Despite the problems exhibited by the post-colonial tensions that attracted dancers who live, work, and create in spaces that appear peripheral to the dominant West, online dance classes offered an optimistic idea of a unified dance community. As dancers were removed from their natural habitat of dance studios and stages, a new digital

community emerged with the presence of online dance classes that invited participation. A great deal of dance performances were released online that normally would not allow access beyond the exclusive theatre settings of cosmopolitan cities, however they could not create the same sense of community as the online dance classes, many of which streamed live, allowed live commentary and re-posted videos of dancers participating in their classes therefore confirming their involvement. Using Harmony Bench's ideas on the common as a site to negotiate, exploit, conserve and consume dance and its practices,⁴⁰ I am interested in what kind a new common have digital technologies produced during this particular time. The dancers offering and taking class became united by the situation created by the pandemic and formed an embodied reaction that contrasted the extreme stillness of the lockdown seen and experienced across the world. The stillness applies to the dance community and not the extremely stressful and demanding pace placed on the essential workers during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

Online dance classes require involvement and engagement creating a participatory type of common. As Bench argues, "by learning a dance, one corporeally manifests belonging to a social group—even if that group is constituted in online spaces or through shared media use rather than through physical proximity,"⁴¹ therefore, it is clear that the dancers enjoying these classes were united by their experience of taking classes during this given time riddled with similar concerns and fears. Engaging with online dance classes through physical participation, commentary, and visual images, dancers negotiated and contested their belonging to a community. Learning to dance as a process of belonging provided the participants with the optimistic opportunity to belong to a world unified by dance, rather, than one clearly divided by politics and economics. In thinking of the common as a global, online phenomenon enabled and perpetuated by the lockdown, I employ Harmony Bench's notion of "no-place" which has the political potential to create "a site deployed to erase location—a site that works to render itself invisible... Its very emptiness grounds Western dance practices and launches dancing bodies into new sites by erasing topological specificities"⁴² to understand the common created by the digital common of online classes created in response to this specific time and specific crisis. Opposed to the oppressive (albeit extremely necessary) restriction of movement during lockdown, this idea of a new space, of no-place offers alternative ideas to render a common "abstracted from built or natural environments that would situate their movement, bodies wander through space with an illusory freedom, unrestricted by physical or ideological barriers."⁴³ Grounded in and by their own homes, dancers offering classes are dis-located from studios and stages, thus increasing their reach and mobility, whilst restricting the literal space to move in. Participation of dancers in online dance classes spreads the dance forms across geographical, pandemic, and economic boundaries creating a "corporeal common,"⁴⁴ however raises alarming issues about colonization through globalization and promotion of Western dance forms, which may ignore cultural specificities of remote, peripheral, or marginalized places. The new more geographically inclusive,

digital common refers to Bench's idea of no-place as a new digital topography created by the circumstances of the pandemic that has political potential to disrupt physical, ideological privileges surrounding dance access and specificity of location.

Online dance instruction cannot replace the experience of dancing in a studio, sharing the physical experience with other dancers, amplified with music and ability to enjoy traveling through space, however, I am interested in the political power that online dance classes have offered to the instructors and participants through a phenomenological lens. The shared corporeal experience of dancing in spite of the quietness of the pandemic, the economic and financial uncertainty, and fears regarding one's health, acts as sign of resilience and resistance. Pointing to the importance of mediated popular dance, and furthermore, the subjectivity that occurs through embodied response of learning dances presented on screen, Blanco Borelli's argument that perhaps fans learning dance routines enables a phenomenological relation of corporeal relation enabled by the screen,⁴⁵ seems fitting in the understanding of the somatic experience of offering and taking online dance classes. Dancers engaging in online dance classes, improvisations, and choreographic experiments during the pandemic had a kinesthetic experience highlighting corporeality as subjectivity; dancers whose physical identities were articulated through dancing formed political, reactive, and reactionary entities that are able to contest boundaries of control. Blanco Borelli defines the relationship between popular dance and its spectators/consumers learning to perform the dances as she writes "for it is through the ubiquitous availability of such mediated performances that dance on screen becomes (corpo)real and tangible,"⁴⁶ which is an idea that has been transferred to the possibility of learning ballet and contemporary dance during the 2020 pandemic. As dancing bodies, united across screens, engage in kinesthetic experiences they form a collective physical action and a powerful experience of community in a world halted and divided by the pandemic.

The enforced physical separation and lack of dancing spaces has had a profound effect on how classes are designed for online teaching and home participation. The consequences of online dance instruction on the physical well-being dancers are yet to be determined but the political effect of expanded access to training in ballet and contemporary dance to people with a decent internet connection and smart phone (and some background training) has been profound. Dancers have been united through a shared, screened experience of dance allowing geographically and economically marginalized groups access to learning dance. Using Bench's observation that participatory commons "enabl[e] a contemporary discourse in which the commons signal open access, anticapitalism, and radical democracy,"⁴⁷ offers a possibility to look at the online dance presence during the pandemic as revolutionary in terms of economics and open access and as an alternative to neoliberal financial ideology that defines economics of the twenty first century Western countries as it challenges formal economics of institutions and geographic boundaries. The new geographic and economic challenge to dance democracy that the online dance classes during the

Covid-19 pandemic have introduced will re-organize dance practices and create new complex social relations that challenge the arts hierarchy. Ballet and contemporary dance classes entering digital media presents economic dynamics of popular dance that embody tensions between neoliberal capitalist incentives by the individual dance artists versus artistic establishment.

As dancers adapted to the new situation and shifted from physical spaces of studio and stage to digital spaces, they responded to current cultural needs and sought to create immediacy and connection that contradicts the separation created by lockdown. In a similar way to the function of the body in staged protests, as a key factor “in constructing both individual agency and sociality,”⁴⁸ the physical presence of dancers creates an individual and collective response in reaction to the emergency of the pandemic. Dance provides a political and social movement that challenges the economic and political stillness of the pandemic. The classes provided an opportunity to connect to one’s sense of physical agency, corporeal power, and a global collective united by dance practice. The very presence of dancers online serves as an act of resistance and their belief in the possibility of instigating change. By colonizing digital spaces of popular dance, ballet and contemporary dancers have created a democratic and participatory access to dance that has opened up a wider engagement with the arts. Through shared physical connection facilitated by dance classes the dance landscape has changed bringing traditional, classical dance forms into the twenty first century by occupying digital spaces.

Biography

Dara Milovanovic is an Assistant Professor of Dance and Head of the Department of Music and Dance at University of Nicosia in Cyprus. Dara holds a PhD in Dance Studies from Kingston University London, UK and an MA in American Dance Studies from Florida State University. Dara teaches contextual dance studies, dance research, contemporary dance technique and jazz dance. Her work has been published in books and journals, such *Perspectives on American Dance: The Twentieth Century*, *Peephole Journal*, *Dance Research*, and *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers (Third Edition)*. Her research interests include popular dance, musical theatre, screendance, and film phenomenology. Dara is an active contemporary dance performer in Cyprus.

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Notes

¹ See some of the classes uploaded here: <https://www.instagram.com/marziamem/>

² Regensdorf, "In the Age of Quarantine."

³ Two articles in the *New York Times*, "One Lost Weekend" by Michael Paulson, Elizabeth A. Harris, and Graham Bowley and "For the Arts in Europe, Lockdown Feels Different This Time" by Alex Marshall indicate the dire situation for the arts scene in New York City and Europe, which are indicative of many other places. According to an ABC news report published on 27th of February of 2021, the number of jobs in the arts fell from 87000 in February of 2020 to 34100 in April of 2020 in New York City. The same report states that arts, entertainment and recreation employment in December was down 66% year-over-year. Furthermore, according to a report published by Brookings Institution in August of 2020, based on their creative-industry analysis, they estimate losses of 2.7 million jobs for creative industries in the US with fine and performing arts suffering the biggest losses. In Cyprus, the arts scene has been off and on, with artists struggling to create, perform, and financially survive. For an article on the state of the arts in Cyprus see Gina Agapiou's piece "Cyprus arts suffer as performers cannot work."

⁴ This is not an exhaustive list of online dance classes offered during the 2020 pandemic and quarantine. As many of the classes were streamed live, they are no longer available however information can be found on following pages:

Isabella Boylston (<https://www.instagram.com/isabellaboylston/>);

James Whiteside (<https://www.instagram.com/jamesbwhiteside/>);

Tamara Rojo (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcT9uRJqCrE&t=406s>);

Tiler Peck (<https://www.instagram.com/tilerpeck/>);

Megan Fairchild

(https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=megan+fairchild+ballet+class);

Ashley Boudier

(https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ashley+boudier+ballet+class);

Adam Boreland (<https://www.facebook.com/adamborelanddance>);

Paul Taylor Dance classes (<https://www.instagram.com/paultaylordance/>);

Martha Graham Dancers (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdSQpl_zUIU&t=682s);

Akram Khan Dance Company (<https://www.facebook.com/AkramKhanCompany/>);

Gaga Dance Classes (<https://www.instagram.com/gaga.people.dancers/>);

Merce Cunningham Trust (<https://www.instagram.com/mercetrust/>)

⁵ Blanco Borelli, "Dancing in Music Videos."

⁶ Blanco Borelli and Anamaria Tamayo Duque, "Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies," 7.

⁷ Theresa Buckland in Dodds, *Dancing on the Canon*, 48.

⁸ Douglas Rosenberg's argument that screendance is a site-specific form of dance fits well in analysis of online dance classes. See *Screendance*, 17.

⁹ Adam Boreland's Facebook page features many of the ballet videos that dancers can revisit. <https://www.facebook.com/adamborelanddance>

¹⁰ See Instagram profiles and classes uploaded here <https://www.instagram.com/isabellaboyston/> and <https://www.instagram.com/jamesbwhiteside/>

¹¹ See NYCB YouTube channel here <https://www.youtube.com/user/newyorkcityballet> and Facebook page here <https://www.facebook.com/nycballet/>

¹² Boylston, I. (@isabellaboyston) March 18, 2020.

¹³ Lovell, "Cultural Production," 543.

¹⁴ Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*.

¹⁵ Dodds, 3.

¹⁶ Karayiannis, "Anamnesis and Queer Poe(/li)tics," 240.

¹⁷ At this time, no serious academic study has been done on the development of ballet and contemporary dance in Cyprus, therefore the author relies on personal experience of living, performing, and teaching in Cyprus. Various websites, such as the Cyprus Dance Association (<http://www.cydanceassociation.org/>) offer information on dance ballet schools; Nea Kinisi Association for Contemporary Dance Groups, Choreographers, and Dancers (<https://neakinisi.com/index.php/en/>) offers information on the two initiatives led by them, including the Summer Festival and Visibility Programme; Dance House Lemesos (<http://www.dancehouse.com.cy/>) provides information regarding their programs and residencies; Cultural Services of Ministry of Education and Culture, which provides most of the grants for dance only lists the contact person and does not have information about the festivals and funding schemes it provides on its opening page (http://www.moec.gov.cy/en/cultural_services.html). Apart from very limited information available, none of these sources give an insight into the internal politics of dance on this small island.

¹⁸ Georgiou, "De-Scribing Hybridity in 'Unspoiled Cyprus,'" 241.

¹⁹ For example, Tuck and Yang address settler colonialism in the US in their article "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," which does not relate to the issues experienced in places like Cyprus.

²⁰ Georgiou, 242.

²¹ Ibid. 245.

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- ²² Ibid. 242.
- ²³ Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 4.
- ²⁴ Ibid. 5.
- ²⁵ Gehl, "YouTube as Archive," 44.
- ²⁶ Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 154-155.
- ²⁷ Ibid. 68.
- ²⁸ Boylston, I. (@isabellaboylston) April 28, 2020.
- ²⁹ Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 7.
- ³⁰ Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright*, 180.
- ³¹ Harlig, "Fresher Than You," 59.
- ³² Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 176.
- ³³ Regensdorf.
- ³⁴ Kunst, "Art and Labour," 116.
- ³⁵ Edgar and Sedgwick, *Cultural Theory*.
- ³⁶ Kunst, "Lust.rf. Lecture."
- ³⁷ Kunst, "Art and Labour," 120.
- ³⁸ Ibid. 120.
- ³⁹ Kunst, "Art and Labour."
- ⁴⁰ Bench, "Remarks."
- ⁴¹ Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 160-161.
- ⁴² Bench, "Media and the 'No-place' of Dance," 37.
- ⁴³ Ibid. 37.
- ⁴⁴ Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 157.
- ⁴⁵ Blanco Borelli, "Dancing in Music Videos," 53.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 4.
- ⁴⁸ Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," 395.

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Movement as Medicine and Screendance as Survivance: Indigenous Reclamation and Innovation During Covid-19

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Abstract

Indigenous screendance challenges US settler colonial constructions that drive political, environmental, and global injustices, which the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated. This article analyzes online workshops taught in 2020 by Rulan Tangen, Founder and Director of DANCING EARTH CREATIONS, as “movement as medicine” and “screendance as survivance.” By connecting Tangen’s workshops to Indigenous peoples’ historical and ongoing uses of dance and the digital sphere for wellbeing and survival, we show how and why these practices provide powerful possibilities to counter settler colonial concepts of anthropocentrism, Cartesian dualism, patriarchy, and chronological time. Tangen’s teaching offers ways for humans and more-than-humans—meaning land, cosmos, nonhuman animals, water, and plants—to (re)connect, drawing on the past to imagine the future and building human solidarity, which we theorize as “homecoming.” Ultimately, we link our concept of “homecoming” to the Land Back movement because of the vital connections among Indigenous bodies, sovereignty, and survival.

Keywords: Native American, Cartesian Dualism, Dance, Digital, Land Back, Survivance, Homecoming, Online, Settler Colonialism, Interdependence, Worldsense

I wasn’t sure if I was alive or not, and the reason why I thought maybe I was, was I looked down and saw my ribs were moving up and down. I thought, “That must mean I am breathing, and that must mean I am alive.”¹

—Rulan Tangen, Founder and Director of DANCING EARTH CREATIONS

Covid-19—which invades the lungs, making it hard to breathe—has exposed not only the disparities in access to adequate healthcare,² but also the fallacies of settler colonial constructions: Cartesian dualism and anthropocentrism.³ Whereas Cartesian dualism attempts to separate thinking from moving, our minds from our bodies,⁴ anthropocentrism is a worldview that assumes humans dominate their environments



and all other beings.⁵ As Dr. Sunaura Taylor writes, “We know that environmental destruction aided the conditions that led to this outbreak: deforestation, rising temperatures, and the loss of habitat, all forced species into closer contact with each other, including with our own.”⁶ Ongoing colonization, which dichotomizes humans and more-than-humans,⁷ drives environmental destruction, political injustices, and global inequities.⁸ More-than-humans is a term that resists the binary of “animal” and “human” life and emphasizes the indebtedness of humans to nonhuman beings.⁹ Such an interconnected understanding of humans and more-than-humans forms the core of many Indigenous epistemologies, including those of the 574 federally recognized nations in what is currently referred to as the United States.¹⁰

This article describes and analyzes online workshops taught by Rulan Tangen during the summer of 2020 that emphasize holistic epistemologies and serve as modes of resistance to colonization, which has attempted to fracture many Indigenous peoples’ ability to come home.¹¹ Tangen is of mixed ancestries—including Filipino, Norwegian, and Irish—and with ceremonial, community kinship ties to Lakota people.¹² Her workshops center a distinct approach to movement that we analyze in this article as a form of homecoming and a challenge to settler colonialism. According to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, the objective of settler colonialism is for settlers to make “a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain.”¹³ To do so, through policy and practice, the US government has attempted to annihilate Indigenous peoples and cultures in a multitude of ways, some of which we detail in our analysis. Tangen’s movement workshops occurred weekly during April and May of 2020, through Facebook Live and Zoom, and were viewed by close to 8,000 people. These circulations of Tangen’s teachings through our homes, as we shelter in place, call attention to the complexities of quarantining in our residences.

While some may view these restrictions on movement as simply “inconvenient,” they expose the multiple ways that governments have historically and contemporarily exerted “corporeal control”¹⁴ over Native mobilities—for example, through relocation, removal, and assimilation policies and institutions, including carceral contexts in which Indigenous peoples today are disproportionately represented.¹⁵ Addressing these settler colonial strategies allows us to attend to the ways that Indigenous peoples globally have mobilized movement both on-screen and off as medicine and liberation. Against concepts of anthropocentrism, patriarchy, Cartesian dualism, and chronological time, Tangen’s online workshops generate possibilities for connection, reclamation, and transformation, which we theorize as “homecoming.” Movement provides Indigenous peoples a way to (re)connect with their practices, languages, and more-than-human others, drawing on the past to imagine the future, linking ancestral knowledge and futurities, and building human solidarity.

In the quote that opens this article, Tangen, the Founder and Artistic Director of DANCING EARTH CREATIONS, shares a memory from the early 2000s when she was incredibly sick and unsure if she was alive.¹⁶ As a dancer, Tangen had trained and

performed with companies that span from ballet and modern dance to circus, film, theater, opera, and television. DANCING EARTH, established in 2004 and based in New Mexico and California, is known for its interdisciplinary projects that activate ecological awareness and include collaborators from Indigenous communities. Scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy has written about the importance of Tangen's stage productions, how she grounds dance-making "in Indigenous values—such as inclusivity, respect, and creative resilience,"¹⁷ and notes Tangen's ability to draw from her "researched, creative, embodied, genealogical investigations to enact ways of being in relationship to land, territory, water, human, and other-than-human others."¹⁸ Our paper extends Shea Murphy's scholarship and focuses specifically on the intersections of Tangen's work, screendance, and homecoming.

Tangen recalled the memory of questioning her mortality in the quote that opens this article, in April 2020, at the start of her *Movement as Medicine* online workshop, that took place a month after sequestering restrictions were imposed in some areas of the United States in response to Covid-19.¹⁹ In the memory, Tangen connects her breathing to movement to vitality, as her movement relays information to her mind, disrupting the Cartesian dualism of "I think, therefore I am." As Tria Blu Wakpa has theorized, a more relevant concept of Indigenous epistemologies is, "I dance, therefore we are."²⁰ Since time immemorial, Indigenous people have danced for a multitude of purposes. Dance has served as a healing practice as well as a mode of self-determination for peoples and their nations.²¹ Tangen's work centers Indigenous practices that challenge anthropocentrism, which seeks to hierarchize human life as more valuable than more-than-human wellbeing,²² and throughout her online workshop, Tangen emphasizes the reciprocities of our existence with more-than-humans, including air, land, water, the cosmos, and nonhuman animals. Tangen says, "When you breathe in, you are taking in oxygen that is made for us by the plant world, and when you give back that is clear carbon dioxide for our plants. It is a cycle of reciprocity."²³ The shelter-at-home restrictions during Covid-19 encourage us to reflect on how Tangen's embodied practices offer a form of "homecoming" for Indigenous peoples, which we define as a challenge to settler colonial policies and institutions that have often attempted to estrange peoples from their tribal teachings and epistemologies.²⁴ Our framework of "homecoming" simultaneously recognizes Indigenous peoples' vast diversity, and conversely, their commonalities in regard to interconnected "worldviews" and experiences of colonization and settler colonialism. Because the term "worldview" emphasizes ocular senses, we elect to replace it with "worldsense" which includes auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic engagements that are ways of knowing often overlooked in settler colonial constructions and discourses.

This paper focuses on how "homecoming" becomes visible through a multifaceted approach to dancing that includes linking movement to healing, to digital survivance, to time as cyclical instead of chronological, and to connections between human and more-than-humans as well as among mind, body, and spirit. We incorporate a capacious definition of screendance that includes three facets: 1. Tangen's workshops, defining

them more as process and practice than as product or performance; 2. Tangen's digital performances; and 3. circulations of social justice organizing and activism on social media and in physical spaces. Ultimately, we link homecoming to the Land Back movement because of the connections among Indigenous bodies, sovereignty, and survival.²⁵ Patrick Wolfe writes, "Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life."²⁶ Settler colonialism has unjustly dispossessed many Native peoples of their original homelands, creating a number of challenges to their wellbeing, lifeways, embodied practices, sovereignties, and survivance.

As co-authors of this article, we are dance scholars with a shared investment in interrogating and challenging systemic exclusions and settler colonialism, and come to Tangen's teaching with disparate experiences and training. Kate Mattingly is a white, ballet-trained dancer who has studied and taught canonical and non-canonical histories of dance for two decades. Her research focuses on circulations of dance criticism and the ways digital platforms such as Facebook support multiple voices and perspectives, particularly those of marginalized and disenfranchised communities.²⁷ Of Filipina, European, and tribally-unenrolled Native ancestries, Tria Blu Wakpa researches Native dance and movement practices, and trained and performed with Tangen and DANCING EARTH in 2014. In 2016, she published an analysis of the company's process and choreography called "Culture Creators and Interconnected Individualism." Because all research is subjective, we share our identities, so that readers have a sense of our relationship to Tangen's work. In this essay, we also include the identities of Indigenous scholars when they are explicitly stated.

As participants in Tangen's workshop, we are linking conscious movement with the intention of contributing to human and more-than-human connections: we are "coming home" through (re)connection. It is vital not to conflate Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences of homecoming through dance, because again, the aim of settler colonialism is for "settlers to make a place their home... [by] destroy[ing] and disappear[ing] the Indigenous peoples that live there."²⁸ At the same time, Native experts have articulated that Indigenous peoples in Europe have also experienced colonization—which has disconnected them from their bodies and more-than-human relatives—and alleviating the enduring climate crisis will likely entail non-Native allyship with Indigenous peoples.²⁹ Attending to the differences in our experiences of Tangen's workshop, as well as to our common goal of centering Indigenous epistemologies, we highlight how dancing offers collective and individual paths to connection, reclamation, and transformation, which we define as "homecoming." As Dance scholar Sammy Roth offers, "perhaps homecoming for non-Native people may allow them to connect to their own Indigenous ancestral lineages so that they could work toward becoming more of a guest than a settler on Native land (from Tuck and Yang's distinction), while it acts differently for Indigenous peoples by enacting sovereignty and survivance."³⁰

While some may refer to the Covid-19 pandemic as “unprecedented” or necessitating “new” approaches, our article, in both contents and structure, foregrounds Indigenous temporalities that resist linear or settler colonial constructs of time, and highlights Indigenous epistemologies that insist on human and more-than-human interdependencies.³¹ While chronological order presupposes a “progression” of time, Indigenous worldsenses tend to emphasize concepts of time that are cyclical, spiraling, and overlapping.³² If Covid-19 shifted dance practices to online formats that seemed new, of-the-moment, and/or “now,” our article focuses on movement practices that synthesize past, present, and future in ways that can challenge such settler colonial logics. A linear or chronological approach to time—made visible in words like “new” or “now”—may contribute to settler colonialism by dividing past from present from future. In this article, we challenge settler tactics by analyzing online workshops taught by Tangen during the summer of 2020 as activating cyclical approaches to time, as emphasizing holistic epistemologies, and as providing modes of resistance to settler colonialism, which have attempted to hinder many peoples’ ability to come home.³³ Tangen is not alone in centering these healing practices during this global pandemic, and we begin by showing how circulations of dancing, both on- and off-screens, challenge concepts of the “divided body”³⁴ and illuminate facets of dancing as healing and homecoming.

Dancing as Healing

Whereas settler colonial constructs rely on binaries and hierarchies³⁵—such as anthropocentrism and Cartesian dualism³⁶—which may result in divisions, antagonisms, and global pandemics, *Movement as Medicine* workshops offer holistic ways of activating ecological epistemologies and recalling peoples’ responses to previous catastrophes. Tangen says, “[W]e’re very lucky to be breathing right now. So many people are struggling for breath. One of the sayings that I’ve heard a lot of is, ‘We dance for those who cannot.’”³⁷ In this way, Tangen clarifies how movement has a healing potential beyond the individual dancer. Another activation of movement as medicine is the Ghost Dance, which scholar Gregory Smoak describes as “a prophetic expression of an American Indian identity that countered United States’ attempts to assert a particular national identity and to impose that vision on American Indians.”³⁸ Similar to Tangen’s online workshops, the Ghost Dance incorporated movement as medicine, promoted a pan-Indigenous worldsense, and resisted settler colonialism and attempts by Euro-Americans to annihilate Indigenous peoples. In her study of the Ghost Dance, Alice Beck Keho traces its roots among the Walker River Paiutes to the typhoid epidemic of 1867, which, along with other diseases, killed one-tenth of this Nation.³⁹ Although the Ghost Dance departs from Tangen’s *Movement as Medicine* workshops, ethnomusicologist and Jingle Dress dancer Tara Browner (Choctaw) clarifies that “[i]n the [Anishnaabeg] worldview, religion and spirituality are not separate from the business of daily life, and activities cannot necessarily be conceptualized within the

Western binary categories of sacred and secular."⁴⁰ Thus, the sacred/secular dichotomy is yet another division that Indigenous movement practices counter.

An additional example of movement as medicine, and response to an earlier disease, is the Jingle Dress dance, which historian Brenda Child (Red Lake Nation), traces to the Ojibwe Nation during the 1918 influenza pandemic.⁴¹ In regard to the Jingle Dress dance, Browner illuminates how music, like dance, is medicine, and inextricably connected to healing. Browner writes:

[O]ne of the most profound elements of the Jingle Dress dancing is its spiritual power, which originates as an energy generated from the sound of the cones that sing out to the spirits when dancers lift their feet in time with the drum. The very act of dancing in this dress constitutes a prayer for healing.⁴²

The dance's sounds, or the music's meter,⁴³ infiltrates our eardrums, brains, and nervous systems: listening, like dancing, is an embodied and interactive process that changes our patterns and perspectives. In musicology, this concept is called "entrainment," which describes how meter is internalized by dancers and listeners and becomes "a kind of motor behavior."⁴⁴

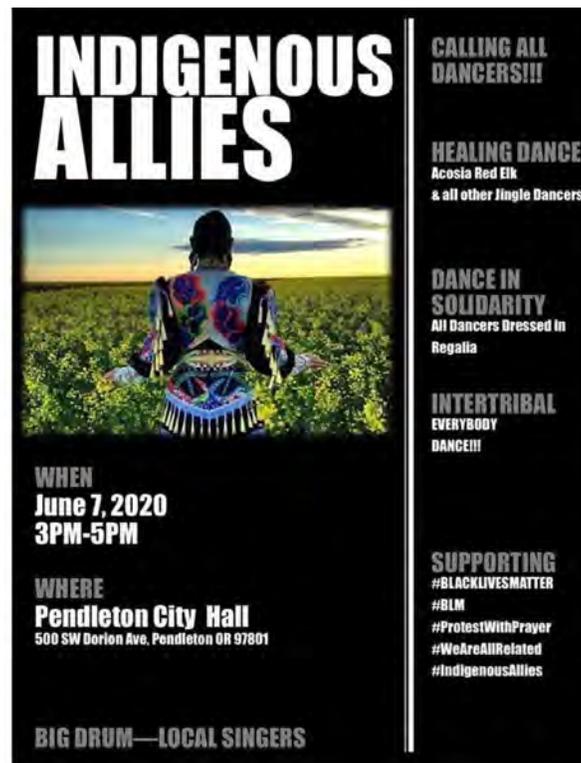
Origin stories about the Jingle Dress dance vary, yet many of them underscore interconnections among humans and more-than-humans, and the healing possibilities of relationships between sound and movement. Norma Rendon (Pine Ridge) describes the cones on the dress "'sound[ing] like the leaves on [our] sister the tree."⁴⁵ Acofia Red Elk (Umatilla), a champion Jingle Dress dancer, shares a less well-known origin story, gifted to her by elders of the Red Lake Nation: the dance was "a gift from the Northern Lights," given by the Northern Light Spirit Beings to a man who was in a coma.⁴⁶ Red Elk explains:

I don't know how long he was in his coma, but they kept him there [in the Northern Lights] for quite a while and taught him a lot of things. And they shared a lot of teachings about the future with him and a lot of information about what was going to happen in the future, and that the people were going to need a message of healing. And that there would be time of separation and that people would begin to separate from one another, and that Nations would be separating from one another, and that people would become separate from their own spirit and from the land. And that we would have poor leadership and a lack of communication. And there would be illness and there would be fear, and that the people needed a message of healing. And so they sent him home with this message and the message was actually a sound. It was the vibration and the frequency and the sound that the Northern Lights can make themselves. And it's a healing vibration, it's a healing sound. That's the sound that a whole bunch of jingle dresses make

together, and it's the sound of electricity. [...] They gave him that sound and he came home with it.⁴⁷

Red Elk's descriptions of separation, especially the separation of people "from their own spirit and from the land"⁴⁸ articulates the divided body and the divided body politic⁴⁹ for which "movement as medicine" can provide an antidote. In Red Elk's narrative the man literally "[comes] home" with the knowledge to heal peoples and their Nations, which takes the form of dancing.⁵⁰ Red Elk herself organized a "prayerful gathering" featuring Jingle Dress dancing at the Pendleton City Hall on Umatilla land in what is often referred to as Oregon, where she resides, following the horrific murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵¹ Red Elk emphasized in a Facebook post that the event was "NOT a protest," and that social movements can also be a form of medicine, aimed at building human solidarity to alleviate structural inequities.⁵² Scholar Cutcha Risling Baldy (Hoopa Valley Tribe) similarly explains how ceremonial dancing, specifically the Hupa Flower Dance, challenges settler colonial narratives by contributing to Indigenous knowledge and solidarity.⁵³ Baldy connects embodied practices to methods of "(re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing" that elucidate how and why ceremonial forms generate solidarity-building. For Baldy, "(re)riteing" counters settler colonial, patriarchal constructions by "foreground[ing] how Native women are central to Native cultures and to decolonizing Native futures."⁵⁴ The examples of "movement as medicine" that we analyze feature women prominently: Tangen's April 2020 workshop, hosted by the Native Wellness Institute, was co-taught with company artist Natalie Benally (Diné).

Tangen views dance as medicine and connected to solidarity-building and social transformation, which can be circulated and strengthened through online networks. In Tangen's words, the "idea of community engagement, that idea of social change through the arts, that idea of environmental, ecological dancing—that's embedded in what we're doing, what we're offering the world. I hope we can bring that sense of wonder, that connection, through this portal of online communication."⁵⁵ In Tangen's and Red Elk's understandings, Indigenous dance counters settler colonial antagonisms by facilitating respectful human-to-human and human-to-more-than-human connections. Indigenous dance can also provide insights into social transformation and illuminate Indigenous people as powerful visionaries and leaders in the contemporary scenario. In *High Country News*, Tovah Strong writes, "Dancing Earth engages in Indigenous futurism—art that incorporates Indigenous perspectives of what the future could look like—by embodying interconnected communities and social change in the company's story-like performances. In turn, the performances often function as both dance productions and contemporary rituals for audience and dancers alike."⁵⁶ Strong's description of Dancing Earth's "rituals" challenges the sacred/secular binary, and recognizes how observers benefit from Dancing Earth performances and interconnection. Likewise, Tangen's online workshops encourage linkages by asking participants to join in movement practices that activate healing and transformation.



Announcement for the Prayerful Gathering organized by Acosia Red Elk. Courtesy of Acosia Red Elk.

Pat Northrup, Umpaowastowin, (Dakota), is another example of an Indigenous leader activating the online realm as a platform for connection and reclamation. Northrup arranged a virtual Jingle Dress dance, which was posted on Facebook with the hashtag #jinglehealing: “Wear your jingle dress at home and be connected. Remember the reason we were given this dance.”⁵⁷ Native American women from Pennsylvania to Nebraska to Ontario to Northrup’s apartment in northern Minnesota joined the dancing.⁵⁸ Northrup explained, “This isn’t just an Anishinaabe prayer. This is an ‘all-people’ prayer... The virus isn’t going to have prejudice... So that’s what the prayers are for.”⁵⁹ In the online realm, these danced prayers of connection, reclamation, and transformation circulate and aim to heal, offering movement as medicine to humans and more-than-human relatives, who have long sustained our survival.

Screeendance as Survivance

Native Americans’ deployment of digital platforms and online circulations that activate awareness and challenge settler colonialism has far-reaching implications, historically and currently. Drawing on the work of Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor who coined the term “survivance” to indicate a combination of Native survival and resistance, we theorize Indigenous screeendance as a form of survivance.⁶⁰ Scholar Karyn

Recollet (Cree) writes about Indigenous dance on screen as a “form of radical imagination tantamount to social change” that “remixes dance, movement and gestures that ‘jump scale’ out of colonial cartographies.”⁶¹ Recollet articulates the transformative possibilities of Native movement forms, and the importance of digital transmission as a counter-narrative to settler colonial depictions and misrepresentations that have existed for more than a century. Instead of the screen being leveraged as a space for white settlers to capture or ossify Indigenous practices, Tangen follows a long tradition of resistance that began at least as early as 1894 with Thomas Edison’s first films to depict Native peoples.⁶² Tangen uses the digital sphere to heighten connections between Nations and communities. She acknowledges the violence of film histories:

Motion pictures were invented in order to document, capture the “vanishing breed.” So the very first films ever made were Native Americans... it was not too long after the Reservation Era, the expectation was that... the blood quantum would be basically lessening... There would be no Natives in about a couple more generations... So that’s where the film industry started and really depicting or sort of consuming versus now we can see incredible Native producers, Native filmmakers, Native script writers. ... The equipment’s gotten cheaper and people are telling stories their own way.⁶³

DANCING EARTH’s online workshops are free and open to the public, and part of the reclamation and circulation of Indigenous identities and knowledge.

Accessible representation of Indigenous epistemology can be essential to health and wellbeing, and, in the Covid-19 context, this often necessitates online availability. Cornel Pewewardy (Comanche-Kiowa) writes that media representations of Indigenous peoples “must be addressed in order to bring equality of identity and representation for all communities. Indigenous children must truly know their tribal histories before United States history. You will never know the history of America until you know and come to grips with its history of cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples.”⁶⁴ In a similar way, Tangen describes the “goal” of her dance-making as “world making, world change, transformation,” and this tethering of “world change” to the digital sphere reinforces her idea of the digital as a realm of Indigenous reclamation and liberation. Although some Native organizations hosted online events and workshops prior to the time of Covid-19, many have adapted to or increased their presence on digital platforms during the pandemic. For example, the Native Wellness Institute, which hosted DANCING EARTH’s *Movement as Medicine* workshop led by Tangen and Natalie Benally (Diné), began regularly posting videos of their “Power Hour” in late March 2020. Studies have shown that for Native people, engaging with Indigenous people and practices can be integral to promoting Native wellness.⁶⁵ The Native Wellness Institute’s mission is to: “promote the well-being of Native people through programs and trainings that embrace the teachings and traditions of our ancestors.”⁶⁶

The digital sphere also offers visibility to activists and artists who use online circulations to amplify social justice organizing, such as Land Back and the No Dakota Access Pipeline movements, and to share Indigenous priorities. Scholar Cutcha Risling Baldy recognizes the vital role social media plays in Native activism, noting that over a million Facebook users “checked in” at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation to try to prevent protesters at the reservation from being tracked. Baldy disagrees with the concept of “slacktivists,” a combination of “slacker” and “activist,” and states:

I don't think that there is any harm in Twitter or Facebook or social justice media. I actually think it helps to build a narrative that we, as people, do have stories that we care about that aren't just the stories that are on the media, or maybe aren't the stories that the media are covering. You have to be willing to fight from the land, but you also have to be willing to fight from wherever you can. I'm not trying to pretend that everyone can pick up and pack their bags and go someplace, but everybody can tweet, so why aren't you?⁶⁷

Although this quote was shared at Tufts University in November of 2017, its relevance is more apparent during Covid-19, when people must “fight from wherever they can.” However, Baldy's words are misleading in that many contemporary Native people—such as those living on reservations and those who are imprisoned—do not have access to the internet.⁶⁸ As Emily Siess compellingly argues, this “digital divide” can exacerbate social inequities—for instance, by limiting opportunities for employment, applying for state services,⁶⁹ and accessing cultural programming that may be essential to Native peoples' wellbeing.

Social media platforms, historically and currently, play a crucial role in facilitating a web of connections, which generate the ability to connect a wide range of like-minded individuals, creating opportunities and transformation.⁷⁰ For example, in September 2012, activist-scholar Jessica Metcalfe (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) posted about the “racist powwow” party that Paul Frank Industries LLC held.⁷¹ In response, the company's president instituted a series of “incredible, amazing, mind-boggling action steps” to rectify their missteps, including collaborating with Native people in various capacities and “donat[ing the proceeds] to a Native cause.”⁷² In another instance of digital activism contributing to social change, in the spring of 2016, Native activists known as the Standing Rock Youth led the #NoDAPL movement, which included this Twitter hashtag and a social media campaign, to protest the construction of an underground oil pipeline from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota to the Patoka Terminal in Illinois, and to support the Standing Rock Reservation. Shortly after its creation, millions of tweets used the hashtags #NoDAPL or #StandWithStandingRock. In addition, Facebook Live brought visibility to activities that were happening at the protest site at Standing Rock. In July of 2020, US District Judge James Boasberg issued a shutdown order, stating that the Dakota Access Pipeline must be emptied while the Army Corps of Engineers produces an environmental review.⁷³

In their article “Digital Survivance: Mediatization and the Sacred in the Tribal Digital Activism of the #NoDAPL Movement,” authors Lynn Schofield Clark and Angel M. Hinzo (Ho-Chunk, enrolled Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska) extend Vizenor’s theory of survivance to include practices of Indigenous peoples and their allies that advance Indigenous epistemologies and storytelling traditions through social media, which includes Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.⁷⁴ There are manifold examples of digital survivance: from socio-political movements like #MMIW for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, to music videos created by Native artists that center pan-Indigenous understandings, like “One World (We are One),” by IllumiNative and Mag 7.⁷⁵ The Land Back movement, which has arguably existed since the origins of Indigenous dispossession, brings together Native and non-Native peoples who support the return of Indigenous land to its rightful Indigenous owners. This movement has gained amplified visibility through online platforms: as of April 2021, an internet search of “Land Back Movement” yields 767,000,000 results, including the “Land Reparations and Indigenous Solidarity Toolkit.”⁷⁶ The LandBack Manifesto is available on [LandBack.org](https://landback.org), a website hosted by the NDN Collective, an Indigenous-led, South Dakota-based organization that is “dedicated to building Indigenous power.”⁷⁷

Similar movements exist on other continents: #SOSBlakAustralia serves to support all Aboriginal communities in Australia to remain in their homelands and country and to enable them to determine their own futures.⁷⁸ In October of 2019, Native and non-Native scholars from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada convened for a conference called “Indigenous Peoples Rise Up: An International Symposium on the Global Ascendancy of Social Media Activism.”⁷⁹ Digital survivance signals the importance of circulating information that fosters pan-Indigenous connection and challenges settler colonialism: Clark and Hinzo write, “[S]paces within social media have become sites for resistance as Indigenous persons use social media to gain visibility, mobilize support, and claim sovereignty, understood as the right to claim authority and autonomy in their (or our) own lands.”⁸⁰ According to this definition, *DANCING EARTH’S Movement as Medicine* workshops offer a mode of digital survivance.

However, there are disagreements in what constitutes Indigenous survivance, especially in the digital realm, and there are intense debates about call-out and/or cancel culture as survivance. Indeed, call-outs can provide groups marginalized by settler colonialism with a mode of political power for pushing back against harm. Such actions can lead to positive social change—as in the example of Paul Frank Industries LLC—yet, others consider it “toxic” and harmful. As Asam Ahmad argues, “Call-out culture can end up mirroring what the prison industrial complex teaches us about crime and punishment: to banish and dispose of individuals rather than to engage with them as people with complicated stories and histories.”⁸¹ Because settler colonial discourses by their very design eclipse Native peoples, issues, and sovereignties, many people are unfamiliar with issues of Indigenous identity. The primary criterion for being a Native person is citizenship in a Native nation and/or connection to an Indigenous community.

However, there are a multitude of other intricacies surrounding Native identity that extend beyond the scope of this paper. In some cases, to address/redress the pervasive structural injustices that have detrimentally impacted Native peoples, institutions have specifically designated resources and awards for Native and/or Indigenous people; this is a familiar practice in the arts and academia. In contrast, “calling-in” is an alternative, and means “speaking privately with an individual who has done wrong, in order to address the behavior without making a spectacle of the address itself.”⁸² Ahmad emphasizes the “performance” of “call-out” culture, aligning with Sara Ahmed’s theorization of the “non-performativity” of anti-racist work,⁸³ and we position these digital interactions as another form of screendance, albeit an at times divisive one. When people with controversial Native and/or Indigenous identities or ancestries are perceived to benefit from their claims, they may be “called-out” or “canceled” via the digital realm. Native people in and beyond the arts and academia have used the circulation or dancing of messages through screens as a “screendance of call-out culture” to contest, and conversely, confirm Tangen’s claims to Indigenous affiliation. Rather than engage in these debates regarding Tangen’s identity, we analyze her workshops for what they do. We center Tangen’s approach to screendance, which promotes Indigenous epistemologies that challenge settler colonialism by suturing the divides that colonization has caused.

Dancing as Homecoming

Tangen is well-aware of the complexities of Indigenous homecoming during a global pandemic, and centered these concerns in an April 18, 2020 online workshop called *Movement as Medicine*, which she co-taught with Natalie Benally through Facebook Live.⁸⁴ The workshop occurred approximately a month after restrictions due to Covid-19 were put in place in the US. The Native Wellness Institute hosted the free workshop on Facebook Live at noon Pacific Standard Time as a part of their “Power Hour” series. Different Native wellness experts led each session, and the workshop Tangen hosted with Benally received 7,700 views, as of January 2021.⁸⁵ Throughout the workshop, participants added comments of support and affirmation. Tangen titled this class *Movement as Medicine*, signaling holistic teachings that connect breath with physical and mental movement, as well as with physical, mental, and emotional equilibrium. She began the class with an affirmation: “People might also be feeling triggers of different ancestral trauma. We are reminding ourselves that we are survivors. We have been through epidemics, pandemics. We have been through all kinds of things, that are similar to this, and here we all are...”⁸⁶ Tangen continued the *Movement as Medicine* classes on Sundays in May of 2020, offered on a pay-what-you-can sliding scale, and hosted through Zoom.⁸⁷

During the April 18 workshop, Tangen incorporated the teachings and directions of a Medicine Wheel, an important part of the Lakota epistemologies of her *hunka* (adopted) grandmother, and chosen for this workshop because of the resonance between these

values and the mission of the host organization, Native Wellness Institute. Daystar/Rosalie Jones, an acclaimed Indigenous artist who created her own dance-drama company in 1980, has spoken about the significance of the Medicine Wheel as a representation of Indigenous philosophies: the circular form reflects the circles found in the shape of the earth and the sun.⁸⁸ In her solo *Dancing the Four Directions*, Jones bases her choreographic design and intention on the shapes and regions of a Medicine Wheel. Indigenous nations bring different interpretations of the Medicine Wheel to their teachings, and many represent each of the Four Directions—east, south, west, and north—by a distinctive color, such as black, red, yellow, and white, which for some stands for the human races and/or types of more-than-human animals.⁸⁹ The Four Directions can also represent stages of life, seasons of the year, ceremonial plants, and more-than-human others.⁹⁰ As she teaches her workshop, Tangen says, “These may look like dance movements, but they are movements that come from us and our Medicine Wheel, so in each direction I am going to ask you to think about four principles. Within the Native Wellness Institute these are Body, Mind, Heart, and Spirit, so you may want to dedicate each of the four directions to one of these, Body, Mind, Heart, and Spirit. You may have other principles that are part of how you see the world.”⁹¹ While Cartesian dualist constructions hierarchize the mind over the body, Tangen’s Medicine Wheel generates equivalences; like the Native Wellness Institute’s principles, Tangen does not promote a ranking system, and instead suggests the interdependence of body, mind, heart, and spirit.⁹²



Tangen, on the left, indicates the directions of the Medicine Wheel as Benally, on the right, names the Four Mountains. Screenshot of *Movement as Medicine* Workshop. Platform: Facebook Live. April 18, 2020.

Tangen begins the workshop by acknowledging patterns that accrue in our bodies during isolation, such as “rounded postures” that come from hours of sitting and working on computers, and a slouched spine which can be exacerbated by feelings of fear; Tangen suggests that this class can “undo these patterns.” She and Benally start

the workshop by standing and breathing, adding arm movements that lift as they inhale and lower as they exhale; then they add a bend of their knees on each inhale and exhale, creating fluid and seamless, cyclical actions. Throughout the workshop options are offered for people who are standing or seated, making the workshop accessible for a spectrum of participants. The movements tend to be functional, such as twisting the torso to “detoxify” the organs, and reaching towards the sun to stretch out the right and left sides of our bodies. Tangen often emphasizes the tethering of our bodies to natural environments: when she reaches upward she says, “To skyworld,” and when she moves towards the ground, she says “To the roots.” Participants are encouraged to move at the pace that feels best for their bodies, and consideration is given to the confines of our interiors: there are no large traveling movements and Benally and Tangen tend to stay in the same place when they change the directions they are facing.

During the workshop, Tangen and Benally, who has been a member of DANCING EARTH since 2014, collaborate. Tangen asks Benally: “I think you relate the four directions to the four mountains?” Benally responds to Tangen, “I do.”⁹³ Tangen continues to do the movements that indicate four directions around her, swinging her arms forward and then behind her, stretching to the left and then the right, which can be interpreted as indicating the directions: north, south, west and east. Benally says:

My homelands lie between the four sacred mountains of our people. The south mountain, which I live closest to, is called Tsoodzil, also known as Mount Taylor. Then we have our west mountain near Flagstaff and San Francisco Peaks, what we call Dook’o’oosłíid. The north mountain is near Durango and known as Hesperus Peak, and in Diné it is Dibe-Ntsaa, which my mother told me translates to Big Ram. Our east mountain is Sisnaajini or Mount Blanca in Colorado. Within these four mountains lie the lands of the people, Diné Bikeyah: ‘Diné’ means “People.” I invite you to bring in your ancestral homelands as you do this with us.⁹⁴

By linking her movements to tribal lands and using her Native language, Benally clarifies how contemporary Native peoples and practices remain connected to their homelands—even when physically removed from them. Given histories of Native relocation and the ongoing settler occupation of Indigenous lands, Indigenous peoples have likely long employed similar tactics of resistance and (re)connection.

Through a split-screen, Tangen and Benally teach in their homes, which suggests a link between their presences and their participants, who may be similarly sheltered in place in residences.⁹⁵ In spite of hundreds if not thousands of miles between the teachers and some of the attendees, there is a commonality in this shared experience of tuning into the event on Facebook Live and making space to dance while we are isolated. Seeing their movement within the confines of their domestic interiors, decorated with textiles and the warm glow of a kitchen area, also enhances a sense of home as a place where we are nourished and comforted, a place of protection and support. Their class

reinforces a definition of dancing as “coming home,” or in Tangen’s words, dancing with the intention of “keeping our communities healthy, caring for each other, and connecting to our more-than-human relatives.”⁹⁶ By inviting participants to move their bodies while imagining their ancestral homelands, Benally provides tools that allow Native people to navigate these complexities during the current pandemic and beyond. For many people who are following restrictions and limiting outdoor activities, quarantining has led to more sedentary lifestyles and increases in experiences of isolation and depression. While the World Health Organization has recommended creating daily routines that involve regular exercise, they also suggest limiting screen time.⁹⁷ As free workshops that are available to people with an Internet connection, Tangen’s teaching uses the screen as a form of digital survivance, and her class can increase participants’ feelings of connection, wellbeing, and mental health. When, as participants, we see her navigating the tight space of a domestic interior, we may feel less alone in our confinement. Our physical activity during the workshop releases endorphins and neurotrophic factors, as well as improves heartrate and aerobic capacity, such that we are changing our emotional outlook without leaving our homes, thereby creating a sense of possibility, self-reliance, and self-determination.⁹⁸



Tangen and Benally create a Three Sisters Garden during the *Movement as Medicine* Workshop, embodying the growth of squash, beans, and corn, and using movements evolved from hand gestures of botanical growth patterns shared by ‘milpa farmer’ Mykel Diaz. Platform: Facebook Live. April 18, 2020.

In a settler colonial world, the term “homecoming”⁹⁹ is fraught and complicated. Settler homecoming occurs through the imposition of Eurocentric laws and logics, which attempt to fracture and undermine Indigenous peoples’ relationships to home, including their inherent sovereignty. Whereas settler colonial constructions aim to create a “divided body,”¹⁰⁰ Tangen’s classes are a method, or “medicine,” for suturing

the fracturing of colonial destruction and violence. Online workshops that promote movement as medicine nurture homecoming as a holistic approach to being and knowing, and work against 500 years of colonial oppression that have sought to eradicate Indigenous peoples and knowledges and reduce Indigenous cultures to Hollywood caricatures. Pewewardy writes, "This distorted and manufactured reality is one of the most powerful shackles subjugating Indigenous People today... [W]e can see that boundaries and colonial structures created by the European invaders are, first, transient and, second, barriers to our self-determination."¹⁰¹ As Pewewardy describes, stereotypes of Indigenous people create material confines that detrimentally impact Indigenous sovereignties.

While settler colonialism attempts to separate cultures from lands in order to justify Indigenous dispossession, Tangen emphasizes how our identities and aesthetics are inextricably linked to specific places and histories. Similarly, scholar Megan Red Shirt-Shaw writes, "As a Lakota person, I feel my own strength when I am 'home' in the lands that were my ancestors, and no one can take that feeling away from me."¹⁰² Red Shirt-Shaw's words powerfully express a phenomenological relationship between Indigenous peoples and the lands they are indigenous to. Settler colonialism has sought to divide Native peoples from their identities, homes, and land; as Tangen, as well as scholars like Tuck and Yang emphasize, the return of land to Native communities is inseparable from decolonization.¹⁰³

Tangen's imagery throughout her workshops emphasizes Indigenous ways of knowing that arise from the land and more-than-human relatives. As Daniel R. Wildcat writes, "If we indigenize or re-indigenize self-determination, then it will entail a re-ordering of values and signal an effort to live in a manner respectful of the power, places, and persons surrounding us."¹⁰⁴ This insistence on Indigenous epistemologies disrupts the multitude of ways that settler colonialism has sought to divide people from their home/lands. Jodi Melamed writes, "By upholding an epistemological formation that separates culture and lands (turning culture into aesthetics and land into private property), multiculturalism has undermined Indigenous land claims based on culture and enabled Indigenous dispossession."¹⁰⁵ Through a tribally-specific approach to movement that makes a direct connection between Benally's body and Diné land, Tangen's workshops directly counter multicultural discourses and illuminate imagination—in this case, coupled with action—as a tactic of resistance, reconnection, and homecoming.

Histories of governmental policies such as Termination Acts sought to "take that feeling" of belonging away from Native peoples. Author of the termination policies, Senator Arthur V. Watkins, was elected chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs in 1947. Watkins brought his Mormon (Latter Day Saint) faith into the policies he promoted to eradicate Native practices to "help the Indians stand on their own two feet and become a white and delightful people as the Book of Mormon prophesied they would become."¹⁰⁶ Watkins words—"on their own two feet"—emphasizes

individualism, a Eurocentric, anthropocentric, and ableist fallacy. He also implies that Native peoples are not self-sufficient; meanwhile, the US government created conditions which caused Native peoples to depend on the settler state.¹⁰⁷ Alongside boarding schools that sought to eradicate Indigenous cultures and knowledge, and the reservation system that sought to destroy connections among Native peoples, land, and more-than-humans, these governmental policies decimated communities and wellness by treating Indigenous epistemologies as “problems” that needed fixing.¹⁰⁸ Beginning in the late 19th century until the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act, US policies largely prohibited Native spiritualities, including Indigenous dance.¹⁰⁹ These policies sought to destroy Native peoples’ sovereignty by socializing them into settler society and undermining their unique political status as citizens of Native nations, thereby attempting to secure settler access to Native lands and resources. Colonizers recognized that Indigenous dance—which is underpinned by and enacts Native epistemologies, including relationships with more-than-humans—interfered with Indigenous assimilation.¹¹⁰ To this day, settler colonial narratives seek to deny and dismiss the ongoing physical and cultural genocide Native peoples endure as a result of systemic injustices, conditions that Covid-19 made glaringly visible.

Tangen’s inclusive approach to her workshops, which are accessible to Native and non-Native people, and simultaneously center a tribally-specific and pan-Indigenous approach to dance-making, operate as a form of homecoming. The workshops provide an entryway for Indigenous people who are physically and culturally disconnected to learn more about Indigenous worldsenses and bring Native people from diverse Native nations together to celebrate their commonalities.¹¹¹ Tangen’s Filipino ancestry makes her keenly aware of the importance of solidarity, since Filipino people, like Native Americans, have endured US colonization and assimilative policies and institutions, and a Filipino performer regularly appeared alongside Native actors in a Wild West show.¹¹² For Mattingly, as a non-Native, Tangen’s workshop accentuated Indigenous knowledges and ingenuity that have been used to combat white supremacy and settler colonialism. For Blu Wakpa, as a woman of color with Native ancestry, the workshop offered a positive atmosphere to move consciously and pleurably in forms rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, and to learn more about Diné teachings and geographies. For both of us, the workshop reinforced the importance of homecoming as a place of connection across borders and differences: that every person deserves a safe place to call “home.”

There is also a critique of pan-Indigeneity, which some scholars view as contributing to “cultural appropriation,” “marginalizing” Native people, and reinforcing typecasts of them by creating a monolithic notion of Native American identity or culture.¹¹³ Tangen counters this view by collaborating with dancers who are Indigenous to the partition of Turtle Island referred to as the US and beyond, in order to highlight both pan-Indigenous and tribally-specific elements.¹¹⁴ Tangen is part of a long lineage of artists and activists who incorporate pan-Indigenous approaches as resistance to settler

colonialism: historians have attributed the emergence of pan-Indigenous identity in the US to a variety of different circumstances, including Indian boarding schools and the spread of the Ghost Dance.¹¹⁵ Historian Gregory Smoak states, “The Ghost Dance movement of 1870 was the first recorded pan-Indian religion to emerge in the Great Basin,” and dancing was an appeal to a spiritual power to overturn a world that was “not of their making.”¹¹⁶ The Ghost Dance highlights shared values among nations, and “a shared Indian identity,” which was an important defense against aggressive demands of white settlers and the US government.

Scholar Benjamin R. Kracht highlights powwows as integral in sustaining a “sense of ‘Indianness,’” and argues that Native dances and US prohibitions of these practices have helped to unify Indigenous peoples.¹¹⁷ In other words, Native dance has long been at the heart of the development and endurance of pan-Indianism. Tangen, who has experience as a powwow dancer, describes her online practices as “movement as medicine” and views digital platforms, both for workshops and performances, as solidarity-building as well as “reclaiming a realm of Indigenous liberation.”¹¹⁸



© PamTaylor Photography forDancing Earth_Natalie Benally

Natalie Benally. Photo by Pam Taylor. Courtesy of Rulan Tangen.

Dancing as Pan-Indigenous Futurities

Whereas settler colonial discourses frequently represent Native peoples as a monolith and relegate them, their practices, and languages to the past,¹¹⁹ Tangen's *Movement as Medicine* workshops illustrate how they persist, innovate, and foster futurities in the present. During the online workshop, Tangen invites Benally to teach the movements using Diné, tribally-specific language, as in the example of the sacred mountains, and pan-Indigenous concepts, such as the four directions. The Diné language that Benally uses can reinforce the idea that dancing, a practice we create through our bodies, cannot be separated from our lived experiences and identities: our positionality informs our movement intentions and interpretations. Offering the names of the mountains in Diné words is an act of reclamation and restoration. By sharing this information with Tangen and the viewers, Benally demonstrates how dancing provides a decolonial tool to teach about Indigenous presence, understandings, and connections. Teaching Indigenous languages can be a way of ensuring their endurance and the futurity of the Indigenous worldsenses which undergird them.¹²⁰

Another pan-Indigenous concept is made visible again through a tribally-specific approach about halfway through the workshop when Benally translates the movements of a Three Sisters Garden—corn, beans and squash—into Diné.¹²¹ (See the Three Sisters Garden image above.) She notes how the word for beans, Naa'óí, suggests the sounds of beans boiling in water. "When my family would make beans," she says, "They would boil them. 'Óí' sounds like something full of water. The sound of the word suggests something that is buoyant and floats."¹²² As Tangen's movements imitate the growth of a strong corn stalk wrapping around a bean plant, making physical the connections between our bodies and our food, Benally's words illuminate the process of cooking food. This moment evokes an Indigenous worldsense that shows respect for the personhood of plants, as well as reciprocal relations among humans and more-than-humans.¹²³ Robin Wall Kimmerer writes in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, "Reciprocity is an investment in abundance for both the eater and the eaten... In some Native languages the term for plants translates to 'those who take care of us.'"¹²⁴ By highlighting the Three Sisters Garden and the specificity of Benally's language, Tangen calls attention to commonalities and generative differences among Indigenous traditional and contemporary practices. Dancing becomes a mode of connectivity and collectivity, and a creation of healing environments, which facilitate Indigenous reclamation and innovation.

Blu Wakpa articulates DANCING EARTH's worldsense through her theory of "interconnected individualism."¹²⁵ This concept foregrounds interdependence which "transcends human-to-human interactions and presents an alternative to Western epistemologies,"¹²⁶ and emphasizes the importance of valuing differences rather than suppressing them. By decentering the human as dominant, Indigenous epistemologies expand the concept of "interconnected individualism" to include both connections among humans and more-than-humans in tribally-specific contexts as well as in a pan-

Indigenous worldsenses. For example, the foundational Diné philosophy of *Hózhó*,¹²⁷ activated through movement practices, clarifies the interconnections among human and more-than-humans and the mind, body, and spirit.¹²⁸ These relationships are similarly visible in the Three Sisters Garden which upholds cooperation, interdependence, and connection among humans and more-than-humans. When Tangen and Benally embody the Three Sisters Garden, they highlight human-to-human and human-to-more-than-human relationships as well as more-than-human interconnections with other nonhuman beings.

Interconnected individualism exists in contrast to value systems that prioritize individual gain and human domination over more-than-human animals and nature, which is a worldview associated with the Anthropocene and described succinctly by Donna Haraway as, "Nature is only the raw material of culture, appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted, or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism."¹²⁹ As scientists investigated sources of Covid-19, they traced its origins to a pathogen that jumped from more-than-human animals to humans at a meat market or wet market.¹³⁰ Primatologist Jane Goodall has explained how wildlife trafficking and its ubiquity have created disastrous conditions by bringing people and animals in closer contact, creating opportunities for viruses to jump from animals to humans, crossing the species barrier. Goodall notes that this proximity is particularly present in meat markets, the wet markets, and "there are no borders for a virus," as is being demonstrated so well in this current pandemic.¹³¹ Our relationships with more-than-humans have a direct impact on human survival, an awareness that many Indigenous peoples, such as the Diné, uphold and enact.¹³² Notably, humans are also animals, which anthropocentric constructions can, at times, conceal.

Throughout her online workshops, Tangen creates linkages between our sheltered presence and healing possibilities by activating the use of imagination. During the warm-up portion of her *Movement as Medicine* class, she describes the warm-up as engaging "our arms, our minds, our imagination, and our memory."¹³³ Tangen views her classes as undoing patterns that accrue in our bodies during times of crisis through imagining sensory experiences with more-than-humans. Given that global colonization has often attempted to separate Indigenous peoples from more-than-humans, and human interference has caused the extinction of entire nonhuman species, (re)connection may require imagination. This emphasis on healing and imagination was reiterated in May of 2020 when Tangen visited students at UCLA through an online class. Again, Tangen drew connections between our minds, bodies, spirit, and emotions.¹³⁴ Tangen encouraged us to "train" our imagination, to "exercise" it like a muscle:

[W]hen you're breathing in, if you can just take a moment to imagine a beautiful sense that you might've experienced, whether that's the desert and the rain or some fresh flowers. Because what we're trying to do is use

our memory to bring back this idea of pleasure and of something enjoyable, because I believe that's where the body tends to learn the most... Reclaiming pleasure and joy as one of the steps of decolonization.¹³⁵

This linking of conscious movement with healing not only challenges Cartesian dualism that separates our minds from our bodies, but also illustrates how more-than-humans contribute to human wellbeing. In Tangen's teaching, her deployment of "imagination" offers another way to "jump scale," to return to Recollet's theorization of Native screendance, and to experience different possibilities, to transcend current conditions, and to build a realm of "liberation." The online workshops are tactics of survival in a settler colonial world, honed over centuries of genocides, violence, and limited access to rights and opportunities. The digital sphere makes the wisdom of artists like Tangen known and available to wider communities.

Given the 2020 quarantine restrictions, Tangen encourages participants to use their imaginations to maintain vital connections with more-than-humans, which can be important to wellbeing during the pandemic and beyond. Arieahn Matamonasa-Bennett notes, "While each remaining Indigenous culture has vastly different social structures and cosmologies, there are strong common themes that form a lens with regard to animal-human relationships."¹³⁶ These relationships include honoring human connections to more-than-humans, connections that are stored in a "collective unconscious."¹³⁷ Tangen foregrounds dancing as a mode of connectivity and collectivity, that simultaneously celebrates a tribally-specific and pan-Indigenous worldsense, and honors both traditional and contemporary practices. To return to Baldy's conception of ceremonial dance as methods of "(re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing," we view Tangen's screendance as similarly "(re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing" Indigenous survivance and futurity.

For Tangen, the digital sphere bypasses geopolitical borders and encompasses a global world as a realm of Indigenous liberation. Speaking about recent circulations of her performance *Between Underground and Skyworld*, which was planned for theater stages and now exists digitally, Tangen says:

We had been doing this whole dance on stage about young Native people escaping the apocalypse and finding ancestor knowledge, and dreaming, and then coming up, waking up to embody the future. So, perhaps the internet is an incredible place to do that, this internet cyber world, because this international Indigenous relationship building, or even beyond indigenous... There's been people in our classes that simultaneously have been in India, Peru, Canada, Albuquerque, San Francisco all at the same time. So, maybe this is the way for messages that we've been asked to carry to reach further.¹³⁸

It is especially important that these messages circulate through digital platforms because dance within this realm opens possibilities for (re)connection and solidarity-

building during a global pandemic that disproportionately impacts Indigenous people.¹³⁹

Asked about the original full name of the company, DANCING EARTH: Indigenous Contemporary Dance Creations, Tangen responds that the choice of words emphasizes the capaciousness of pan-Indigenous practices:

I chose the word Indigenous contemporary dance when people were not always into that word “Indigenous.” In a way, I liked it because of its ambiguity. It’s not something that’s defined by the US government, which is exactly what I was thinking that’s where I want to be. I don’t want to have somebody’s identity defined by the US government... what I’m more interested in is creating a place of belonging. And that belonging transcends borders. Mexico, that’s a recent border. Canada, that’s a recent border. The Pacific, that’s a place with connection.¹⁴⁰

For Tangen, this “place of belonging” is made visible through the disparate identities of the dancers in her company, the connections created through her online workshops, and the welcoming and inclusive atmosphere Tangen cultivates in them. These elements reinforce a worldsense that centers reciprocity and interdependencies shared among humans and more-than-humans.



Rulan Tangen. Photo by Pam Taylor. Courtesy of Rulan Tangen.

Conclusion

As the digital realm offers Tangen the ability to circulate her performances and workshops on a global scale, frequently centering Native women as leaders, she uses these forms of screendance to emphasize interdependencies of land, histories, people, and cultures. Reconfiguring how we perceive relationships between people and geographies requires shifts in conceptions of time, from linear or chronological towards

cyclical and spiraling forms. By insisting on the interconnectedness of past, present, and future, Tangen is activating a challenge to settler colonialism, which aims to relegate Indigenous peoples and practices to a past or “historic” era. Dance scholar Ananya Chatterjea explains this hegemonic notion of time as linear or chronological: quoting Ranajit Guha, she writes that one strategy of domination used by the settler state is to “forbid any interlocution between us and our past.”¹⁴¹ In other words, linear or chronological models fail to take into consideration the ways that dance practices activate and illuminate past/present/future simultaneously: steps and phrases are passed through generations of bodies, transforming current practitioners and making visible their potentiality. Tangen evokes this sentiment when she describes her dancing and her classes as “a chance to bring out an alternate way.”¹⁴² One reason why embodied practices are so frequently surveilled and policed is because they hold the potential to link traditions and futurities, activating ancestral wisdoms and potential transformations.

Like other peoples who have existed without access to adequate healthcare and living conditions, Indigenous peoples have been impacted by Covid-19 in far more damaging ways than white, affluent communities.¹⁴³ Tangen responds to these conditions by thinking of the most marginalized communities, “What I’m looking at is what the most radical inclusion of folks who have been pushed out to feel not enough for many different reasons, all of which are not their fault.”¹⁴⁴ Tangen continues:

For all people who have been exposed to life threatening disease, so that could be European people going through the plague, that could be the people who encountered smallpox-laden blankets here that were given as germ warfare. So, this triggering of ancestral trauma and the idea being like, okay, now you have to stay in this place, only this place, if you come out of this place, you're in trouble, that's a reservation... There's been a lot of policing of reservations in the not too distant past. So, of course, that would be triggering for people...¹⁴⁵

This concept of time as overlapping and cyclical—the past cannot be separated from our lived present—is essential to Tangen’s activation of imagination.

Non-linear conceptions of time are also essential to dancing as healing and to dismantling settler colonialism, and the Land Back movement makes these connections vividly clear: it is a vision, impulse, action, and dance, made visible in the Ghost Dance, the Jingle Dress dance, and *Movement as Medicine* workshops. Dancing provides Indigenous peoples a way to (re)connect with their bodies and more-than-human others, drawing on the past to imagine the future, connecting ancestral knowledge and futurities, and building human solidarity. It is a form of homecoming that insists on the return of Indigenous lands to Indigenous stewardship. As the movement states, “To truly dismantle white supremacy and systems of oppression, we have to go back to the roots. Which, for us, is putting Indigenous Lands back in Indigenous hands.”¹⁴⁶ This is

the inseparability of lands and people, and Tangen is keenly aware of this tethering of land to worldsenses to embodied practices. As Tangen says:

Once you've taken in the scent of dancing in the rain, seeing those flowers blooming, the dew coming off, and that one time where the rain comes to the desert, the experience of the senses, the smell, the taste, the touch, that is what makes you want to love that desert enough to not want to build a mall there. Otherwise, it's a theory. It's something that's good on paper and you can march on it, but we have to be able to engage the pleasure centers, the senses of the body, and the pure of love. Love brings compassion; compassion moves us to action.¹⁴⁷

Biographies

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Notes

¹ Tangen, "Dancing Indigenous Futurities."

² For inequities in healthcare specifically pertaining to Indigenous peoples during Covid-19, see Givens, "The coronavirus is exacerbating vulnerabilities Native communities already face," Morales, "Coronavirus Infections Continue To Rise On Navajo Nation," and Power et al. "COVID-19 and Indigenous peoples."

³ Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," 6.

⁶ Taylor, "What Would Health Security Look Like?"

⁷ Tuck and Yang, 4-5.

⁸ Ibid. 6-7.

⁹ Blu Wakpa, "From *Buffalo Dance* to Tatanka Kcizapi Wakpala, 1894-2020."

¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior: Indian Affairs, "About Us."

¹¹ Tangen; Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

¹² For decades, Tangen believed she had Indigenous, ancestral ties to Turtle Island through her estranged father. In October 2020 via her "Artistic Director's Personal Statement of Identity," which was posted to the Dancing Earth website, Tangen clarified that she "do[es] not claim bloodline, enrolled membership, or citizenship to any North American tribal nations or First Nations." Dancing Earth, "Artistic Director's Personal Statement of Identity."

¹³ Tuck and Yang, 5.

¹⁴ Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*.

¹⁵ Lakota People's Law Project, *Native Lives Matter*.

¹⁶ Tangen.

¹⁷ Shea Murphy, "Dancing in the Here and Now," 537.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

²⁰ Blu Wakpa, "Native American Embodiment."

²¹ Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 19; Shea Murphy, "Dancing in the Here and Now," 536.

²² Tuck and Yang, 6, 19.

²³ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

²⁴ Native experts have discussed movement practices as a way of "coming home" to their Indigenous identities and ways of knowing. Haley Laughter also specifically delineates how settler colonialism impacted the domestic sphere in which she grew up: "I dealt with a lot of historical trauma in my own home—alcoholism, addiction, abuse, domestic violence, all those types of things are what I went through." See Blu Wakpa, "Yoga Brings You Back to Who You Are," 8, 9, 11.

²⁵ Our research expands upon the concept of "dancing sovereignty," coined by Dr. Mique'l Dangeli, and defined as self-determination carried out through the creation of performances that adhere to and expand upon protocol that is foundational to Indigenous nationhood and governance. Dangeli, "Dancing Chix, Dancing Sovereignty."

²⁶ Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," 387.

²⁷ See for example Mattingly, "Digital Dance Criticism."

²⁸ Tuck and Yang, 6.

²⁹ See for example Iron Eyes, "Carceral Liberation?"; Tuiimyali, "Uncovering the Relationships Between Native Dance and Marital Arts."

³⁰ Roth, comment on paper.

³¹ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 39-40.

³² *Ibid.* 42.

³³ Tangen; Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

³⁴ Blu Wakpa's concept of the "divided body" references dichotomous and hierarchical, settler colonial constructions—such as Cartesian dualism and gender norms; capitalist logics that render more-than-human relatives as "resources"; blood quantum—which literally uses division to calculate a person's "Indianness"; and the body politic. Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

³⁵ Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Tangen.

³⁸ Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 10.

³⁹ Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance*, 33.

⁴⁰ Browner, *Heartbeat of the People*, 35.

⁴¹ Child, "When Art Is Medicine."

⁴² Browner, 92.

⁴³ Meter is the measurement of the number of pulses between more or less regularly recurring accents. Therefore, in order for meter to exist, some of the pulses in a series must be accented—marked for consciousness—relative to others. Merriam-Webster Online. s.v. "meter."

⁴⁴ Music scholar Pieter C. van den Toorn writes, "[L]isteners entrain to meter, which in turn becomes physically a part of us. Entrainment is automatic (reflexive) as well as subconscious (or preconscious). Like walking, running, dancing, and breathing, meter is a kind of motor behavior." See van den Toorn, "The Rite of Spring Briefly Revisited," 172.

⁴⁵ Browner, 55.

⁴⁶ Red Elk, interview with Blu Wakpa, June 18, 2020.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

⁵⁰ Red Elk, interview.

⁵¹ Red Elk, "Calling all dancers to the Pendleton City Hall."

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You*, 34, 144.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 25.

⁵⁵ Strong, "Finding Indigenous futurism through dance."

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Kraker, "'Every step you take is prayer.'"

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*.

⁶¹ Recollet, "Gesturing Indigenous Futurities Through the Remix," 91.

⁶² Carter, Davis-Fisch, and Knowles "Circulations," 98-99; Musser "At the Beginning," 17.

⁶³ Tangen.

⁶⁴ Pewewardy, "To Be or Not to Be Indigenous," 84.

⁶⁵ Hodge and Nandy, "Predictors of Wellness and American Indians"; Fiedelvey-Van Dijk et al., "Honoring Indigenous culture-as-intervention."

⁶⁶ Native Wellness Institute, *Facebook*.

⁶⁷ Blough, "Native American Scholar Talks #StandingRock."

⁶⁸ Donnellan, "No Connection."

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ An individual's social capital is a measure of the degree to which they can bring together, or bridge, a wide range of other actors who are themselves not connected.

⁷¹ Metcalfe, "Paul Frank's Racist Powwow."

⁷² Keene, "Paul Frank Powwow Party Update."

⁷³ Wamsley, "Court Rules Dakota Access Pipeline Must Be Emptied For Now."

⁷⁴ Clark and Hinzo. "Digital Survivance."

⁷⁵ Taboo, "One World (We Are One) - Official Video."

⁷⁶ Resource Generation. "LAND REPARATIONS & INDIGENOUS SOLIDARITY TOOLKIT."

⁷⁷ NDN Collective, "Home Page."

⁷⁸ Noone, "SOS Blak Australia protests."

⁷⁹ Northern Arizona University, "Learn how Indigenous peoples throughout the world use social media for activism at inaugural symposium."

⁸⁰ Clark and Hinzo.

⁸¹ Ahmad, "A Note on Call-Out Culture."

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness."

⁸⁴ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Dancing Earth, "Movement As Medicine."

⁸⁸ Daystar, "THE ANISHINAABE MEDICINE WHEEL."

⁸⁹ Mawhiney and Nabigon, "Aboriginal Theory."

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ World Health Organization, "#HealthyAtHome - Mental health."

⁹⁸ Harvard Health Publishing, "Exercise is an all-natural treatment to fight depression."

⁹⁹ The word "homecoming" has multiple interpretations. In dance contexts, the word "homecoming" may refer to events held at high schools and colleges that welcome students back to campuses; In 2019 Beyoncé released a film called "Homecoming," that has been described by Michelle Obama as "a celebration and a call to action." In March of 2020 a global rewatch of the film, using the pseudonym #HOMEcoming, a playful take on the name given the global pandemic, garnered over 500,000 tweets and trended at #1 worldwide. *Homegoing*, a 2016 book by Yaa Gyasi, won the PEN/Hemingway award. There are also tragic "homecomings" such as the return of the bodies of 16-year-old Oneida girls who attended Carlisle. See Fox, "The bodies of three young Native American girls are returned to the Oneida Reservation."

¹⁰⁰ Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

¹⁰¹ Pewewardy, 83.

¹⁰² Red Shirt-Shaw, "Beyond the Land Acknowledgement."

¹⁰³ The Land Acknowledgement that is growing ubiquitous in university settings is a useless statement without linking words to actions, such as a commitment to free tuition for Native students, financial contributions to social justice organizations, and dedicated action to return land to Native nations. See Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor."

¹⁰⁴ Deloria Jr. and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 140.

¹⁰⁵ Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, xxii.

¹⁰⁶ Watkins's correspondence to the LDS church general authorities written on 13 April 1954. Grattan-Aiello, "Senator Arthur V. Watkins."

¹⁰⁷ Estes, *Our History Is the Future*, 133-134.

¹⁰⁸ Grattan-Aiello, 283.

¹⁰⁹ Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 85, 199.

¹¹⁰ Castillo, "Dancing the Pluriverse," 55.

¹¹¹ Blu Wakpa, "Culture Creators," 115.

¹¹² Hunziker, "Playing Indian, Playing Filipino."

¹¹³ Parsons, "Pan-Indigenism and Cultural Appropriation."

¹¹⁴ In his book *Ghost Dances and Identity*, Dr. Smoak describes how Ghost Dances united different nations while allowing each tribe, in Smoak's writing the Shoshones, Utes, and Bannocks, to retain distinct intentions and purposes for their dancing. Smoak writes, "The Ghost Dance movement of 1870 was the first recorded pan-Indian religion to emerge in the Great Basin" (114). Dancing was an appeal to a spiritual power to overturn a world that was not of their making, and a way of strengthening communities while resisting assimilation programs and the imposition of white culture. These were shared values among nations, and "a shared Indian identity" was an important defense against aggressive demands of white settlers and the US government (203). However, Bannocks practiced the dance "more intensively" because of deprivations of reservation life were felt more keenly and in different ways (118). As an embodied practice, meaning the material of dancing is literally our bodies, movement can be generated individually and shared collectively: dancing produces distinct and communal priorities simultaneously. The Ghost Dance, which derives its design from a Paiute round dance, is an ideal example of this, as is Rulan Tangen's *Movement as Medicine* workshop wherein Tangen draws from shared priorities among nations without changing the distinct knowledge and approach of each Indigenous community.

¹¹⁵ Gibson, "The Last Indian War."

¹¹⁶ Smoak, 114.

¹¹⁷ Kracht, "Kiowa Powwows."

¹¹⁸ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

¹¹⁹ Dunbar-Ortiz, and Gilio-Whitaker, "*All the Real Indians Died Off*," 3.

¹²⁰ Chew et al., "Enacting Hope through Narratives of Indigenous Language and Culture Reclamation," 132.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Robin Wall Kimmerer explains, "[I]n the Potawatomi language, as well as many other Indigenous languages, that's not how the grammar works. It would be impossible in Potawatomi to refer to that same sugar maple or the squirrel sitting in its branches as 'it.' It's not possible. We refer to them with the same grammar that we do our family members because they are regarded as our family members." Roach, "lessons in the plants."

¹²⁴ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 200, 229.

¹²⁵ Blu Wakpa, "Culture Creators and Interconnected Individualism."

¹²⁶ Ibid. 119.

¹²⁷ Definition of *Hózhó*: *Hózhó* is a complex wellness philosophy and belief system comprised of principles that guide one's thoughts, actions, behaviors, and speech. The teachings of *Hózhó* are imbedded in the *Hózhóójí Nanitiin* (Diné traditional teachings) given to the Diné by the holy female deity *Yoolgaaí Asdzáá* (White Shell Woman) and the Diné holy people (sacred spiritual Navajo deities). *Hózhó* philosophy emphasizes that humans have the ability to be self-empowered through responsible thought, speech, and behavior. Likewise, *Hózhó* acknowledges that humans can self-destruct by thinking, speaking, and behaving irresponsibly. As such, the *Hózhó* philosophy offers key elements of the moral and behavioral conduct necessary for a long healthy life, placing an emphasis on the importance of maintaining relationships by "developing pride of one's body, mind, soul, spirit and honoring all life." Kahn-John and Koithan, "Living in Health Harmony and Beauty," 24.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 27.

¹²⁹ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 592.

¹³⁰ Covid-19 traced to bats and pangolins: Cyranoski, "Mystery deepens over animal source of coronavirus." Scientists assume that the pathogen jumped to people from an animal, as has been seen with other coronaviruses; for example, the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is thought to have jumped to humans from civets in 2002. Dozens of people infected early in the current outbreak worked in a live-animal market in the Chinese city of Wuhan, but tests of coronavirus samples found at the market have yet to identify a source.

¹³¹ NowThis News, "Jane Goodall on Wildlife Trafficking and COVID-19."

¹³² For the Ute Nation, it was the depletion of natural resources by the white Mormon settlers that led to conflict in the 1850s. Duncan, "The Northern Utes of Utah," 187.

¹³³ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

¹³⁴ Tangen.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Matamonasa-Bennett, "Putting the Horse before Descartes," 32.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Tangen.

¹³⁹ Power et al.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Chatterjea, *Butting Out*, 141.

¹⁴² Tangen.

¹⁴³ Power et al.

¹⁴⁴ Tangen. This quote continues: "It has to do with colonization, people who might be fully native but they were adopted out of their culture, or people who are living in the city so they're not connected to land base, or people who are speaking their language, but there are so many different variants, but people are often carrying this wound like they're not enough."

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ NDN Collective, "Land Back Home Page."

¹⁴⁷ Tangen.

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ROUNDTABLES

TikTok and Short-Form Screendance Before and After Covid

Moderator: Alexandra Harlig, University of Maryland, College Park

Crystal Abidin, Curtin University

Trevor Boffone, University of Houston

Kelly Bowker, University of California, Riverside

Colette Eloi, University of California, Riverside

Pamela Krayenbuhl, University of Washington Tacoma

Chuyun Oh, San Diego State University

This roundtable was presented on 12 March 2021 as part of the symposium connected to this special issue, *This Is Where We Dance Now: Covid-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen*. It has been edited for clarity and length. The video of the full roundtable conversation and Q+A is viewable at: <https://doi.org/10.18061/ijsd.v12i0.8348>



**ROUNDTABLE
TIKTOK AND SHORT-FORM
SCREENDANCE BEFORE
AND AFTER COVID**

With Crystal Abidin, Trevor Boffone,
Kelly Bowker, Colette Eloi, Chuyun
Oh, and Pamela Krayenbuhl
Moderated by Alexandra Harlig

Friday, March 12
5pm LA / 8pm NYC /
1am (13/3) London /
12pm (13/3) Sydney

THIS IS WHERE WE DANCE NOW
COVID-19 AND THE NEW AND NEXT IN DANCE ONSCREEN

 THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

GLOBAL ARTS + HUMANITIES
DISCOVERY THEME

Photo by Elena Benthaus, used with permission. Design by Regina Harlig.



Keywords: Covid-19, TikTok, Dubsmash, dance challenges, popular screendance, appropriation, platform specificity, congregational global body, #Jerusalema, Zoomers, #Blacklivesmatter, influencer, Dance Central, face dance, algorithm, viral, privilege, entrapment

Alexandra Harlig: I'm very excited to be moderating tonight as we discuss dance on TikTok and other short form video platforms as they have developed over the last year in particular. Our presenters will each give short remarks and then I'll pose some questions and we'll have some time for questions from the audience at the end.

Crystal Abidin: Here are five provocations on TikTok based on my forthcoming book *TikTok and Youth Cultures* coming out next year. First, let's think about curation. On TikTok the audio meme is the sorting vehicle or the organizing principle for content. So what this means for a lot of performers—especially for myself as a trained musician—is that we tend to connect the memory of the audio to the bodily performance. So if we hear something, immediately some people break into muscle memory and perform that TikTok dance. And that primacy of audio over the physical and the fleshiness is quite interesting. So think about this as earworms leading the way and shaping how we make use of dance on TikTok.

The second provocation is in relation to creation. On TikTok, technical expertise is really important for visual narrativity; we think about transitions, cuts, the vernacular of trends. We've got a whole layer of celebrity on TikTok whose expertise is teaching people how to do these cuts and transitions, and the knowledge share of the performance of the app—of all the technical knowledge and skills—is an add-on in relation to your knowledge of dance and performance. So there are people who may groom both different sets of expertise, and then there are people who can bring both together, and end up being TikTok stars.

Provocation three looks at competition. You may remember that on TikTok you are able to click into an audio meme and look at all the traceable histories of videos that have used a sound, and that traceable history tends to foster competitive ranking. Most of the time the first video in the audio meme stream is the originating video, and thereafter all the other videos are not sorted chronologically, neither are they sorted by order of the popularity, but rather in batches. So in the first batch you see those who've got millions of engagements, followed by 500k and above, 100k to 500k, and so on. Creators who are posting TikTok videos are competing within each of these tiers in order to be seen. What happens here is there's often a lot of conversation and wrestling over people trying to step over each other in the rank, or play within their ranks. To put this more cheekily: "if I cannot play with the kids in the big leagues and the millions of followers, I'm going to remain amateurish and play within my league and become the big fish in a small pond, rather than worm my way and be a little little fish in the very big pond."

Number four looks at circulation. On TikTok, remix cultures are built into the platform norm; my friends Meg Zeng, Xu Chen, as well as Bondy Kaye wrote a paper describing creativity on TikTok as a type of “circumscribed creativity,” where all the features of the platform shape you to create content in specific ways. So while you believe you’ve got flexibility, this platform is really squishing you into a template and teaching you how to perform creativity within a box. Now, the consequences of this platform norm is that ownership and authorship is often in tension with spreadability; on the one hand you see people performing feeling so happy that millions of people are using their dance, on the other hand every half an hour there are people calling out each other for not acknowledging them. Sometimes the most menial things like a hand sign that goes from the left to the right showing a twist have TikTokers coming up in arms with each other going, ‘you stole my idea!’ ‘You stole my move!’ and we’re now breaking down to these micro interactions and micro-wrestles of ownership for even the most mundane of bodily symbols.

The fifth and last provocation looks at commerce. On TikTok, visibility does not naturally convert to celebrity or leverage and this is because in this platform, post-based virality takes precedence over persona-based virality. You will see that there are lots of lower-end mid-tier TikTok accounts—you’ve got one or two viral videos and the rest of the content not registering anything. And in order to get a leg up in that game, they end up repeating the same tweak or the same format of that one viral post over and over. And to try and circumvent the algorithm, they try their very best to blend this core originator viral video with other trends, but they can never really stray far away from the one trick pony that got them viral in the first place. So, we’ve got curation, creation, competition, circulation, and commerce.

Trevor Boffone: I want to talk to you all about Dubsmash, a dance challenge app that quickly became one of the most popular social media dance places among Black teens in the US in October 2018. In my upcoming book, *Renegades: Digital Dance Cultures from Dubsmash to TikTok*, I interrogate the roles that Dubsmash, social media, and hip hop music and dance play in youth identity formation in the United States. It explores why Generation Z—or so-called Zoomers—use social media dance apps to connect, how they use them to build relationships, how race and other factors of identity play out through these apps, how social media dance shapes a wider cultural context, and ultimately how community is formed.

These Black Zoomer artists [referring to image on screen] Jalaiah Harmon, who was the one that created the Renegade dance, Brooklyn Queen, Kayla Nicole Jones, and my high school students have become key agents in culture creation and dissemination in the age of screendance. They are some of today’s most influential content creators, even if they lack widespread name recognition. Their artistic contributions have come to define a generation and *Renegades* tells their stories.

We are in the middle of a major cultural moment in which Zoomers are stirring change through social media performance. This was no more apparent during the summer of 2020. As the Covid-19 pandemic waged on and the country became engulfed in the renewed Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd, one thing became abundantly clear—Dubsmashers had mobilized. They were making “moves” on the streets in much the same way they had been doing on social media. And, as always, these teens advocated for racial justice through screendance. With a platform comes great responsibility, and these Zoomers didn’t back down.

As Dubsmashers attended BLM marches and used their social media platforms to elevate Black voices, at the same time there was a new dance challenge in the works. On June 5th, the Dubsmash Instagram account posted a collection of dubs set to the song “Black Lives Matter” by Dae Dae featuring London on Da Track. The primary dance, choreographed by well-known Dubsmasher @Niyahgotcurls, had all of the hallmarks of a viral dance challenge, combining standard Zoomer dance moves such as the Woah, the Wave, and the Clap, with moves invoking BLM such as freezing with one’s hands up and the Black Power fist. At the end of the dance, Niyah holds out her hands, inviting in viewers before the words “#Blacklivesmatter” appear. While other dancers offered their own spin on the challenge, Niyah’s version gained the most virality, likely due to her popularity on Instagram and Dubsmash. Even so, nearly every version of the dance featured the hands up and the Black Power fist, marking these dance moves as an essential part of the viral dance repertoire in the wake of the continued oppression of the Black community at the hands of White supremacy.

The #BlackLivesMatter dance challenge conveys how this cohort of Black teens uses Dubsmash dance trends and aesthetics to push against mainstream notions of civility and identity. These dancers use digital platforms and hip hop culture to push against the pervasive whiteness, and corresponding white supremacy, in mainstream US pop culture as seen on other apps such as Instagram and TikTok, where clicktivism and black squares are the norm. In 2020, this was even more apparent. Dubsmashers were not going to let this moment pass them by. Even though they may be young, this is the world they have grown up in and it’s the one they’re ready to transform. Having a viral social media platform was unthinkable when I graduated high school in (year redacted), yet this is the reality of Dubsmashers and other members of Generation Z who are coming-of-age in a digital world. They are not just the next generation of activists, artists, influencers, and leaders; they are the present. And, as this collective work reveals, the revolution will be Dubsmashed.

Kelly Bowker: In my dissertation research I have been looking at the original *Dance Central* video game as it was created for the Xbox using the Microsoft Kinect. One thing that I examined in that study is a language of authenticity that got circulated with the game. For example, two comments from press about the game say: “If you’re serious about learning new dance moves ... buy *Dance Central 2*.” And “If you’re looking for the true dancing experience... ‘*Dance Central 3*’ is the boogie machine for you.” And the

game's creators said: "They can do it in their living room and learn a real skill. And now, when I go to my next wedding—where I used to sit out—I can actually do a few things."

My concern was that there's language being attached to it in terms of "this really teaches you to dance," while the choreography for the game is actually very tailored because of the technology, and the Kinect's tracking system, which does a really poor job with the dance styles that are performed in the game. If you compare images of the choreographer of a particular dance, an avatar during game play, and a woman performing the dance, who notes in her YouTube comments that she gets 100, and labels herself as an expert; she says, "I'll show you how to get 100." Looking at screenshots of these dancers at the same moment in the choreography, you can see that the movement becomes less angular, and more vertical. In other words, the Africanist aesthetics are being evacuated from the dance. And that happens throughout the dance and throughout the game. We see the choreographer with extreme lean and deep knee-bend, the avatar is a little more vertical, and then the gamer is almost completely upright. And one of the things about this particular gamer: she has over 3,000 subscribers on YouTube, and she has over 500 videos; in the morning she posted a video that when I saw it at only 4 hours old, already had 36 views, 11 likes, and 4 comments.

So there's an ongoing community, and my questions in relation to the topic of TikTok are: in terms of TikTok, does the game continue, and how does the game continue to circulate? Does the rhetoric of authenticity that game creators and early press tied to the game continue to be picked up by game players? And then how does the movement change when the game moves to TikTok? The game certainly is on TikTok; people post screen shares of them playing the game, and people post videos of them doing the dance moves. Sometimes it's really clear that they're playing the game, because they're looking past their phone at a screen to know what move to do next, but a lot of times they're doing the moves from memory, they've done these dances so many times.

One example is an account with the username 2000snostalgia7, and you can see the community that's being created, because they post their next video based on the comments that on their previous videos of what songs people want to see next. You can see in a comment at the top of their video: "move your body been asking." As in, "I've been asking you to do this dance," so in this video they are performing the dance to the song "Move Your Body." I think their username and hashtags really capture the essence of what a lot of the members of this community are interested in, which is nostalgia for a game that they played as a kid. A lot of people talk about how when a certain song comes on, they just do the moves, they know them from memory, and also that a large number of young women had a crush on a particular avatar.

As far as the rhetoric of authenticity, it does get attached to the game as it continues on in TikTok. This women's caption at the top says, "y'all talking about *Just Dance* but can

we PLEASE acknowledge the most underrated (and superior) game *Dance Central*?" And a few of the comments on her video say "yessss Dance Central was better. You had to use your whole body," "finally!! it was actually choreography. I love it so much" and "*Dance Central* had the real dances." These kinds of comments appear not just on her video but on other *Dance Central* videos. A lot of people note that this is how they learned to dance, that they do these moves at the club, and one particular person learned an entire *Dance Central* dance, auditioned for the dance team, and was accepted.

As far as my question about whether or not the African aesthetics get evacuated in the same way on TikTok, I think that something different might actually happen because there does seem to be so much communication amongst the community on TikTok. In the screenshot, you can see up in the right-hand corner there's a little box with a silhouette in it. That is the silhouette of the dancer as it's being recorded by the Kinect. And in one of the videos that I looked at, people were just ripping this dancer to shreds in the comments, saying, "you're offbeat," "you're not even doing the dance!" While the feedback system of the Kinect might score someone to get 100%, the community might give them different feedback.

Colette Eloi: I am interested in how pre-colonial African worldviews and ideas of self in dance provide an increased understanding of contemporary Black dance, like those we see on TikTok. With respect to this roundtable discussion, "What is the Next and the New for TikTok?" I cannot say what will be "New," but I do know that it must include a further decolonized perspective of Black Dance, one that seeks out pre-colonial ideologies of the African cultures that have contributed much to the world and to dance on TikTok; ideas of sacred versus social must be further analyzed, along with ideas about the body, and body parts.

I think it's necessary to mention the global Afrobeats music trend, and specifically the song with its hymn-like meanings of transcendence, "Jerusalema," written by Master KG with vocals by singer/songwriter Nomcembo Zikode, released in November 2019. The song itself was wildly popular shortly following its release; however, it was the TikTok #JerusalemaDanceChallenge that fueled its global reach. Angolan group Fenomenos do Semba recorded themselves dancing a super laid-back, electric slide-like dance routine while eating and holding plates and pots, igniting the dance challenge and making the popularity of the song reach biblical proportions. With more than 85 million Spotify streams, 1 billion views on TikTok, and 812 million dance creations through the challenge, the song "Became a Global Hit Without Ever Having to Be Translated," according to *Rolling Stone's* October 2020 article.

My analysis of Jerusalema revealed that African-rooted dance can be understood as a kinetic medicinal frequency that like-minded community members generate and apply in the face of change and turmoil. This is in fact very similar to the purpose of dance in precolonial cosmologies from Africa as found in the Bantu-Kongo, Ewe-Fon and in the

Mali-Senegambia regions. As such, the #JerusalemDanceChallenge on TikTok was a manifestation of African dance technology in the way it soothes a crisis with joy, with joint community togetherness. The release of this song coincides with the toxic twin traumas of the Covid Pandemic and the George Floyd Murder and the global protests. The projecting of being at ease that is embodied in the steps and lyrics of Jerusalem, seemed to be a remedy and met the desire of the world for transcendence. What makes this challenge unlike others on TikTok is that so-called “non-dancers” danced: entire police departments, firefighters, funeral homes, scientists, business people, entire airline crews, nursing homes, butchers, people with walkers and in wheelchairs, soldiers in riot gear, soccer players, celebrities, every way of life was represented.

For this roundtable, I would like to offer the idea of the Congregational Global Body. Not limited to the church, my idea of the congregational global body is my philosophical expansion of the Nigerian Lucumi pre-colonial ideology of *Ara* or person. More than the physical body, the *Ara* is built by community—a new divine whole body that extends beyond the limbs of the dancer into the cosmos; the body is not just the individual but the congregational body, including dancers, singers, musicians, and audience members, engaged in raising positive energy. In the case of TikTok trends like Jerusalem, the social media platform/screen facilitates the congregational global body, creating a balance in the world in their shared resonance that extends beyond their reach.

The enlivened congregational global body of Jerusalem speaks, it unites the voices of the many; it votes; it signifies life, unity, and humanistic values. It soothes pain. It is generous and abundant. It shuns the power of fear and even of illness. It promotes inclusivity and individuality. It performs and incites well-being. It embraces sexuality and joy and enacts through body, mind, and spirit, holding a diverse and complex array of expressions and meanings. This is what I came to understand after watching hours of these videos. Essential workers dance through the hospital with people on ventilators. One clergyman from a parish in Mumbai said that his congregation’s video performing Jerusalem was about “Unity in Diversity.” In another video a queer youth puts his individual aesthetic into the seemingly set choreography and is embraced. Another priest posted his congregation dancing, quoting bible verse Jeremiah 3:16, in an act of hope and danced prayer stating, “We Will Dance Again.”

The TikTok screen created the congregational global dance body rooted in pre-colonial Black/African culture, which is based in raising healing frequency to activate wholeness. The corporeality of ease, the recognition of all those who are now on the other side, the coming together due to shared conditions, shifts what might be social to sacred. Much has changed; traditional dance that is usually learned over years can be transmitted in one evening of binge watching TikTok. Surprisingly, the sacredness of the dance was retained in the Afrobeat dance Jerusalem to a detectable degree. My closing provocations are: Can the sacredness of dance co-exist with the desire to go viral? Is

Black culture being erased or widely disseminated through TikTok like platforms? Can TikTok and Social Media screens facilitate Global harmony?

Chuyun Oh: Today, I am going to talk about TikTok dance challenges with an emphasis on the face, based on my current book project. TikTok, as you already know, is the newest short video sharing app, best known for “#DanceChallenge.” Although it’s unclear when and who started the trend, it can be traced back to fall 2019. Since the Covid-19 outbreak in December 2019, the time users spent on TikTok was doubled, and it became the most downloaded app of 2020 with increasing popularity to cope with pandemic-related anxiety.

As Sherril Dodds and Colleen Hooper explain, the face is the central part of human expression and identity. For them, “facial choreography” refers to a preferred facial expression and convention in each dance style, often enhanced by video editing, like the highlighted aggressive facial expression of an African American Krumping dancer on *So You Think You Can Dance*.

When applying “facial choreography” to TikTok, I argue that there is a rise of “face dance.” Face dance differs from facial choreography because face is no longer an adjective, “facial,” that elaborates choreography. On TikTok, it is the face that is dancing, and the dancer is the face that is at the center of attention. While “choreography” implies professionalism, dance can refer to a more inclusive activity that everyone can do, from ritual to street festival. It can be a spontaneous, amateur activity, like many social dances.

TikTok dance challenges, as social dance, prioritize socializing and popularity instead of doing the dance right. They mostly consist of simple movements, such as body rolls or swaying hips in a regular tempo—not too fast, not too slow, in an easy going way. A dance challenge is usually recorded by one camera, as a one-shot, focusing on the upper body in portrait orientation, and is front-driven, within a limited space like a bedroom, and time, about 15 seconds.

From proscenium theatre, movie screen, television, computer, and then to tablet and smartphone, the stage actually gets smaller and it is even mobile because the audience now watches video on the go. So today, I argue that we watch dance on the smallest stage in the history of dance, which does not require the previous holistic viewing in theater or what Dodds referred to as focused, completed, intimate viewing.

In a dance challenge, when everyone is doing the same movement without multiple cameras, without enough time or space, the best way to stand out as an individual is to focus on face dance. That includes movements like flirtatious winks, naïve happy smiles, biting lips, rolling eyes, smirking with a shoulder shrug, grimacing, and more. Face dance expresses emotional variety within 15 seconds, such as curiosity, boredom, excitement, awkwardness, just being “cool,” or self-pleasure that resonates with a private, intimate moment of orgasmic, sexual ecstasy. Face dance is quick, whimsical,

drastically changing every second, and unpredictable so that the audience doesn't swipe up. TikTok dance challengers keep the body movement the same, but play with the face with a great deal of improvisation and thus individualization.

It has been rare to see "face dance." Examples can be a proud natural smile after the successful completion of 32 *fouettés* in *Swan Lake*; a cathartic grimace during the sharp, passionate footwork in Flamenco; the subtle, uncomfortable, vulnerable face of a postmodern dancer who walks onto the stage naked without any sound; or a father dancing with his daughter at her wedding whose smile says more than happiness. So I argue that TikTok dance is actually imitating the fleeting authenticity of face dance that is hard to capture. But we know that TikTok dancers would stop smiling as soon as they stop recording, so although it looks improvisational and raw, it is still a choreographed authenticity.

During the pandemic, people across the globe suffer from the lack of clean water and hygiene products, unsafe work environments, domestic violence, and racist attacks. In this crisis, we might wonder why there are so many smiley, happy, light-skinned girls dancing in luxurious bedrooms. Future studies can investigate neoliberal capitalism and social media algorithms that support racial, gender, and classed privilege, and how they affect monetization, celebrity culture, and dance labor on social media during and after Covid-19.

Pamela Krayenbuhl: I want to offer one last disciplinary perspective: that of a (dance) media historian who tends to take the long view. Given that, I want to briefly discuss two of my own avenues into making sense of short-form dance on these apps, focused here on TikTok.

My two avenues are medium and/or platform specificity, and restaging old phenomena. First, medium specificity is a film and media studies concept inherited from art historians that asks, essentially: what is unique about x medium? What forms or aspects of human expression does x medium allow or disallow? (and in this case x medium could be painting, photography, film, sculpture, etc.) For our purposes, I am interested not in the larger medium of "the computer"—too big—or even the much smaller category of the "smartphone application" but rather the "short-form video app" specifically—so my question becomes: what is unique about these platforms? And to drill down even further: what unique affordances and constraints are given to or placed upon dance by shortform video platforms like Dubsmash and TikTok? For those of you steeped in technology studies literature, you'll recognize the term affordances from Janet Murray's work on the "digital medium"—she defines them as properties that allow particular uses.

But I'm more interested in TikTok's constraints, so here are two of its major limiting factors: first, that TikTok videos are limited to 15 seconds or up to 60, but it's worth noting that the platform's original 15-second limit tends to be the one that everyone

cleaves to. And second, the forced vertical or portrait orientation of the app; you can't flip it sideways as you can with many other applications, so dances can't move much laterally. These constraints play perhaps the biggest role in shaping dance style and choreography on the platform. Choreographers construct simple sequences of movement in order to stay under that 15-second marker and in the limited space of a portrait-oriented phone screen, amateur dancers can learn and replicate those simple sequences. As Chuyun discussed, the common thread in TikTok choreographies is a focus on the face, as well as hands, arms, hips, and butt. Footwork is rare and so are full-body dances, so the age-old complaint of non-dancers having "two left feet?" Not a problem on TikTok.

In the context of Covid-19 and its various lockdowns, we've seen millions of new users flock to the app, so these constrained dances with lots of elbow hits—as if they're hitting the edge of the screen—have been performed by increasingly numerous and diverse people. I want to argue that they collectively constitute a *performance of entrapment*, mirroring our shared experience of being stuck at home. These dancers are all similarly "stuck" within the frame of their smartphone camera, which is usually propped up or mounted somewhere and notably *not* moving. Instead of an expansive stage or dance floor, a small rectangle within one's bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, or porch is the only allotted space for embodied expression, and it gets viewed on loop, much like our day is in front of Zoom.

My second avenue here is about restaging old phenomena. Today, as many American critics have pointed out, Dubsmash in the US essentially functions as a space where Black youth create and develop dances within their own community. On the other hand many see TikTok as the space where white youth steal those dances and profit from them. And while this is perhaps an oversimplification (there are numerous popular Black dancers on TikTok as well), I can't help but see a very clear parallel to the last century of American vernacular dances in the United States, especially on media platforms.

In fact, TikTok restages the same processes of "mainstreaming" Black vernacular dances via white bodies that has gone on in every previous generation via a different medium. In the jazz era it was the Charleston and Lindy Hop on film, at midcentury it was rock-n-roll dances like the Twist on TV, and now it's hip-hop dances like the Dougie, the Woah, the Wave, the Dab, and so on—and they're online. In every case, a mass medium was the means through which white folks made money performing the dances created by Black folks. With its time and space constraints, TikTok offers a literally condensed version of the same phenomenon.

To conclude, I want to suggest that short-form video apps bear a great deal of continuity with older media when it comes to their circulation of popular dance and the politics thereof. But at the same time, they offer new constraints that help to shape that dance into something very much of the (pandemic) moment.

Audience Q+A

Alexandra: I wanted to start with this question of platform specificity, but there's also a significant cross-platform and cross-medium experience; we have a video game, on YouTube, on TikTok, and Dubsmash as a company sharing via Instagram. On one hand TikTok has such primacy right now, and TikTok and Dubsmash are perhaps unique for being "dance first." Dance is what TikTok and Dubsmash are famous for. On the other hand, they need the platforms that predated them and the pandemic moment.

Trevor: A lot of popular TikTok trends are actually longer forms of Vine trends that are being recycled. Something that I noticed with a lot of the teenagers I work with is that they're hyper aware of what works well on the different platforms. My students will say, "let's make a Dubsmash," and then we'll make the same exact song and dance on TikTok, but we change our face— exactly what Chuyun said. Our face dancing is different, the dance goes less hard; it's simplified, it's more playful. And it's amazing to me, these young people are super aware of the systems that everyone's talking about in a very scholarly way, but they're aware of them in a very "hey I just want to get more followers" way.

Pamela: We can see in places like Vine and YouTube and elsewhere the seeds of where these platforms might be going next. My students last quarter were really excited to talk about the influence of TikTok on music video because of the video for the Doja Cat song "Say So." The song became wildly popular in one of these dance trends and the dance, created by a 16-year-old Zoomer, then actually got incorporated into the official music video for the song, which is on YouTube and everywhere now. And I believe the young woman was invited to be in the video with Doja Cat. So I'm thinking about not only what feeds into TikTok, but also what comes out the other end.

Crystal: I wanted to reflect on the cultural specificity. I'm an anthropologist by training, and a lot of what I do involves meeting with people in the flesh to see what they do when they make things for social media. And I was just thinking, if I were to go to any of my young informants in the Asia-Pacific region, and asked them "what is TikTok for?" or "what is Dubsmash for?" I dare say that none of them are going to list dance within the top three things. Speaking to any of my Chinese informants, they use TikTok as a legacy of its predecessor app Douyin, that came out a year ago. For them, TikTok is a way to perform make-up transitions, and shock people that a face that "woke up like this" can look drop dead gorgeous with some transitions, or for fashion. And there is a legacy there of cross-platforming from something domestic and using TikTok to go global. If I were to ask my informants in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore what Dubsmash was for, it would be skits and voiceovers where they mimic actors. They would be very subversive and cheeky with their parodies, trying to make humor a vehicle to talk about political critique. That is a legacy of learning to circumvent state censorship. These are countries where something that is borderline dissident would land you in a police

station for questioning, but doing so in the vehicle of humor on Dubsmash passes off as frivolity.

So, dance does happen there, but there are two core differences: One, a lot of the young people on TikTok use dance as a way to get noticed by the algorithm, and for other people to see them on the “for you” page. Young people perform great dances, but in the captions and the texts laid over, and in their speech, they outrightly tell you, “I’m doing this so the algorithm puts me on your fyp, and now that I’ve got your attention here’s what I want to say.” They’re very aware that dance is the popular format that gets them onto people’s screens.

The second way I’m seeing dance used as a background is through this concept of refracted publics, where young people believe that if it’s just a young woman dancing scantily clad, the algorithm is just going to pass you by, but then in your dialogue, you’re talking about genocide, racism, all the state abuse that you believe TikTok’s going to remove from the platform, if not for the fact that your fancy trendy dance is helping mask this from the machine algorithmic eye. So I would say that there are a lot of young people not in the dance sphere who are aware of the value of dance and who are using that social capital to embed their messages there as well.

Trevor: I think the regional differences are really important; for example the musicals that are popular on TikTok in the UK are very different than the ones that are popular here in the US. Even though the actual Broadway canon is the same, the ones that the algorithm pushes out in the UK are different.

Chuyun: I was born in South Korea, and I was able to visit my family there last semester because I was teaching online. Because my research is about K-Pop and also social media, I ended up stuck at home watching a lot of TikTok videos. And I noticed the “for you” suggestions were dramatically different from the videos suggested in the United States. I’m not an Algorithm Studies scholar, but to think about the audience reception of dance, we might need to collaborate with people in other fields, in order to get a better idea of how our understanding of a popular trend is actually manipulated by something beyond our human level of expectation.

Colette: So who creates the algorithm?

Alexandra: This is a very important question that’s increasingly being handled in Internet Studies, questions about algorithmic bias and who is in fact making those decisions, and who’s training the AI “who” is making those decisions. There’s speculation that the algorithm on TikTok does focus heavily on facial recognition and also perhaps reads body movement.

Pamela: I’m interested in discourses around these things, and what I’m noticing about the discourse around the algorithm is that it shadow bans fat people, disabled people. Anyone who doesn’t fit the normative notion of who’s going to look attractive on the

“for you” page. I follow a number of creators who fit into or identify with one or more of those categories, and they will post really great dances that a lot of people like, but they just won’t get the traction. So then they’ll post “y’all aren’t ready for the conversation about shadow banning,” or something like that. Even though we don’t have a lot of information about the creation of that algorithm, there’s definitely a lot of discourse amongst users critiquing it.

Trevor: If you look at just the top 50 creators on TikTok, the most followed people, they’re mostly “attractive” white teenagers or people that fit into “western beauty standards” and so it goes exactly with what we’re talking about.

Crystal: I don’t think the body is central for many genres of TikTok. But if we consider the body in the equation, there are cultures where people ally with the underdog or the black sheep, and a lot of your cultural capital on the app is linked to the fat body, the disabled body, and people interact with more of such content to disrupt the “Instagram bodies” infiltrating the platform. The intentional design from this app makes it such that we can never have a fruitful conversation about what’s the minority, except for when we can prove that these creators have been censored. A recent movement on TikTok by creators is to ask the company ByteDance to be transparent with their moderation policy, because it seems like in some countries just mentioning the word “algorithm” in your captions gets you removed. In some other country markets if you talk about the government, that gets removed. In some other markets showing something that is similar to nipples in coloration—even if you’re just wearing a t-shirt—gets you removed. And then you get exploitation, mutilation, and gore: viral. And that standard of moderation is something that we can push the company to be more transparent with. If not, I feel we’ll always be in this box of guessing.

What we do know from research is that TikTok operates very differently in specific country markets. For instance, we know that from the way TikTok entered the South Korean market, they cooperated mostly with K-Pop companies, and when you see a lot of people doing dances based on these K-pop songs, it’s because the very first batch of them started there. When TikTok broke into the Japanese market, they mass-harvested these humorous high school creators from Vine, and therefore it seems like that is the most popular genre. So, the origin story of every country market shapes what people believe the algorithm is looking for.

There are people you can pay to teach you how to maximize traction on your page—that swear upon using a combination of songs, that if you like and engage in a specific time slot you are going to be able to be more seen, and we see a lot of mutual following, and collaborations with influencers. And there are also TikTokers who will try something for 100 days and say, “based on a sample size of one, TikTok likes *a*, *b*, *c*, and hates 1, 2, 3.” All of this is folklore, but if enough people do it, it becomes truth. And that kind of takes the power away from the platform coming to say yes or no.

Sima Belmar: I'm interested in the ways kids become aware of these processes of dissemination and appropriation.

Trevor: My book is mostly about Black teen girls, and they are hyper aware of this conversation: that someone like Jalaiah Harmon can create a dance, Renegade, and then Charli D'Amelio can get the credit; how white teens are able to appropriate trends and monetize them. They are very much aware. What I noticed though is that the comments in these videos on TikTok and Instagram, for instance, are divided by racial lines where young white people are saying, "this isn't a big deal, it's just TikTok, it's just a dance, we're just having fun." And then people of color, largely Black young people are saying "No, this is not just fun, this is not just a TikTok dance. This is actually our livelihood, and you're taking away our opportunities."

Keisha Turner: I'm curious about how we repair the lack of attribution/erasure of Blackness in these dances. I had my students select a viral dance challenge to learn and present, including what culture the dances came from. The movements were largely hip-hop based but students identified that as "pop culture" rather than Black culture. This is all too prevalent.

Colette: At some point I'm hoping these kinds of things will bring the adults to say "we should probably address racism. We should put it in curriculum." We need to undo this anti-Blackness; this new global community is coming about so quickly, and it is going to require new conversations. One of the things that happened with *Jerusalema* that was different was because it was a shared experience of the twin toxic traumas of the pandemic and the George Floyd murder. We were sharing this feeling of "I don't get to move," and social distancing, so you had people with wheelchairs, people in Mexican folklorico costumes, people in Ireland who did the challenge. We shared a meaning and then did a dance. So that's not quite appropriation, and that kind of thing can happen on TikTok, which I think is beautiful. But the other part of this globalization that we're experiencing requires finding out ways to undo some of this mess.

Crystal: I think if I can summarize this: social justice is cool on TikTok! If we think back on the predecessor apps, the top creators on Vine were comedic people who had great editing skills; Instagram has been overtaken by fashion influencers. For a Gen Z on TikTok, social justice pursuits, and callout cultures are key platform norms. For this reason, oftentimes posts that go viral are just calling people out. On the one hand this means that a lot of minority creators—certainly in Australia, indigenous creators—often get their voices heard. They make noise, and they challenge when white bodies claim to represent them, because they can speak for themselves in an app that allows them to communicate directly with someone. On the negative side, there are also a lot of TikTokers who commodify social justice by bandwagoning, and if you interrogate them in the comments, many of them don't really know what they're saying. It's become trendy, almost like a badge you wear.

Pamela: One positive movement I've noticed is an increased trend in giving "dance credit" on TikTok as a result of the Jalaiah Harmon Renegade issue being very public. *The New York Times* did a big piece, she was on *Ellen*, so once it became big enough, culture in general was like, "this is bad, we can't have this happening," even though it had been happening for a while, and will continue to happen. So, Dubsmash, Instagram; they had cultures of crediting the original creator of the dance. TikTok did not before Renegade, but now people are giving a "dc" in their captions. And when they don't, people call them out and say, "where's your dance credit?!" and they'll tag the person who did create it. So as a community, I think they are trying to correct for some of those problems.

Trevor: That's spot on, and I find with TikTok, the big creators set the tone. Once all that happened, Charli D'Amelio, Addison Rae Easterling, they began to give dance credit, which changed the app culture. By the time "Savage" came out two months after the Renegade story blew up, the #SavageChallenge creator, Keara Wilson, was immediately credited. She immediately had a blue check on Instagram, on TikTok; she had an agent immediately, she had merchandise; Megan Thee Stallion was tweeting about it, and it was a night and day difference from what Jalaiah Harmon had experienced. A lot of creators will now ask in their caption, "hey who created this dance?" if they don't know. One more thing that's changed in the last year is that anything that goes viral, a social media journalist has written an article about it that gives you a very clear lineage.

Chuyun: I think it'll be useful to differentiate finding implications in this fast-changing social media world versus celebrating or glamorizing social media trends. Because what I also notice is that the life span of a viral dance video is really short! TikTok has been here two years, but I cannot even count how many viral dance videos and influencers are out there. In the next few years, maybe the viral video itself won't necessarily mean anything, because anything can go viral. Another thing I notice is the dancers become younger, but they look so mature. The explicit commodification of young girls and their bodies is alarming to me. I think it might be useful for us to see the consequences of fame and how the younger generation is programmed to want to be a star. As a teacher, what can you do when you are guiding students?

Colette: Talking about this kind of sexualized body—the Back to the Root online class series was a response to all of the people who now want to wine their hips; wining of the hips in pre-colonial African cosmology means a lot of things that are not exactly sexual. That gets extracted out as it becomes viral, along with this sexualized, over made-up face and a marketed, commodified body. That is a problem. And that's why we do this, so that people understand what your wining hips might mean, to teach people to look at the body differently, and for women to even imagine themselves differently.

Alexandra: I think that there's a really interesting connection between this appropriation question and the platform affordances. As many of you noted, the

emphasis is above the knee, and on the face—which allows the persona to be a particular focus, but also eliminates some of the parts of the body that we associate most with movement that we would class as Africanist. The knee bend that Kelly referenced, you can't hardly even see in most TikTok videos! And then videos on other platforms are being influenced by that highly constrained movement. So we have a really specific movement style that's predicated on the technological components, and that continues to reinforce a change in the performance itself.

Biographies

Alexandra Harlig is an Assistant Clinical Professor at University of Maryland in the University Honors 'Virtually Human' thematic cluster. She holds a PhD in Dance Studies from The Ohio State University. Her research focuses on popular dance forms in media: the political and economic analysis of their production, circulation, and reception, the movement cultures captured, and the platforms utilized. Her multi-disciplinary dissertation *Social Texts, Social Audiences, Social Worlds: The Circulation of Popular Dance on YouTube* (2019) is available to read and has been downloaded almost 8,000 times. Her writing has been published in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance on the Popular Screen* and *The International Journal of Screendance*, for which she is co-editing the special issue *This Is Where We Dance Now: Covid-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen* with Harmony Bench. Find her on the internet [@ReadyMadeAI](#)

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A/Prof Crystal Abidin is an anthropologist of vernacular internet cultures, especially internet celebrity, influencer cultures, and social media pop cultures in the Asia Pacific region. She has published over 60 articles/chapters, and her books include *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online* (2018, Emerald), *Microcelebrity Around the Globe: Approaches to Cultures of Internet Fame* (co-edited with Megan Lindsay Brown, 2018, Emerald), *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures* (co-authored with Tama Leaver & Tim Highfield, 2020, Polity), and *Mediated Interfaces: The Body on Social Media* (co-edited with Katie Warfield and Carolina Cambre, 2020, Bloomsbury). Her newest book is *tumblr* (co-authored with Katrin Tiidenberg & Natalie Ann Hendry, 2021, Polity), with forthcoming books focused on Influencer cultures, Blogshop histories, and TikTok youth movements. Crystal works closely with industry, and her internationally acclaimed research has been recognized by Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia, Pacific Standard Top 30 Thinkers Under 30, and the ABC Top 5 Humanities Fellowship. She is Principal Research Fellow and ARC DECRA Fellow in Internet Studies, and Programme Lead of Social Media Pop Cultures at CCAT, Curtin University.

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Kelly Bowker is a Ph.D. candidate in Critical Dance Studies at the University of California, Riverside where she has received the Chancellor's Distinguished Fellowship, Gluck Fellowship, Digital Humanities Fellowship, and Dissertation Year Program Fellowship. Her research uses critical race studies to examine the way that technology is represented and utilized in both popular and concert dance. Her interdisciplinary research addresses the relationship between identity and how individuals experience and engage with technologies, considering both the active construction of images and the role of representation. She has presented her research at Dance Studies Association as well as the Popular Culture Association.

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After Quarantine: The Future of Screendance

Moderator: Omari 'Motion' Carter, London Contemporary Dance School

Sandra Maduoma, University of East London

Antoine Marc, Independent artist

Vilma Tihilä, Independent artist

Alice Underwood, Independent artist

James Williams, Independent artist

This roundtable was presented on 13 March 2021 as part of the symposium connected to this special issue, *This Is Where We Dance Now: Covid-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen*. It has been edited for clarity and length. The video of the full roundtable conversation and Q+A is viewable at: <https://doi.org/10.18061/ijsd.v12i0.8347>



ROUNDTABLE
AFTER QUARANTINE: THE
FUTURE OF SCREENDANCE

With Sandra Maduoma, Antoine Marc, Vilma Tihilä, Alice Underwood, and James Williams
Moderated by Omari 'Motion' Carter

Saturday, March 13
9am LA / 12pm NYC /
5pm London /
4am (14/3) Sydney

THIS IS WHERE WE DANCE NOW
COVID-19 AND THE NEW AND NEXT IN DANCE ONSCREEN

 **THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY** **GLOBAL ARTS + HUMANITIES**
DISCOVERY THEME

Photo by Elena Benthaus, used with permission. Design by Regina Harlig.



Keywords: Covid-19, screendance, film, dance film, future, translation, image, collaboration, education, online, digital, access

Omari 'Motion' Carter: I'm so happy to have you guys here and to hear what you have to say. This is a big question—what is the future of screendance? We're looking at being oracles in a sense. Please introduce yourselves, and let us know where in the world you are.

Sandra Maduoma: I am Sandra. I am based in London, UK where I study urban dance practice at the University of East London. I'm actually taking screendance as one of my modules at the moment. You know in the post-pandemic world, we don't know what's going to happen. However, I do believe that screendance is actually taking over the dance industry. People who have never had to learn about editing and filming have had to learn by force. We've had to learn to use Zoom, and all of these different platforms, and it's just going to keep growing.

There's no way it's going to go back to just seeing dance in a theater. More people in my generation are taking a lot more interest. I wasn't really interested in screendance until I started studying it, and learning, and seeing that it's a whole 'nother language, seeing that actually there's so much more you can do with screendance—not only with choreography, but with the different angles of the different shots, the different editing. So I really feel like it's just going to keep growing and this generation is going to build up and help people outside of screendance to really believe and respect dance and art in themselves.

Screendance is going to represent not only different types of dancers, but different types of artists and genres as well. At the moment, I see more contemporary screendances, but I really feel that urban styles are going to come into it a lot more, especially crossing over into Black Lives Matter and other issues as people continue to use screendance as a way to voice their ideas and opinions. I'm really excited to see what the future holds. I definitely believe that it's just going to keep growing and growing and growing.

Omari: Thank you so much for that. Wicked.

Antoine Marc: My name is Antoine Marc. I'm a film director and choreographer based in London. And what a special year it has been. It's true that there's something very special about screendance, and precisely as Sandra was saying, we were able to see how much it has expanded already just after one year of this challenge. And there are different possibilities, as well as ramifications, with how things have changed. I'm thinking of dance film festivals. I always loved to travel, but the reality was that—whether in terms of time or resources—it was often difficult to actually go to all of them, and it was not something that everyone was able to do. This and last year so many

dance film festivals moved onto the digital space. And that means so many people across the globe were instantly connected and able to network and share ideas, and even share different ways of seeing screendance throughout the world. More room has been created for discussion—just like is happening right now. It's been quite amazing in the sense of giving more people accessibility to a platform to really experience different points of view of how screendance is created and the impact that it had, and will have, across the world.

In terms of specifics, last year I directed an interactive dance film called *(Re)United*. You select the character/story that you want to experience, and that little change integrates audience participation. We have had some amazing feedback, so I think in the future, it is something that we will implement much further and more often, because it creates that instant co-connection and personalizes the experience. I also recently shot an XR (extended reality) dance film. The challenge was to actually understand the technology better to see its future application. XR has become kind of mainstream thanks to Disney's *The Mandalorian*, but immersing a performer into a virtual world is something that dance film can integrate as the technology is becoming more accessible.

To conclude, we can already see the different possibilities for how dance film can be the bridge that connects the performer and the audience at home, as well as the creators. This is kind of an exciting time to be creating stuff.

Omari: The future is closer than you think! The more we learn about the technology available to us in this current age, the more we realize it was there already, before we found it ourselves.

Vilma Tihilä: My name is Vilma Tihilä, and I'm a dance filmmaker from Finland. I thought I'd start with a few questions:

- What is behind the words?
- What is before the words?
- What is it that one can only know by feeling it or experiencing it?
- What is it which cannot be explained with words, or what is the vocabulary for a language with no words?

These are a few of the questions I often return to in my work. And for me, the potential and the challenge in dance filmmaking is to find the ideas and techniques that deal with these questions in practice. For me, the key approach in this practice is poetics. Dance filming, its physical and visual and aural languages, has a poetic approach that offers radical and self-reflective, fluid and innovative strategies to address questions in meaning-making, communication, and storytelling. And I think this is the power

of screendance to challenge the thinking and doing in the fields of cinema, dance, media arts, visual arts, and so on.

Thinking of everyday life and the visual era we are living in now has really made me think how the imagery we are creating and absorbing affects our being and behavior. And in my opinion, we need more soft, accepting, and listening visuals. We need to learn how to ask with images, rather than to possess with images. Deconstructing, questioning, and challenging norms through the poetry of movement and image in dance film links with feminist issues and intersectional perspectives. Asking not only **what**—but more importantly, **how**—is the key. Having an ongoing conversation about meanings, working methods, hierarchies and roles, responsibilities, and objectives is important. The way of working becomes a part of the final film. And in communicating all of this we need, of course, language. Words. Meanings. Visions. Action. And this brings me back to where I started: What is behind the words? What is before the words? What is it that one can only know by feeling it or experiencing it? What is it which cannot be explained with words?

Omari: I remember once at the Frame Rush festival an artist called Cléopée Moser said the words we use—the idea that the camera “captures,” it “shoots”—we use really harsh words to describe how we get our material.

Alice Underwood: I’m Alice. I’m a filmmaker and I work predominantly with dance artists and in the creative arts sector. Pre-pandemic, I was filming a lot of social content for live shows—trailers and short documentaries looking into creation processes. Over the past year obviously things have changed quite a bit, and it has opened up some collaborations on really great screendance specific works. I’ve gotten more involved in ideas and planning shoots, and I’m loving the type of screendance works that I’m doing at the moment. I’m looking forward to getting back into the studio and to working with live works again, but I’m also looking forward to seeing where the screendance path takes me.

What I’m noticing is that there may be a bit more scope to interlink live work and film. There’s a huge amount of live work which is standalone—which you go to see at the theater—and I think it’s the same with screendance. There’s some great standalone screendance works but there’s not necessarily much connection between the two. There’s a good opportunity to combine the two within one process, which I know is already happening, but I think there’s definitely more scope for this. I don’t mean altering live work, but using the ideas and themes and materials from a live show and creating a screendance work that complements it. I don’t mean replicating a live show, so it wouldn’t be the case that once you’ve seen one you don’t need to see the other, but rather that one supports the other as another outcome from a creation process that can be used in different ways. We all know films can reach a wider audience and create better accessibility, which crucial. So you could see the film and it makes you interested

to see the live show, and vice versa. They would each be new experiences in themselves and used for different purposes.

Screendance has always been developing, but this last year has just rocketed it into the forefront. I think as people have delved into the filming side of things, their eyes have been opened to the possibilities that the camera can lend, and the other things that can be shown through its lens. A whole new array of visual ideas can be created that aren't necessarily doable in a live show situation, but would really complement a live show well. And I like the idea that there could be an umbrella of different outcomes from one initial idea that stretches out to create different experiences and reaches different audiences in different ways. I want to push screendance and see what can be created.

Omari: That makes perfect sense. Even when we make single screen works, we always create multiple outputs. The filmmakers out there aren't just making one Apple ProRes version for the cinema screen, we're also making a H.264 for YouTube, and a 1x1 aspect ratio for Instagram. So it's good to think about what types of screens we're putting these things on, and how we're integrating them to make multiple lives—multiple souls—of this idea for it to have longevity beyond just a single screen.

James Williams: I'm James Williams. I'm an ex-dancer and circus performer, now fully transitioned into cinematography. I split my time between dance film/screendance and the commercial world. I try and balance the two out and give myself a little bit of scope. I've been preparing what I wanted to say and the question of what is the future of screendance post-Covid was something I've really had to think about. I had to really search for what I thought the root of that question actually was and, I think I've maybe come down to something that's a little bit of an uninhibited answer. What do I think the future of screen dance is post-Covid? It's the same as it was prior to the pandemic. I don't see the pandemic as a catalyst for something that's changed the future of screendance, but instead it's just worked as an accelerant, spring-boarding us 5-10 years ahead of where we would have been without a pandemic.

If we look at where we were in 2019 on the eve of the pandemic, we see every single live performance art weighing the utilization of digital integration in some way—either in their development process, in their presentation, or just in their marketing outreach like we were just talking about with Alice. For the future of screendance, I wanted it to be something that is widely acceptable and an invaluable creative option for choreographers and dance companies considered the beginning of the choreography development, and is weighed as an option against live presentation. So the screen presentation would sit along things like outdoor festivals, site-specific work, or the traditional proscenium arch. All of those things are equally valid options. When the pandemic shut everything down, it forced the industry to look at the screen as **the** valid option. I don't think it changed where we were going, it just accelerated us exponentially to get there.

Where I get a little bit more predictive, I think that dance is about to face kind of a new birth into the public eye, much like it did when TV and network competitions like *Britain's Got Talent* jump-started the influx of young dancers about 15 years ago. More screendance means more representations of the dancing body are shared digitally than ever before. How will dancers decide to represent themselves and their art form with this newfound position of digital exploration and exposure?

Omari: These are all head-nod provocations. I want to keep thinking about the future. What kind of work do we want to see? Is there something we need more of? Is there something we need to invent? We've tapped on this but I wonder if we can expand a bit.

Antoine: Well like Alice was saying, new ways of integrating dance film into a complex organism of dance performance or exhibition so that it can be explored and experienced in a different way.

Alice: Something I'd love to see more of is animation. I've seen a few films recently which have had brilliant animation and actual proper art in there. I love that.

Omari: Oh yeah, my favorite dance moment in animation is the scene in *Dumbo*, "Elephants on Parade," when Dumbo gets drunk and hallucinates. If you haven't seen that in a while, watch that scene again and let it blow your mind.

James: What I would like to see more of is dance film thought about as a film, produced as a film, presented as a film. At the moment, it's dance film made by dancers, produced by dancers, developed by dancers, and then presented as a film. So there's a big disconnect. It actually isn't that collaborative of a process, it's dancers dictating how to make a film with no real input from filmmakers, and no real education about film. So I would like to see more of dance film collaboratively developed as a film.

Sandra: To me, it seems that there can almost be a line—I'm the filmmaker and you're the dancer. What if it integrates more so that everyone gets each other's understanding? Then it's more of a collaboration than when you just go up to the line. Let's actually cross over the line and try and understand each other's backgrounds.

Vilma: I think one of the questions I always ask is how to make the translation? If we come from a dance background and think in the logic of the stage and choreography, how to make the translation into images? To recreate the effect of a big jump on stage might mean going to close-up in film. You have to go into the details to get the feeling of the physical awesomeness. It's the translation process.

Antoine: It often comes down to education. Dance film now is much more accessible to everyone, but it still requires specific tools and understanding of filmmaking to create something that has integrity in both in dance and film. So that would include creating a storyboard, having a pre-shoot, even editing your entire film.

Omari: We talked about education. We're seeing lots of screendance undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Vilma studied with me on the Master's in screendance, Sandra is doing the course now, James has taught with me in the past. But I always think to myself, well, what do screendancers need to know? It's such a different process to dance for theater than it is for film. How do we train for film? A lot of those courses are on dance courses, not on film courses. But at the moment, now that we can't get into the studio, I find that I'm really just teaching film, and I can't get them to embody the camera. How do you think these courses can contribute to the future of what we make as artists?

James: I think really teaching what collaboration is would be huge, because it took me a long time. I came from dance and then I transitioned out to film, and it took me years of doing my own films and building up small projects with clients before I actually understood how to work as part of a team. And I think that came from being a dancer, where the choreographer runs the show right from the beginning. If you're putting a show on in a theater, the choreographer does all the rehearsals, they probably have applied for the funding right from the get-go. It's not probably until 3 days before the show that they even meet with a lighting technician in the theater. That's not a collaboration. So you have to unlearn that, and I think that's the educational part of it. Because film is just a team. Without the right team, the film doesn't get made right.

Vilma: I couldn't agree more. I really want to learn how to break out from doing every part of the work in each part of the production. Bringing in more brains, and discussing things, and developing the whole film—the whole idea, each scene, each character—together with the group can just bring everything further. And then one person is not going to be dead from doing the job of 12 or 20 people. I would also add teamwork or collaboration into screendance education.

Alice: With the question of what is screendance education doing and is it helpful, I got into filmmaking through a screendance module in my undergraduate dance course. We didn't know what we were doing, it was a big test—but it propelled me into film. I had wanted to be a dancer, I diverted and went into film, and now I've connected the two and it's brilliant. But as you're learning, you're not going through a big film course and learning all the intricacies and everything you're meant to know. Once the module's done, you're teaching yourself. Having people by your side who you can lean on and collaborate with is so important.

Sandra: Coming from a dance background, learning about film hands-on has been very helpful. When I collaborate in the future, I'll be able to understand more. I also think it comes from humbling yourself. It's not just about you. It's about humbling yourself and trusting that other people have good ideas as well. Compromise doesn't mean you're weak. It actually means you're stronger, and that different people's ideas can create a whole new world, a whole new language.

Omari: You never do anything on your own, you know?

Audience Q+A

Simon Ellis: How do you all think screendance collaboration is distinctive from other forms of collaboration in and outside of film?

James: I think in the current process, the collaboration is minimal. It's not a collaboration between two entities: a choreographer and a director, or a choreographer and a cinematographer, for example. It's not two people joining to make a single piece of art, it's the choreographer hiring the filmmaker to make their vision. There are obviously also some wonderful collaborations that I've had the privilege of being involved in.

Omari: I hear that James, but we mold the mode to move our moving images. We can change it. Even seeing Katrina McPherson on stage with the camera and interacting with the performers changed my whole life! It opened up a new way of thinking about how we practice.

Yerin Lee: Maybe understanding the camera's view and getting used to being in front of the camera, and communicating it as well? Because South Korea doesn't have any Screendance or Dancefilm courses yet, so when I tried to collaborate with Korean dancers, they said that they have difficulties being in front of the camera.

Vilma: Right now I'm doing a dance film and we've found a way to work together with the camera. The expression in the camera can be very specific. If you're really in a close-up, making a tiny shift with your eyes might tell too much. Or if you're a tiny person in a huge wide shot, it might require way more expression and movement than what you'd do onstage. It's just also doing, and seeing, and trying, and doing again, and bringing the camera into the rehearsals.

Antoine: It's really about understanding those details that are possible with the different framings, and to really work with the performers so that the performance is specific to what is being shot. And to build the emotion for the entire storyline not just for a specific moment in the choreography, so that when you shoot it, the emotion corresponds to what it should be within the film. That's why the camera should be brought in as early as possible, so that performers can get comfortable with an entire crew looking at them and the pressure of hearing "action" and suddenly everyone's relying on them.

Omari: It's such a different process, so how do we train for film?

Douglas Rosenberg: The stage/camera or dance/camera dialectic anchors screendance to an arcane set of rules. What is the intent of the project? What is the desired outcome or mode of reception and why am I undertaking this project?

Collaboration exists on a spectrum and there are no absolutes about what collaboration looks like. Much of what I am hearing frames film as in service to dance. That will lead to a very particular outcome and close the door to other possibilities. The festival model has enforced a kind of platform determinism: short, single offering from numerous authors. It is a limitation that becomes the motivating factor for makers and thus becomes a methodology.

Clare Schweitzer: There's been a lot of mention of accessibility. People are able to see more dance film, but I still think a lot needs to be done as far as who we are seeing onscreen and who actually has the tools to create work or engage in collaboration. These times have exposed a lot of inequities and barriers to access. San Francisco Dance Film Festival went online, and the films we select don't have to conform to cinematic settings so we are seeing films that are shot on an iPhone. The priority of the festival has really shifted toward films that people can't see anywhere else. Now is an opportunity to ask what are we not seeing? who are we not seeing? And can we share that perspective and encourage more creation from that perspective as well?

Alice: I love the fact that smaller productions, even productions that have no budgets, have been shown in online film festivals. People have different money to play with, but it comes down to what can be created. It's not all about the gear. It's not all about the money. What can be created with what you've got? And I think some of the films that have come out with very little support have been incredible, and I love them.

Omari: Everyone's got the tools now, they've all got phones.

Antoine: Most phones now have a pro version of video. As long as you can shoot, you can learn so much about lighting, about contrast, and about the basics of filmmaking.

Gitta Wigro: I was thinking about this idea of the future that we're building this on, and something that I worry about in the future is that I don't think screendance / dance film has very much of its own infrastructure. A lot of what we do is based on other infrastructures, especially dance and universities. And both of those, particularly in the UK, are going to get a massive hit from Brexit. Some of the infrastructure that we use and rely on is going to go away, I think. How do we keep things going and find other resources to make it brighter and more beautiful and more weird and all different?

Harmony Bench: I really hear this infrastructure question—it's about sustainability in times of precarity. What practices can exist when the supporting infrastructures are under threat?

Claudia Kappenberg: Crossing into other art forms and their institutions is the challenge—but they are keen! We have so much to offer right now.

Katrina McPherson: Do people think that the 'cult of the individual' that is perhaps encouraged by social media etc. works against true collaborative processes? Also, do festivals perhaps work against a different way of working by still insist on credits being

such as 'director,' choreographer,' 'dancer' and find it hard to accept more non-hierarchical processes?

Vilma: I think this question links quite a lot with what Gitta was saying. These crediting different people, it's a tradition from the field of film. And I do find it very hard to find non-hierarchical strategies. It's not so hard when we are working, but when it's finished and presented, how to communicate the work in the dance field or the film field.

Claudia Kappenberg: Besides crediting at festivals there is also the reliance on open submissions and very little curating of programs around issues, practices, histories in the art form. This has been an issue for a long time and there is little change—and I wonder why?

Clare Schweitzer: At least from a US perspective, I feel the role of the festival tends to be locally focused with the intention of stimulating production of Screendance work in local communities. Histories of Screendance are certainly valuable, but are by no means comprehensive and rife with erasure.

Hannah Fischer: I do think it is important to discuss the edges and inner scaffolding of the field, to name it, otherwise intention and vision tend to be amorphous in my experience.

Omari: I heard in a talk recently that the edges are the new center. And what's happening is that the people who have now become the new center don't necessarily know how to orientate themselves in the center because maybe we've never been there before. And so let's keep working. Thank you to Sandra, Vilma, James, Antoine, Alice. Let's keep it moving. We mold the modes to move our moving images.

Biographies

Omari 'Motion' Carter is a screendance practitioner and lecturer based in London and, for the past decade, has been choreographing and performing for music videos, film, television and theatre. He is the founder and creative director of award-winning screendance production company, The Motion Dance Collective, associate lecturer in screendance at London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS), Lincoln University and University of East London, and is graduate of the world's first MA in Screendance at LCDS.

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Sandra Maduoma is 19 years old and based in London, UK. She originally grew up in Essex but moved into the big city when she began her journey in the BA (Hons) Dance: Urban Practice at the University of East London. There are three things she holds close to her heart and that is her love for Christ, Family and Dance! From a young age she fell in love with dance and its variety of skills and techniques. Since then she's trained with choreographers such as Botis Seva, Kloe Dean and Seeta Patel. Sandra was introduced to screendance through lecturers Omari Carter MA and Dr. Claudia Brazzale in 2020 and is currently studying on the *Hip Hop and the Choreography of Digital Activism* module this year. Since then it has sparked her interest of learning more about the field in its entirety. She says, "Dance on screen has been a knowledgeable journey for me already. The transfer from stage to screen creates a whole new language and process. I am hoping to keep growing, and impact lives through the two mediums merging together."

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Antoine Marc: Multi Award Winning director and choreographer working on live shows and films to bring cutting edge Technology and logistics consultancy from production's development to its completion.

In 2015, received the Van Gogh Award by the Amsterdam Film Festival Jury and the Beoordelen van Comité.

In 2016, awarded the Cannes Global Film Awards at the Red Carpet and Fashion event for Best Dance Film.

In 2017, honoured by Limelight Award for best Visual content.

In 2019, was awarded the ARFF award for Best experimental film.

Additionally, he was nominated for Best Choreographer at the International Achievement Recognition Award.

Through 18 years of creative experience, Antoine had the privilege to work with established brands and organizations such as BBC, Royal Opera House, Olympic Ceremonies, Canadian Opera Company, Ferrari, Virgin Active, Sony.

Engaged in both live performances and films, developed work that prides itself by being rich in collaborations between Creatives and Performers.

His credits includes Israr Award ceremony, Award winning Fashion film Paroha, Swatch Global launch, David Guetta live performance, Volvo National Launch, Olympics Opening Ceremony, Award winning film Descent.

In collaboration with film production, Arts & Movements Ltd, produce films and technological performances.

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Vilma Tihilä (b. 1991) is Finnish film director specializing in dance film. She combines contemporary dance and physical theatre to visual storytelling and poetry of film in her work. In her current dance film productions Tihilä explores the influence of different cultures in the stories told through the movement and the camera; the process of

adapting a stage piece into a film; and surrealistic experiences in one's reality. Working at the edges of different artistic disciplines and techniques, Tihilä asks: How an image can touch? How physical experience translates into moving image? How to visually communicate what is after, before, or behind the words? Tihilä holds Master of Arts in Screendance from London Contemporary Dance School and a degree in contemporary dance from Turku Conservatory. She has also studied physical cinema at Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts. Tihilä's films have been screened at various festivals internationally including Loikka Dance Film Festival in Finland, Quinzena de Dança de Almada in Portugal, F-O-R-M Festival in Canada, and Video-poetry Festival in Argentina, among others.

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Alice Underwood transitioned into filmmaking after initially training in dance, thus developing a unique style due to her specialist understanding of movement. For the past 7 years she has been making films with a range of choreographers, dance companies, and artists across the creative arts industry. She has collaborated with renowned organisations and festivals, such as East London Dance, Dance Umbrella, Akademi, Gandini Juggling, Crying Out Loud and Far From The Norm, making films that increase supporter following and attract new audiences to dance and the performing arts.

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James Williams started working as a Cinematographer after a career as a professional dancer and circus artist. His connection to the Performing Arts scene meant he could combine these experiences and has, as a result, found a firm foothold in the Screendance genre. Aside from his work in the world of dance James has worked on a range of projects from documentaries to commercials, and alongside household names including GAP, BMW and Skoda.

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Website: <https://www.jwcinematographer.co.uk/>

Resources in order of mention

(Re)United. Dir. Antoine Marc. Perf. Kristina Alleyne and Sadé Alleyne. Prod. Alleyne Dance. 2021. <https://www.alleynedance.com/reunited/>

The Mandalorian. Disney Media Distribution. www.disneyplus.com/mandalorian/

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Screendance Festivals and Online Audiences

Moderator: Harmony Bench, The Ohio State University

Gabri Christa, Barnard College; Director, Moving Body - Moving Image

Yolanda M. Guadarrama, Director, Movimiento en Movimiento

Cara Hagan, Appalachian State University and Director, ADF's Movies by Movers

Kelly Hargraves, Director, Dance Camera West

Marisa Hayes, Co-Director, Festival International de Vidéo Danse de Bourgogne

This roundtable was presented on 13 March 2021 as part of the symposium connected to this special issue, *This Is Where We Dance Now: Covid-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen*. It has been edited for clarity and length. The video of the full roundtable conversation and Q+A is viewable at: <https://doi.org/10.18061/ijds.v12i0.8372>



**ROUNDTABLE
SCREENDANCE FESTIVALS
AND ONLINE AUDIENCES**

With Gabri Christa, Yolanda M. Guadarrama, Cara Hagan, Kelly Hargraves, and Marisa Hayes
Moderated by Harmony Bench

Saturday, March 20
9am LA / 12pm NYC /
4pm London /
3am (21/3) Sydney

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Keywords: screendance festivals, online film festivals, dance film, audiences, equity, international, curation, drive-in theater, access, representation, community, local, global, glocal, *Moving Body - Moving Image*, *Movimiento en Movimiento*, R.E.D. International Film Festival, REDIV Iberoamericana de Videodanza, ADF's *Movies by Movers*, Dance Camera West, Festival International de Vidéo Danse de Bourgogne

Harmony Bench: I'm excited for this roundtable: Screendance Festivals and Online Audiences. I've asked each of our presenters to take 3-5 minutes to address how they adapted their festival format in 2020 or 2021, including successes and lessons learned for the future, and what practices they might take forward. After they have an opportunity to speak, I will follow up with some questions just to get the ball rolling, and then we'll open the floor for a general Q&A.

Gabri Christa: Hi, everyone. I'm really excited to be here with these other wonderful presenters. My name is Gabri Christa. I'm Associate Professor of Professional Practice at Barnard College. I'm a dance and filmmaker and also the founding director of the biennial *Moving Body–Moving Image* festival, which I started in 2016 when I came to Barnard. It's a small one-day festival focused on community creation—not too many films, highly curated. The audience has time to sit, watch all the films together, watch the installations, the virtual reality, see the second program, have time to eat, drink, have wine, and then go to the discussion.

It came out of a long idea of wanting a festival around themes of social justice and social issues, and looking at representation so that it wouldn't be an all-white, young space. As a maker and viewer, I want to have guidance when I'm watching films. I started the festival with the theme of the *Moving Brown Body* onscreen, which now would have been the BIPOC body, with films from Africa, Asia, Europe, and all of the Americas. To foreground equity, the composition of the jury reflects the theme, as well as the choreographer, director, producer of the films selected. In other words, the jury and the films both reflect the theme. For example, we wouldn't accept a film around *Brown bodies* if it upheld a white gaze. This became more difficult with our 2020 festival, focused on the *Moving Aging Body*, but we did have an intergenerational panel of jurists aged 24-80.

April 4th, 2020, we were supposed to have the live version of the *Moving Body–Moving Image* festival. March 15th, we heard that we were going on lockdown. I decided right away I could not bring an aging population in. I had no idea how we were going to do it, because at the time there were no festivals online yet. I asked my team: who is our audience, what do we want their experience to be, and what limitations might they encounter? I came away with two key ingredients that determined all decisions that were made: accessibility and equity. The festival had to be easy to navigate and open and free to all. The festival had to remain a community event. So with that in mind, we

decided that everything had to be on one website, that we didn't want to do YouTube or Facebook or reservations, and that people could just come to the website and click and watch. I was lucky to have funding from Alzheimer's Society, UK, and the Global Brain Health Foundation, and the support of the Barnard Dance Department and The Movement Lab, which I also direct.

Both programs were short, 45 minutes. The curation was quite intense because of the time limit we set. Some of the films that didn't get in became part of the installation, and we had still virtual reality, and a speaker series. Part of the difficulty was not just doing a festival around aging, but also not having only aging white bodies on screen. So the process was intense to really create and keep the diversity.

We kept the festival up for 48 hours instead of one day, and we had an astonishing turnout representing 61 countries. Normally in the festival, we got 200-400 people. We had 11,231 festival visitors, meaning people that watched 1-2 things, and we had 5,265 film viewers who watched everything. What it suggests is that there is a far larger audience than I was thinking there would be. Also, I don't think it hurt that we were, I dare say, one of the very first festivals that went online. We got everything—the whole festival, the whole website, up in two weeks. I'm incredibly proud of the three of us for doing that.

Yolanda M. Guadarrama: Hi, I'm Yolanda. I will introduce the festival I direct, *Movimiento en Movimiento*, and I will also mention both R.E.D. (Residency Eina Danz) International Film Festival (RIFF), a Norwegian festival where I do the curation, and REDIV Iberoamericana de Videodanza, the Iberoamerican Screendance Network.

movimientoenmovimiento.wordpress.com is the link for the international screendance festival that I direct. There are three curators. Normally the festival is celebrated annually during October or November. And then we show whatever thing with movement, experimental and traditional screendance with strong meanings, literature, social and philosophical issues, body identity. So we have a wide spectrum. Normally the festival consists of 20-30 films in the official selection, and about two video-call-screendance live performances. There are face-to-face screenings with talks with the creators and pre-recorded 2-minute video interviews to show with films. We exhibit the films in a loop format for about 20 days at Centro de Cultura Digital in Mexico. We have an award for best selected pieces. We have workshops and *Mov en Mov* Magazine with texts about screendance and the festival printed in paper and online. And for the past 9 years, we have also ended with an online permanent gallery published a couple of months after the screenings. The 9th edition dedicated to body identity was online during 2020. We had 26 films in the official selection, which were shown together with a pre-recorded 2-minute video interview, a call-screendance live performances, no face-to-face screening. The exhibition of the pieces in loop format at Centro de Cultura Digital for 20 days still happened, but online, because they have a platform. The problem was how to do it free online. The selection was divided into 6

thematic programs, and 3 days dedicated to each program. We stated the importance of the pieces and the program with the activities dedicated to them. For example, the Day 1 program was a talk about the films with experts. Day 2 was a written chat with the creators. And Day 3 was a loop of the program for 8 hours, so people could sit there and watch the films all together with the interviews. There was also an award for the best selected pieces and the workshops, which had to be online. We also have *Mov en Mov Magazine* with texts about screendance or the festival. They were printed on paper and they were released online. As an extra, there was an online interview about body identity, comparing the body online and the body face-to-face, of course, in performances also. And then 60 international screendance creators, curators, philosophers, writers, etc. were briefly interviewed. It was very enriching for everybody, I think. That's what happened with *Movimiento en Movimiento* in Mexico.

RIFF: R.E.D. International Film Festival is a Norwegian festival in Einawood directed by Ella Fiskum, and I am the co-curator. This festival is normally in July and consists of about 30 films. Some films exhibited in the same galleries of the venue, R.E.D., to be visited during one week, some screenings are in R.E.D. Arena, and some more traditional films are screened in R.E.D. Drive-in. We normally have face-to-face concerts and live dance performances, awards, workshops and international SØNDANZ FLAC, that is a film lab and art camp. RIFF 2020 was hybrid, online and face-to-face, no exhibition in the gallery. 23 films were selected. There were some face-to-face screenings and live performances in R.E.D. Arena and Drive-in with 30% occupancy. The online version was a publication and sale of the online RIFF Magazine 2020, which provided access to all the films for one month. There were also awards and some local workshops. The result was a good balance of face-to-face and online public.

Finally, RED Iberoamericana de Videodanza, REDIV, which is the Iberoamerican Screendance Network, started in 2016. This is a network of managers, researchers, artists, and screendance festivals, which work transversally through various projects and actions of curatorship, dissemination, training, management, etc., everything around screendance. We are 23 international festivals at the moment, 3 academic projects, and 10 independent collaborators. About 10 festivals celebrated an online edition during the Covid lockdown. We were really very active!

Cara Hagan: Hi, my name is Cara Hagan. I'm the director and curator for ADF's *Movies by Movers*, an annual international screendance festival under the auspices of the American Dance Festival. As such, we're kind of a festival within a festival. Our audience and our community includes those who are attending ADF, local folks in North Carolina who are traveling from towns and cities around Durham to come to ADF, and because we do the majority of our screenings at the Nasher Museum of Art on the campus of Duke University, we do get spill over from their events for folks that come to our stuff. So essentially, ADF's *Movies by Movers* is part of a really dynamic tapestry of things happening all summer at Duke University through the American Dance Festival. All of the screenings are free. Before the lockdown, I would say that our

structure was pretty traditional: most of the events happened in a screening room where people would come to sit. We would have artist talks, do some workshops in the studios, and some satellite screenings in specific spaces around Durham during the summer. A lot of the events would be spread out throughout the summer. When lockdown happened, we didn't really have a choice of whether or not we would pivot online. We were kind of in response mode. How do we create a platform to put the films on, and how will people have access to them, and how will we do the artist talkbacks?

One nice thing is that we had more films than we've had ever in the festival this past year. We showed about 80 films, which was twice the amount that we show generally because we have limited time in our screening spaces. And we had all Zoom artist talkbacks. The feedback we got was that folks really appreciated being able to have a truly international experience, where folks who would not have been able to make it to our festival came and talked about their work. This year we're going to be online again, and we've had more time to think about how we'd like to do that. We're crafting something more intentional, more focused, and in my opinion, more intimate feeling. By the time we got to the summer last year, people were already feeling inundated with all of the offerings. And I know this community, we all try to be at everything. So trying to create some more space and a more personal experience became really important to me after the first online iteration of the festival. And trying to create something where the artists also feel that their work isn't being lost in a sea of the internet.

During this Covid time, now that we're a year into it, I wonder if 'international film festival' now means international access in a post-Covid world. We've always labeled ourselves an international screendance festival because we accept submissions from all over the world, but to truly be able to have that international conversation space became really important. So that's a question that I have. What new considerations we will have for caring for the work once we're live again with regard to things like accessibility and exclusivity? How much access do you give people? Do you put up a paywall? We did not, and we're not going to this year. For how long do you put films up? Do you limit the time that they're up? And if so, what is the sweet spot for how much time you leave things up? And what amount of time honors the artist's wishes, but also gives the audience a chance to really engage with the work? Finding that balance has become really important. And my last question is how are we going to re-imagine the festival experience for a hybrid post-Covid world? Because I have this feeling it's going to be a staggered process for us to get to the point where the pandemic is really totally over. Even if we have events in-person, there will be places where there are outbreaks and places go on lockdown, so that issue of access and what a festival looks like is going to be a big thing moving forward. So, there are things that we still have to reckon with because of the pandemic that I think we're going to be experimenting with for quite a while.

Kelly Hargraves: Hello, everybody, my name is Kelly Hargraves. I'm in Los Angeles. I founded Dance Camera West 21 years ago, and I've now returned to it as of two years ago. My day job is in film distribution with independent film companies, so I have a lot of experience working with theaters and with streaming companies. We actually went through a pivot when I came back to the festival because my previous director had made it a much more expansive festival with live events, live performance, and all over the city, and I wanted to come back to a more traditional film festival view. So when I came back, we were already envisioning a hybrid version of a festival. We came back to a traditional four-day event in one venue, we showed 75 or 80 films, because I had always wanted to expand the vision of what could be shown so I jammed in 9 programs in one day. It was like a marathon. We had invited guests and speakers. Our festival is in January, which is very notable, because we got it in before the shutdown, and we had already planned a March online version. We went up March 1st on [OVID.tv](#), our streaming partner, with a 30-day version of the festival where people would pay \$10 and have seven-day access. And we had started that because as soon as the festival was over people would say "I missed it. I'm sorry, I didn't come. Where can I see your films?" So because I work with streamers now, I did that. One of my goals when I started again, was to pay artists. It's a really important part of my expansion plan for this festival. We went with online streaming so that they would get paid, and we work out distribution deals with broadcasters.

When it came to the idea starting 2021, I didn't want to do an online festival because we were already doing that. And I was steadfast about that. Instead, we created a finishing fund for BIPOC artists. We decided to pair Los Angeles based BIPOC artists with mentors to take their films and kind of bump them up into that next level. We have two artists now working on their films.

So, fast forward, all of a sudden I started getting phone calls from performing arts centers who didn't have programming. They were asking, "Can you send us films? Can you send us films?" So we quickly started a touring program with UC San Diego and with the Hopkins Center, and again, the artists made money, we split it 50/50. When it came to the 2021 festival, a couple of Los Angeles venues, like The Broad Stage and Théâtre Raymond Kabbaz called and said, "We want to do this. How can we do it?" And that's when the idea of building a drive-in started. There's a documentary that shows how we built the drive-in, and also all the films that we screened, or interviews with the artists, which is something new. Building a drive-in is not a cheap initiative, and I knew we would lose money, but thought, "If there's ever a year to lose money, this would be it."

Now we are teaching a lot. We're doing a lot of workshops with university students and community dancers. As they pivot to having to make dance films, you have to have that documentation versus screendance "aha moment" with them. I keep laughing, "Now you have to listen to me. You haven't wanted to for 30 years, but now is the time."

The 2021 festival will be on OVID.tv for one month with a fee, and then we're becoming a total streaming channel. We will stay on over throughout the year. Right now, it is only Dance Camera West films, but it doesn't have to be. I am a dance film distributor at this point and willing to talk to all of you about films that should be up there. We will start with this year's films and last year's films, but I may go back through our archives and put all the greatest hits up as well. As to 2022, I'm not even thinking about it.

Marisa Hayes: Hi everyone, my name is Marisa Hayes. I'm the co-founding, co-director of the International Video Dance Festival of Burgundy in France. We are currently preparing our 13th edition. I co-direct the festival with Franck Boulègue. And I'm also a guest curator for the National Choreographic Development Center near Paris. And I also co-curate the International Screendance Festival Freiburg. One of the underlying elements of our festival is a collaboration with other institutions, both in France and abroad. To provide a bit of context about our festival, so you understand what's important to us during the so-called normal times, we have three major axes of our work, which is of course festival screenings. We do have an open call that we curate, but we are also very interested in thematic work. And one of the signature elements of our festival has been the commissioning of thematic collective films, or omnibus films. So for such a project, we have one common theme that could be a visual motif, a piece of music, or a political prompt, and we ask artists from around the world via open participation to create one segment, which is then edited together to complete one final film. The objective behind this is to provide as many diverse perspectives and representations exploring one theme from as many angles as possible, to allow for a rich exchange of ideas coming from different cultures. Alongside screenings, another very important aspect of our work at the festival is to provide as many workshops as possible. And those range from a one-week intensive for emerging professional artists who might like to create their first work of screendance, to school children and families in the local community. So there's a wide range of kind of outreach and educational activities that we provide during the festival, and also throughout the rest of the year. Another aspect of the festival is to increase funding for screendance. For our third year in a row, this year in collaboration with other choreographic centers in France and Germany, we've been able to offer a two-week screendance production residency at a national choreographic center in France. The responsibility for the residency is shared by a network of partners, and it's normally accompanied by an €8,000 production grant.

Harmony had asked us, what is our approach to curating? And I'm always really inspired by the Latin root of curate, curare, which is to care for. There's a lot of really interesting philosophical material circulating about the idea of care, thinking about the care of the work, the care of the artists, the care of our public. One of the things that has been a really disastrous result of this pandemic year has been the economic precarity of artists, many of whom are not working or don't have stable employment.

We were able to negotiate with different cultural performing arts organizations in France and Europe, many of whom have funds for live work that's not currently being used, and we were able to expand our residency program for the current call that has just been launched this year. This year we're going to offer two residencies instead of one, that will include a two-week residency period, but we've also been able to nearly double the financial grant, which has gone from €8,000 to €15,000. I'm very grateful to our partners who are willing to shift some of the funding for live work, recognizing that right now, it is possible to continue making screendance, and that it's very essential to support artists at the present time.

Another extension of this idea of care is thinking about format. The exhibition format is always important, but as most screenings are now taking place online, I think it's more important than ever to check in with artists to make sure not to assume that work is suitable for an online internet screening. Has the work been made in installation format for a gallery exhibition? Has the work been made envisioned for a big screen? And of course the question of sound. A lot of our artists have asked us, "Can you please tell the audience to wear headphones while they're watching the work for a better experience?" We need to pay attention to the technology and format, because it has been frustrating for artists who prefer to share their work on a large screen or who have very particular concerns regarding sound.

I completely echo the sentiment of how we can touch a much wider geographic audience and have really rich discussions that might not otherwise have taken place. In our approach to the festival, we are very interested in the idea of glocal, the global and the local, and how we join the two together in dialogue. The international aspect has been somewhat simple because even pre-pandemic, we were used to communicating via Skype and Zoom. But with the closing of physical theaters and institutions here, it has been difficult to maintain that connection to the local community. The connection has been severed a bit during the pandemic. Whereas the international connection has really increased tenfold with all of the opportunities we have to dialogue online. And what's unfortunate about that is that often when you dialogue with the local community, you're touching people who might not otherwise be a part of the arts community, people who might not otherwise attend a screening. I really hope that as we reimagine the future, we can regenerate, recreate, and renew our ties with both the local and the international community.

Harmony: Thanks to all of you, what wonderful ideas and perspectives. I want to recognize the labor and investments that each of you had in sustaining your various festivals in these past several months, and to thank you for the work that you have done. One of the things that I appreciated across the presentations was a sense of each of the festivals' values and what each of you are trying to do as curators. I'm curious to learn a little bit more about the audiences that you have really been tending to and caring for, and are they the same as you look ahead to 2021, 2022?

Cara: When we have had live screenings, I often felt like our audiences were too homogenous. Those of you who know my work know that I'm very concerned with representation, both onscreen and offscreen, and I found myself struggling with how to diversify our audiences more effectively in terms of racial diversity, as well as age and background. In pivoting online, we got some new folks. In some of the talkbacks, there were folks who had never been to our festival before. And I got emails from people who had never been to the festival before, saying, "Hey, I saw this thing, thanks for putting it up. I would have never come to it otherwise." So knowing that there are other people out there who would be interested to see the material that we're curating for audiences means that we can really think about the next time around how we're marketing it, and who we're marketing it to, and not relying so much on the ways that we have done it before, where you're reaching the same people who already come to ADF. What kind of outreach do we need to be doing to make sure that local audiences that we haven't seen in our theater feel welcome? Also being able to tap into the university community a little bit more, because a lot of people have been looking for material, workshops, and access to resources. And we have those. So that's another way of bringing community in.

Kelly: With the drive-in, people just came because it was a great fun event. So we created new viewers that way. One of the things I've done is I've created a screening committee of about 25-40 dance performance artists in Los Angeles, because I want our vision to be very Los Angeles, what it looks like and its beautiful diversity, and that has helped diversify our audience a little bit. But we'd never have film people in our audience, and I think that will start with OVID.tv, which is an experimental film channel.

Gabri: I think what happened for me, well, it's a totally new festival and also smaller, but I do find that representation and theme is what really sets the audience. So when we did the Brown body theme, that was our audience. When we did it around aging, that was the audience. I find that the people came mostly for the theme and not so much for the screendance, because a lot of the audience is not normal screendance folks. The next festival will be on disability. And then the part that's important is how do you hold on to the diversity?

Audience Q+A

Mitchell Rose: With the hybrid model becoming a more permanent thing, now that people have found that it works, it seems with the inevitable fall-off rate, that a lot more people are going to see the first few films than the last few films. Has anyone found any creative solutions to that?

Kelly: I can say when I did it live, one of the comments I got from the audience was it was so eclectic, so there was no way they were going to miss a thing because they didn't know if a blockbuster might be between two DIY films I love. So that's how we

program. That's one of the reasons I don't use themes, because I want people to not know when to be there or not. You just have to come. It's all in.

Gabri: Using themes, even themes like abstract films, or experimental films, or documentaries, help the people that come to the audience who don't know this field. My experience has been that people just come open anyway, like, "Okay. Let's go to see this thing that we don't know about." And then hopefully we also create a larger audience for this art form.

Yolanda: I also divide by themes, and people do come accidentally, but a lot of film lovers and dance lovers come too from around the world. But for each program, there are many ways to watch the films. For one example, people could go around and click the five films of the programs whenever they wanted in any order, and then it was followed by discussion so they were interested in watching. Another day they could watch them as if they were in a screening, but it was one hour program and it was an eight-hour loop, so they could arrive whenever and watch whatever film. There was also discussion with creators, and having the possibility to click on that film so they read some comments. People really watched many films, and we gave them many perspectives to see them.

Cara: We had shorter screenings. Some of them were only 15 minutes long. I was definitely thinking about audience patience when I put the screenings together—how long are people actually going to sit to watch this and what films are not going to get seen if we make this too long? Some things were just one film and a discussion with the filmmaker.

Marisa: We recently dared to be short, which is interesting because normally with some cinemas that we collaborate with, they'll tell us, the minimum, you have to have at least one hour of programming. So we're quite used to that mindset. But just last week we showed three films, and even with an introduction and translation in two languages, the program didn't go beyond 35 minutes. For us, that was quite short and unusual, but the viewing numbers showed that it works really well.

Kelly: For the drive-in, we did two screenings each night, and each program was an hour, so that we could get cars in and out between screenings. And honestly, it could've been longer.

Harmony: So what then is the future of the long film? If the tendency is to go in the direction of these shorter experiences, does that mean the death of the long-form film, or will there be a resurgence post-pandemic?

Gabri: We get the short films, and then find space for the longer films. I think that it's going to be a hybrid personally. I love the longer format, but I do find that it's harder for an online festival. Maybe the shorts will go online and the longer films will be in person. As a maker, I found that my longer films have been in museums, and that was

incredibly gratifying because it brings a different view to it. People have more patience to just sit and just watch things on a loop.

Yolanda: I think there's audience for everything nowadays but we are getting tired of just being on the internet. For example, at RIFF Festival, we accept long feature films and documentaries, and they are in the magazine and people can sit and watch them whenever they want. They can carve the time when they want. Long feature films are going to come back. So there's a space for everything, but if you have an online program, you need to have it short, or only one film.

Marisa: I think this is a really important topic. And I appreciate what Yolanda said about there being an audience for everything. The screendance community is so diverse, but there hasn't been a very good place for longer films. And there are very practical reasons for this. Many times curators' hands are tied because of the spaces that they're working in and the length of time they have for a screening. But it is really important to find the place, space, and time for longer films, so that artists don't feel forced to make a certain format simply because they won't be able to share their film if it goes beyond a certain length. I think something really important about this is the relationship that you have to the work. When people in Western society go to the cinema, or a screendance festival, or the theater, they feel very stiff, they stay in their place, they don't even get up to go to the toilet, and feel they must adhere to a certain behavior. That doesn't exist in many other cultures that have longer durational artistic events, where people might feel free to take a nap, grab something to eat, leave the room and come back. We really encouraged people to do that during our durational screening.

Coming back to what Yolanda said, I think one of the places that you could find for longer films online would be the setup where you have a film that's up for 24 hours and people can have the time to watch it at their leisure and really create their own temporal relationship to the film. So perhaps the best format is not live-streaming on Zoom, but to have a home for the work online where people can come to it and create the relationship and the space that they want for it.

Harmony: Anabella Lenzu has a practical and important question in the chat which has to do with music rights and how you all have navigated rights, restrictions, copyright around music, navigating take down notices from YouTube and the like. How has that worked for you or how have you worked around the very real concern of music rights when you're streaming online content?

Cara: I really try to stress with the artists, if you don't have rights to the music, I might not be able to show it. I have this conversation with students all the time because their projects get taken down all the time. I think people are getting more hip to it like, "Oh, okay. Either I have to go to BMI and pay for this, or I've got to find something that's not copyrighted, or I have to get something made that is original." That leads to some nice

topics of conversation about the aural experience of films, including soundscapes and ambient sound.

Kelly: Yeah, I'm echoing that while I'm doing these workshops, and speaking to them about how that changes the structure of their film, when they're trying to create a chorus-verse four-minute film where maybe they have two minutes of a film. One of the ideas for next year is to focus more on music, maybe by doing some screenings that have live accompaniment by musicians, just to kind of get dance filmmakers and musicians connected.

Harmony: Jeanette Ginslov asks, "Do you think the online in real life festival format needs to change, i.e. running films in a linear format? Could one not use a collection or an archive (with trailers), so the online viewer selects what they want to see? Put the control in the audience's hand as online experience is such a temporal and ephemeral experience? And then leave the archive up for a while." Might that be a good model?

Kelly: That's our post-festival model. There's a photo for each film and you can click on them as you go. I do find having to sit for a duration of 90 minutes online is challenging for me even, especially because I found it hard to kind of not have program notes at the same time. I don't know. I'm sad to say this, but I'm really challenged by watching online festivals. I get frustrated.

Marisa: We keep an archive on a page called [Numeridanse](#), which is a bilingual video archive site where you can make your own playlist. You could go through the hundreds of videos and play with being your own curator in that sense.

Yolanda: You can be an active festival and the can audience choose whatever, or you can choose a traditional way. You can do plenty of things. I think festivals also need creativity. There's always been a way to grab people with many tools. I think we are beginning with these experiences online and I'm sure in one year we could say tremendous creativity came out of this experience.

Gabri: I like the different approaches Yolanda has talked about, and that's also the strength of having so many different visions. I personally don't have a lot of bandwidth for watching a lot online, so I'm still struggling with how long to leave something up. We started experimenting with bringing back one film for the whole month on our website, so people could just watch one of the films. Going back to equity, not everybody can sit down and watch, and not everybody has a computer, especially younger folks. That's a real thing.

Harmony: Thank you so much to this wonderful roundtable on what it means to have a screendance festival in 2020, 2021, 2022. There are so many rich ideas to think about further. Let's continue the conversation!

Biographies

Harmony Bench is Associate Professor in the Department of Dance at The Ohio State University. Her research addresses practices, performances, and circulations of dance in the contexts of digital and screen media. She is author of *Perpetual Motion: Dance, Digital Cultures, and the Common* with University of Minnesota Press in 2020, and is at work on a new book on affect and kinesthesia in screendance spectatorship. For several years, Harmony has collaborated with Kate Elswit on bringing the digital humanities and dance history into greater dialogue, most recently with *Dunham's Data: Katherine Dunham and Digital Methods for Dance Historical Inquiry* (Ref: AH/R012989/1; www.dunhamsdata.org). From 2014-2019, she was co-editor of *The International Journal of Screendance* with Simon Ellis, and is excited to be guest editing the special issue *This Is Where We Dance Now: Covid-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen* with Alexandra Harlig.

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Marisa C. Hayes is a Franco-American artist, scholar and curator working at the crossroads of moving images and the performing arts. Much of her work focuses on explorations of screendance, particularly with regards to its pedagogy and

curation. She is the founding co-director of the Festival International de Vidéo Danse de Bourgogne in France, an annual platform that is currently preparing its 13th edition. She also curates screendance for the National Choreographic Development Center in Paris and Theatre Freiburg in Germany. She teaches screendance practice, theory and history in higher education internationally, as well as for various public outreach organizations. Her screendance publications include the book *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies* (ed. Douglas Rosenberg), *The International Journal of Screendance*, and the book *Art in Motion: Current Research in Screendance*, which she co-edited for Cambridge Scholars. Her own screendance films have won the Susan Braun Award (New York Dance Films Association) and Pentacle Movement Media's summer video dance prize.

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Resources in order of mention

Moving Body–Moving Image. Directed, produced, and curated by Gabri Christa. Associate production and co-curation by Abby Lee. <https://www.movingbodymovingimage.com>

Movimiento en Movimiento. Directed and curated by Yolanda M. Guadarrama. Co-curated by Nayeli Benhumea and Lucitzel Pedrozo. <https://movimientoenmovimiento.wordpress.com>

R.E.D. International Film Festival (RIFF). Directed and curated by Ella Fiskum. Co-curated by Yolanda M. Guadarrama. <http://www.riff-festival.com/>

RED Iberoamericana de Videodanza (REDIV). <https://rediv.org/>

American Dance Festival (ADF)'s Movies by Movers. Directed by Cara Hagan. <https://americandancefestival.org/performance/moviesbymovers/>

Dance Camera West. Directed by Kelly Hargraves. <http://www.dancecamerawest.org/>

"2021 DCW Documentary." Uploaded 17 Feb. 2021. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqY74lpQvxM>

International Video Dance Festival of Burgundy (Festival International de Vidéo Danse de Bourgogne). Directed by Marisa Hayes and Franck Boulègue. www.videodansebourgogne.com

VidéHomeDance. Centre de Vidéo Danse de Bourgogne. 2020.
<https://www.numeridanse.tv/videotheque-danse/videhomedance?s>

PROVOCATIONS AND VIEWPOINTS

A Forum of Questions for Active Viewing, Learning and Creating on Screen(s) During a Global Pandemic

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Marisa C. Hayes, Artist, curator, scholar

Marco Longo, Film critic, programmer

Ariadne Mikou, Artist-scholar

Katja Vaghi, Independent scholar

Keywords: pandemic, online, screendance, collaboration, community, perception, labour/market, digital classroom, aesthetics of disappearance, pandemic gaze

Introduction

This contribution proposes a forum of questions in order to reflect on the reception, creation, and distribution of dance media online during the global pandemic. It is the result of a collaborative initiative undertaken by a group of five interdisciplinary dance and film scholars and artists based in Europe—specifically France, Germany, Greece, and Italy—who met weekly on Zoom throughout the summer of 2020 to exchange ideas, concerns, and projects related to choreography and screens during lockdown. A shared Google doc allowed all contributors to add their own questions and comments, later discussed live during virtual meetings conducted in English, which for the majority of us is not our native language. Some of us already knew each other, while others had never met. An additional shared document mapping dance-related works made or adapted for the screen¹ during Europe's initial lockdown enabled us to gradually share ideas and exchange different viewpoints. Recognizing our diverse backgrounds, approaches, and geographic locations as a strength, the following forum of questions does not assume that there is any one established definition of screendance or experience of the pandemic. Instead, it seeks to build upon a shared interest in screendance to pose questions that extend to many types of dance media and screen experiences that arose and continue to arise within the context of the pandemic.

The decision to use questions as a structure for this contribution was key. While recalling and orienting the topic of discussion as our shared methodology, questions inspire autonomous reflection and do not seek to impose a single response. They provide a wide girth for different points of view and considerations of complex issues, which vary according to many factors, including geographic location, economic disparities, subjectivity and personal tastes, technological access and more. Currently, the forum of



questions is structured in large groups according to topic and numbered sequentially in each of these categories. However, this structure does not suggest a hierarchy, but instead proposes a way to navigate the document and follow the cross-references that appear in multiple points of the hypertext. This proposes a horizontal approach to reading the text—a web of sorts—as opposed to reading in a linear fashion. The order of the categories is random, but does tend to follow a logic that proceeds from the personal to the collective. The partial use of the first person is an intentional choice in order to underscore subjectivity, as well as to provide a phenomenological way of reading.

The importance of pre-existing screendance scholarship, which has already drawn on the exponential rise of screens and electronic media in our daily lives, became a recurring topic during our exchanges. In contrast to certain specificities that arose during the ongoing pandemic, the following general introductory questions seek to underscore the relevance of established dialogues in the screendance community to further enhance discussions of screen-based work at the present time.

- How does dance mediated via a screen convey a singularity of the moment?
- How are diverse uses of screens embodied in narrative production and configured in collaborative approaches for knowledge building and sharing?
- To what extent can we speak of a community² born from the screen?
- What happens when the codes of live art are introduced to online space— more specifically, when the aesthetics of disappearance³ that make online content ephemeral on social media networks (Instagram, Facebook stories, etc.) were intensified during the first lockdown in Europe?
- Have the limits of screendance been reached ten years after the claim that “Screendance has not yet been invented”⁴?

Following this brief introductory set of questions, the remainder of the forum is dedicated to questions that specifically emerged during the pandemic as a result of viewing, making, or sharing screen-based choreography online. Our references are non-exhaustive, and based on personal experiences in our respective locations. They predominantly cover the timespan that dates from the first lockdown in Europe through the second pandemic wave (approximately March 2020-October 2020). It is our hope that these questions will serve as a tool to generate open and diverse perspectives on the experience of screens and dance media during this time and in the future.

Perception

1. When a body is not a body: What happens to an isolated body viewing an image of a body or bodies?

2. How can we cultivate kinaesthetic empathy through performing agents⁵ on screen? What type(s) of somatic awareness do we cultivate with increased screen use? (link with [EDUCATION/Q2](#))
3. Am I feeling another type of body after so much screen time?
4. How has the perception of the other's body changed through online devices? Is it possible that the other's body is perceived for the way(s) it occupies the frame, for its partial invisibility, or for the interface with which its image is mediated?
5. How does the blurring of online/offline boundaries affect our perception of a work of art (in this case, screendance)?

Touch

1. Are there different levels of touch (real versus imagined)?
2. Does dance mediated through the screen create somatic awareness? And if so, how?
3. If touch is mutually felt by both the giver and the receiver, how does this relation change through the screen?

Screen

1. What are the implications of curated and non-curated online spaces? What does each propose? (link with [ECONOMY/Q12](#))
2. Do online performances help build spectatorship for live art or do they actually contribute to diminishing the public when the former becomes accustomed to easily accessed art from home? (link with [ECONOMY/Q12](#))
3. How does quarantine influence the form and production of screendance? How does the rise in online dance media influence, or not, awareness of and access to screendance?
4. How did the sudden popularity of screendance production and online dissemination during the shift from live festival events to individual screens affect/influence a lay audience, as well as the art form itself?
5. Has our understanding of screendance changed? Has it perhaps become more precise or open? And does the quantity of dance media online pose a threat to the specificity of screendance?
6. What are the roles and responsibilities of screendance experts with regards to the sudden surge of screendance during the pandemic?
7. Does a work for screen age more quickly than one for the stage?

8. Do archived performances appear to age more quickly due to evolutions in camera and recording technology (with the influx of online material and technological variations being more visible during the pandemic)?
9. Are new screendance communities being formed online during a time when the world is largely staying at home?
10. To what extent has the use of screens challenged the concept of location? And to what extent have screen spaces been translated into screen places?⁶ (link with [LABOUR/Q4](#))

Education

1. Are there procedures or requirements for opening a digital classroom? (link with [ECONOMY/Q1](#))
2. How does teaching screendance workshops on Zoom and other online platforms allow for new sensorial and creative approaches (for example, focus on sound or development of imagination)? (link with [PERCEPTION/Q2](#))
3. Do such platforms encourage alternate approaches to dance learning?
4. How do Zoom and other online platforms build on and/or depart from dance pedagogy's traditional focus on physical contact and oral transmission?

Aesthetics

1. Is there a common aesthetic or aesthetics in dance media that has surfaced during the pandemic (exquisite corpse videos, aesthetics of suffering and/or containment)? When collaborating from a distance, what type of variations of the exquisite corpse, as opposed to other narrative and formal possibilities, have proliferated?⁷ And why?
2. Is there an aesthetics of intimacy that emerged during the pandemic via the sharing of personal home spaces online, self-representation, framing options, etc.?
3. What is the role of touch as a choreographic motif in screendance during the isolation experienced during the pandemic?
4. Is there an aesthetics of hyperactivity manifested in social media (Facebook and Instagram stories, etc.)? (link with [TIME/Q2](#))
5. Is there already a new aesthetic shift occurring in screendance as an outcome of the saturated (mis)use/alternative use of technology?

6. Did the role of low-tech personal equipment (such as webcams) become more commonplace in screendance production during the pandemic and thereby impact the appearance of images, sounds, etc.?
7. Does the broadly/widely accessed use of technology redefine the distinction between amateurism and professionalism during quarantine?
8. What is the role of live-streaming and editing for screendance production during the pandemic?
9. Do the aesthetics of television reality shows affect the image that the audience receives during the live streaming of dance performances—especially during the second wave of the pandemic?
10. What happens when the gaze of the filmmaker is absent or filtered by Zoom/Skype?
11. Did ecological considerations shift the look and creation of screendance projects that emerged during the pandemic, as questions of environmental security, our relationship to animals, and climate change were often underlined in relation to the pandemic?
12. Can the extended online circulation of screendance during the lockdown serve as a tool to embrace diversity of gender, race, and class?

Space

1. What types of hierarchies does the visual composition of the online public and shared space (for instance, during a Zoom meeting) generate?
2. What new political and social dimensions does online space acquire during a time of quarantine and curfews?
3. Is it relevant to speak about an economy of space in relation to screendance work created under quarantine? (link with [ECONOMY/Q10](#))
4. How does the context of home-viewing during quarantine impact the experience of transmission from screen to viewer, as opposed to the collective viewing experience in a cinema or at a festival?
5. What architectural motifs in domestic and intimate spaces were mediated on screen during live video chats (e.g. Zoom classes, meetings and events) and screendance works?⁸

Time

1. How does perception of time in a changing lived experience during the pandemic impact viewing and creating works of screendance?

2. Does the pressure to be productive from home hamper creative impulses and rhythms? During the quarantine is there an increased urgency to be present and productive via the screen and how does this presence manifest? (link with [AESTHETICS/Q4](#) & [LABOUR/Q2](#))

Narratives

1. Is the pandemic a theme, a production context, or both?
2. Did some artists focus on social distancing as a theme? If so, what were the challenges?
3. Why did some screendance projects attempt to 'neutralize' the domestic space while others completely ignored it?
4. Can screendance be a form of escapism from the psychological pressures of the pandemic?
5. Is there a sense of urgency to create and share via the screen that emerges during quarantine? Was screendance used as a tool of asserting/declaring/expressing presence? (link with [TIME/Q2](#))
6. Could the reduction of physical distance through the screen be considered a form, a topic of narration, or a task?
7. What has been the role of the screen in projects of reenactment made in distance and across diverse bodies during the pandemic?⁹ Could projects related to dance transmission by distance become part of new narratives constructed during the pandemic (as for instance in *Corner Studies* by Trisha Brown Dance Company)?

Society

1. Does being present on the screen help us as individuals, as well as institutions, to feel that we exist in relation to others?
2. Is there a new type of ritual that occurred during the shift from the public sphere into the private sphere that was introduced via the screen? What kind of online codes of conduct have emerged during the pandemic, in terms of gestures, clothing, and representation of the self and its (architectural) surroundings?
3. To what extent can screen-enabled communication substitute for the physical distance experienced between bodies?
4. How does access to art online affect society's perception of dance media and its role during times of crisis?

5. Has the migration of dance events online (streaming, conferences, interactive discussions) increased the possibilities of audience participation?
6. How does teaching dance online erase or create barriers (geographic or others) that impede or facilitate students' access to learning opportunities? (link with [POLITICS/Q4](#))

Labour

1. What are the responsibilities and rights of institutionally contracted performance artists regarding their intellectual property and the online, often free distribution of their performance recordings? (link with [ECONOMY/Q3](#))
2. Has the pandemic pushed the notion of precarity and hyper-productivity to its limit? (link with [TIME/Q2](#))
3. How did some artists seize the pandemic as a context to advance ideas about uselessness and unproductivity?¹⁰
4. How did the imposed quarantine create a surge in the collaborative work of screendance making? (link with [SCREEN/Q10](#) & [ECONOMY/Q8](#))
5. In this time of physical and social distancing, to what extent have screens influenced research on dance and brought greater visibility to the labor behind the production process (e.g. migration of live dance and choreographic practice to screen/online public space as for instance in *Modes of Captures symposium*)?

Economy-Market-Industry-Production

1. Who controls the online labor market of independent dance educators? How is it controlled? Does it need to be controlled? (link with [EDUCATION/Q1](#))
2. What are the implications of free access to dance online (performance documentation as well as dance made for the screen) for the artists as well as the (virtual) audience?
3. How does the pandemic influence the relationship between artists, curators and institutions? (link with [LABOUR/Q1](#))
4. There is an array of funding available for the digitalization of the performing arts. As artists, how should we respond to this surge?
5. How does monetization work online and to whose advantage?
6. When pre-recorded performances become available online, how do the rules of distribution change?
7. How do we create a fair and sustainable framework for screening fees online given the specificity of the virtual context (all access at any moment for at least

- a set period of time—as opposed to a single screening) and the international disparity between cultural budgets and incomes?
8. How do we create feasible, organized, temporary and long-term structures for screendance productions during this time? How is it possible to proceed with equitable actions?
 9. Have professional and human relationships changed within audiovisual production, and as a result, in screendance production? What changes have affected the creative process, both in pre-production and during production? (link with [LABOUR/Q4](#))
 10. Is it relevant to speak about an economy of production costs in relation to screendance works created under quarantine? (link with [SPACE/Q3](#))
 11. Will dance festivals and institutions (re)embrace the field of screendance considering the growing tendency towards interdisciplinary formats such as video on demand or live streaming?¹¹
 12. What considerations cannot be ignored when organizing an online festival in order to protect the works, to enhance the artists and the curators' framework and to guarantee public accessibility? (link with [SCREEN/Q1 & Q2](#))

Politics

1. How does screendance work challenge, enforce, or ignore local and international pandemic policies?¹²
2. How do recently created works of screendance contribute to political dialogues regarding the pandemic and international affairs?¹³
3. Can online campaigns (videos made through and for solidarity such as Unesco's *ResiliArt*, *#ArtistsAreNecessaryWorkers* and *Culture and Its Workers*) and viral videos mobilize and create political awareness?
4. Are visibility and representation related to internet connectivity? (link with [SOCIETY/Q6](#))

After-Question(s)

This forum of questions was produced in order to encourage reflections regarding the acts of viewing, creating and sharing choreography on screen. We hope that it has contributed in some small way to the democratization of active viewing, as well as to the consideration of the ethics associated with responsible distribution and sharing. Throughout the global pandemic, the screen remains a means of perceiving and reimagining the body and its environment. It continues to be a potential site for

knowledge-making, telling a story, empathizing, connecting with others, as well as protesting or raising socio-political awareness. In this respect, is there something that has shifted? True to the structure of this forum, we would like to conclude with one further question regarding what may be a common yet unconscious experience. As we grow further accustomed to connecting, engaging, creating, and looking at the world from home: Is there such a thing as a pandemic gaze?

Biographies

Elisa Frasson is an Italian researcher interested in dance and sound ecosystems. With extensive experience in the organizational context of screendance events, dance in urban spaces, and in mentoring students in creating their own projects, she is a freelance dance event curator and educator for independent and institutional projects between Italy and the UK. She is cofounder of the nomadic screendance platform *[SET.mefree] Dance & Movement on Screen* and of the Italian cultural association *V.e.N.e.*. In 2020 she researched the Italian dance scene during the pandemic, visible in her latest publication 'As the words are touching us. Reconsidering some No Manifestos in the light of the present pandemic' (*Dune Journal* Vol. 1 n. 2, 2020). Elisa is a PhD candidate in Dance Studies (Roehampton University, London) and is currently based in Berlin.

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Katja Vaghi is an independent researcher based in Berlin, Germany. She obtained her Ph.D. in dance philosophy from the University of Roehampton (UK) and is currently a visiting lecturer at several universities and conservatories in the UK and Germany. Her most recent publications include entries on Sasha Waltz for the newest edition of *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers* (2021) and on Jirí Kylián for *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*. Her research interests encompass referencing in dance, intermediality, the comic, screendance, and somatic approaches to space.

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Notes

¹ As well as online conferences and symposiums, Zoom talks and meetings, live and online dance/performance festivals, journal articles and blogs.

² And practices of “performative commons”—as suggested by Bench (2020).

³ In using this term, we recall Virilio’s seminal text *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1991) acknowledging the fact that it is a term that emerged in the 1980s, a long time before Instagram (IG) and Facebook (FB) applications appeared. During our discussions, the words “aesthetics of disappearance” came to us instinctually. It is only later during our research that we (re)encountered Virilio’s definition. Noteworthy to us is the resemblance to Baldwin’s use of Virilio to indicate the “metaphoric potential of media technology, blurring materiality into engines of appearance and delirium” (Baldwin, 137). We connect this with the uses of IG and FB stories seen during spring 2020, especially in the dance and movement field. Witnessing this phenomenon, with thousands of short videos, fragments, TikTok entries appearing and disappearing on our screens, we recalled the logic of acceleration applied by Virilio to technological advancement and each of them as clearly analyzed by Ginette Verstraete for Snapchat, presupposing a different interaction on the part of the audience (IG/FB) or those of the message sender/receiver (Snapchat).

⁴ This question was the title of the first volume of the *International Journal of Screendance*.

⁵ This could refer to human dancers pictured on screen or inanimate object compositions, as well as somatic camera work and choreographic editing.

⁶ An example of this can be found in *I Miss Outside*, an audiovisual contribution of choreographer and professor Rebecca Hilton for her keynote for Modes of Capture Symposium (2020). In her video format presentation, Hilton has framed topics such as “perception, memory, influence, legacy, orality, literacy, ageing, caring, intimacy and uncertainty,” into the lens of the screens. The camera was capturing images from a corner in a studio of the Dance Department of Stockholm University of the Arts. From time to time, imposed words in red appeared on the images, such as “I Miss Outside,” “Dancerness,” in relation to Hilton’s audio narration. In this way, the screen is the place where specific feelings and themes have been displaced. In her audiovisual journey, Hilton traces an oral and visual archeology of memory into kinesthetic and life

experiences, from New York in the late 1980s and Melbourne in the middle 2000s, arriving at a Swedish project for a rest home. Almost at the end of her contribution, to trace the sum total of her experience, she further highlighted how much the present pandemic has shown the extent to which dance needs to remain a local practice and location—in the sense that the first location is the dancer's body—and how much screens took charge of becoming places to be. After the pandemic, she aims for dance production systems to return to “localness,” meaning “finding ways to work where we are, figuring out what new modes of capture, new forms of transmission and dissemination may be.” Affirming this, she points out how much the internationalness of dance was unsustainable prior to Covid-19.

⁷ To cite a sample of examples: *Night Creature* by Alvin Ailey American Dance, the two different versions of *Lo Spettacolo Più Bello Del Mondo* by Jacopo Jenna and Marco D'Agostin, *Indoors* by Scottish Ballet, *Willies in Corps-en-Tine* by the Australian Ballet and *We'll Meet Again* by the Drag Queens in Quarantine.

⁸ During the first lockdown in Italy, Cinematica festival created a series of calls on a weekly basis under the title *Small Contest for Small Dances*. Every week curious and restless minds were encouraged to explore in works made for the screen the relationship between the body and furniture, as well as architectural and environmental elements such as chairs, mirrors, carpets, beds, doors, lights, plants, and water. In a similar context, the International Videodance Festival of Burgundy created the open call *VidéHomeDance* encouraging artists to explore their intimate spaces as lived during the first wave of the pandemic.

⁹ *Virtual Studies for a Dark Swan* by Nora Chipaumire for Opera Estate Festival was created and exclusively rehearsed through digital transmission by the choreographer to the dancers. During the festival, in summer 2020, *Virtual Studies for a Dark Swan* was performed live before a live and socially distanced audience.

¹⁰ The notion of unproductivity as part of the critique of modernism had gained currency well before the pandemic with significant examples that include, among others, the notion of “unproductive expenditure” as found in the writings of French philosopher Georges Bataille and to a certain degree, the immobility and the non-performance as analyzed in *Exhausting Dance* and “The Non-time of Lived Experience” by performance scholar André Lepecki. Furthermore, performance and moving-image artist-scholar Claudia Kappenberg in referring to her performance practice often deploys the notion of uselessness “as an antidote and as an attempt to challenge the ubiquitous imperative to work and to always be useful” (643). Through this lens, uselessness and unproductivity should not be confused with laziness. In addition, they should be further differentiated between, on one hand, the forced and involuntarily unproductivity that has been imposed by governmental measures to inhibit the spread of the pandemic and on the other hand, the notion of unproductivity that has been put forward as a choice and as an act of resistance. The former caused artistic production, especially in

the field of performing arts, to cease or slow down in parts of the world that underwent a lockdown. The latter concerns a proposal against the spirit of neoliberalism and the mechanisms of the goal-driven society, as well as the progress-based and product-evaluated economy that all impose a boundless availability for work. Regarding the second option, Jamila Johnson-Small's contribution during the online discussion *Performing Solidarity, Ethics and Responsibility* that took place during summer 2020 resonates. In this framework and in a call for solidarity, Johnson-Small during the Q&A suggests a well-embraced proposal by the discussion participants by stating: "What if, we as artists, stop making art for a while? What then? An artists' global, one month, no hour or something. What would we find? What would we come up with, if we would speak to each other in different ways?" This is a provocation that expresses protest and aims to reveal the benefits of art through its temporary absence and withdrawal from everyday life.

¹¹ Relevant cases in support of this question include the designed for camera streaming of *Draw from Within* by Wim Vandekeybus for the Rambert Company and the Artangel dance on screen commission *Strasbourg 1518*.

¹² In *DECAMERON PROJECT*, participants are based across five continents and their videos 'live' together on one fictional, virtual street: Decameron Row. Every week, a new set of videos is revealed, each indicated by a lit-up window within an illustrated city block. Also, *From: Meg Stuart*, as part of the *CC: World* project that was created through multiple contributions in the form of letters in different formats, is related to the field of screendance in a loose sense and supports this question.

¹³ While definitions of the political vary, our research returns to the root of the word, as outlined in Marcel Prélôt's *History of Political Ideas*, which underscores how the Greek "polis" or "city" came to represent everything that concerns the city-state, resulting in Aristotle's *Politics*, one of the most influential texts in the fields of philosophy and political science. According to Aristotle, all communities attempt some good, with the aim of politics being to investigate what makes for good government. Today, for many, the political therefore becomes an act or an aim for greater social, climate, and economic justice. Recent screendance examples created during the pandemic include: Choreographer and Pacific Northwest Ballet dancer Amanda Morgan's *Musings*, created in collaboration with movement artist Nia-Amina Minor of Spectrum Dance Theater and inspired by a class Morgan had taken on spatial injustice and racism, the non-partisan *Dance the Vote* project, and the viral documentation of the "Cupid Shuffle" honoring the life of George Floyd.

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Honoring the Unseen

Catherine Cabeen, Marymount Manhattan College

Keywords: unseen, practice, cultural conditioning, transformation, somatic, embodiment, advocacy, social justice

The irony of writing to bring visibility to that which is intentionally unseen is not lost on me. Nonetheless, I feel that in response to a call for writing on “Where We Dance Now,” it is important to acknowledge the value of aloneness; the value of dance practices not caught on camera, not uploaded to social media sites, not used to show who you are to others, but perhaps used to show who you are to yourself. What does it mean to dance in isolation? What is the value of dance that is not performative? Does dance matter when no one is watching? This provocation suggests that it does; because with or without an audience, dancing changes the dancer.

Before Covid, my private dance practices were in service of future live performances. However, as one performance opportunity after another was canceled in the spring, summer, and then the remainder of 2020, the process itself came under scrutiny. Without the enticement of a performance product to validate my practice within a capitalist society, I found myself asking—Why am I doing this? What/who is it for?

A quiet voice within kept calling out to, ‘keep moving,’ to celebrate the power of change and transformation that exists within each of our kinetic bodies. It was as if my cells were asking for the stimulation of momentum; a gateway to feeling alive, a counter-sensation to the trauma of the quarantined moment.

One of my greatest loves as a dancer in group choreography has been the opportunity to feel myself as part of a greater whole. The live, antiracist choreographies of protest, which emerged within the pandemic underscore (to use Nancy Stark Smith’s term) during the summer of 2020, amplified my awareness that our physical bodies are always part of a greater whole. Our corporeality is constantly co-creating the social body. Dance practices, seen or unseen, create rich sites through which to interrogate our own role in culture and community. Within this work, unconscious bias is being increasingly recognized as an embodied phenomenon. Individually and collectively, we are being called to engage in deep practices of unpacking our habitual and culturally conditioned



perspectives. This work, which allows us to show up to our communities whole and responsive, is essential, somatic, and often unseen.

Skin, cool against a wooden floor, dropping into that labyrinthine reflex, sensing my weight as it rides gravity towards the earth. The impulse to move, to shift, to pour my trillions of cells into a new form. It is a quiet call that guides me at first. Breath animates my body, calling up a dance of exchange with the space around me. Each inhale is an opportunity for nourishment and with each exhale I co-create the environment I inhabit. The form of my body and the shape of space around me play with fullness, emptiness, and possibility.

Tuning into breath I feel the privileges, struggles, joys, and fears that mark my particular body. I feel the limitations of perspective and the depth of responsibility held in each muscle fiber. Compassion emerges for myself and others with the core realization embodiment offers; that we are all operating from specific positionality.

Feeling my breath, I hear Black Lives Matter protesters, "I can't breathe." I stay with the discomfort; working through the suffocation of generational trauma, reclaiming breath as power, each exhale connecting to my voice. A yearning in my body spills into sound. I let it roll me through space, bringing me to my feet, which take over the song with a rhythmic shuffling.

The beat rides up my body from my feet into my pelvis and chest. Organs in my core move thickly around each other's density; unconscious digestion, integrating with rhythmic movement choices.

Dancing envelops my consciousness, detaching it from cyclical thinking in order to navigate shifts of weight and interconnectivity. Embodied sensation displaces mental grappling, inviting the clarity of being in the moment, off balance. Multiple truths emerges from this multi-sensory experience. Sudden insights illuminate my being as cross-lateral connections forge new neural pathways, opening to possibilities.

It is within this embodied seeking that we process, strategize, release negativity, and build hope for the future. Through space, time, and physicality we come to know what we stand on and for. Dance is transformation; an invitation to engage with the world and ourselves as processes rather than objects. Unseen, we have the opportunity to get messy and honest with ourselves. We can practice facing our fears and confronting our shadows, so as to move through the world taking action, rather than being constantly manipulated by reaction. If our practice includes switching directions, staying grounded while reaching, and a continual curiosity dedicated to reframing limitations as creative prompts, we are able to face challenges like the present moment as potent opportunities to speak truth to power, and reimagine the next moves.

In contrast, a Departmental Zoom meeting. I witness colleagues in threatened positions of power funneling immense amounts of energy into strategizing how to maintain historic standards in an idolization of, 'the way things have always been done.' New potentialities are discarded in attempts to, 'return to normal,' even while we all know, 'normal' was racist, homophobic, transphobic, misogynistic, ageist, and ableist, among other things.

Here and now is where our practice matters. Having taken the time to resource within the body, we are able to find the courage to dissent from the status quo and to advocate for change, because we know in our cells that change is the only constant. Moderating difficult conversations and effectively communicating across difference, we are grounded and emboldened by unseen embodied practices. Navigating each moment as dance research supports the disruption of attachments to familiar modes of assessment and assigning value. It gives us the courage to try new things, and to believe in life as continually unfolding potentiality. Our embodied advocacy for social justice, which we engage in as teachers, colleagues, artists, and citizens, is not a performance, not a show, but another site in which we dance, now.

Biography

Catherine Cabeen, MFA, RSMT is an artist and teacher based in NYC. She is a former dancer with the Bill T Jones/Arnie Zane Company, the Martha Graham Dance Company, and Richard Move's *MoveOpolis!*, among others. She directed *Hyphen*, an interdisciplinary performance group from 2009-2019. Cabeen is currently an Associate Professor of Dance at Marymount Manhattan College (MMC). Cabeen is also a certified yoga instructor and a teaching artist for the Bill T Jones/Arnie Zane Company.

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Considering the Power of the Camera in a Post-Pandemic Era of Screendance

Kathryn Logan, Independent artist

Keywords: camera, power, The Maya Project, Rajko, Wernimont, feminist unboxing, process, improvisation

For many years I have been practicing contemporary dance-based improvisation with cameras, theorizing-through-practice how the camera operates uniquely in relationship with dance. I created *The Maya Project* in 2018, a project in which my collaborators and I investigated our bodily relationships to the camera using experiments derived from our own experiences of cameras and digital media.¹ Through this investigative process, we not only made some compelling visual works, but we discovered that the camera is loaded with philosophical and bodily implications.

The camera is not just another stage or the medium through which a dance is experienced. The camera is a vehicle for capturing perspective. It is a channel, a crosser of space and time, an object-participant, a powerful observer, a director of attention, and a looking practitioner. The camera is a tool of visual culture. The camera is political. The camera changes the stakes. The camera's frame is a literal tool of inclusion and exclusion.

The camera is a tool of power that can be wielded by the user, owner, and sharer. This power can be used subversively, or can participate in perpetuating dominant narratives. Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin would likely not have been convicted for murdering George Floyd in 2020 were Darnella Frazier not present with her camera, supplying visual evidence of the horrific crime. Stories get told or don't get told by way of cameras.

And this is where we dance now. Not all of us, not ubiquitously, not forever, but certainly in droves since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. I wonder how the pervasiveness of the camera is changing our cultures and our bodies, and how we incorporate these shifts into the work we make. As more and more dance work is being created for and by way of the camera due to the pandemic, I wonder how artists are examining their own relationships with the camera and the stakes it carries with it. Have



daily interactions via camera raised the stakes or lowered them? Are people more aware of the camera's power now, as they feel the energy suck of being watched on Zoom or feel a sense of connection they've been missing by speaking with someone on FaceTime? Or are they less aware of the power, as the camera becomes more quotidian?

I will point here to Jennifer Rajko and Jacqueline Wernimont's work on what they refer to as "feminist unboxing." Rajko defines this term as "a facilitatory structure for introducing a new technology into a creative process, research project, and/or collaborative working group." Rajko's work includes activities for considering the inherent risks, unknowns, and concerns around working with technologies. She suggests that this work "situates a technology within one's own lived experience."²

For me, *The Maya Project* work unknowingly became a feminist unboxing methodology of the camera as a technology. Utilizing contemporary dance-based improvisation and cameras, my collaborators and I looked into our ambivalent feelings about and experiences with this technology and its implications in our culture and individual lives. We acted as both camera operators and movement improvisers, making constant choices about how to be in relationship to the camera: picking it up, passing it, setting it down, or doing whole sections of a dance out-of-frame, depending on how (or whether) we wanted to be seen moment-to-moment. We built scores around things that cameras do as a way of unpacking (or "unboxing") our understanding of them.³ We discovered that the way a person behaves or feels in relationship to the camera depends on who is holding the camera. We considered the stakes of recording visual information as part of the content of this work.



Image from *The Maya Project_4_T_Personality_1*, 2020. Two cameras capturing different points-of-view simultaneously in the same space. Laura Patterson by Dian Jing (left); Dian Jing by Laura Patterson (right)



Image from *The Maya Project_4_S_Visible Time_1*, 2020. Davianna Green and Dian Jing by Yildiz Güventürk (left); Davianna Green by Davianna Green (right)

In this post-pandemic era of vast camera usage, I call for artists to engage in a camera “unboxing” that considers the way cameras participate in the meaning-making and context of a dance work, and considers the real life stakes of capturing and sharing visual imagery.⁴ Following are some questions to begin this process that have arisen from my work with *The Maya Project*.

How do cameras make you feel and what experiences have led you to these feelings? Hold a camera in your hand, then pass it to someone else. Take a video of them and have them take a video of you. How does it feel when the person points the camera at you? How does it feel different when they press record? How does it feel when the person holding the camera is, or is not, someone you know?

In your screendance, who wields the camera and what is their relationship to the work? If it is you, what kind of limitations does that put on your camera movement, body movement, and framing? Where does this camera come from and whose is it?

What happens to this visual / digital data and who has access to it? Was this image taken on your phone, and if so, who has access to your phone? Is this your private information? Are you sure? What is your archival process? Where do these images live?

Where is your physical attention when you are making a work with the camera? Do performers feel the same way in their bodies when the camera is pointed at them as they do when they are rehearsing or performing for a live viewership? Is this recorded or a live feed? Rehearsed or impromptu? How do each of those feel differently in the bodies of the performers?

Rajko’s work with feminist unboxing is a practice through which artists can know the technologies we are using so that we might have more agency and better understanding of the effects of the contexts of those technologies on ourselves and our

creations. For those of us who are making dance for screen, which in the post-pandemic era is only growing, the camera is an unavoidable technology. The use of the camera has and will continue to carry stakes, whether or not we consider those stakes in our creative processes. What are the various power dynamics playing out “in front of” and “behind” the camera in screendance works and what are its effects on the work we make?

Biography

Kathryn Nusa Logan is a collaborative interdisciplinary artist who utilizes experimental art practices to explore perspective, lineages, and imagined futures. Her research is based in integrated dance-with-camera works that holistically consider the camera in the making process. Through this work she is interrogating the dominant gaze by engaging in new, somatic-based practices of looking and interacting with cameras. As a video dramaturg, she works closely with directors and choreographers to utilize the camera in a way that best fits their work, interested in the camera as an innovative tool in art works beyond traditional film or dance documentation. In collaboration with the DiGS Anti-Racist Working Group at The Ohio State University (u.osu.edu/arwg), she is investing in dismantling systems of oppression in the arts and investigating how practices in somatics, dance therapy, and trauma can be activated in dance education to address systemic oppression in the body. She holds a BFA from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and an MFA from The Ohio State University.

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Notes

¹ *The Maya Project* is an iterative contemporary dance-based investigation of dance with camera. This work has been presented as video art installation and live performance with wireless live-feed projection, and is continually used in a workshop setting as a lens through-which to consider the camera’s power and unique qualities as a technology. *The Maya Project* was created in collaboration with many people, most notably Davianna Green, Yildiz Güventürk, Dian Jing, Brianna Johnson, Claire Melbourne,

Katherine Moore, and Laura Patterson. The full list of collaborators to date is available at kathrynnusalogan.com

² From “Feminist Unboxing” on Rajko’s website <http://www.jessicarajko.com/feminist-unboxing>

³ Humans use cameras to do things like preserve a moment, capture a sensation, or revisit a visual scene. Cameras are used to connect people across space and time, to communicate something, or to surveil. In a video vignette entitled “Preserving a Moment,” we practiced conjuring the felt-sense of the desire to keep a visual memory. We identified what kinds of moments this might happen in: a moment in childhood, a wedding or graduation. We identified a sense of nostalgia in the desire to preserve a moment. Through dance improvisation, we practiced capturing visual moments, either through the camera or through our own visual field and memory. We found that this desire, nostalgia, and seeking of moments to preserve created a unique sensibility of calm attentiveness, which then informed the movement vocabulary for this section moving forward, for both the dance and the movement of the camera.

⁴ Additionally, I suggest that we apply feminist unboxing methodologies to the platforms we use to share material: TikTok, Vimeo, YouTube, Zoom, Instagram... Each of these platforms brings their own cultures and practices of viewership, the same way live venues bring different practices of viewership: cinema spaces, proscenium theaters, outdoor concert stages, etc.

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Reflection on Teaching Dance on YouTube: Negotiating Between Maintaining a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Participating in the Commercialized Realities of Teaching Dance Online

Maiko Le Lay, University of California, Irvine

Keywords: YouTube, online teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, dance education

Before the pandemic, I was a dance scholar-practitioner in the process of completing my doctoral dissertation on embodied hip hop pedagogies. My research advocates for wider use of embodied and culturally relevant pedagogies in K-12 and higher education in underserved schools in the Inland Empire region of Southern California. In short, I was teaching hip hop dance and culture in underrepresented academic settings and teaching about socio-cultural and socio-political concepts such as cultural appropriation, commodification, positionality, etc. When the stay-at-home order started in California in March 2020, I, like many others could no longer teach face-to-face. I knew though, that during the quarantine, youth—especially those from underrepresented communities—would have even fewer opportunities to move and learn about dance cultures. So, I developed a YouTube channel with family-friendly dance and workout video tutorials. Online is where we dance now. Screen-tutoring became my new normal during the pandemic.

In this piece, I examine my transition from teaching dance in-person with my students in academic settings to teaching on YouTube for viewers I don't know and cannot see. I reflect on my negotiation between my teaching ideals based on culturally relevant pedagogies, and institutional barriers to dance education online. For me, teaching dance on YouTube meant both participating in and trying to disrupt neoliberal ideas of education, such as the commercial nature of the very online platform I was using. I present both the benefits and problems associated with pedagogical uses of YouTube and describe how I navigated these two realities.

Difficulties of Sustaining a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy on YouTube

MiRi Park and Heather Castillo argue that dance and technology have always intersected, yet that the “dance-at-home” necessity gave a push and “stretched” dance



education positively.¹ They conclude that stepping out of conservatories and studios enables dancers to re-center dance as a communal and social activity. I knew through my own research and teaching, that most youth today used YouTube regularly to access both academic resources and videos that engaged their personal interests. With that in mind, I was very excited to create dance tutorials on YouTube because I was primarily focused on the accessibility and new possibilities this platform had to offer for online dance teaching.

The term “culturally relevant pedagogy” was coined by education scholar Gloria Ladson-Billing.² It refers to the kind of teaching that places students’ cultural identity at the center of learning to transcend the hegemonic culture. I also ground my teaching philosophy in bell hooks’ work. She critiques Eurocentric educational practices and advocates for teaching about non-dominant knowledges.³ Both scholars suggest that teachers make space for students’ critical reflection on their identities, societies, and cultures.

As a dance scholar-educator, I have always been conscious to instruct dance with historical and cultural context by, for example, teaching about the origins of the moves and inviting students to critically think about their evolution. When I teach in person, I structure my lessons so that students both learn the embodied techniques and develop their own creative voices through improvisation. However, while developing my online tutorials, I gradually realized that, while the digitalization of dance made creating and sharing movement more accessible, the economic interests of a platform such as YouTube made it more difficult to pursue a culturally relevant pedagogical structure. In her examination of YouTube-native dance videos, popular dance and media scholar Alexandra Harlig provides a nuanced and critical analysis of commercialization and massive circulation of dance.⁴ Harlig states that the commercial use of dance videos in social media contexts both “subsumes and broadcasts” the innovations of web-native dance communities. She describes that while artists now have a platform to transmit social media-native movements on a large scale, they do so within “longstanding infrastructures that primarily benefit those with preexisting economic and cultural capital, and along lines of class and race.”⁵ My YouTube experience matched Harlig’s analysis very closely and shed additional light on the complex reality of teaching dance online.

Many difficult dance tutorials already exist on YouTube, so I wanted my channel to appeal to introductory-level movers. Originally, I had created tutorials that lasted around 30 minutes. In that amount of time, I could explain and culturally contextualize movements for beginners. However, I quickly realized that this format of teaching did not work on YouTube. Viewers wanted to receive catchy, quick-to-digest, and fun content all at once, which required me to shorten my videos considerably. According to experts, YouTube contents should be 5 minutes or shorter.⁶

Compressing the videos required a lot of soul searching and compromise. My teaching philosophy is about providing context to the movements. Unfortunately, YouTube does not really lend itself to that kind of method because it privileges quick and immediate “how to” instructions. Though some successful YouTubers thrive on longer videos, they are the minority who can afford that approach because they have developed their fan base.

I had to negotiate between creating tutorials which would match my teaching priorities but may never be seen by anyone and creating content that was more attractive to viewers but was not culturally connected. I felt conflicted, both as a dance instructor and scholar. On the one hand, I believed I was helping youth move during the quarantine. On the other hand, I felt like I was reproducing some of the teaching habits that my scholar-self would critique. In the end, I had to find a compromise, and I now wonder whether practicing culturally relevant pedagogy is even possible on YouTube.

Navigating Hypervisibility on YouTube & Social Media:

Developing a YouTube channel almost always requires engaging with other digital spaces, such as social media. For that, I had to “get back online” and become visible again. Social media became the marketing platform for my tutorials. At first, I did not feel very comfortable “being out there.” I felt that dancing on YouTube was already a big step for me as it made me uncomfortably more visible. Until recently, I was torn between participating in and resisting the marketing imperatives of teaching online and succumbing to the hyper-focus on body images in the online world. However, I soon realized that I could be teaching great, useful content, but if nobody knew about it, then the cycle was broken. And my main goal was to make embodied practices accessible to a wide audience during the quarantine. So, I developed the image and messaging I wanted to portray: cozy, friendly, welcoming, and me-like. If I was going back on social media, I did not want to create picture-perfect scenarios that distanced me from my audience of beginners. The main idea was to create an inviting environment showing that dancing and working out can be accessible and done from the comfort of our living rooms.

I have learned to negotiate my own vulnerability and increased visibility as a female dance educator and a sense of loss of privacy I experienced after “putting myself out there.” After I created my YouTube tutorials, I realized that my living room, my accent, my body, and my identity were at the disposal of anyone who comes across my channel or social media accounts. I like to think that my viewers have good intentions and that the few bad experiences I had in the process were exceptions.

Conclusion

From this experience, I learned about making YouTube tutorials, marketing my channel and using social media to promote my work. My experience shows the limitations imposed by a commercial online platform on a culturally relevant pedagogical philosophy. That philosophy is usually grounded in deep, genuine, and reciprocal relations between students and teachers. But maintaining such relations with viewers I don't know and cannot see was challenging. Thus, embodied relations do not always translate on screen and can break online. However, the most important lesson has been in negotiating between my stance and convictions as a teacher and the commercial nature of YouTube. My main takeaway from this process was that I had to reconfigure my teaching philosophy and compromise to a certain level to achieve the most important goal—reaching the audience.

Biography

Dr. Maïko Le Lay is a French and Japanese scholar-practitioner. She currently works as a postdoctoral scholar in the Connected Learning Lab at the University of California, Irvine. Le Lay received her PhD in Critical Dance Studies from the University of California, Riverside. Her doctoral research on embodied hip hop pedagogies advocates for more embodied and culturally sustaining pedagogies in K-12 and higher education classrooms. More specifically, she conducted an ethnography and performed choreographic readings of hip hop events, dance classes, and lectures and examined the tensions between Western and hip hop epistemologies in these Western institutional spaces. Le Lay possesses a MA in Political Science from the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL, Belgium) and a MA and BA in Media and Cultural Studies from the Université Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle (France). Le Lay started a YouTube channel during the pandemic to render embodied practices more accessible to wider audiences.

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Notes

¹ Castillo and Park, "Towards a Mindful Preparedness."

² Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy."

³ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.

⁴ Harlig, "'Fresher Than You,'" 50.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Greenfield, "The Internet's Attention Span."

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Extended Beings: Screendance as a Reflective and Interrogative Tool During Covid-19

Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram, Independent artist-scholar

Keywords: screen-selves, screendance as a pedagogical tool, movement as a digital presence, sustainability, reflective pedagogy

The pandemic in perspective

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and controlling its spread, the first school closures began in mid-March 2020 and classes shifted to home-based distance-learning models in Washington state where my children go to elementary school. Originally from South India, I have lived in the United States for 19 years and have worked closely with different communities and cultures in the context of traditional and folk dance. As a family, we are naturally curious about the world around us and our children enjoy being part of Indian cultural traditions as well as the larger milieu of cultures they are exposed to, growing up and going to school in the US. Our family spent a year (2018-2019) living and traveling within South India where the children walked through the several of the national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and protected reserves in the Western Ghats, learning about the wildlife, trees, and the people who live in these protected forest areas. The Western Ghats is among the world's key biodiversity hotspots. During the year in India, my children also learned about traditional practices which centered on cross-species empathy and learned from environmental biologists about the issues that needed to be resolved to conserve biological diversity in the Western Ghats. As school closures dampened a sense of normalcy, my children went back and forth remembering the year in India. As a parent suddenly taking on a bigger teaching responsibility with school closures, I decided to use dance and embodied approaches to teach some basic scientific principles and develop resilience at a time of uncertainty and global climate change. In the following essay, I have outlined our engagement, storytelling for reflexive learning and using screendance as a tool for bringing in a deeper focus and understanding to special topics in childhood education/pedagogy.



Reflecting on resilience

The few months post-March were intense as my two children grappled with what Covid-19 means, listening to special CNN news segments for children and trying to figure out how a virus can impact our immune system. This was complicated with concerns about family and friends living in other countries. We played with balls to understand how Covid-19 spreads. We drew T-cells and talked about innate and adaptive immunity. We pretended to be T-cells fighting 'coronavirus balls' with light sabers. As a mom, I wanted my children to learn resiliency. As an educator, I believe in reflective pedagogy particularly in early childhood education.

For example, here is a short dialogue:

My kindergartener asked many times each day, "Will I get the coronavirus, will I have to be in hospital?"

I asked her in turn, "Do you know your body is strong and it has an immune system?"

Which led to more questions: "What is an immune system, where is the immune system in my body, does my sister have an immune system too?"

I explained that, "just like the digestive system helps you eat yummy food, get vitamins and make energy for playing all day, the immune system keeps you safe and fights bad germs." I encouraged her by asking if she would like to draw or maybe dance out what she learnt. I asked, "Can you tell me what characters we need to have for this drawing?"; she would pick herself, a germ, and the immune system. Then I would break down the immune system into smaller components such as a T-cell which would give me an opportunity to explain the idea of binding sites.



Final drawing of T-cells by my 5-year old, April 2020.

At the end I asked, “how do you feel about Covid-19 now?” Her answers were calmer and focused on the spiky pattern of the virus, touching multiple surfaces which can lead to contact with the virus, MHC Complex, a T-cell etc. An engagement like this could last for a couple of hours and then be left behind for a whole week and picked back up another day. The advantage of this approach to teach some concepts in biology is that it gives young children the time to fulfill their curiosity and ask lots of questions. Children can also understand that there are many players in immunity and that it is not exactly a linear process or outcome. Children comprehend that there is the time to infection, the immune response and aligned processes with variable outcomes that depend on multiple underlying factors.



Performing coronavirus and immunity: coronavirus light-up balls and T-cell light sabers, April 2020.

When we perform this with a spiky light-up ball, it is easy to denote 2 states: an initial virus entry into host and the lit-up ball showcasing active viral replication mechanisms inside host.

While the complexity of this entire biological process cannot be taught to a kindergartener, it is still possible to develop a systems-thinking approach from a very young age.

In my work with teaching my own children as well as working with elementary school children using dance to teach science, I have found that enacting or embodying the concept goes a really long way in how they understand the concept and begin to apply it. When I work with elementary school children, this learning and application of concepts is particularly enhanced when I take videos of children in groups and play it back to them asking them to explain in words what action they were performing, how did this action make them feel, what was the outcome of this action and could they explain why the action ended up with a certain result. In a follow-up session, the video would allow me to teach the scientific method.

Using Screendance tools and Embodied inquiries into sustainability

Dance is an immanent aspect of my children’s lives. From birth they have been witness to dance, to *solkattu* (the rhythmic syllables of Bharatanatyam footwork), and been privy to my conversations and collaborations with dancers from different cultures. They have watched

videos of dance and the practice of dance is not a new concept or meant only for a dance lesson.

With remote learning, I structured our day around necessary school work but emphasized outdoor time hiking, biking, or simply watching birds at the bird bath. I encouraged them to express their observations through journaling, drawing, as well as play-acting or dancing—simple activities that my children enjoy—and used these expressions to create photo stories and musicals. One topic discussed often at our home is climate change, environment, and sustainability. During the remote learning months, we researched several children’s books that talked about sustainability and also decided to use dance movements to interrogate what we learned more deeply. We learned about extinct and endangered species and the environmental modifications and stressors that lead to the challenges these species face. This provided a segue into conversations about many questions relevant to sustaining our planet and its biodiversity for the future children of the world. It also allowed them to enact three different human-animal conflicts, which I discuss in the sections that follow. The sections about vultures and tigers in India were directly inspired by their experience of living in India for a year and waiting to see a tiger for many hours at Bandipur National Reserve in Karnataka, India. The section about ocean pollution comes from their love for dolphins and swimming.

Working with movement exercises and using technology to capture these movements provided a lot of opportunities and time to discuss and ask several questions during this process. While my kindergartener enthusiastically embodied the animals in different scenarios, my fifth grader used the Apple iPhone 11 Pro Max 12MP camera; *f*/2.2 aperture panorama setting to take photographs. Her favorite is the panorama feature. In her words, “I can create new and magical scenes like my imagination. I can change the perspective and make doubles or triples of the same person while they are doing different actions. When I see the pictures again, I think about many different choices.”

Plastic pollution in the ocean

A dolphin swims through the ocean playfully in the opening scene surrounded by dappled light on the water. On its way it encounters plastic waste and ingests them.



Embodying a dolphin swimming in the ocean and encountering plastic waste, May 2020. Prompts: Looking at documentaries of ocean life and plastic pollution. Discussing memories of watching ocean life from our different trips to Maldives, Hawaii and San Francisco and aquariums in India and the US. We inquire into two modes of being: 1) Cross-species empathy and 2) 'Becoming' another species. In the empathy mode, they are human beings trying to help an animal in distress while in becoming another species they dance as if they are themselves the animal experiencing the distress. Questions from the children: Why did the dolphin eat the plastic? Why does it not know that plastic is not yummy food? What will happen to the dolphin if it eats a lot of plastic? Will it get sick? Will it die? Why is there so much plastic in the ocean?

I asked them to try different movements in response to the two modes of being: 1) Cross-species empathy and 2) 'Becoming' another species. The children explored different movements such as writhing, struggling, curling up into a ball, distress calls, carrying a hurt animal, etc. They took photographs of each other in different postures and facial expressions and actively discussed which movements looked like a dolphin, what if they could try this in the swimming pool and photograph underwater with a debate about how iPhone pictures can really show what they were feeling when they were dancing. When they shifted to dancing outdoors, they started adapting to the site, adding picnic blankets over the black stones to allow for a gliding movement and altering the length of the movements. In an interesting way, using panorama technology functioned in integrating their little minds and bodies to make sense of themselves in the context of the environment. In reflecting on the dolphin series of images, the two most important aspects of using technology and the screen that stood out in how they were learning and how their thinking was changing as a dynamic response to the screen are:

Negotiating time: The juxtaposition of the abstract inner self with variations in 'dolphin' movement captured within a single image provided the children with a human-technology

interface that could be explored in many ways for deeper learning. Instead of a linear progression of time, there are multiple temporal frames that the children discovered and navigated. Using technology, the children broke boundaries of the self and 'became' another species, bridging the human world and the animal world with technological realities.

Multicentered gaze: Navigating the rich imagination, memories of travel and reality of their remote schooling in the US brought a multicentered gaze to how the children reflected on the panorama images. Instead of just seeing a dolphin trapped in plastic waste, the picture lent itself to the imagination of three dolphins and a variety of plastic waste making its way from around the world into different oceans. This led to further questions about rising temperatures, bleached corals, and endangered species and the need to address climate change. In the multicentered gaze, many places gathered in the location of their dance. The notion of place and identity gathered multiple layers of meaning through the eyes of my children as the real and virtual transposed and emerged new possibilities for the role of screendance in educational pedagogy.

Impact of veterinary drugs on vultures

In India, drugs such as diclofenac and ketoprofen were used widely for treating inflammation in cows. However, both these drugs cause liver damage in vultures and India saw a steady decline in all of its nine vulture species through the 1990s until the drugs were banned in 2006. Research following the ban showed that population decline had slowed or ceased in some parts of the Indian subcontinent between 2007 and 2011.¹ However, complete elimination of diclofenac from the vultures' food supply has not yet been achieved. In the photograph, one child portrays a vulture spreading its wings to fly towards carrion. After feeding, the vulture feels sick and unable to fly. This was a tricky situation for the children to resolve because they felt torn between helping a sick cow with the medicine it needs and saving vultures from becoming endangered.



Enacting a vulture flying to feed on carrion and feeling sick later. May 2020. Prompts: What should we do if there are two animals that need to be saved, do we pick the most useful one? How should we think when we have interconnected issues? Questions from the children: Do animals that become endangered always become extinct? Is it possible to help both the cows and the vultures? Why do you say that the earth needs biodiversity?

Human-wildlife conflict

There are increasing instances of human-wildlife conflict throughout South Asia, particularly in buffer zone areas adjacent to key wildlife reserves, which are heavily utilized by farming communities or forest food-gatherers. One of the biggest concerns is declining populations of tigers as human-tiger conflicts remain unresolved. These conflicts manifest as attacks by tigers on livestock or people, or as people harming tigers. Once again, this scenario was both provocative and sad for the children as they understood that losing livestock could be crippling to poor farmers and wild plants are important sources of food, materials, and medicines for the gatherers. As they looked at their images again, the fact that each of the images captured different actions and timepoints stood out. My 5-year-old described the image in her own words for example: "The tiger is hiding in the green buffer zone. It is thinking, wait what is the tiger thinking? It must be thinking about lunch. Zoom... it is moving so fast! Oh no! it caught a poor little lamb; it is going to eat it. Mmmmm ... so yummy."



Embodying a tiger crossing the buffer zone to prey on a lamb. May 2020. Prompts: Why does the tiger attack the farmer's lamb? How much space does an adult tiger need in the forest? Questions from the children: Can we save the tiger? What can children do to help our planet? Am I a tiger or am I myself?

An interesting question that my 5-year-old posed was: "Am I a tiger or am myself?" As a child, she was easily able to move back and forth between a 'tiger state' and 'herself' and examine her movement in digital and real time and space. Being part of a generation that is so tuned to technology, my kindergartener would look at the images and tell her sister, see I look like this (making an expression or a posture) and then she would playfully come up with more jumps or rolls or more facial expressions asking, "do I look like the vulture is dying?" or "hmm how long should the tiger wait, I am hungry now-now (roar)." Her sentences conflated her identity with the identity of the animal. Also, interestingly she tried to respond to the excitement of her movement as a digital presence. This is quite a contrast with my teaching Bharatanatyam to her when I emphasize perception rooted in the physicality of the body and the tuning to inner and outer rhythm. Her conflated identities paved ways for me to think more about her movements embodying a tiger and her experiences of responding to technological capture of the scene. As an artist, understanding how, what, and why the intersection of embodiment and technology could enable the creative process is fascinating.

Reflective learning using panorama images

My fifth grader with her inquisitiveness in exploring technology has been experimenting with iPad and iPhone features to create composite, layered, and complex images of movement and locations and both my children have improvised their techniques over time to capture the stories they wish to tell. In this activity I observed her actively trying to come up with a question or an answer or an opinion before she took a photo. This attempt to have an intent was the hardest exercise. Her final image choices were the ones that she felt contained the narrative she wanted for her audience, however during the entire process, she used the panorama feature and took many images of the site and of the characters that were obscure, tilted,

collapsed, distorted, elongated, or crooked and panned the frame to clone the characters (dolphin, vulture, tiger) into multiples. Tilting the phone to change the perspective of the image was another area of experimentation. She decided to use the panorama feature (without the add-on 360° app) based on the fact that it allows for a variety of modulations. In her words, "When I tilt, I think of the iPhone like a magical machine and it lets me take pictures that are always changing. The photos can be moved, cut, copied, colored, given effects, made into an iMovie or one long attached picture for telling the stories I want. I can even tell a story in many different ways."

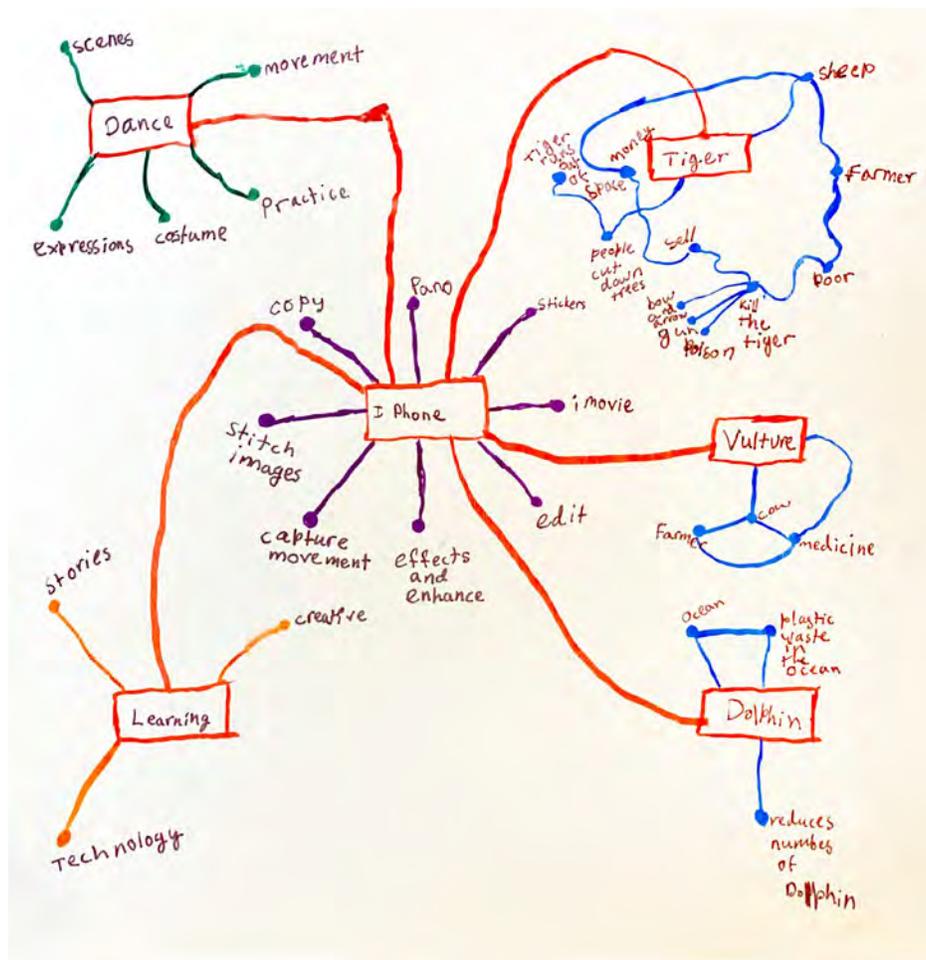


Improvising 'tiger' habitats, May 2020

The children reflected with the panorama photographs of themselves in new ways they had never done before. Their perception and experience were challenged as they integrated the dimension of technology into their thinking. Much like looking through a kaleidoscope, they use of technology allowed them to reimagine scenarios and locations in multiple ways to tell their stories. Based on their research with digital storytelling tools in early childhood education, O'Bryne et al. write, "This medium and the associated tools incorporate higher order thinking skills while also strengthening social connections in and out of the classroom."²

Panorama mode works by stitching together many individual images into a single image. In screen dance, videos or images may be edited and or modified for a differentiated perspective. One advantage with the panorama mode is that the children could have each other appear in both the left and right sides of a panorama by panning past the person and then asking them to shift their position or change their action. In the figure above, as the child enacting the tiger runs to grab the lamb, three images get stitched together to form one panorama image. The 'tiger' is prowling in the buffer zone followed by a very blurry 'moving tiger' and finally the tiger

having captured the lamb. These images compressed and expanded time all at once while their little bodies surfaced a complexity of meanings. Douglas Rosenberg writes, "The raw data of the dancing body is stitched together in the editing process of either film or video, resulting in an impossible body."³ As the children reflected on this image, they were able to re-imagine a new 'tiger-self' for themselves on the iPhone screen and a sense of urgency in asking, what can I do to help? Blending narratives with dance movements, technological capture and active interpretation of the documentation led to a complex and nuanced understanding of human-animal conflict issues, concepts of sustainability, and inquiries into personal lifestyle and ethical choices. Combining information from categories that do not display a direct relationship, and understanding that stimuli are not independent between timepoints in the different scenarios, are essential skills for incorporating and using technology to solve problems in creativity as well as larger global issues of climate change and sustainable development. These kinds of skills can be successfully developed in young children using a combination of embodied and image processing technologies.



Mapping Performance, Constructing—Decoding Narratives using iPhone technology, drawn by 10-year old.

Conclusion

Technology allows my children to intensify their experiences and find new ways to express their cognitive processing. The screen extends their bodies into a hyper virtual space-time, capturing an inner reality that is processing a complex understanding of the world. At a time when we are all forced to engage with the virtual world as a primary model for both learning and communication, screendance offers a dual space of engaging with our bodies and extending the experience into the screen, making physical experience primary to learning and communication. It also helps to re-corporealize our bodies in relation to technology.

I also see screen dance offering a challenging pedagogical tool for teachers across the world to engage with screen time without screens become invasive or overwhelmingly cognitive, providing substantial space for embodied enquiries that extend the screen as a collaborative aspect of the mind-body complex.

Biography

Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram is a dance educator, choreographer and poet. She partners with local communities to develop sustainable foodscaping and urban restoration. Before her work with the environment, she was a researcher in the field of Neuroscience. 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. She enjoys working at the intersection of science, technology and art and is currently expanding her research into the role of dance in science education. Sandhiya's focus areas include delving into the tensions between word and meaning through dance, reflection of artistic processes, particularly imagination, improvisation and abstraction of form.

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Notes

¹ Prakash et al., "The Population Decline."

² O'Byrne, et al., "Digital Storytelling in Early Childhood."

³ Rosenberg, *Screendance*, 10.

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This is where we have danced for quite a while – A Viewpoint/Reflection on Social Media Dist(d)ancing

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Keywords: Social Dist(d)ancing, Popular Screendance, Social Media

“Restricting where we can go seems to focus us on where we are.”¹

On March 17th, 2020, right at the start of the pandemic and right at the beginning of what would become a 7-month-long lockdown for us in Naarm (Melbourne in so-called Australia),² I made a tiny living room office dance video to Jessie Ware’s song “Spotlight.” I recorded the video with Apple Photobooth and chose the ‘plastic camera’ effect, which bathes the scene in a yellow and green light. I am a white person with short brown hair, wearing a slightly oversized black t-shirt. I am framed from the hip up in a medium shot. I am facing the camera. Visible in the shot are a bookshelf, a picture frame, the top of a fan and the top outline of a couch. While I recorded a 03:41 minute video of me improvising to the song, I edited out a shorter 00:33 seconds-long clip, which I posted to my Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/p/B90yMLHn425/?igshid=1w5fxeiti7ubj>) with a slightly longer-than-your-usual Insta caption (see screenshot below).³

The video has been viewed 116 times, got 22 likes, 9 comments, and a dance video response from popular dance scholar Melissa Blanco Borelli. In one of the comments popular dance scholar Alexandra Harlig states that, “I’ve been thinking, you’ve been training for this for years now with tiny office dances!”⁴ When Harlig mentioned that I “have been training for this,” they were referring to prior casual Instagram dance videos I made and posted under the “tiny office dance” banner and hashtag, dating back to February 2017, meaning I have been here, online, hovering-dancing for a while.



tiny_office_dances Tiny office dances COVID-19 precarity social dist-dancing edition: So, here we are. 2 to 3 weeks into the new semester of the new academic year and as with all of 2020 so far, everything is balancing precariously on an edge. Faced with a global pandemic, those of us who can, are working from home - from social distancing measures to lock downs to quarantines to self-isolation. I finally found out we are going online as of tomorrow at both unis I work for. Hooray. I also found out I will be paid for the hours in my contract. Double hooray as this is not a given at all universities and for all my friends and colleagues - casual academic workers and casual other workers alike. And then there is the arts sector and independent artists... And the elderly and immune compromised.. And I am down to my last roll of toilet paper... Oh-oh..... Here I am turning to Lauren Berlant and think about the current moment in cruelly optimistic terms, as as an "impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on. Observable lived relations in this work always have a backstory and induce a poetic of immanent world making" (CO, 8). As dancing is my poetics of world-making I am sharing this with you and hope others join in tiny office social dist-dancing measures. #tinyofficedances #casualacaprecarity #socialdistdancing
(PS: thanks 🙏 @mablanc for sharing this song. It's been a great solace)

Tiny office dances post from March 17, 2020. Screenshot taken by the author.

Pause, Rewind, Reflect

What does this mean for this particular moment in time and the call of this special issue "This Is Where We Dance Now: Covid-19 and the New and Next in Dance Onscreen"? In an attempt to wander alongside (wonder about?) this question, I want to turn around and look at Katrina McPherson's viewpoint piece published in Volume 11 of *The International Journal of Screendance* (IJSJ) in 2020, which starts with her observation, also cited at the start of this piece, that, "restricting where we can go seems to focus us on where we are."⁵ In the article, which McPherson wrote during the first lockdown in the UK, she walks the reader through her reflections of lockdown 1.0, the way the decelerated pace of living seems to bring a greater focus on the body, the purpose of art and art-making at this time, and how technology sits in relation to these temporal and spatial changes. When it comes to screendance practices, she asks, "An unexpected legacy of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic may be that screendance becomes more visible, shifting if not into the limelight, then perhaps at least out of the shadows?"⁶ Riffing off Douglas Rosenberg's observation, made in an unpublished talk at Stanford University, that screendance is not new, but has been "'hiding in plain site,'"⁷ she later notes that "a frequent hiding place for screendance are music videos..."⁸ Both the question and this observation made me pause and have been hard to shake off since I sat down to write, always hovering and poking at the edges of my thinking-moving popular screendance body.

The idea that screendance has been hiding in music videos, a play on Rosenberg's "hiding in plain site" comment, reminds me of Tom Gunning's observation that what he calls "the cinema of attractions," which is a cinema that has the "ability to *show* something"⁹ via the technologies that the new medium had to offer, went "underground" with the increasing importance of narrative films after 1906/1907. It went underground, or into hiding if you will, in the aesthetics of the song-and-dance numbers in Hollywood musical films.¹⁰ As someone who has grown up on musical films, dance films, and music videos (on MTV and later on YouTube when it was launched in 2005), as well as moved alongside social media dances, my thinking-moving body, made, unmade, and remade by popular screendance¹¹ over many, many years feels a bit wary of the idea that screendance has been hiding in, or under something or other until Covid-19 lockdown life has chased away the shadows in which it has been hiding. I would say that the limelight has been on it for quite a while, at least for a particular style/genre of screendance and its participant-viewership. The public has been interacting and playing with popular screendance media like music videos since at least the early 1980s when MTV was launched.¹² They have watched (and also made) amateur dance covers of music videos¹³ and commercial dance class videos on YouTube.¹⁴ Viral dances and dance fads have been created, popularized, and appropriated (with and without credit¹⁵) on social media platforms such as Vine, between 2013 when the app was launched and 2017 when it was closed (RIP), Instagram (launched in 2010), and now, of course, TikTok (originally launched in China in 2016, but becoming more globally popular and accessible since 2017/2018). But before all that social media dance hype and before even music videos became a thing, dance fads were not only circulated by Hollywood musicals and dance films, but also especially via early music television shows such as *American Bandstand* (1952-1989) and *Soul Train* (1971-2006).¹⁶ For example, I learned from John Waters' 1988 musical film *Hairspray* that teens have danced along their television sets broadcasting these shows since they started airing "in plain site."

*"Perception is a way of facing something. I can perceive an object only insofar as my orientation allows me to see it (it must be near enough to me, which in turn means that I must be near enough to it)..."*¹⁷

The question of screendance hiding in the shadows, or in "plain site" (under our noses but not quite there yet), makes me wonder about questions of place, positionality, and orientation, of where people are coming from and how they look at and engage with the screendance umbrella. Here I want to turn around again and move back in time to 2010, when screendance artist and scholar Douglas Rosenberg published an article called "Excavating Genres" for the very first volume of *IJSD*. At the very start of this piece, he states that:

Both dance's and media's contingent origins thus conspire to create meaning that emerges from the cumulative effect of their grafting: traversing both temporal and physical geographies, dance and media

absorb something of the landscape and culture of each, thereby generating communities of practice that share both common languages and stylistic elements.¹⁸

Rosenberg's idea that dance and screen media traverse "temporal and physical geographies" to incorporate something of the "landscape" of each in order to create communities of practice, brings into focus these moves and turns we perform in order to situate ourselves and our practice within the world.¹⁹ This world, in which we seek orientation and place through dancing on screens and by thinking about categories of screendance to be excavated, however, has been shaped by binaries of "art versus entertainment" and "high culture versus (low) popular culture" that carry within them traces of the logics of colonialism, capitalism, and whiteness. These logistical traces nestle in the crevices of questions around screendance hiding in the shadows, hiding in music videos, or hiding in plain site, where the issue of visibility is about where people look, not just what they see and how they perceive it, but also if they see it at all. In other words, does the looking come in the form of a cursory glance, a drifting over the content, or a looking in order to see, attentively and deeply? It made me think of popular dance scholar Sherril Dodds' observation that, "whether we speak our politics blatantly or live them quietly through how we move in the world, we take a position on the screendance that surrounds us: we choose what, how, where, when, and why we watch."²⁰ And also, what we participate in, where, when, why, and how. And even more so, what we know, or what histories and knowledges we get to know, often overshadowed by the binary logics mentioned above. Yet, as Melissa Blanco Borelli and Anamaria Tamayo Duque have noted, "These unproductive antagonisms no longer apply as together they mobilize cultural and relational models where lo popular becomes a mode from which to act, do, and dance."²¹

Pivoting Back to The Beginning

@tiny_office_dances started on a whim at the start of Semester 1 (March to June), 2017. I was working as a casual subject coordinator at the University of Melbourne for a subject called "Rock to Rave," a cultural studies subject on popular music, for which I was assigned a temporary shared office space, out of which I started recording and posting tiny dance-break videos with short captions to my Instagram account when I was the only person in the space. I was listening to so much music in preparation for the subject, to which I had also added two weeks on dance—one on the connection between popular music genres and popular dance styles, and the other on dance in music videos—that it felt fitting to break out into dance. There was also lot of tempting floor space in the office, begging me to use it. Additionally, as someone who researches popular screendance across different screendance contexts and spaces, one of which is social media, where dance videos are created in casual home spaces as Archer Porter discusses in their contribution to this volume it felt like a continuation of my interests to participate in that space of casual Instagram bedroom/other random location dance

videos for fun, without any intention to develop it further. For example, my very first tiny office dance, posted on February 21, 2017 was set to Bruno Mars' song "24K Magic." Recording it on my phone, leaning against a bookshelf unit on the floor, means I am framed from the hip down in a medium shot with a slightly upwards tilted angle. I am wearing beige oversized pants and my feet are bare. The whole 23-seconds clip is focused on the playful movement of my feet, working with the rhythmicity of the song. The caption is equally short, sweet, and playful: "Tiny office dances = tiny feet dances. Just your average day. #tinyofficedances #dancewithme."²²



Tiny office dances post from February 21, 2017. Screenshot taken by the author.

All of the posts in 2017 and 2018 follow a similar pattern. I am playfully moving (and captioning). Feet-focused dances are intermingled with dances focusing on the upper body. I am unwinding, grooving, and twirling between my shared office space and home.

In March/April 2019, the tide began turn, so to speak. When I speak of turning tides, I am speaking of the way that the already precarious positionality of casual academic laborers in our school (and also generally across local and global institutions), slipped further into precarity. While always hovering at the edges of my precarious body, it all became more visible, more tangible, and more unstable.²³ As a result, I started posting dances with longer captions centered around the notion of precarity, tracking the atmosphere and feelings with my thinking-moving body. Not just to share, but also to get through.²⁴



Tiny office dances post from May 27, 2019. Screenshot taken by the author.²⁵

Sharing is caring, as the saying goes... Or, as Tavia Nyong'o has remarked, "perhaps precarity is not solely intrinsic to life in its individual existence but also in and through its collective repetition across lives."²⁶ To being, as Jean-Luc Nancy states, "singular plural,"²⁷ where precarity is, to pivot back to Nyong'o, "more concerned with compassion, with co-passion, co-presence, a being in common with that which we do not know, and with those whom we can not speak for."²⁸

And thus, I arrive at the beginning, in March 2020, when all dancing became, more or less suddenly, confined to home spaces and when the home became the office became the home became the office ad infinitum. It also marks a further slippage into precarious conditions and seemingly never-ending flexibility. Making tiny office dances and writing captions, in which I started interweaving diary-style reflections with critical theory (of texts and authors that left a mark), became a lifeline for me that also became increasingly more critical as a practice in the way that I started taking it seriously as a critical practice. Thinking about the "singular plural" in relation to this means that I have to give a big shout out to the people who took this seriously as a critical practice way before I did and kept dropping more or less subtle hints that I should, too.²⁹

Coda: Screendancing Singularly Plural

Another thing that really struck me as part of the pandemic screendance response on social media was that besides all the popular screendances I have participated in over the years (like learning Galen Hooks viral choreo to "River" off the screen in 2017—no, there is no video documentation) and the tiny office screendances I created myself (whimsical and serious and not viral at all), I was now able to access dance classes by people and companies, who had so far only been accessible in physical, material, f2f spaces, via Insta Live. Suddenly, I could do choreographer Ryan Heffington's "Sweat Fest" dance party, or do a Cunningham technique dance class offered through the

Merce Cunningham Trust's Instagram page, or take ballet classes with American Ballet Theatre's principal dancers Isabella Boylston and James B Whiteside, which they taught together-yet-separate from their respective kitchens in NYC. Even if joining live-live was not always an option due to the time difference between the US and so-called Australia, I was able to do these classes within the 24-hour time period that they stayed up on Insta Stories. Despite not always being live-live (for me at least), the experience felt communal, creating a shared space for movement based on platforms that already existed, and where screendance has already been happening for a while. Same-same but different maybe? It is certainly bringing into greater focus the restrictions on where we have been going/screendancing and where we are at now and why.

Biography

Dr Elena Benthaus is a Casual (Adjunct) Lecturer, currently living and working in Naarm (Melbourne) in so-called Australia. As a very very interdisciplinary dance studies scholar, her research on dance on the popular screen sits in between the disciplines and theoretical lineages of screendance studies, screen studies, cultural studies, popular culture and popular music studies, and fandom/spectatorship studies. Elena's scholarship can be found in *The International Journal of Screendance* and *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition*. They also currently serve as the Chair of PoP Moves Australia/Australasia and create so-called tiny office dances on their Instagram account with the handle @tiny_office_dances.

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Notes

¹ McPherson, "Walking in the light," 52.

² The 7-month lockdown started with stage 3 measures in March (stay-at-home orders, which meant, there were only four reasons we were allowed to be outside: shopping for food and supplies, exercise, medical care and caregiving, work and education—if necessary), an easing of restrictions in June, back to full stage 3 restrictions in July, and stage 4 restrictions from August to October (which meant an 8pm curfew, only 1 hour of exercise outside, and remain within a 5km radius from home).

³ Benthaus, "Tiny office dances COVID-19 precarity social dist-dancing edition."

⁴ Harlig, "I've been thinking."

⁵ McPherson, "Walking in the light," 52.

⁶ McPherson, 55.

⁷ Rosenberg, cited in McPherson, 55.

⁸ Ibid. 55.

⁹ Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]," 382. Original Emphasis.

¹⁰ Ibid. 382.

¹¹ I have been learning "how to popular screendance" from music videos beside my training in ballet and modern and contemporary dance when I was growing up. I am still learning from dancers/choreographers such as Parris Goebel, who is also someone who has come up through popular screendance, ie. music videos, which has in turn shaped her practice.

¹² See for example, Melissa Blanco Borelli's article "Dancing in Music Videos, or How I Learned to Dance Like Janet . . . Miss Jackson" on learning to dance like, and as an extension, learning how to screendance from Janet Jackson.

¹³ See for example, Harmony Bench's article "Screendance 2.0: Social Dance-Media" in which she talks about viral choreographies and the way they work as a form of participatory choreography, or Philippa Thomas' chapter "Single Ladies, Plural: Racism, Scandal, and "Authenticity" within the Multiplication and Circulation of Online Dance Discourses" on how Beyonce's music video to "Single Ladies" created a multiplicity of online responses in the form of homages, parodies, and reinterpretations.

¹⁴ See for example, Alexandra Harlig's article "'Fresher Than You': Commercial Use of YouTube-Native Dance and Videographic Techniques" on the commercial use of web-native and amateur video and dance aesthetics in music videos and ads.

¹⁵ See: Jasmine Elizabeth Johnson's short-form essay "In My Feelings" on the Drake "In My Feelings" dance challenge and Naomi Bragin's chapter "From Oakland Turfs to Harlem's Shake: Hood Dance on YouTube and Viral Antiblackness" on how "hood dances," such as the Harlem shake and Oakland turf, as particularly localized sub-categories of hip hop dance, shape and at the same time obliterate political memory and social/racial identity when going viral within the structural antiblackness of participatory media and the global dance industry. For this, also see mainstream media pieces on the topic, such as: Battan, "A Decade of Viral Dance Moves"; St. Felix, "Black Teens are Breaking the Internet and Seeing None of the Profits"; Diep, "The 'Milly Rock' Remains New York Rap Dance Royalty."

¹⁶ See for example, Alexandra Harlig's chapter "Communities of Practice: Active and Affective Viewing of Early Social Dance on the Popular Screen" on television dance party shows like *American Bandstand* broadcasting the Twist and other new dances in the 1950s and 60s and Thomas DeFrantz's "Unchecked Popularity: Neoliberal Circulations of Black Social Dance" in which he looks back to *American Bandstand* and *Soul Train* to highlight the neoliberal logics in contemporary circulations of black social dances.

¹⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 27.

¹⁸ Rosenberg, "Excavating Genres," 63.

¹⁹ He later poses a series of questions, designed as a methodology for "excavating" genres and thinking about the different types/styles of dance on screen texts that exist under the more overarching screendance umbrella that help to direct the focus in a more specific way.

²⁰ Dodds, "On Watching Screendance," 145.

²¹ Blanco Borelli and Duque, "A Word from the Guest Editors," 7.

²² Benthous, "Tiny office dances = tiny feet dances."

²³ Simultaneously to the situation becoming more visible and unstable, a more organized pushback started to happen through the casual network of the University of Melbourne's National Tertiary Education Union branch.

²⁴ The inspiration for my practice came from gender non-conforming writer and performance artist's Alok Vaid-Menon's Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/alokvmenon/>), on which their personal, critical, and creative writing accompanies and juxtaposes their pictures to record and share their art and activism.

²⁵ Note: Only I can see the full post these screenshots refer to on Instagram at this moment in time, as it has been blocked due to copyright issues with the song I used. This was not always the case as the post has 76 views, 15 likes, and 11 comments.

²⁶ Nyong'o, "Situating Precarity," 158.

²⁷ Nancy, "Of Being," 1.

²⁸ Nyong'o, 159.

²⁹ These people are: Melissa Blanco Borelli, Sherril Dodds, Alex Harlig, and Laura Saunders.

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Notes on Pandemic-Era Screendance-making

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Keywords: screendance, lockdown, pandemic-era, screen-based, digital adaptation, virtual dance

The dance world's abrupt and involuntary convergence on screens during lockdown has generated a flood of new dance content online. In addition to broad sharing of previously unseen dance recordings, dance artists unaccustomed to creating for screens have made the shift as a way to stay active, fulfilled, visible, and solvent. As an experienced screendance-maker, I hoped this moment might legitimize or even valorize screendance practices and practitioners for the mainstream dance world. Like so much else in 2020, this has not quite gone as I expected. Below is a discussion of trends in recent screen-based dance and the works that exemplify them.

A common characteristic of many dances made since lockdown is the use of screens to erase physical, temporal, and even generational distance. Often, the visual anchor is one continuous phrase of movement shared between dancers, performed across seasons, or placed in different locations.¹ One of the first iterations of this was the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre company's collective performance of the "Buked" section from *Revelations*.² It brought the new thrill (now commonplace) of seeing virtuosic artists close up, without lights, costumes, and make-up, and joined in their homes by children and pets. The widely shared video was like an affirmation of faith for the newly diasporic dance community, relocating sacred choreography to mundane spaces and demonstrating that even when displaced from the studio and the theatre, our bodies hold the artform. Although it preceded the pandemic by six years, Mitchell Rose's film *Globe Trot*, which features 50 performers in 23 countries packed into a span of less than 5 minutes, modeled this space, time, and distance-collapsing concept, and now plays like an anthem for Covid-times. Realizing this, in March 2020, Rose generously shared a sort of how-to guide for his style of "hyper matchcut" filmmaking³ via a closed Dance Professors Online Transition Group Facebook page for dance educators hurriedly pivoting to virtual everything.⁴

Janet Wong took an imaginative and markedly different approach to collapsing multiple solo clips into one work in her edit of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane work,



Continuous Replay: Come Together,⁵ live-streamed on November 19, 2020. Employing an architectural structure of moving split screens on a grid-like background, Wong guided us through a virtual installation of 44 video solos. The effect felt strangely cold and technical, given that the performance was a coming together of and love song to multiple generations of the company. But, by letting individual videos drift in and out of the frame instead of employing quick cuts, Wong succeeded in preserving the continuousness of the piece's title.

Looking at work as visually complex as *Continuous Replay* has led me to wonder if the pandemic is altering our aesthetics. I certainly have more neurological stamina for the multiple images and sounds of Zoom meetings, classes, and gatherings than I did in March 2020. Could we possibly be moving toward a collective preference for art that harnesses this multiplicity? Paradoxically, even as I seem better able to process multiple images within one frame, I have also noticed that camera movement and multiple camera angles in pre-pandemic dance films now seem strangely artificial compared to the current, static, single-camera images of dancers in living rooms and gardens.

These same living rooms and gardens constitute another challenge for pandemic dance-making. Even pre-Covid, dance-makers often misunderstood the way the camera lens inverts spatial geometry, choosing locations that in-person seemed to provide a sweeping and idyllic background but detracted from the movement when on-camera. Although Doris Humphrey wrote about stage space rather than screen space, she described the problem aptly in her mid-1950s text *The Art of Making Dances*:

The student should be led away from his understandable feeling that dancing is movement of the body and can be placed just anywhere that is convenient in the space at his command. This introspective concentration on the movement has been instilled in him by years of class work, in which the only space consideration was to find room enough to work without interfering with other people.⁶

The issue is compounded when dancers move from the limits of stage space to performing anywhere and everywhere, and compounded again when they record themselves with no external eye. One glorious exception is the opening clip of Alonzo King LINES Ballet's *There is No Standing Still Part 1*, released in June 2020.⁷ In the clip, Adji Cissoko, standing in a grove of tall trees, reaches three of her own tall limbs to the sky in perfect harmony with her surroundings. The image is also a balm for its locked-down audience, allowing us to experience the freedom and strength of Cissoko's body in concert with the natural world. It is a rare moment in which movement and location are not juxtaposed or in competition, but contribute to a unified vision.

With respect to my hoped-for convergence between mainstream dance-makers and the screendance community, the results have been mixed. *Dance On! An Evening with the Mark Morris Dance Group*, which premiered on May 28, 2020, was preceded on May 26 by Marina Harss's feature in the *New York Times* titled, "The Pragmatist's Progress: Mark

Morris Adapts to Creating Online.”⁸ Morris, I thought, would have his pick of screendance collaborators. But, Harss’s feature revealed that instead of reaching out for expertise in screendance or even more generally to professional cinematographers and editors, Morris instead relied on his music director, Colin Fowler, who “taught himself the editing program Final Cut Pro after the lockdown began.” During the second iteration of *Dance On!*, live-streamed on November 12, an audience member questioned why Morris found Fowler to be the “collaborator of choice” in the role of film editor. He responded that Fowler is a “jack of many trades,” a “tech queen-nerd,” and has a music degree from Julliard. Even though I wholeheartedly support Fowler and Morris’s experimentation in this new medium, their disregard for an entire field of artistic expertise is disappointing. Can you imagine Morris taking similar pride in declaring that one of his dancers had taught themselves to play the piano in order to accompany a performance?

Dance On! Parts 1 and 2, unsurprisingly, are recognizable as early experiments in digital editing. Morris and Fowler lean heavily on effects, exploring the many tools the medium provides to manipulate movement in time and space, in pronounced contrast to their often spare and elegant work for live performance. A welcome exception is Morris’s solo *Offertorium*, performed by Lauren Grant as part of *Dance On! Part 2*,⁹ in which the compositional integrity of Morris’s movement and Schubert’s music carry over to the video edit.

More heartening has been the inclusion of screendance collaborators in the Virtual Commissions from Works and Process at the Guggenheim, including Ben Stamper, whose *Notes on Gathering* with Andrea Miller boasted the most stunning cinematography of the series at the time of this writing.¹⁰ Donald Byrd’s *Solanum Dulcamara*, created with Teri Jeanette Weikel, and filmmaker Luke Wigren also stands out for its masterful use of available materials during a lockdown, layering historical video with intimate, contemporary shots of both Byrd and Weikel to communicate the complexity of relationships and art-making.

I do not mean to imply that dancers should stay in their lane and leave the cinematography and editing to the professionals. I actually believe quite passionately that dance artists have a singular vision for how their work should be translated to screens, that they should acquire the requisite skills to do so, and that the field’s tendency to outsource this translation is one of the major reasons dance has not yet fully realized the potential of screen space. But, dance-makers new to screen-based work can also educate themselves, honoring and learning from skilled practitioners and more than a century of dance filmmaking history and practice. It is a fine line, but one that can lead us out of this time better equipped for a world that again includes live performance.

Biography

Rebecca Salzer, Associate Professor of Dance and Director of the Collaborative Arts Research Initiative at The University of Alabama, is an intermedia dance artist and educator. Her work for the stage has been seen in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco, where she directed Rebecca Salzer Dance Theater for a decade. Her award-winning films and videos have been programmed in national and international venues and on public affiliate television stations KQED, KPBS, and WTTW. Salzer holds a B.A. in Humanities from Yale University and an M.F.A. in Dance Theatre from the University of California, San Diego, where she was a Jacob K. Javits Fellow. She also serves as Project Director for the Dancing Digital Project, supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities (dancingdigital.org), which works toward creating and facilitating more centralized, accessible, equitable, and forward-thinking dance resources online.

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Notes

¹ Two examples are Redha Medjellekh's *One Year*, featuring Calvin Royal III, which extends one continuous movement phrase through multiple seasons and Derek Brockington and Alexandra Hutchinson's *Dancing Through Harlem*, which extends one continuous movement phrase across multiple performers and locations.

² "Ailey Dancers Perform an Excerpt from 'Revelations' ('Buked' Section), Together While Apart" (2020) by Miranda Quinn.

³ Also including Rose's works *Exquisite Corps*, and *And So Say All of Us*.

⁴ Rose, "ATTENTION TELE-TEACHERS"

⁵ "Continuous Replay: Come Together" (2020) by Arnie Zane.

⁶ Humphrey, 72.

⁷ "There Is No Standing Still, Part I" (2020) by Alonzo King.

⁸ Harss, C1.

⁹ "Dance On! An Evening with the Mark Morris Dance Group Part 2" (2020) by Mark Morris.

¹⁰ Ben Stamper might find “screendance-maker” too narrow a term to describe his cinematic expertise. I use the term here to acknowledge his specific experience in this area.

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TikTok, Friendship, and Sipping Tea, or How to Endure a Pandemic

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TikTok is a short-form social media app on which users create brief, pithy, and endlessly shareable performances on video that last 60 seconds or less. When you open TikTok you're taken to the *For You Page* (after a compulsory ad plays), an endless stream of video content curated "for you" by algorithms that use your prior engagement with the app to show you the kind of content it assumes you want to see, beaming content onto screens the algorithm thinks you are most likely to enjoy.¹ Depending on which "side" of TikTok you train the algorithm to put you on, your *For You Page* might show you far-right conspiracy theories and cat videos, or you might see drag makeup tutorials, cooking how-tos, hot takes on current events and queer people of color dancing to jams like "WAP" by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion.

These types of brief performances are intended for the phone screen, with artificial intelligence driving the app's capabilities to loop, distort, and alter images and video. For performance studies scholars, TikTok evinces what Elise Morrison, Tavia Nyong'o, and Joseph Roach move us to think of as the "algorithmic performative," noting that "it has become increasingly difficult in this day and age to use the term "performance" without calling up an algorithmic matrix of input/output, cause and effect."² In similar fashion, we also see TikTok enacting what Sianne Ngai would call a "capitalist gimmick."³ This gimmick "is both a wonder and a trick. It is a form we marvel at and distrust, admire and disdain, whose affective intensity for us increases precisely because of this ambivalence."⁴ These critical frames could not be more relevant in 2020 and beyond.

2020 has been an unprecedented historical moment where in-person events in the USA have been cancelled for over a year at the time of this writing due to the coronavirus pandemic. During this time when the live arts have moved from the stage to the screen, TikTok offers a fascinating venue to consider the "sets of meanings and conventions" implied, innovated and reiterated in quotidian performance practices.⁵ Recently, Black



feminist scholars have been shaping thought around the racist logics built into algorithmic processes. Ruha Benjamin, for example, calls these processes “coded inequity” and Safiya Noble uses the term “algorithmic oppression.”⁶ When articulating the performance cultures of a social media app like TikTok, an app that relies on the endless circulation of relatable content, performance scholars might take up Simone Brown’s question: “how do we understand the body once it is made into data?”⁷ In this, examining TikTok through a critical dance and performance studies lens offers a multiplicity of ways to see *how* the body-as-data is mobilized through gesture, dance, fashion, speech acts, and choreography. With its rise in popularity during the pandemic, in addition to the machinations by the Trump Administration to ban TikTok in the United States, TikTok exists as a rich, neoliberally activated virtual stage that moves across pleasure, politics, and personality.⁸

Over the past year, the authors of this piece have sent each other dozens of TikTok videos via Facebook Messenger, sometimes in the middle of the night. Due to the isolation and unparalleled loss of social life brought on by the pandemic, these videos worked to rearticulate our friendship. That dialogue, the call and response of sharing 60-second performance content, led us to position this piece as a conversation. We thought we could model our friendship and pleasurable exchanges for you in a way that resembles the kinds of sociality that TikTok allows. What follows is our way of thinking about TikTok through our enjoyment of it as a compelling site of contemporary performance.

madison moore: I am so glad to be in conversation with you about TikTok, particularly given the way you think about popular dance, screens, and performance. I think what I find so compelling about TikTok is that it extends what John Muse calls “microdramas,” or incredibly brief performances that challenge temporal structure.⁹ Muse points out that there is a long history of really brief performance, and I think TikTok videos are a great example of that because they can only be a minute long, not more. That temporal limit presents an incredibly tight but exciting range of performance possibilities. I even tried using TikTok in my classes in Fall 2020 in lieu of assigning writing responses as a pedagogical exercise. Some of my students did them and loved it, but others complained about how difficult it was to come up with even a 15-second video every week. Compelling short performances are tough! So I’d be really interested to hear what strikes you about TikTok and how the app differs from other social media platforms for you in terms of its connections to performance-making and the everyday.

Melissa Blanco Borelli: Well, I tried to do weekly TikToks for my graduate seminar in Performance Studies, but I gave up less than halfway through the semester because I realized how labor intensive making a quality TikTok can be. But, I am so glad you turned me onto it this past summer when we were having our usual Facebook messenger catch-ups. I saved all the TikToks you initially shared with me. I was enthralled from the

start. I remember you telling me that you had stopped watching movies or television in the evenings and you were exclusively watching TikTok. I started doing the same and I understood TikTok's allure. I began to notice how each video is a micro-performance of daily life, imagination, pleasure, and ways of coping with Covid-19 lockdowns happening across the world. Each short video is a new world. Content creators expand on already known dances, quotes from films or television shows, they engage in citational, presentational, and/or satirical practices about their tastes, culture, passions, or skills. TikTok offers relatively easy to use (with practice and lots of trial and error) editing tools such as duet capability and green screen, so that there are endless possibilities and variations available for your video. It need not look like anybody else's video, but part of the way that community is created through TikTok is through the circulation, repetition, and re-interpretation of performative conceits that somehow show how your video *does* look like another one. TikTok becomes this space of performance surrogation,¹⁰ where the user's literacy (of the TikTok archive) and knowledge comes to play depending on how they engage with pre-existing TikToks thereby contributing to what I would call a contemporary genealogy of digital performance. TikTok also functions as a digital commons, a space where "difference" seems obsolete because in order to belong, you just have to join TikTok, know the parameters of how to make a video and then use it according to your own skills and aesthetic preferences. This digital commons of TikTok offers up a creative, collaborative, and even critical space to comment on the current moment. Harmony Bench asks several questions in her book *Perpetual Motion* that feel relevant here to our discussion: "What can dance, movement, and gesture afford—and what conflicts arise—when they are perceived as common or utilized to enact a common? How, why, and for whom are assertions of dance as common meaningful in digital contexts?"¹¹ I think the lockdown experience of the pandemic allowed the digital commons of TikTok to expand and become a crucial survival mechanism for many. It became a way, through all types of embodied performances (dance, cooking, crafting, acting) and performative tactics to make sense of our world and participate in the misery of lockdown and pandemic fear together. So, while TikTok's accessibility and usability set it up as a commons, I think you are right in bringing up the algorithm (and the algorithms of race) that lie beneath its seemingly universal veneer. Bench writes about a participatory commons as "as an alternative to the extractive neoliberal financial logics that govern much of contemporary life in the United States and beyond."¹² Yet, TikTok is most definitely a product of neoliberalism's marketing and commodification of the self through social media. The tension between TikTok functioning as a participatory commons outside of neoliberal financial logics while simultaneously being a product of the neoliberal financialization of the self makes it the perfect stage for critical dance and performance analysis. Such critical framing helps me to unpack and justify my pleasure in TikTok. Not that one's pleasure's need justification, mind you, hahaha, we both know that!

madison: Right! It's a question of both/and here, and I think the contradictory nature of TikTok as a space of possibility *and* a space where folks can do hot takes on popular

culture *and* a space deeply tied to flows of capital is what makes it such an interesting venue to think about contemporary performance onscreen. We can agree that TikTok absolutely is a product of the neoliberal financialization of the self. Part of the allure of the app is the way it creates the kind of participatory commons through shared performance content. I knew about TikTok for a while as a friend of mine used to send me TikToks all the time, imploring me to get on the app because it was the next new social media phenomenon. I was missing out, he told me. At the time, I didn't take the app seriously. My data is already owned by the dozens of social media apps already installed on my phone, so the last thing I needed was another one. It was not until the pandemic dramatically altered quotidian life, the live arts, and reoriented notions of time and leisure that I downloaded the app and fell down the rabbit hole, as it were. Purely in terms of the content, I could not stop laughing at the short-form performances I landed on and really found it difficult to stop scrolling. 1am became 3am became 5am, all scrolling, the algorithm learning more and more about my taste and showing me even more precise videos tailored to my liking, making it that much harder for me to put it down.

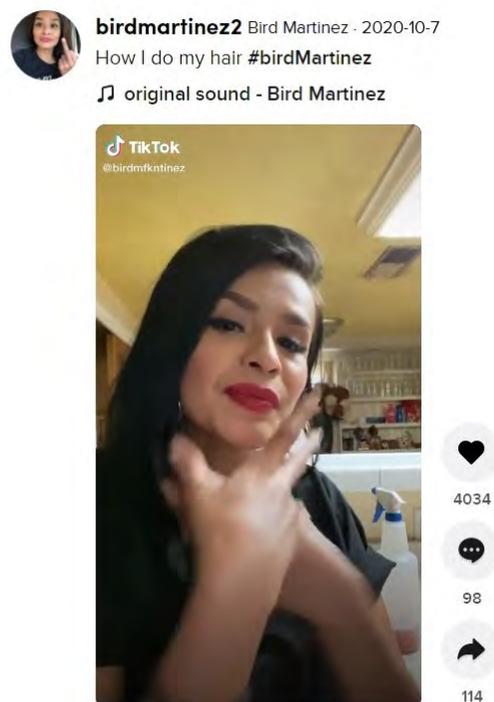
No better TikTok captures that feeling of endless scrolling than one I saw recently of [@the_mannii](#) in bed late at night wearing a blue eye mask and holding their phone in hand in the dark. A laughing track plays in the background and the video banner says, "Me dying from TikTok videos at 4am and my alarm is set for 7am." That was basically me all summer!

But even as I embrace the potential for worldmaking on the app, I am also aware and wary of the ways TikTok is programmed solely to capitalize on my attention. I'm thinking of Shaka McGlotten here, who writes so beautifully about the ways technology, data, and algorithms impact our daily lives. McGlotten is interested in how these systems "hack our desires in increasingly molecular ways," encouraging us to keep "our eyes glued to screens and our bodies arranged around our phones or otherwise contorted, our fingers tapping, typing, swiping, and scrolling away."¹³ The fact that I stopped watching TV in favor of TikTok is a prime example of the power of my catered TikTok algorithm, which computer scientist Tristan Harris notes is designed to do exactly this. "If you want to maximize addictiveness," he wrote in an article that appeared in the *Observer*, "all tech designers need to do is link a user's action (like pulling a lever) with a variable reward."¹⁴ It's the roulette wheel or slot machine effect that, when programmed correctly, wins no matter what you choose.

I think the thing that kept me pulling the lever on TikTok was that I unknowingly trained my algorithm to constantly spit out a reliable, endless stream of Black queer performance that, first of all, I was certainly not seeing in other media spheres where there continues to be a problem telling stories that aren't about white people. But the other reason I kept pulling the lever is that, deep in the darkness of the initial lockdown and the sudden lack of live art, I was able to find avenues of pleasure, joy, and human "connection" through these algorithmic performances. There was something important

to me about the collective feeling of loneliness, depression and anxiety that came from the large-scale cancellation of public entertainment, coupled with an enduring sense of hope in a stream of videos which highlighted that even in the darkest hour, the show must go on.

Melissa: Since we both respond so pleasurably to the worldmaking performative potential of TikTok, I'm wondering how does TikTok generate a digital space for users to perform an/their identity? I know we share giggles and guffaws over particular videos of queer extravagance (@[themanuelsantos](#)) or *rasquache* aesthetics (@[birdmartinez2](#)) so I wonder how this platform allows for such performances to be possible.¹⁵ Again, here I am thinking of what Ngai writes about the gimmick: "Labor, time, value: the contradictions that explain why the gimmick simultaneously annoys and attracts us explain why it permeates virtually every aspect of capitalist life."¹⁶ If each TikTok video can be interpreted as a gimmick, how do these videos corporealize labor, time, and value so that we can see the process of performance and self-making through performance?



Screenshot of Bird Martinez [TikTok video](#) showing how she styles her hair.

madison: Child, don't get me started on @birdmartinez2! I *live* for her.¹⁷ She might be my favorite TikToker because of her complete lack of interest in respectability politics, alongside other Black queer content creators like @[headofthehoochies](#). For those who don't know, @birdmartinez2 is a Latinx diva who makes videos about how to make Mexican dishes. TikTok is certainly full of cooking videos and how-tos, but what makes

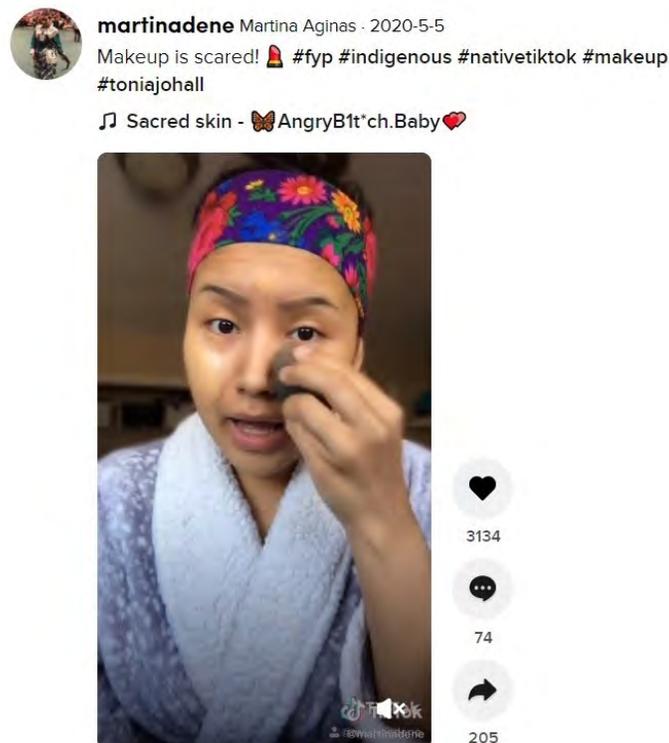
@birdmartinez2 so compelling is the ratchet-*rasquache*, working-class aesthetic, with the red lip, the dramatic bat-winged eye makeup, the gaudy gold earrings and the big, bouffant hair piled on top of her head. Her videos are punctuated by the phrase “*bitch...bitch...bitch*” said performatively in a cadence familiar to Black and Latinx queer and trans people. She is truly a gem, and offers a prime example of what Jillian Hernandez calls “aesthetic excess,” or the debates that mark “Black and Latina bodies as fake, low-class, ugly, sexually deviant, and thus damaging to the public image of their communities.”¹⁸

@birdmartinez2 is a perfect example of how in certain ways TikTok allows a space for queer extravagance and ratchet aesthetics because it is in the app’s favor to operate as a marketplace for a poetics of the self because similar users will find these performances of fabulousness content and feel “seen.” In turn, that encourages users drawn to queer extravagance to spend more time on the app, which then will spit out even more related content, which keeps the user logged in. The house wins. As Ruha Benjamin warns, illusions of progress that we might assume because we see more marginalized people on screen allows “racist habits and logics to enter through the backdoor of tech design, in which the humans who create the algorithms are hidden from view.”¹⁹ That being said, I still believe a poetics of the self is important when you are multiply marginalized because you don’t necessarily always have the access or the resources to cultivate visibility in the cultural sphere. At a basic level, on TikTok all you need is a smartphone and an idea to bring your microdrama to life.

Melissa: OMG, yes, Bird Martinez is definitely *una joya*! For me, Bird possesses this enthralling mix of (decolonial) self-love and validation mixed with a keen self-awareness and self-deprecation (“I know I look a little musty, a little motherfu\$in’ crusty but always motherfu\$in’ lusty... at least that’s what my husband says”). She peppers her Spanglish videos with humorous profanity. She draws you in as you wait to hear when and, more importantly, *how* the Spanish or the word muthafu\$a will make their appearance. Her cursing is excessive; her hair and make-up while cooking seem excessive and impractical (won’t the labor of cooking and the steaming pots melt her foundation and eyeliner?); and her commentary sometimes borders on too much information about her personal life. Mind you, this is not a critique. I am drawn to that excess. In fact, I cannot get enough. There is skill and humor in how she moves between all of these excessive expressivities. I appreciate you bringing up Jillian Hernandez and her important work for this context. Hernandez explains that “the aesthetics of excess embrace abundance where the political order would impose austerity upon the racialized poor and working class.”²⁰ She further writes that “to present aesthetic excess is to make oneself hypervisible, but not necessarily in an effort to gain legibility or legitimacy [...] it’s how we dress in the undercommons.”²¹ Bird’s aesthetics of excess creates an intimate sociality. She invites us into her kitchen, she shares her lexicon and her pleasure and skill at Mexican-American cooking. Her quotidian undercommons may not necessarily attract huge followers (I can’t believe she only has 35.2K followers?!), but that is exactly

what makes her videos so powerful. They are there for her and nobody else, really, yet as her fan, you feel like you are part of her intimate and privileged circle. She's that cool girl you desperately want to be friends with and you can't believe she's so warm and inviting.

madison: I love that! Yes, there's so much self-love, assertion, and self-awareness. I also love how you are thinking about the many forms of excess in her videos, from the cussing to the big hair. Of course, TikTok's algorithm also reifies white standards of beauty as well as the kinds of bodies that are seen as desirable. TikTok certainly rewards, recirculates, and repositions images of whiteness as the most desirable.



Screenshot of @martinadene applying Fenty make-up

Melissa: That white femme beauty standard is such a violent one to dismantle and I see it to many differing degrees of success and failure, but I am mostly inspired by the Gen Z TikTokers who blatantly reject these white standards. Young Black and Brown femme girls specifically turn to aesthetics and sensibilities from their culturally specific locations and sometimes even call out the tyranny of white femme aesthetics. I am particularly drawn to the TikToks by Nakota Navajo woman @martinadene. Her aesthetic practice on TikTok seamlessly amalgamates how she is indigenous, a fan of hip hop culture, and makeup tutorials. I think it is these intercultural practices of identity formation that do not adhere to any specific hierarchy but rather become a negotiated (often experienced as creative) conglomeration of our experiences and our tastes that I

find so rich on TikTok. Case in point with Martina: she can be both indigenous and fabulous. She can wear Fenty lipstick and dance fiercely at a powwow. But, it does seem that videos that remain within the white standards of TikTok form and content aesthetics that get the most followers.

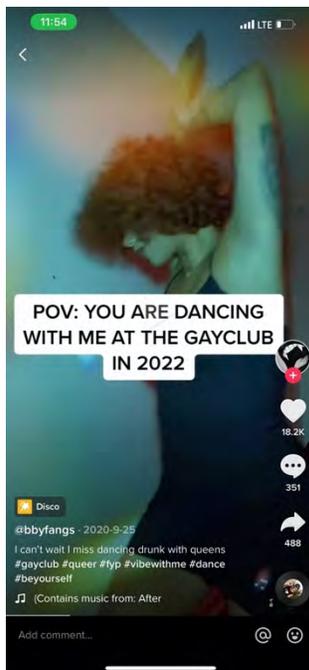
madison: One of the most fascinating, mind-bending aspects of TikTok is both the ways people perform their identities and how these identities are curated on the *For You Page* of each individual user. The *For You Page* is an algorithmically driven, randomized roulette wheel of videos. This roulette wheel creates different “sides” of TikTok, which at first glance might seem like an echo chamber of sorts, similar to how our Instagram or Facebook feeds are also curated to the content we like. But TikTok takes it a step further because your activity on the app foreshadows the kinds of randomized videos you will see and thus the “side” of TikTok you will be on. The app does what you tell it to do. But what is really interesting are the countless videos of queer people saying things like, “If I land on your *For You Page*, you’re queer and I love you” or otherwise pleading other queer users to engage with their content so they can “get out of straight TikTok.” In my own case, my *For You Page* shows me short performances mostly by Black women, femmes, trans people of color, gays, as well as anti-Trump people, nightlife queens and fashion videos. I have no idea what kinds of videos other people see. What “side” of TikTok are you on?

Melissa: Hahaha. Well, first when you told me about it I was on the *For You Page*. Since I had not started “liking” any videos I was beholden to a random algorithm: videos with mostly white teens doing silly things. Initially I thought this is definitely not for me. Thankfully, you started sending me the videos you thought were funny, smart, performative, witty by mostly Black women, femmes, gays and they were about fashion, fabulousness, dance and dressing up. I purposefully started liking them so the algorithm could curate my feed better. I also started engaging with the hashtags to find material that I fancied and started saving, following or liking. One magical day, I logged onto TikTok and felt its algorithm FINALLY understood what I wanted to see: a mixture of Black and Brown queer, femme and camp performance peppered with make-up tutorials, clever dance choreographies, and *Schitt’s Creek*, *The Crown* or *Golden Girls* parodies.

I find I am drawn to content creators who stick with one concept but play around with it. It reminds me of what Diana Taylor writes about performance, that, “performance—as reiterated corporeal behaviors—functions within a system of codes and conventions in which behaviors are reiterated, re-acted, reinvented, or relived. Performance is a constant state of again-ness.”²² For example, there is this one user [@sahdsimone](#) who uses the same music (Coño (feat. Jhormountain x Adje)) to make his self-help dance videos. He sashays to the beat of the song towards the camera. He circles his head, rotates his hips and gets down into the groove of the music. Once three percussive beats punctuate the song, he uses each beat to point to text that appears on the screen. It offers self-help advice in the form of simple sentences: *Just in case you need a reminder.*

Wait for it. Your kindness can save someone's life; Just in case you need a reminder. Wait for it. Joy is in your DNA; or In case you need a reminder. Wait for it. You are a legend. He flips his head, turns and sashays away. End TikTok. Once I saw several, I knew what his gimmick was, but each new TikTok brings the surprise of a new reminder so I keep watching.

madison: TikTok is a really thrilling place to see and think about dance cultures and performance worlds, especially during lockdown. Some of the videos I see the most are people talking about how much they miss nightlife and dancing in gay clubs. At one level, nightlife has always had to morph and shape-shift according to the political and cultural landscape of the moment. That's why in states like Connecticut, Virginia and Pennsylvania, there are still blue laws that make public alcohol consumption legal only until 2am. But of course these legal restrictions only give way to new, more clandestine ways to consume offline. When the coronavirus pandemic pulled the curtain on the live arts overnight, and I'm including nightlife here as one of the richest forms of live art, rather than simply come to a complete stop, nightlife simply moved online to spaces like Zoom, Instagram Live, and gaming platforms like Twitch. Now, the dance floor is the chat room.

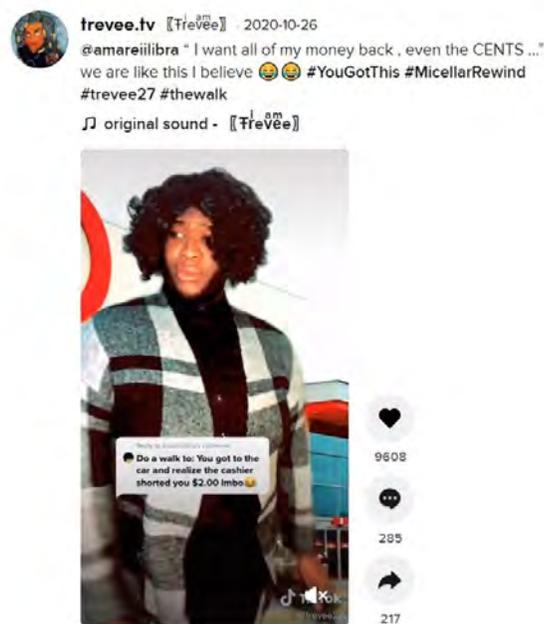


Screenshot of @bbyfangs dancing in their bedroom.

There are a range of TikTok videos that punctuate the collective feeling of missing the dance floor and all the chance encounters, cruising, flirting, kissing and holding space together that most of us long for again. In a performance by @bbyfangs, a persistent banner reads "POV: You are dancing with me at the gayclub in 2022." They dance wildly in a little black dress in their bedroom, where most of us go clubbing these days, the colors in the room changing quickly from blue to green to red to evoke the dynamics of club lighting. A soundtrack of typical gay club music animates the minute-long video.

On the one hand, performances like these have a certain nostalgia for the dance floor we all once took for granted. And on the other, these performances show the significance of the ability to dance together to loud music on a dance floor in real time. Even in lockdown, "the girls" still want to dance, encapsulating the point made by Susan Leigh Foster that "there is always energy for dancing because it is so fun."²³ When the club is closed, maybe TikTok is the best place to dance.

Melissa: It's the best place for so many things... so much creative potential if you have the time to really play around with it. I think it's a great place to experiment with one theme or "gimmick" and see how far you can take it. When I watch the videos made by @trevee.tv I am thinking about this quote by performance artist Tehching Hsieh: "Life is a life sentence," he says. "Every minute, every minute is different. You cannot go back. Every time is different but we do the same thing."²⁴ The life sentence of life is an opportunity to make declarative statements with and through your body as @trevee.tv chooses to do with his walking. He always has the same bouncy, purposeful biomechanical motion forward, but each TikTok video about "the walk" features a different context, framing, costume and background. In what I call his "Walking Choreographies" videos, @trevee.tv takes a prompt from a follower who asks him to "do a walk..." that is related to a particular life situation. It reminds me of choreography classes I took as a graduate student with Susan Rose who would ask us to "make a dance where..." and it was often a simple task-based request that had infinite creative possibilities. The choreographic task is implicit in the follower's request. "Do a walk to: you got to the car and realized the cashier shorted you \$2.00" leads @trevee.tv to create this piece:



Screenshot of @trevee27 (now known as @trevee.tv) TikTok doing one of his "walks"

"do the walk after you lost 2 lbs and feel like a whole new woman! Move bit%hes, a new me is coming through" offers us this:



Screenshot of @trevee27 (@trevee.tv) celebrating the loss of 2lbs.

and “do the walk when you see that person take your parking spot” gives us this:



Screenshot of @trevee27 (@trevee.tv) asserting their parking spot.

In each of these videos @trevee.tv engages in drag performance and dons a wig and femme style clothes (he usually wears a shawl, accented with a thin belt and carries a purse and a phone) to enact his interpretation of a determined and focused Black

womanhood. The walk is usually accompanied by the same soundtrack, but he varies it on occasion. Once you see several, you begin to understand the choreographic/dramaturgic conceit. Audience anticipation and satisfaction stems from how well he dramatizes/choreographs the walking task proposed by his follower.

Of course, this is not without issue. madison, what do you think about the problematics of Black queer worldmaking at the expense of caricaturing Black femme aesthetics and Black cis-women? Part of me loves the performative and aesthetic conviction and commitment many of these Black queer femmes engage in, but I must raise an eyebrow and throw critical shade at how the Black woman becomes the brunt of jokes. How do we reconcile the Black queer worldmaking with the misogynoir on TikTok?²⁵ Or, is this tension part of the richness of TikTok as a site for cultural critique? I sent several of @trevee.tv's videos to one of my most staunch Black feminist graduate students and she was both fascinated and annoyed. With her permission, I quote her here: "Okay, I loooooove this. I keep replaying it. It's problematic but I hate to say how some of these fools get us [Black women] so right!"²⁶

madison: WOW! That's a heavy one. You know, I have also seen videos by Black women calling out gay men who get their followers from this kind of misogynoir. I wasn't familiar with @trevee.tv's performances, but they definitely make me think of @nasfromthegram, or "Thank you choosing McDonald's, may I take your order please?" (**Melissa:** OMG, recently trevee.tv did a #duet with him [here!](#)) He makes sassy sketches about an impatient, imaginary McDonald's teller, who is clearly meant to be working class, ratchet and presents the kinds of "ugly" aesthetic excess that Jillian Hernandez talks about. Nails (**Melissa:** he puts long silver hair pins as his nails, DYING!!), wigs, speech patterns, use of African American Vernacular English. So I agree with your student here and I join you in throwing some *fierce* critical shade. I have been crying laughing @nasfromthegram when his videos hit my feed (**Melissa:** yes, I hate to admit it but me too), but I also want to draw attention to the ways in which gay men continue to instrumentalize Black women for profit, a project that includes RuPaul, Tyler Perry, Shirley Q Liquor, and on and on. The same forms of aesthetic excess that lead to Black and Latinx being called "unprofessional" or "ugly" make Black gay men millionaires and billionaires, in the case of Tyler Perry. Case in point: @nasfromthegram has 1.3 million followers. MILLION. Who is his audience? Videos like these make me think about Safiya Noble's notion of "technological redlining," which is the power algorithms have to swiftly create, normalize, and reinforce stereotypes.²⁷ By contrast, Jeanette Reyes (@msnewslady), an Afro-Latina news anchor based in Washington D.C. who makes videos about code switching and the TV anchor accent only has 299,000 (January 2021. By 6 May 2021, she now has over 665,000).



Screenshot of @msnewslady.

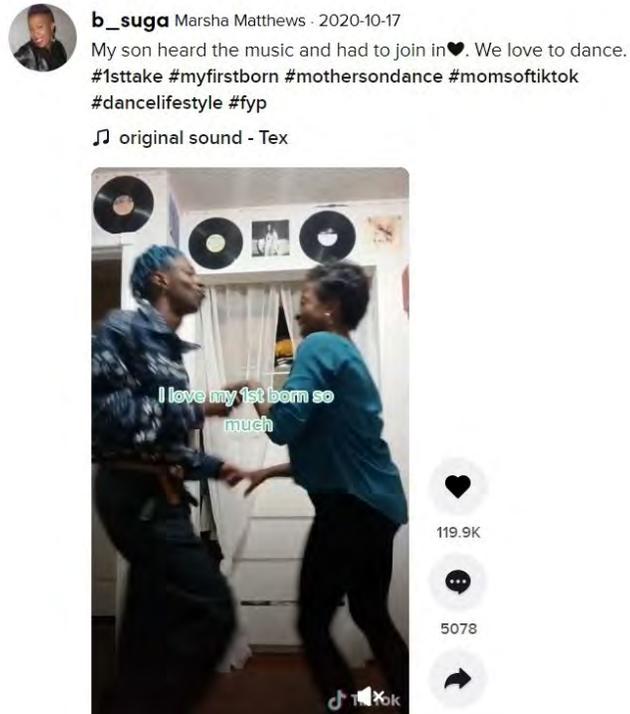
One thing's for sure: we are certainly not going to find liberation on TikTok. We can find humor, escape, information, thirst traps, recipes, makeup tips, dance routines, distractions, and a voyeuristic view into other people's lives, but we're not going to find liberation. So while I am absolutely here for the worldmaking potential of TikTok, especially right now when we are all cut off from so much, I would say that performances like the kind @trevee27 and @nasfromthegram expose the limits of algorithmically driven performance. Once you start getting hundreds of thousands or millions of followers by portraying negative stereotypes of a marginalized group, who are your videos for?

Melissa: Exactly. At whose expense is your TikTok fame? I want to turn back to the discussion of dance to close even though I know we could keep chatting about this forever (maybe this is an idea for a book project, or better yet, a digital humanities one? Watch this space). The best part of TikTok as a dance scholar who focuses on the popular screen is the capacity it has for the creation, circulation, and appreciation of dance moves.

madison: For sure! I think that once we understand the strategies of surveillance and anti-Black technology that undergirds TikTok, we can then move to think about the possibilities the app affords with regards to performance and connecting to others on screen, especially now when so much performance is done on screen.

Melissa: I turn to my essay on Janet Jackson to remind us about what dance on screen allows: it is through the ubiquitous availability of such mediated performances that dance on screen becomes (corpo)real and tangible.²⁸ Intersubjectivity exists in the practice of doing TikTok dance duets, for example. It allows you to dance in real time alongside an already existing TikTok video which you then post and circulate. It becomes a way to dance together, create virtual sociality and for some, to increase their followers. You can also dance in front of a green screen of a well-known performance and show your capacity of imitation, technique and precision (or not). Even though you learn a dance via the screen, you also learn how to embody another body's technique and style. You practice their corporeal nuances so that you can get the pop of the booty just right, or the timing of the head whip around. You can then improvise and innovate from said choreography. The most popular way to dance on TikTok is to become part of

its participatory commons through a particular dance challenge. TikTok dance challenges are what made TikTok such an indispensable escapist activity and space during lockdown. The rules are simple: you watch the original video (e.g., 14-year-old Jalaiah Harmon's [Renegade dance](#) that was appropriated and then went viral on TikTok, the [Blinding Lights challenge](#), 16-year-old [Lesley Gonzalez's Tap in Dance](#) and its subsequent challenge, or the Savage challenge started by [Kiera Wilson](#) and endorsed by the song's rapper Megan Thee Stallion who even posted herself doing it), you learn it, you plan your performance of it, you record and then post it making sure you have the appropriate hashtag to direct viewers to you. Dance challenges are set up to go viral for a period of time. It's passé now, but I am still obsessed with that #tocotocotochallenge you shared with me over the summer.²⁹ There is something about seeing the multiple executions of a specific challenge that makes me appreciative of interpretative difference (or commitment to mimicry). These challenges set up TikTok as a space for creative and pedagogical exchange through dance. They bring up the always-present issues around cultural appropriation, choreographic copyright, the racialization of bodies through techniques, and ideas around innovation. Innovation and interpretation are qualities already inherent in social and/or popular dance forms where dance's reiteration is a prerequisite for its circulation, relationality, and value.³⁰ Yet, there are multiple ways to have relationality on TikTok with and beyond the dancing. It happens when family members get together to make a TikTok and they take pleasure in the process. It also happens with the uploading of the TikTok on the site and waiting to see who views it, likes it, shares it or copies it. Then, for us, it is sending TikToks to one another based on our shared affinities and what we find fabulous or funny. Sharing TikToks with one another is a rearticulation of our friendship especially during lockdown. Whether it's teens dancing with their parents and learning #dancechallenge choreographies together, Black family members dancing with one another [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), or some self-affirmative dancing in front of your bathroom mirror ([@dancelife6905](#)) we do whatever it takes to help us endure through this horrific pandemic and the exhausting reminder that we have yet to move past white supremacy and anti-Blackness in the world. Thankfully, we can continue to imagine and create worlds via TikTok where our (Black, Brown, queer) joy can reign supreme.



Screenshot of @b_suga dancing with her son to Solomon Burke’s “Cry To Me”



Screenshot of @dancelife6905 doing their morning affirmation dance.

Biographies

Melissa Blanco Borelli is Associate Professor in the School of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is the author of *She is Cuba: A Genealogy of the Mulata Body* (de la Torre Bueno Book Prize 2016) and the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen* (2014). You can follow her on TikTok @athleticacademic.

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Notes

¹ McGlotten, "Streaking," 160

² Morrison, Nyong'o, and Roach, "Algorithms and Performance," 10.

³ Thank you to Elena Benthaus for drawing our attention to Ngai's essay on the gimmick.

⁴ Ngai, "Theory of the Gimmick," 469.

⁵ Taylor, 17.

⁶ Benjamin, *Race After Technology*, 17; Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*, 4.

⁷ Browne, *Dark Matters*, 114.

⁸ In August 2020, the Trump Administration issued an Executive Order asking the Chinese owners of TikTok, ByteDance, to divest from its American assets for fear of privacy and national security violations. They were given a 45-day deadline. ByteDance currently continues negotiations to be sold to Oracle and Walmart. See article by Laura Kolodny "President Trump Orders Bytedance to Divest from US TikTok" CNBC, 14 Aug.

2020. Accessed 3 May 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/14/president-trump-orders-bytedance-to-divest-from-its-us-tiktok-business-within-90-days.html>

⁹ Muse, *Microdramas*, 2.

¹⁰ Surrogation is a term taken from the work of theatre historian Joseph Roach in *Cities of the Dead*.

¹¹ Bench, *Perpetual Motion*, 9.

¹² Ibid. 4.

¹³ McGlotten, 154.

¹⁴ Harris, "How Technology Hijacks."

¹⁵ *Rasquache* is a term used to describe a particular working class Chicano sensibility related to food, dress, words, aesthetics and structures of feeling. The term emerged in the work of Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, *Rasquachismo*.

¹⁶ Ngai, 504.

¹⁷ Bird Martinez was unfortunately the victim of a serious crime and is now faced with possible quadriplegia. Her family has set up a GoFundMe account and we list it here in case you would like to contribute funds to help defray the costs of her housing and medical bills: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/99quvv-help-with-medical-and-housing-bills>

¹⁸ Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess*, 6-7.

¹⁹ Benjamin, 160.

²⁰ Hernandez, 11.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Taylor, *Performance*, 26.

²³ Foster, "Why Is There Always Energy For Dancing?" 15.

²⁴ "Tehching Hsieh: One Year Performance 1980–1981," Uploaded 30 April 2014. Accessed 8 Jan. 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvebnkjwTeU>

²⁵ This term was coined by Moya Bailey to explain the intersection of misogyny and race on Black women's lives. A full-length book is forthcoming entitled *Misogynoir Transformed*.

²⁶ Jordan Ealey via text message 18 November 2020.

²⁷ Noble, 10.

²⁸ Blanco Borelli, "Dancing in Music Videos."

²⁹ Here are three examples of the #tocotocotochallenge: <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZScAqXnD/> ; <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZScAQRmN/> ; and <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZScAg1o7/>. In this challenge, the idea is to successfully walk rhythmically and in sync to the music while wearing very high heels and changing positions from forward facing, walking sideways, walking forwards with back turned in opposite direction and then turning to walk forwards again. It requires multiple skills: upright torso and ab strength, ability to walk comfortably in 5+ inch heels, and rhythmic and spatial awareness.

³⁰ Here, I am thinking about what Susan Foster articulates in *Valuing Dance*: "dance's actions, riddled with power, suffused with history and memory, constantly create, renew, and reaffirm connections between and among dancers and, when present, their teachers, choreographers, or viewers. Dancing combines, segregates, bonds, and excludes, but in any of these acts, it brings people into relation" (33).

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A Provocation for Screendance as a Secular Space

Sumedha Bhattacharyya, Jindal School of Liberal arts and Humanities, O.P. Jindal University

Keywords: dance, secular, camera, pandemic, tradition, gender, duet with camera

The dancer and the camera do not exist in a vacuum
They co-exist in a space that is not transparent and innocent¹
but complex and layered socio-political and religious structures of power.

They are imbued with Power

Power drives, escalates, and charges us like a field condition.

Dance and camera exist in field conditions of Power.

Power is intrinsically connected to how the dancer and the camera interact.

Dance for Camera, Dance on Camera, Dance with Camera

These are connecting words that imply power and non-transparency.

Such is a world that the pandemic saw

Rights of being human, forcibly taken,

to solemnly resolve to constitute a Secular country,²

Together, we, the people of the world, are receiving a continuous assault on values of
secularism and democracy.

We need to talk about the Secular, as citizens first and dancers later

Secular is not anti-somereligion

It is for-everyreligion

I write here, today, navigating and questioning the Secular in Screendance,

Why do I always see an Indian dancing in front of a beautiful monument



Like a museum doll,
Mysterious, untouched, never up-close.
A tradition, in wide shot of her full body(mostly) in a beautiful costume
or too many beautiful shots, from different viewpoints
A tradition, untouched.
Another tradition, in close-up shot of her beautiful eyes bold make up
The male gaze, mostly white
Shooting an exotic dance of the Sacred
Ah! Beautiful, they say
So, where is the place for grotesque in Indian classical dance?
Doesn't the doll feel pain?
How do we share difficult topics of pain, ageing and decay?
through the camera behind the laborious footwork of Kathak?
Is there room for sharing female pleasure?
Are we classical dancing bodies all the time?
What about our homes?
What kind of everyday myths we tell each other?
Is that all our identity been reduced to,
The sacred?
The idea is to submit, to perfect, to perfect beauty.
My body is trained in the beautiful form of Kathak
They say is the storyteller.
Storytelling about the Gods.
The male gods
Brahma
Vishnu
Mahesh

Krishna

Ram

I could not relate to the dancing and the reality outside of it.

A lot of it is maybe because being a female body

A body being looked at

Gazed

Through a lens,

Lens of an audience

a Guru,

a parent,

a frame

an angle,

an aperture.

With so many layers,

A female, brown, Indian body

This body is trying to explore beyond what is the tradition.

What is this space?

That I constantly negotiate between the observer and the observed.³

Dance has been witnessing an unprecedented relatedness and a probable slow aversion to technology during the Covid-19 pandemic. It has also been during this entangled time consciousness, that we have been seeing a form of "organised loneliness"⁴ emerge with our screens. For me, the seed of screendance began in 2018, which was planted during my Master's program.⁵ Returning to India that year, growing through different experiments⁶ with the camera, my mind wandered around questions like: What is Screendance in India? Does anyone know of screendance here in India? Why does anyone need to know about screendance in India? Does it have another name here? How can I belong to something that has not been researched and practiced here? Or maybe it has been, but in a different path. In India where we have a history of a strong and rich visual culture, where does one begin to locate and perceive screendance, if at all?

During the pandemic in April 2020, a month after lockdown in India, I received a one-year Practice-based Art research fellowship to study the relationship in-between the dancer and the camera with my project titled *Duet with Camera*. The first and foremost way to work around this project was for me to get out of the bubble of a privileged dancer, happy with my discipline, with the privilege of possessing a camera and a stable internet connection. This could happen only when one extends a hand, literally opens the screen, and drops in a text: conversation became my inquiry. Being a South Asian, and an interested student in screendance, already conjures up so many images (mostly stereotypical) as you read me today. The loneliness of working with screendance even after significant playing with the repertoire, amidst the pandemic, triggered an uneasiness to understand so many questions bottled up with curiosity, wonder, nervousness and fear of missing out anxieties. I found a post on Instagram on a short notice, interestingly called *Screendance: Diversity & Representation Matters*.⁷ These conversations were already taking place in the Global North, but only this time, it became global. The pandemic renewed the urgency of these conversations. India witnessed a sudden semiotic turn towards representation and diversity conversations.

Most international film festivals became accessible and online like Movimiento en Movimiento Festival 2020, Souci Festival for Dance Cinema 2020, Rogue Dancer Festival 2021, Screen.Dance Scotland Festival Artist presentation category 2021, and the upcoming Kinesthesia Festival. All these festivals I had applied to with minimal fee or no fee at all and had also been accepted for most of the above festivals. This kind of inclusion also challenged the dominantly elite and western viewpoint of screendance and how we can rethink the accessibility of art, today. Was this semiotic turn of events merely, as *The Care Manifesto* indicates, a form of “carewashing,” as opposed to genuine care? Was the inclusion and diversity term selectively carried out to increase the legitimacy of the festival, coming forth as socially responsible, while contributing to more inequity and thus privilege and elite-ness in screendance. The conference for me, proved to be a great resource for networking to start a conversation with familiar strangers, but also left me constantly perturbed: Why there had not been any screendance films presented (not re-presented) from India? Why was I the only one from India in that conference? I am also speaking to the landscape and lack of festival presence in the screendance locale. In the early discoveries of my project, I noticed the absence of India’s own dance film/screendance/dance on camera festival and its negligible, linear, and exotic participation in these international festivals

My creative process of dance for the camera germinates from a nomadic subjectivity and embodied experience in the Indian classical form Kathak and the hybrid art form of screendance. My provocation stems from a space that asks how the traditional modes of presentation of the Indian classical body through a male, white, exotic lens can be disrupted, not only in performance, but in the creative process of knowing, imagining and making screendance. Why has the representation of screendance film from India, been next to negligible, even after having such a rich culture of both dance and film? Is

India too big to begin, or too mysterious to never begin? In the dance and film history of India, Indian classical dance is most often captured using the camera as a passive observer to document the autobiographical narrative of a dancer and recorded only the full-body dancing from a frontal perspective. However, there have been many films that had utilized new editing strategies of filming dance in India with co-presence of a dance and cinema aesthetic, like Uday Shankar's *Kalpana* (1948), Pramod Pati's *Explorer* (1968), a ghost dance sequence from Satyajit Ray's *Goopi Gyne and Bagha Byne* (1968). Why is this history neglected as a part of screendance? Screendance as a term is a very new one in the dance and film community of India, but maybe because it is something that comes from the Global North.

As a part of my practice-based art fellowship project *Duet with Camera*,⁸ I have been researching this relationship and the space that dancer and the camera create, on an embodied level as well as in a community of practice. Especially within the framework of radical uncertainty, transition to locked environments, and crisis of belonging, *Duet with Camera* was born on Instagram as an accessible, inclusive, and democratic space for documenting students'⁹ process of working with the camera. This Instagram page thus became an awareness platform on screendance, provocations, which guided its way to discover new conversations, experiments and collaborations between movement and camera practitioners. One of the initiatives was *Camera and I*, a self-designed virtual residency on Instagram,¹⁰ that brings different movement and camera practitioners in India, to create a visual knowledge mapping of their artistic processes with the camera. *Duet with Camera*, today, envisions a research-creation space which aims to galvanize and activate these dialogues and create a local yet global pedagogy of screendance.

As the author Arundhati Roy rightly quotes "The pandemic is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next."¹¹ We need to re-think, re-visit, re-search and re-write screendance. How can the camera go beyond a passive, ethnographic, or historical capturing object? How can the space and spectatorship of Indian classical dance go beyond what is considered as sacred? Can camera become a space for a performance of protest? Can screendance become a secular space? By secular I mean challenging what has been legitimized as "technique" in Indian classical dance and conventional filmmaking practices, including Bollywood, which further galvanises/mobilizes a community space by articulating dialogues of experimentation in-between dance and camera practitioners. By Screendance as a secular space, I also mean a provocation for an unsurveilled, experimentative and creative environment that is anti-fundamentalist, especially in the current political climate. How can embodying the secular, instigate new practices to re-look, re-visit and re-imagine screendance 2) galvanise/mobilize a community space and thus 3) democratize screendance learning and dissemination through independent festivals. Seeing the dearth of Dance on Camera/Screendance India's participation in dance film, *Duet with Camera* has been aiding in the upcoming Body and Lens International Screen(ing) Dance Festival and Seminar 2021¹² conceptualized by Dr.

Urmimala Sarkar.¹³ I look forward to reaching out to the existing screendance community, educators curators, consultants, sponsors guides, and mentors as working towards this festival and many more to discover.

Biography

Author Sumedha Bhattacharyya is an interdisciplinary dance artist, educator, researcher, dance filmmaker and a primary caregiver. She is a faculty (Academic Tutor and Teaching and research for Intellectual Pursuit (TRIP) Fellow at Jindal School of Liberal arts and Humanities, India. Her artistic practice brings a fresh viewership of the camera as an artistic process for caring and contemplation, an enabling space for intergenerational bonding, and a narrative tool for dance pedagogy which challenges the existing formal qualities of 'seeing' dance. She is an awardee of [Kolkata Centre for Creativity](#) Art Fellowship in Dance with her embodied practice-based research project *Duet with Camera* that explores the space and spectatorship in-between the dancer and the camera.

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Notes

¹ This is a PhD dissertation by Valerie Briginshaw called "Dance, Space and Subjectivity."

² The words as quoted in the Preamble of our Indian Constitution.

³ This issue was published in an online magazine called Someother Magazine on December 30th, 2020. The issue was based on the diverse forms in which surveillance transpires around us in the physical and the virtual dimension

⁴ As defined by The Care Collective, Chatzidakis, et al., in *The Care Manifesto*.

⁵ It is a two-year Erasmus Mundus Masters in Dance Knowledge, Practice and Heritage which started in 2016-2018 <https://www.ntnu.edu/studies/choreomundus>. The module was called *Mediated Choreography* taught by Dr Heike Salzer.

⁶ For example: *Saraab*, a collaborative film by Sumedha Bhattacharyya and Hediye Azma 2018; *Touch the Sound*, a Screendance video as commissioned by Flame University, Pune India 2019; *Body as Archive*, a curatorial project with Curatorial intensive South Asia 2018 with Khoj International Artists Organisation in India.

⁷ The link to the event <https://www.gabrichrista.com/upcoming/vrystaat-arts-festival>

⁸ This project was one-year fellowship project where I was selected by arts organization Kolkata Centre for Creativity. The website shows the journey of the last year and current processes www.duetwithcamera.com

⁹ These were undergraduate students from a co-curricular course I self-designed and conducted called Screendance at Ashoka University, India. This course was a part of the Performing arts department, run by Justin McCarthy. He is the also the Head of the Department for Co-curricular, Ashoka University.

¹⁰ The Camera and I Instagram takeover/ virtual residency on <http://www.instagram.com/duetwithcamera> was initiated as a method of understanding Screendance in India. Through this initiative, a visual knowledge-mapping and visual archiving of each practitioners' insights, processes, inspirations and vulnerabilities of working with dance and/or camera vis-a-vis the moving body and the moving image.

¹¹ Arundhati Roy is a leading Indian author best known for her novel *The God of Small Things*. She talks about how the pandemic threatens India, and what should the world do next. <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

¹² The upcoming Body and Lens Festival and Seminar as scheduled for July 2021 and November 2021, dreams of creating a pedagogy for Screen dance / Dance for Camera a space for a series of three webinar / seminars to formulate a pedagogic discourse around a pedagogy for teaching Screen dance in India <https://www.duetwithcamera.com/body-and-lens-festival2021>. The festival is organized by Koushik Podder in Sastrika Unit of Performing arts and Leo's Lions Production Company.

¹³ Dr. Urmimala Sarkar is an Associate Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies, at the School of Arts and Aesthetics in JNU, New Delhi. She is a dancer/choreographer trained in Uday Shankar style of Creative dance, Kathakali, and Manipuri at Uday Shankar India Culture Centre. Her current work is on changing landscapes of dance in India, Sex-trafficking and designing of survival processes for survivors of trafficking, and politics of performance. She is also a visiting faculty at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, teaching a module on "Dance and Movement Therapy." She is currently the President of World Dance Alliance Asia Pacific, and one of the Directors of the Broad of Kolkata Sanved – an organization that works with women survivors of violence.

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"Touch the Sound." Dir and Perf. Sumedha Bhattacharyya. 2019. Vimeo. Installation. <https://vimeo.com/344758115>

Together We Dance: A Community Dance & Film Project Using Zoom to Combat Social Isolation for Seniors During Covid-19

Diane Busuttil, Independent dance artist and researcher

Keywords: Together We Dance, Dance, Creative Dance, Community Dance Project, Women's health, Art and Health, Covid-19 online community, Shared experiences, Subjective storytelling, Creative aging, Screendance, Video Dance, Cinedance, Zoom art

Together We Dance is a collaborative dance film project between FORM Dance Projects and Creative Caring. As creative director of the project and the *Together We Dance* film, I met with approximately 20 dancers once a week for 10 weeks with the aim of dancing together and sharing movement explorations to create an online Zoom film. The sessions were split evenly into a) learning contemporary dance technique, and b) executing creative movement tasks. The latter being the method for generating movement material to be used in the film. The project was made possible through funding from the New South Wales Government to combat social isolation for seniors during Covid-19.¹ In this short viewpoint essay, I discuss what dance looks like during Covid-19 and how dance continues to thrive in an online digital format. I talk about the participants involved in the *Together We Dance* project, the creative process, the health benefits of dance for seniors, and where I draw my inspiration and ideas.

Inspired by Covid-19 and the necessity to remain safely indoors, there has been a generous boom in the production of screendance works. Many dance companies have spent hours rehearsing choreography specifically for the screen while other company dancers have filmed themselves doing repertoire in their homes and had this edited together. There've been works between dancers in different countries integrating text, animation, and innovative uses of a phone, laptop, or tablet device. From the minimal to the extreme, the genre has no boundaries when it comes to creative expression on how dance is captured and translated to screen.

In my work, I resonate with Maya Deren's cinematic approach, which represents a subjective reality from a female perspective. As Danielle Cofer states with reference to Deren's work in *Hollywood Heroines: The Most Influential Women in Film History*, "With regard to space, the film depicts a woman whose subjectivity in domestic space is explored, foregrounding Deren's interests in feminism and politics via self-representation."² Inspired by Deren and French experimental essayist Agnès Varda, my



own screen works draw upon personal experiences to reflect a feminist subjective configuration of social and cultural constructs.

For *Together We Dance*, I used Miranda Tufnell's books *A Widening Field: Journeys in Body and Imagination*, and *Body, Space, Image*. Both were useful resources for using various materials and creative stimulus to generate improvised movement. I also looked at many dance films, the most inspiring one being *Phenom*, a Zoom music video clip by Thao & The Get Down Stay Down, and enjoyed revisiting Karen Pearlman's publication, *Cutting Rhythms, Intuitive Film Editing*, that I would recommend to anyone interested in editing movement sequences. Other artists whose work I've explored include: Maya Deren, Barbara Hammer, Pipilotti Rist, Tracey Moffatt, Miranda Pennell, Pier Pasolini, Agnés Varda, Sally Potter, and Darren Aronofsky.

Together We Dance Participants and Creative Process

Of all the 20 female dance participants, one third of them were familiar with the work I do and have been previous participants of my classes over the past two years since conducting seniors' classes through FORM Dance Projects. The other two thirds are from an existing group called Agile Not Fragile under the direction of Fiona James and Joe Ibbitson. I met with the *Together We Dance* participants once a week online via Zoom in the context of a contemporary dance class, after which we engaged in creative movement experiments with the intention of producing scenes and scenarios to be used for the dance film.

Most of the participants have had previous dance experience and have a clear understanding of movement practice. What was new to them in this project was the experimental nature of the creative tasks that had an equal chance of succeeding as well as failing. In all situations, the participants gave me their trust, confidence, and curiosity. Importantly, the senior dancers were forming new friendships through digital technology and a shared love of dance.

The participants were invited to film themselves on their devices. This solo material, which I titled "home alone," generated a series of poetic moments that revealed equal doses of vulnerability and power. The participants speak personally about their experiences throughout Covid-19 and how they feel the project has affected their mental, physical, and spiritual health during the time of the pandemic's strict lockdown. They later provided incredibly personal and insightful access to their inner worlds and how they were navigating this sensitive and sensory-deprived period. At an age where most of these women had children and grandchildren, being isolated and away from their families was a challenge. Most participants were unable to leave their homes and some, over eighty, were house-bound as they were most vulnerable to Covid-19. The regular weekly gathering with an invitation to dance and be creative became increasingly significant in their lives, and somewhat filled the void of human contact and touch forbidden at this time.



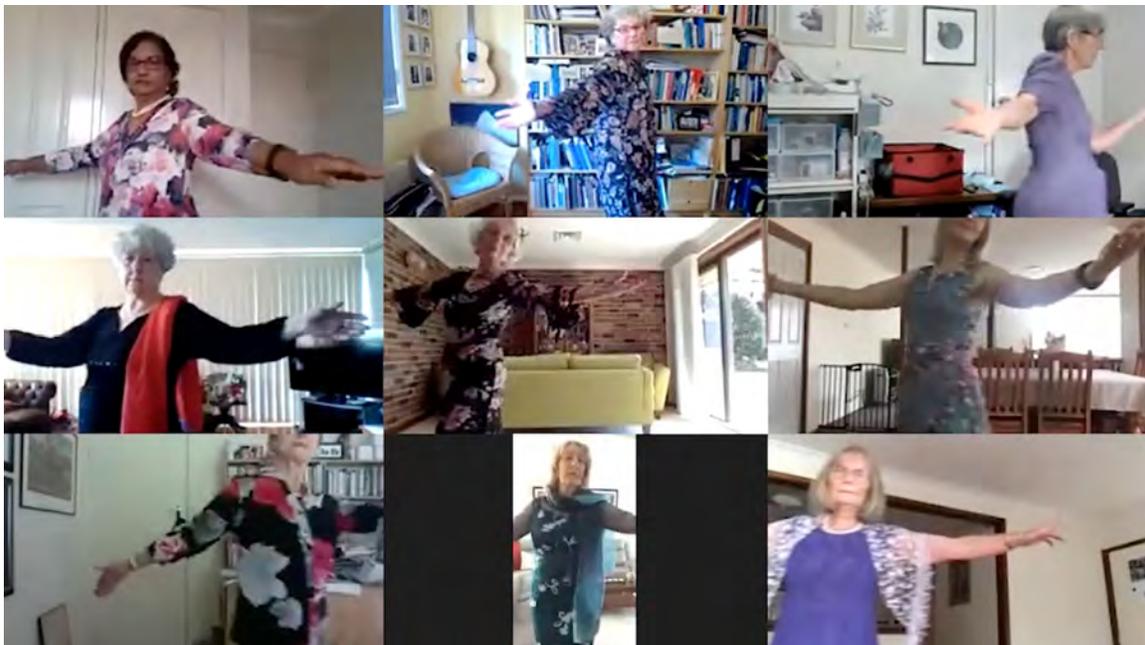
The dancers are having fun on our black themed session, singing along to AC/DC!

The creative objectives of *Together We Dance* were two-fold: creating group movement ideas and choreography specifically for the frame. Inspired by film director Mike Figgis, whose film *Timecode* (2000), brought choreography to the fore as the film is a totally improvised piece of cinema shot on a hand-held camera for 90 minutes in real-time. After participating in a workshop with Figgis in Amsterdam in the early 2000s, I was inspired to create my own split screen film, *Super Power* (2011), which screened in over ten international film festivals. My introduction to split screen, through Figgis, had taught me to consider my choreographic and editing options whilst filming, and to execute both roles, filming and editing, in consequence to each other. In this sense, editing becomes another choreographic device.

For the *Together We Dance* process, we needed to go with the flow and be open to whatever would happen during the one-and-a-half hours we met on Zoom each week. Some people experienced technical difficulties, or had a screen that always made them look like they were wearing blue no matter what color they had on. Patience and communication created an authentic flow between the group as we embraced all hiccups as possible creative devices. For example, we did a close-up facial exercise that was timed using a metronome, whereby there was a clear rhythmical cue when to conceal the face and when to reveal it. One person came out of sync and made a hysterically funny face while the others were concealed. I'm reminded here of the work of Swiss video artist Pipilotti Rist whose playful approach to movement is often foregrounded in her early video works, in particular *I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much* (1986). Other challenges were how best to communicate the tasks to a blind participant. I made sure I did a verbal description of all movements and kept checking in that my descriptions made sense. One participant did not have a camera so she was asked to

audio describe her movements when leading a group mirroring task. I've always believed that the participants will guide you toward being a better teacher if you listen to their needs. Challenges are opportunities to be more creative.

I introduced the idea of choreographing the frame to the participants and explained the three main shot sizes we'd be working with: wide, mid- and close-up. Choreography takes on a double meaning as one needs to compose the movement patterns with the forethought of how they will be edited together. This allowed me to creatively direct the project wearing not only my teacher and choreographer's hat, but also my filmmaker's hat ... a challenge I embraced with great enthusiasm. I was completely transparent about my ideas for the editing process and used myself as a practice tool to show them how I intended to film a scarf scene in slow motion, then have it sped up and reversed for the final film. I was able to share my screen and show them a previously filmed image of myself doing the sequence—sped up and reversed. My intention behind revealing stages of the creative process to the participants, allowed them to understand where we were going with the imagery we were creating, and how each image had the possibility of being manipulated.



This is the closing shot in Together We Dance.

We held 10 face-to-face Zoom meetings; each was guided by a different focus as we simultaneously created a color-coded storyboard. We innovated with words, colors, props, and frame size as stimulus for movement tasks. I knew from the outset that I wanted to create a contemporary environment which the participants inhabited, this entailed concocting scenes that were big and energetic as well as scenes that were intimate and gentle. I drew inspiration from dance books and isolated the hands to create a more intimate look at movement, then danced freely on numerous occasions

knowing that we were all doing this together in our private spaces. There was a strong sense of community and trust of free expression within the group. Exploration, experimentation, and play kept us together. During the week off, the participants were invited to send in a video of themselves dancing at home. The freedom and pure joy in these solo videos is astounding as they exude such confidence and grace in their authentic movement styles.

During the last few weeks, I integrated the use of break out rooms, which I found to be a productive tool for working with groups and film-choreographic arrangements and tasks. Each group of approximately 4-5 people was given a creative task with which to devise their own movements and then create a shared choreography within the group. Once that had been mutually established, they took turns at presenting it to the other groups. This process provided a safe setting for a performative aspect as well as social engagement.

The general tone of the project was committed, relaxed and light. The group was adventurous and trusted my experiments such as demonstrated by the short AC/DC inspired head banging moment during our black themed session. Overall, the participants felt safe to explore movement ideas outside their comfort zone. The atmosphere of nonjudgement encouraged uninhibited play.

Health Benefits of Dance for Seniors

There have been numerous scientific studies regarding health benefits of exercise in older adults. Those who participate in creative dance activities are actively improving their quality of life as they age.³

As part of my planning and weekly session structure, I incorporated the use of repeating movements that developed into choreographic patterns. Most combinations were rhythmically structured to a regular bpm (beats per minute) that, at times, was modified to accommodate the groups' comfort needs. My direct objectives for the dance and creative sessions were to use movement sequences to enhance balance, lower leg strength, cognitive processing speed and the ability to complete creative tasks within a short time frame. All of these objectives align with similar aims for people living with dementia and other cognitive disorders as well as being key components that support prevention of diseases relating to cognitive decline.

Findings from a recent study conducted in Canada during Covid-19 used dance interventions as a way to "facilitate embodied social connections among older adults."⁴ The results of this study concluded that "Overall, research results appear to support these claims; dance-based interventions have been shown to improve participants' quality of life, satisfaction with life (McNeely et al., 2015b), mood and depression (Crumbie et al., 2015; Hyvönen., 2020)."⁵ These qualities resonate strongly in the film, *Together We Dance*. In addition to these positive personal and social outcomes,

neurological benefits formed from creating and embellishing choreographic patterns is a great way to keep the mind engaged as new neurological patterns are being formed. The repetition of choreography from week to week also enhances memory capacity.

Overall health, both mental and physical, is enhanced through community projects such as *Together We Dance* that serve to reduce feelings of isolation and increase social support. During this unique period of Covid lockdown in Sydney, Australia, the participants needed to feel connected to like-minded people. Dancing together on zoom was the perfect medium to achieve that goal.

The group have since continued with another online dance course, without the outcome of a film. Friendships are being formed as we meet each other in our own homes every week. We often share news of our experiences with local topics such as floods, fires and at times, medical issues. Zoom has presented a successful medium to connect and sustain community communication through the love of dance.

Biography

Busuttill holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Dance from The University of Western Sydney. In 2000, she was awarded a DAAD scholarship to study at The International Women's University in Germany. She received scholarships from Film Victoria and the Ian Potter Cultural Trust Fund Award, Australia and had artistic residencies at fabrik Potsdam and PACT Zollverein in Germany. Her choreographic interest combines dance, performance and visual art in a collaborative *mise-en-scène* and most commonly deals with the visual representations of the female body. She uses these elements to create her visual stories, be they visual, narrative or a mixture of both.

As choreographer she has worked in theatre, opera, music, dance theatre as well as facilitating various self-devised youth projects. Her video dance works (screendance, experimental and narrative films) fit into various categories: queer, feminist and dance, and have screened at various International film festivals. In 2017 she made her first short, experimental, documentary film, *Without Consent* as part of a Master of Research Degree. *Without Consent* is a personal story about forced adoption in Australia circa 1950's that has screened in Australia and internationally to critical acclaim.

Other publications by Diane Busuttill can be found [here](#).

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Notes

¹<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/inclusion/seniors/overview/chapters/what-we-are-doing-under-the-strategy/combating-social-isolation/successful-grant-recipients>

² Cofer, "Deren, Maya (1917-1961)," 109.

³ See for example Gottlieb-Tanaka, "Creative Expression, Dementia and the Therapeutic Environment."

⁴ Hansen, Main, and Hartling, "Dance Intervention Affects Social Connections," 1.

⁵ Ibid. 3.

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What Happens Next?

Omari 'Motion' Carter, *The Motion Dance Collective*

Keywords: teaching, screendance, spoken word, hip-hop, dance film, rap, Covid-19, zoom, online, The Motion Dance Collective, Mitchell Rose, Omari Carter, What Happens Next

a-Welcome to the class,
welcome to the class.
Make sure you've got a webcam
and your internet is fast.
We've got time for a warm up
so I'm sharing through the sound.
So turn your speakers up
and mute your microphones now.
Look...

My name's Omari 'Motion' Carter
that's for starters.
Screendance practitioner -
with the Master's,
lecturer at universities with dancers,
and produce dance-film with
The Motion Dance Collective objectives,
with hip-hop's perspective.
I be "ebonically linguistic"¹ with the
rhetoric while academically legit.
So listen carefully and
check out all the references,
there's knowledge in the words I spit.

I want to talk about the problems
I've been having teaching.
How pandemic present
has affected all my lessons.
Bridging the gap with a rap

is my rhyming's reason.
So take a seat, sip a tea,
and let's start the session
from the bottom,
to implement a base.
Beginning with the novice in the
screendance space...
With limited time to teach them
what they should know,
do we need shutter speed, aperture, ISO?
I asked Mitchell Rose and he said no,
reorienting their thinking is the way to
go.²
Oh! So have I been teaching all wrong?
Was I implementing camera theory
all too strong?
Has this digital detachment
thrown my practice in a realm
where my teaching is now limited
to lecturing film?

I know my goal is to make
film methods tangible
and for dancers this process is
much more manageable.³
However, I could not imagine at all,
that I'd have to shift initially to teaching
verbal.
When we all know the best workshops



either start with walking around the space, laying on floors or sitting in circles. Uh!

a-Welcome to the class that takes place in your room. I'm sorry that your late, you should have downloaded Zoom. This is being recorded though for you to watch back and if you want to check the videos they're posted in the chat.

I don't want to teach online...

Is that a crime?

Face-to-face knowledge was working out just fine. I had my notes, the projector, a huge dance space, and a stopwatch set to keep time.

Of course the necessity is undisputed, but engaging creative minds while their muted is not what I computed.

I also wonder if it's good for my health, since the first sign of madness is talking to yourself. Listen...

It's also impossible to know what I lack, cause as an hourly paid lecturer I don't get the feedback.

Most organisations assuming that screendance education is as easy as a screen and an educator. Re-writing modules with the phobia of trial and error; Blackboard/Moodle network architecture; Face-to-face, live-stream, pre-recorded lecture; Adequate schooling? A matter of conjecture.

So I reached out to dance-filmmakers under separate names, to provide mutual support and thoughtful exchange. But these came mostly in the form of empathy texts, as we keep our altered exercises close to our chests. Couldn't say I aim to blame, we all need a paycheck. A place to share experiences is what we need next.

That's what we need next...

So what happens next?

So here I am:
Editing dances,
while teaching classes
and being asked 'Sir?
How do we pass this?'
Well here's the truth kids.
I got my Masters
by making my interests
worth more than the marks were.

Being authentically you is the answer,
regardless of the modes in which
you're taught to be dancers.
You mould
the mode
to move
your moving
images.
Flip the
script to
rip apart your
scrimmages...

You should be having *Conversations*
like you're Malaolu;⁴
Curating other artists like my man
Mr Opoku-Addia.⁵

Solidifying process? No stress;
Common Dance like Lee,⁶
 direct like Morg & Jess,⁷
 hyper-match like Mitch,⁸
 journal like Kappenberg,⁹
 location scout like Millar,¹⁰
 write like Rosenberg.¹¹

As hard as it may seem
 to work in these extremes
 and to explore the practice of
 screendance practically.
 Disseminating knowledge
 through these digital means
 has, to my surprise, come quite naturally.

I'm not sure if that's because I'm under 33
 or when it comes to analogue,
 I know it ends with a 'g'?

a-Welcome to the class
 I think that you will find,
 we were meant to be face-to-face
 but Boris changed his mind.¹²
 I've made a whole new schedule
 and I hope it's not too strange.
 And just like the whole world right now,
 it is subject to change.

Asking podiums at symposiums
 in particular,
 How do we *mark* the language in the
 screendance curricula?
 In your digestion of that
 rhetorical question
 let me recommend
 a couple of suggestions.

Number 1: Let's have fun;
 Lighting simple - lamp, torch, sun;
 Flick on a soundtrack
 that's copyright free;
 Explore every axis: X-Y-Z.

Suggestion 2:

we already know what to do:
 Netflix, Facebook, Vimeo, YouTube -
 So much information coming at us
 in a loop;
 So much screen time
 that we professionally view.
 So what happens when years of viewing
 is put to use?
 Knowledge comes from each individual
 frame you peruse.
 The art is showing us
 how it reacts to the times.
 I can only guide its processes
 a limited amount.
 But if I was to give this period a title,
 I wonder if the splitscreen era counts?

Let's advocate developments of
 more embodied learning.
 Through exercises utilised in
 our creative teaching.
 Physically advancing
 an approach to the screendancing
 that affects the many ways in which
 we are currently filming.

We owe it to ourselves,
 to be proud of our process.
 Hold our heads high
 as we hope for a time
 that is zoom-less.
 Even if at times we feel clueless.
 Know that our practice isn't rootless.
 Relish in the NOWNESS¹³
 and the newness.
 Know that you can do this.
 Experience never renders you useless,
 so remain ruthless.
 Be an optimistic opportunist.
 The best single way to conclude is...

a-Welcome to the class
 I think it's time to end
 I thank you all for coming
 and I hope you re-attend.

I think I've said my piece
(a rant it may have seemed to be).

I wish you all adieu
and hope your paths stay Covid-free.

Listen to "What Happens Next?" on Soundcloud:

<https://soundcloud.com/omari-carter/what-happens-next-1/s-4Gv7bv4Qlz8>

Audio Credits

Original Composition and Performance by Omari 'Motion' Carter

Sound Engineering and Consultancy by Stacy Carter

Biography

Omari 'Motion' Carter is a screendance practitioner and lecturer based in London and, for the past decade, has been directing, choreographing, editing and performing for music videos, film, television and theatre. A first-class BA(Hons) degree in Performing Arts at London Metropolitan University led Omari to perform for 7 years in the West End and international touring productions of 'Stomp!' During this time, Omari choreographed, directed, performed and produced a varied reel of dance on film work with award winning Screendance production company, The Motion Dance Collective, of which he founded in 2011. His practice and research centre around hip-hop dance culture, body percussion, urbanity, and dance-film, with the aim of bridging the gap between the movers, makers and thinkers within the genre. Omari is associate lecturer in screendance at London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS), University of East London and Lincoln University and a graduate, with distinction, of the world's first MA in Screendance at LCDS. Omari's short dance-narratives have screened both in the UK and internationally at over 50 film and dance-film festivals, as he continues to push the critical awareness of narrative dance-film practice, through workshops, talks, podcasts, curations, screenings and commissions within the UK.

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Notes

¹ Q-Tip, "Start it Up" by A Tribe Called Quest.

² Filmmaker Mitchell Rose, speaking with The Motion Dance Collective in screendance podcast, The MDC Talks (July 19, 2020). This episode was unreleased at time of publication.

³ Ellen Maynard as cited in Bench, "Screendance: Learning, Teaching, Living," 191.

⁴ Lanre Malaolu, "The Conversation."

⁵ Freddie Opoku-Addaie, SystemsLAB.

⁶ Rosemary Lee, "Common Dance."

⁷ Jessica Wright & Morgan Runacre-Temple, <https://www.jessandmorgs.com/>

⁸ Mitchell Rose, "Crowd-Sourced Filmmaking."

⁹ Claudia Kappenberg, <http://www.ckappenberg.info/>

¹⁰ Marlene Millar, <https://www.marlenemillar.com/>

¹¹ Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance*.

¹² "Boris Johnson has announced all primary and secondary schools will be shut for the whole of January amid ongoing backlash from teaching unions." 4 Jan. 2021. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1379534/School-closures-live-update-UK-latest-term-dates-in-my-area-Covid-lockdown-rules>

¹³ NOWNESS. <https://www.nowness.com/topic/dance>

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INTERVIEWS

On Trying to be With Each Other: A Conversation Between Laura Vriend and Nichole Canuso

Laura Vriend, Independent Dance Scholar and Artist, Philadelphia, PA

Nichole Canuso, Director, Nichole Canuso Dance Company, Philadelphia, PA

Conversation recorded in Philadelphia, PA on 25 August 2020, via Zoom

Keywords: Participatory Performance, Philadelphia, Interactive Technologies, Choreographic Improvisation, Zoom, Instructional dances

Laura Vriend: You've been working on this piece *Being/With* for a while now, you were working on it when the pandemic hit, and you used the video technology in [your earlier piece] *Pandæmonium*. Could you describe how the piece was to unfold for the audience/participants in the originally planned live version of the piece?

Nichole Canuso: It's an intimate performance for two audience members at a time. Those two audience members are far away from one another geographically. The idea is that eventually those two audience participants will be in two different countries, but for the first iteration they will be in two parts of the same city. There will be two separate installations, one will be in West Philadelphia and one will be in South Philadelphia a few miles apart. The experience of the audience member/participant is that they enter into first a gallery space, a warm up space. Then they enter a small room and in that small room there are a few pieces of furniture and a big screen that shows their own image life sized, through live feed video, so it's almost like a mirror. Through the live feed video, they see themselves walking around that room, but they also see someone else on the screen. They are alone in the room but on the screen, they see themselves interacting with another image: that other image is the other audience member who's in the other space. So, these two people are having a virtual duet on screen. They'll be given instructions about where to sit and how to explore this apparatus, there will be a guide that talks to them [through a headset] and there will be music. Then there's also a chance for them to get to know each other verbally. They're also wearing a microphone and they're prompted to tell each other stories. Then one dancer will enter each space so it eventually becomes a quartet. The dancers are really backgrounding the duet of the two participants. They have a very soft presence and their primary purpose is to elevate the use of the video. The two audience members will



be new to the experience of navigating the video installation, whereas the dancers will be familiar with it and prepared to take the movements and choices of the audience members and lift them a little bit and amplify them within the context of the video apparatus. The dancers provide subtle guidance and visual suggestion. So those are the elements: the live feed imagery, a verbal conversation and a movement interaction.



Test audiences in *Being/With: Live*. Credit: Johanna Austin.

Laura: This piece, which you are now calling *Being/With: Live*, was originally slated to premiere at the 2020 Philadelphia FringeArts festival. It sounds like there's physical distancing already built into structures of the piece. At what point did you realize that it wasn't going to be feasible to do it this year, that you would premiere it in 2021 and pivot to *Being/With: Home* on Zoom for 2020?

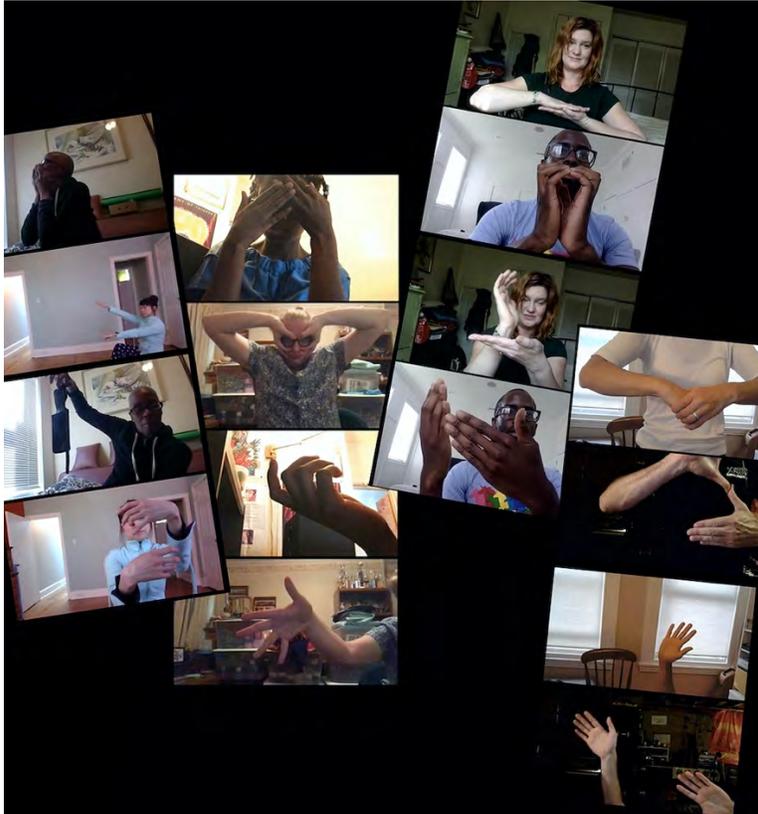
Nichole: It took a while actually because in some ways, the festival and a lot of the collaborators felt like this was the perfect project to be doing in this moment, because it's an opportunity for people to dance without touching. The heart of this piece is this disorienting sensation of reaching out and seeing yourself hold and touch someone who you're not actually holding and touching, and you're the only person in the room. We started rehearsing online through Zoom so that we could be prepared to build the live show as soon as it was safe to gather again. Eventually we realized that it would not be safe to build the set and risk the health of staff and audience members, and the festival supporting the premiere and the touring grant that was behind the future tours, were both supportive of stretching the timeline of that live premiere. I thought, well if we have the opportunity to wait, why not be as safe as possible? Meanwhile, we were rehearsing it on Zoom, and it was almost like someone dropped a boulder in the highway I was on. I was driving towards *Being/With* for years, the ideas had been building, it's a very large project as far as the collaborators and the set design, so fundraising took a long time and there's a community outreach section. So, I had this big truck on this big highway and I was almost there and then the boulder dropped and so instead of just sitting there and waiting, we thought let's drive down this side road, let's take a detour and rehearse on Zoom. That detour revealed a beautiful view and

adventure that I wasn't expecting. That's how the Zoom project felt. It felt like a gift. The center of *Being/With: Live* was bringing people together through this live feed video technology, which we couldn't do because we can't set that up on everybody's computer. Once that was gone, we still had the conversation between strangers, the instructional dance piece, the movement and the relationship to the guide, so we placed all of that in Zoom and found that there was something quite beautiful about two people doing all of this in their own home instead of a neutral space. It is more vulnerable to move around your home, to conjure memories when you're surrounded by your own objects and to meet someone you've never met and see them move around their home. In a way when we were trying to make this decision about postponing the live version, I started to really mourn letting go of the possibility of doing this on Zoom, which made the decision easier as well. Now we can do both. We can spend a year working on this online piece, which feels very accessible, people who can't leave their homes normally can log in, people from other countries can log in and we have time to feel safe and prepared to do the one we were originally going to do.

Laura: *Being/With: Home* on Zoom has been running periodically with several different presenting partners since September 2020. Can you describe how the home version unfolds for audience members/participants?

Nichole: In *Being/With: Home* you log into a Zoom room and we have a lobby designed, a waiting room, with a video and sound installation that will play while you wait. Then a very warm stage manager greets you and teaches you how to use Zoom, so there's an instructional piece that gently guides you to adjust all the settings on your computer so that you only see your own image. Then an audio guide arrives and starts to lead you through some perception exercises, asks you to see your room a little bit differently, asks you to tune into a way of seeing, and a way of experiencing your body that prepares you for the experience. Then you look at your own image and there's some imagery around how you see yourself, who you are now and your ever-changing nature. We bring in themes of water from the outset, seeing yourself as the surface of a lake with currents underneath that cannot be seen. We're asking participants to enter knowing that you're more than anyone will ever know and then when you meet the other person you are also encouraged to understand that they are more than you will ever know. Then you introduce objects to each other from your own home that you have preselected and from there there's a guided journey with the stranger that includes prompted questions that you both answer and time for you to ask follow up questions of one another. Then there's some movement, you're guided through some very simple, gentle movement improvisation instructions that get you communicating non-verbally with the other person in your space and with the screen. Then there's a section where instead of bringing in the two dancers in each space, you each bring in an imaginary person, someone you miss, and so it becomes a quartet between the two of you and the two imaginary memory people. Then there's a final layer of movements and

questions and answers and then an open space at the end where you can ask each other anything you want. That's the journey.



Test audiences in *Being/With: Home*. Credit: Nichole Canuso.

Laura: I've seen most of your work and there are some overarching themes that I've named for myself. One is this tension between a warmth and delight in intimacy and a loneliness and solitude. Another is a deep interrogation of absence and presence, often with a thread of nostalgia. And formally, the interrogation of absence and presence is explored through, buttressed by and arises from video and audio, technologies that one might typically think of as disembodied forms. These themes: connection, loneliness, and disembodiment seem ripe for exploration during this pandemic. Once that boulder dropped and you went down the side road, what was it like really diving into these themes and these ideas, that had already been such a part of the trajectory of your work, on Zoom in the context of the pandemic?

Nichole: I'll start with something you said that's really insightful and true, which is something in all the work, that feeds everything I do. It comes down to a fascination with the fact that we're all alone in our own experience. We're in the pod of ourselves. But within that is this magical world of imagination and memory and it's infinite and no one can actually understand all of it. No matter how much they love you and how curious they are, they'll never be able to hold all of it. So in that way, we're all alone in our own experience. But in the way that we're all doing that, we're also all connected. So, there's this dichotomy and we can't help but be connected, we can't help but be

curious. There's this desperate loneliness in the way we're all trapped in our own pod of experience and yet there's this hopefulness around our innate desire to reach past it. We're reaching for something that's completely impossible and yet we reach anyway. So here we are in the pandemic where we're in an exaggerated state of isolation, in our own pod of experience and it starts to feel really small and we start to forget that we have an imagination, we start to forget that we have a past. All we see is the day to day and it feels smaller and more desperate and so this show is asking us to sit across from somebody else who's a stranger and to look past what our first assumptions might be and to remind ourselves that they're going through some version of what we're going through. What if we reach? What if we try? The reaching is even harder because there is no touch and there is no real eye contact, we can try but you can't actually make eye contact. But the trying feels important. We can't touch but we can touch the things in our own space, and there's just this way that we can try for those things that I place high value on like connection and imagination. And maybe the people signing up to do this value those things too, and if not, they're saying yes to trying it with me for an hour. It shed a new light on these themes that were driving all the work to begin with.

Laura: As you know, I was a test audience member for an early version of *Being/With: Home*. There were two things in particular that struck me. The first one was the sense of taking my home space, which I'd been confined to and so it had taken on a sort of excessive familiarity, and making that space unfamiliar. The second was the efficacy of the sensory strategies for imagining and feeling the presence of people that I missed. I've been video chatting a lot with my family and friends who I'm not able to visit and who I won't see for a long time, but throughout the whole pandemic, this is the thing that made me feel closest to some of those people. How did you conceptualize those strategies and draw from past choreographies to generate these effects?

Nichole: Making the familiar unfamiliar felt really essential. Whenever I make these exploratory works, I make sure that I experience them a lot so I choreograph through doing. Being the audience teaches me what the work needs. In my own body for *Being/With: Home*, whenever I would look around my room, I would think, oh, we need to acknowledge that we're stuck in here and we need to pour water on it. The sensory strategies had been in place from the beginning with all of these shows, for instance in *The Garden*¹ where the goal is to invite people to dance and become part of the choreography, without ever using those words. For people who think that dance is something that's only for certain people and you watch if from afar, how do I subtly, without ever using the word dance, show people that I think we're all choreographers? Another theme is longing, the sensation of missing someone. In *Pandæmonium*, Geoff [Sobelle] and I are on opposite sides of the stage during the video duet on the screen. There's a yearning that is inherent in the visual set-up. You see these two lone bodies: every time they look at each other in real life they're turning their backs on each other in the video duet and every time they find each other in the video duet, they're turning their backs on each other in real life. While *Pandæmonium* was being made, my mom

got really sick and right after it premiered, she passed away. So, being alone/together with Geoff and performing with someone who wasn't actually there suddenly took on enhanced meaning. In *Pandæmonium*, I'm lying on a table and imagining that I'm putting my arm around Geoff, but he's not there. Just the act of conjuring a body that wasn't there and moving in negative space while losing someone that I really cared about was very therapeutic and very cathartic so I really wanted to explore this with audience members and give them the opportunity to imagine their own relationship to loss and absence and presence. I was really entering this *Being/With* process thinking about all these things prior to the pandemic. Then when we all started losing the ability to see people we want to see, all of that already existed in the piece. There are already people we've lost or people that are still around but have drifted away from us for one reason or another, and so I was already thinking about that with the main show because it's inherent in the video apparatus that we're playing with. For *Being/With: Home*, I was trying to explore ways of talking about that that aren't so on the nose, that don't force people if they don't want to. How can we create an invitation where people can go to the depth that they want to in that moment? To replace the dancers, I asked participants to bring these memory people in and that was born out of necessity, but then took the show to a different level: the invitation to invite someone in that you miss and then, have a guided path for what to do with that person and then from there, creating imaginary choreography for you and your person. So, these backpacks were in the car when the boulder fell and when we went down the dirt road, we realized these tools were useful in different, new ways. Oh, that could be a tent, you know, that could be used as this.

Laura: What, if any, kind of choreographic discoveries did you make in working with Zoom? What kept you interested in working with it, learning from it and researching it?

Nichole: I've been working with live feed video for a while, especially in *Takes²* and *Pandæmonium* and I was also the performer in both of those. The skill of being in a live space and tracking yourself on a video space is something I had been working on for ten years and I really enjoy sending my brain in those two directions at once. I realized that's actually what I'm asking the audience/participants to do, to really engage with their live space in one part their brain and track themselves on a screen in the other part of their brain so that they could make a dance together in this screen space. I realized the instructions were built around guiding them through that process, using metaphor so it didn't feel tedious. What are the steps to ask of someone who doesn't normally use their space in that way or think about the camera in that way? What are the steps to inviting them to do that without overwhelming them? I had been doing these instruction dances, these headphone dances like *The Garden*, but they didn't involve video so we had to include the recognition of the camera. What was also interesting was bending to fit any space because in the past we've always designed the space and now the space is changed. Some people are in a tiny closet trying to get away from the rest of the people in their house, some people have a sprawling house with a lot of stuff in

it and so it's been fun choreographically to watch these duets unfold in very different environments and to script something that can support that.

Biographies

Laura Vriend is an independent dance scholar and artist in Philadelphia. She holds a PhD in Critical Dance Studies from the University of California at Riverside. Her research has focused on intersecting close readings of site-based choreographies in Philadelphia with social theories of space, spatiality and urbanism to more fully account for how space means in/through dance and performance. She has taught courses in dance and performance studies at the undergraduate and graduate levels at Temple University and at Bryn Mawr College. She has also worked as dramaturge for Megan Bridge/ <fidget> and was a 2019 fellow at Headlong Performance Institute, a supported residency program in Philadelphia. Her current research seeks to intersect dance studies with fat studies to understand how current models for conceptualizing "the body" and "choreography" in both western concert dance practice and the field of dance studies itself do not account for the potential of fat dancing bodies, and have contributed to the consistent and persistent exclusion of fat bodies from the contemporary concert dance stage, even in dance spaces that claim inclusion and purport to embrace all forms of movement as potential choreographic material.

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Nichole Canuso is a choreographer and performer experimenting with the participation of audience bodies and personal narratives through a cross-pollination of artistic mediums. Canuso is dedicated to ensemble-generated processes, aiming to create connections across distances and life experiences. Based in Philadelphia, Canuso founded Nichole Canuso Dance Company in 2004 and is currently a faculty member of the MFA program at The University of the Arts / Pig Iron School for Advanced Performance Training. She is currently exploring the interfaces of live, embodied presence with emerging technologies with a focus on intimate exchanges and the power of listening. Support for her work includes The National Endowment for the Arts, The Knight Foundation, a Bessie Shoenberg First Light Commission, The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage and National Dance Projects/New England Foundation for the Arts. Presentations of her work include New York Live Arts, American Repertory Theater, Los Angeles Performance Practice, Kohler Arts Center, Bates Dance Festival, The Swedish Performing Arts Coalition/Scensverige, Stockholm, Sweden, Festival Internacional de Danza Contemporánea Onésimo, Guadalajara, Mexico. Artistic residencies include Maggie Allessee National Center for Choreography (FL), MacDowell (NH), Millay (NY),

NCCAkron (OH) and BiLateral Residency (Budapest, Hungary). Nichole is a 2017 Pew fellow and 2021 NEXUS/NYSAF recipient.

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Notes

¹ *The Garden*, Canuso. *The Garden* is a piece for six audience members at a time who are led via wireless headset through a labyrinthine installation on individual tracks. They are given gentle choreographic directions that invite them into specific choreographies with other audience members as well as more improvisational scores with the cast of performers. See <https://nicholecanusodance.org/works/the-garden/> for images.

² *Takes*, Canuso. *Takes* is a duet that takes place inside a box composed of four translucent screens. Cameras are set up inside the box to capture live feed video of the performers, which is then projected onto all four screens in black and white with a film noir aesthetic. There is often a delay in the projected image so that previous “takes” overlap with live feed to create a sense that the projected bodies are engaging in a duet with each other as well as the live dancers inside the box. See <https://nicholecanusodance.org/works/takes/> for images and video.

References

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“Double-tap, ‘That Was Really Dope’”: A Conversation on Breaking on Instagram with Tsiambwom Akuchu and Alexandra Harlig

Tsiambwom Akuchu, Independent Artist, Atlanta, GA

Alexandra Harlig, University of Maryland

Conversation held 15 April 2021, via Zoom

Keywords: Bboying, Social Media, Hip-Hop community, pandemic-era screendance

Alexandra Harlig: I follow you on Instagram and I wanted to talk about how you’ve been thinking about your practice and how filming is part of that. Could you tell me a little bit about what you were doing before Covid in terms of posting online or engaging with other dancers through video?

Tsiambwom Akuchu: Covid’s definitely been the speeding up of what’s already been happening, and it’s also been an expansion of who’s been in the digital dance space, especially for Hip-Hop dancers. Prior to Covid, I actually wasn’t particularly engaged on Instagram. I had just started really engaging digitally and posting videos and engaging with the community at large that way. I’d been really focused in school until then. I had just gotten out of the grad program and I finally had all this time. I was like, “Well, I should engage with the platform that I’ve been on for a while now.” The Hip-Hop world has really shifted into the digital space very quickly, hard and fast, so it’s been a really neat way to connect with other dancers, which I was kind of doing before as well. Once you tag something, everybody can see it, and then it puts you in communication with everybody else who’s dancing.

Alexandra: Whether you want to or not.

Tsiambwom: Yeah, this is true, but it’s also really cool because there are a lot of barriers that are taken down; you can get somebody pretty big who comments on your work. As a result of me posting more and engaging more online, some OG heads in the b-boy world have been, not reaching out, but they’ve been commenting and being like, “Hey, I see your stuff,” and I’m like, “Oh, cool, yeah, thanks.” So, it’s been really cool to have that connection. But, prior, I had been working more in live work in physical space. My work itself is a little different because I blend mediums so much that it doesn’t quite live in any one space whether I’m engaging with b-boys at a cypher¹ or modern dancers in a studio.



Alexandra: So, when we were allowed, were you sessioning² with people live?

Tsiambwom: Definitely. It's sort of dictated by where I am geographically because my MFA was in Montana; a lot of work I've done has been in predominantly white spaces, so it's been hard to find a community of Hip-Hop dancers. We started to build a small but decent Hip-Hop community in Missoula, Montana. We didn't necessarily have resources, so a lot of cyphering and events would happen in parties and whatnot; we engaged with it more socially than we did as practice or battling or training.

Alexandra: So, in lieu of that social session experience, when you're filming your daily practice, are you thinking of it as a social thing, a way that you're putting something out there so people can engage with it? Is it a documentary thing so you can see, "What am I doing? What do I need to work on?" Is it kind of a performance? Is it all of the above?

Tsiambwom: I would say all of the above, depending on head space and what you're going to be doing in the practice session. There was actually a really interesting discussion that I got into on Instagram with B-Boy Wicket, he's been in the community for 30+ years at this point. He posted this question about recording dance practices and if that's a viable practice, if it's necessary, "What do you guys think about it?" So, there was a discussion with b-boys, some of them were against it because you take yourself out of the space when you're supposed to be engaging with other people, and you usually are practicing with a crew, and so they can be your immediate feedback. I responded that, "Well, it really depends because you can find yourself in a place where you have no access and no resources like I've been, and you don't know how to engage with people." And so, having the ability to record what you're doing is helpful, one, for critical feedback, at least for yourself so you can look at it. But secondly, it helps you plug into everybody else. If you post on social media, then there's this expanded cypher that happens where it's like, suddenly, anybody can, if they want to, engage with it like you're walking down the street and you see a bunch of b-boys practicing. They can be like, "Oh, hey, check that out. I see what you're doing." Or, they can just keep going on and scroll past you. So, it redefines how we're engaging socially. But, you can post it as a performative clip. You pick a song that you want to do, then you create a piece of work to it. That starts to fall more in the world of screendance and whatnot. Or, you can just put it out there for your own.

What I started doing at the beginning of the pandemic was just keeping a personal diary, almost a daily log. The #365Challenge is one of the reasons I started engaging more as well because I was trying to find a way to keep myself more accountable now that I was outside of school. I was constantly in another state within the next three months. I was like, "How do I keep myself accountable for the work I'm doing?" I turned to digital platforms because having to post each day was a drive, I guess, a thing that pushed me to do it. But, it also meant that I had to figure out how to generate my own work, how to find a way to practice or train or at least engage with my movement practice in some form in order to post it on there.

Alexandra: You had started that before the pandemic, right? Which is really interesting because then you had something to continue as opposed to having to invent something.

Tsiambwom: Yeah, and having the structure of a daily dance post was helpful. You can obviously gear it towards what you want to focus on, so mine was just sort of a broad, "I want to post a dance video a day." If you keep it as a training log, you can say, "Here's my head spin progression. Here's my windmill progression." And you see a lot of that too on Instagram. I scroll through and I follow a lot of b-boys and they'll be like, "This is where I am with my air flares today. This is where I am with my windmills, my head spins, my power combos." Same deal, you get to engage with them and be like, double-tap, "That was really dope," or, "Hey, I've gotten tips from other b-boys who are like, 'You've got to straighten out that leg if you really want to whip around for that windmill.' I see where you're balancing on your head spin. Try reorienting your hands. Try arching your back for your balance," so that happens as well. You can get this communal feedback on how you're doing.

Alexandra: An important part of sessioning is that everybody has their own style, but also, they're in different places with their skills. And so, in the best case, when people are generous and you've really got a communal feeling, people will share and are open to feedback. Hearing you talk about the progression of power moves,³ I just remember being in a session and somebody would finally get something. You'd look over and this feeling of jubilation...

Tsiambwom: Everybody gets hype.

Alexandra: Not just the person who did it, but everybody!

Tsiambwom: Oh, yeah. I recently captured one of those moments in my Instagram post because I've been training a transition, a pop move transition, and I finally clicked. I was sessioning with my crew, but we were doing an Instagram Live just for fun. We were having a session and doing some training and I finally got the movement in the middle of it. We all just erupt because I did it and I know I did it. But then, across the room, they're like, "Whoa!" You see my friend hopping across the video like, "That was so cool!" So, one person's success isn't just theirs. It's everybody's.

Alexandra: Obviously, it's not possible to have the exact same experience, but do you feel like that kind of being attuned to people and pumping people up is also happening in the online space?

Tsiambwom: Yes. Obviously, the immediate feedback isn't there, so the level of excitement tapers off. But, you'll get people that comment. That's the hype. That's the pumping up of the moment. Also, it's really interesting because you can go back and relive that moment over and over—I'll go back to a dancer's post and I'll just keep watching it because I'm like, "Wow, that was so cool." It's a little limiting because

sometimes it doesn't feel like you've captured the moment correctly by just posting 👍👉🔥🔥🔥. There's some interesting emoji combinations as people try to describe the way they're feeling and hype up the person; you might get the wind emoji with fire 🔥🌀, or on power moves, you get the tornado emoji 🌪️. It's hard to convey an adequate amount of wonder or excitement or fantasticalness? You get that space star shooting one 🌟 sometimes like, "That was out of this world. That was crazy."

Alexandra: When you're together the reaction is usually so embodied, with the hand props, or you're sitting down but you jump up, and there's a lot of vocalization. That has to be flattened in a way because of the platform.

Tsiambwom: Absolutely. Initially, I had an apprehension about digital platforms particularly because the community aspect of Hip-Hop, the way you engage with people, gets lost a little bit. There's something to be said about the sharing of the space, being next to each other one-on-one. It's almost in a ritualistic sense. There's this meditative sense that you all are plugged into, that you can't get when it's all electronic.

Alexandra: Have there been attempts to do Zooms, like synchronous sessions?

Tsiambwom: It's hard to do a cypher, but they've been playing around with battle formats. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic they started doing Instagram Live battles where it's, "I dance. You dance. I dance. You dance," like in a battle. But, just through the medium, there's going to be degradation of the quality of video and you can't quite see what that one dancer did, or, if the internet cuts out then you're just dancing in a void or you're not watching anything. If one person's playing the music from their end, there's a delay on the other end, and then you suddenly lose an element of the dance that's required to judge it, which is musicality. So, there's been a couple of experiments, but they died out pretty quickly because of the hurdles.

Alexandra: And in battles there are so many nuances to the response system, so if you're missing part of what your opponent is doing, then that's a lot harder to key into. Maybe that's also one of the things you're practicing when you're sessioning, is being attuned to what other people are doing.

Tsiambwom: Yeah, you pick up on how to react and how to engage by being in the space with other people. Online, everybody's sort of doing their own thing. Not that you're not observing from your own unique perspective, but there isn't an implicit understanding of the rules of how you're sharing in it.

Alexandra: Whereas, in person, you think the etiquette is more understood?

Tsiambwom: Yeah, cypher, jam, battle etiquette, all that isn't fully articulated. It tends to still live in the world of oral history, and it differs regionally. So it's hard to just pin down specifically how you're supposed to be in a cypher. It's something you learn by being in one.

Alexandra: Having to articulate rules for a new context could be hard if the previous rules are not explicitly articulated. On the point of trying-to-get-the-cypher-feel, is that how you found DanceFight?⁴

Tsiambwom: Honestly, I don't know how I got half the apps on my phone. I think it probably was an Instagram ad that redirected me towards it. It's pretty difficult to structure battles on a digital platform, and so I was wondering what their approach was going to be. I was really interested that it took the sort of TikTok format. I was trying to engage with it because part of me was like, "This could actually be a really, really great tool, especially pandemic-wise to try and recreate the idea of a battle or a cypher in a way that connects more people."

Alexandra: And what did you think of it?

Tsiambwom: There are ups and downs. Actually, the people who were developing it reached out to me, and they wanted some thoughts on it; they were really focused on dancers engaging with each other. I conferred with my dance crew and as a spokesman, I sent over our collective thoughts on it. We were thinking about all the things that make a cypher a cypher, what it is we do when we're battling each other and what's going on there, and then thinking of how to translate that into an app, which is really difficult. I haven't fully fleshed out my thoughts on DanceFight yet, but I sort of have an eye on it—it's pretty new and I'm sure they're going to learn and grow over time. They've been steadily developing a base of users from what I've seen. One thing that I found in the beginning was that there wasn't necessarily a distinction between when it was community dancing versus people battling or engaging with more of a battle mindset.

Alexandra: Because anyone can engage with any video. Is that right?

Tsiambwom: Yeah, anyone can engage with any video at any given time, and so you can have people just enjoying the music put up against somebody who's going really hard to the music. What I do like is the voting system: you swipe on the one you prefer. As a form of engagement, it brings the audience into it like you would in a cypher. I may not be able to be like, "Whoa, you did something really cool," but I can swipe, which I thought was really great execution. But that's one thing that I think will need to really get fleshed out on the app because the thing with TikTok and DanceFight now, the dancing that happens on there isn't necessarily technical dancing. It's more community dancing, the way I see it anyways. Everybody's like, "You should go on TikTok." I'm on it, but there's a difference in the way I engage with dance and the way the majority at large engages with dance. Some of the most famous dancers who have been in the community forever have the smallest following on TikTok.

Alexandra: It's not a freestyle-based ecosystem.

Tsiambwom: Not at all. There isn't necessarily room for improvisation. And there's no whole body, right? Where do you pinpoint technique to anything if you can't really see the full body in action?

Alexandra: Thinking about your posts where you're trying out windmills—it literally wouldn't fit. The camera would have to be so far away.

Tsiambwom: I feel like, to create a TikTok video, you've got to be right there. The aesthetic of it, but also the experience of it is this up-close in-your-face kind of thing, and there's an aesthetic distance that exists when you're improvising or freestyling or engaging with dance that's necessary to really enjoy it because you got to see the whole body at work, see what's happening.

Alexandra: I think you mentioned on Instagram that you've had some problems getting into a flow when you're aware of the camera.

Tsiambwom: Yeah, I've been interrogating that lately because it's something I hear reflected with a lot of other dancers: "the camera turns on and everything I know goes out the window." I'm so confused about the phenomenon because, when I'm in a cypher with my crew or at a jam, it's a lot of eyes on you, but you're able to engage your brain fully in the way you want to in the dance form. But then, with the camera, you can't tell if anything you're doing is good or not. Usually, when you know someone's watching, you can expect a reaction. But, with the camera, you know something is watching, but it's not watching to engage.

Alexandra: It doesn't know anything about how to be in a breaking space; it's like having a situationally illiterate person—a new person, to say it neutrally—come into a space and just stand there.

Tsiambwom: Yeah, and just stare really hard.

Alexandra: Don't say anything. Don't make any noise.

Tsiambwom: There's probably a lot more to it psychologically, especially because there's, I guess, a conflict that exists between doing something communal-based, but as a solo practice sort of because it's just you and the camera.

Alexandra: Do you similarly feel like you're in a different head space just by virtue of being alone even if you don't have the camera on?

Tsiambwom: Yeah, for similar reasons. The camera is probably the most difficult part, but what I've been focusing on over the past year is learning how to just work by myself when I don't have anybody that could respond to me. There's a creative energy that doesn't exist when you're by yourself that makes it harder to plug into the dance, and I've actually come to enjoy the challenge of it because it's really forced my brain to be like, "So, what am I doing?" It's suddenly like, "What is dance and what is it to you and

what does it mean to just be a body moving?" If there is nobody to engage with it, are you really still dancing or are you just flailing on the floor trying to figure something out? Yeah, I guess that's the really scary thing about it, is the existential place it puts you in.

Alexandra: Alternatively though, is there any freedom to it? If you aren't going to post something or if you're not recording it, can you care less about messing up or pausing?

Tsiambwom: Yeah, it took me a second to learn, leaning into failing and being more comfortable with that because you tend to be your own worst critic and don't have somebody to balance that, that'll pile up on you. Just creating work with a camera is really helpful because then you can fail more. But, if there's a failure, you can really develop something interesting.

Alexandra: So, are you typically filming a whole hour or something, and then you choose what to post from that?

Tsiambwom: Sometimes I'm like, "I want to see that move again," and I'll do short recordings of a specific move set. But for the most part, in my training sessions, I like to warm up with a freestyle for 10-15 minutes and just let the camera go. And then, later on, I'll be like "Ah, I like this section. I'll post this section." If I look through it and I don't like anything, I don't have to post every day, is where I've landed with that; I want to post something that's an interesting concept that I was playing with. I'll keep sections I want to look at again whether to see my technique, or if I'm trying to create something that's specifically to be experienced through a phone screen.

Alexandra: A general critique about social media broadly, but especially Instagram because of its visual-centric culture, is that people post the best of everything. Do you find in your own posting an impulse towards putting your best foot forward, and do you see that in other people, or are people posting falling out of a head spin or whatever?

Tsiambwom: I think in general because a lot of people are going to watch it, you want to post something that is the best representation of who you are. Prior to the pandemic, that's what I would do. But, at least in my personal practice, over the course of the pandemic, I've been learning to post as a work-in-progress rather than a finished product. There is a section of the community that engage in that way, they'll say, "Check it out. I've been working on something. I'm failing, but I feel good about the work I'm doing," and leaning into failing as a natural process of learning.

Alexandra: When people were getting together in person, they were able to fail semi-publicly in a session and get feedback there, and then this more finished product thing was happening online. But now, there isn't that other outlet.

Tsiambwom: I think there's a bigger fear in posting work that has flaws in it, partially because it's everybody, not just your specific community that gets to engage with it.

Alexandra: Do you think that you're going to keep up these practices as you are able to be more co-present with people?

Tsiambwom: Yes, at this point, I've integrated it into my personal routine, as a dancer, and part of it is curating my online presence. I hadn't thought about it too much before, it'll be harder to switch out, than to just keep going with using it as an accountability tool. Social media for me has become a log of my personal journey, but also a way of seeing my work develop. It's become a super useful tool.

Biographies

Tsiambwom "T" Akuchu is a hip-hop/theatre artist and activist based in Atlanta, Ga whose work has been presented on stages like the Kennedy Center and Joe's Pub at The Public. His work spans various forms of theater and dance, from Commedia to Hip Hop. As a hip-hop artist, he choreographs and creates work for the concert stage that utilizes hip-hop and black vernacular dance blended with classical, modern, and post-modern dance that creates deeply personal work rooted in his culture as a Cameroonian native and his experiences in the United States. He is currently investigating solo practice as a hip-hop dancer. See more of his movement practice on Instagram @tsebwoman and @somaticbboy.

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Alexandra Harlig is an Assistant Clinical Professor at University of Maryland in the University Honors 'Virtually Human' thematic cluster. She holds a PhD in Dance Studies from The Ohio State University. Her research focuses on popular dance forms in media: the political and economic analysis of their production, circulation, and reception, the movement cultures captured, and the platforms utilized. She sessioned with the Cornell University breaking crew Absolute Zero while an undergraduate student. Find her on the internet @ReadyMadeAI

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Notes

¹ Cyphers are informal, unjudged competitions that anyone present can join into. They may happen at a party, on the street, or on the side at an organized breaking event.

² Sessioning, or going to (a) session, is the usual pedagogical model for breaking, as well as House and many other Hip-Hop and Funk styles; it involves people sharing a space and music, mostly working on their own to master movement vocabulary or work on putting moves together, but with feedback and encouragement from the other dancers.

³ Power Moves are those more acrobatic moves that display strength and flexibility, including a range of flips and spins.

⁴ DanceFight is an app which debuted in 2020, that allows dancers to go up against each other with posts to the same music. Other users determine who won the matchup by voting.

REVIEWS

TOM: A Review

Jo Cork, *Independent dance artist, choreographer and screendance-maker*

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Originally intended as an installation displayed across silver-threaded transparent screens, dotted over the stage of Sadler's Wells, the work *Tom*—by Wilkie Branson—has been reimaged as a dance film.

This film captures an entire world in each of its images, just as Tarkovsky would have the filmmaker aspire to do. Pausing on a single frame, I am struck by its saturated atmosphere and the thick visceral feel of *Tom's* world emanating from it. It is this quality, in all of its images, that gives the film an unyielding grasp on my attention throughout its fifty-five minutes duration, and which makes the images feel so inimitable and unique to the work.

We first, as viewers, glide into the workshop in which the film became. Seeing the shelves full of models we are yet to see come to life, we absorb the dust, Stanley knives and tiny paintbrushes, all revealing the meticulous process of the film's construction. As the room disintegrates into a digital, psychological space, we understand that this is a prelude which makes us feel both empowered in our omniscience, and naively curious—as we acknowledge the deep craft of its creation, as yet unsure about its particular form.

My brain is unsure of how to process the emerging visual and yet quickly accepts this peculiar world. There is a distinctive melding of animation, horror and thriller genres, dance, a look of video games, and perhaps even a feel of extended music videos. The electronic score, composed by Benji Bower with sound design by Mat Clark, utilizes very little real sound and this disembodiment allows us to deeply envelope ourselves, as we defect from the aural reality of our world, and instead tune in to the sonic language of *Tom's*. The images are painterly at first. There is something of Dali in the deadwood tree we see within the first couple of minutes, and I am immediately struck by the recognition of gaming aesthetics—I remember the ability to turn around, as Lara Croft,



and see a completely different horizon behind me—and have a sensation of being drawn into a complete world of which I am absolutely a part. The sense of movement in space, generated by the choreography of the camera, betrays what we understand of the capacity of the 2D image—our understanding of its potential to envelop us is expanded. We know, by our experience of ‘flying’ in arcs, swoops, and in our ability to hone in to close-up detail, the dimensions of the world’s spatiality, and we soon feel comfortable as our transient perspective generates a flow that allows us to understand our surroundings and feel at ease here. The significant contribution of gaming aesthetics and their triggering of such mind-states allows the film language of *Tom* to do something new by rekindling the relationship to the screen for those who came to adulthood with gaming, offering an orientation through which the viewer quickly feels incorporated in the film’s world. It is this mechanism perhaps, that dictates my committed emotional investment in the protagonist... He is not a character in a film, but a human entity in a world I myself have entered. I am compelled to extend to him, not my witnessing judgement, but my empathy and compassion as a fellow human.

We first meet Tom alone, and as we encounter his multiple incarnations we come to understand the complexity of his humanity. The sense of him as an entity is emphasized as we relate to the idea of multiple versions of self—all existing within us simultaneously. The release date of the film, in the beginnings of the first UK lockdown in March 2020, provided a particular context for heightened reception of this notion by its viewers. Trapped in our own, newly lonely circumstance—with each viewer discovering the censored depths of their own psyche in the wake of too much time to think—we feel a kind of kinship with Tom as he reflects our immediate personal experience.

This concept of multiple-selves is accentuated by the camera movement in relation to the choreographed movement. Dance is normalized as part of this world and as such, rather than an emphasize, it becomes the primary vehicle for emotional and narrative expression. The camera moves with complexity, or ‘dances’ throughout the film, and provides composition enough to serve the numerous dances we see by individuals in amidst pedestrian scenes; they simply occur within our tracking or orbiting field of vision. We encounter the dances as we encounter fleeting senses of self; each seeming defined and characterized, yet their installment being but a contribution in a flux of state—a run of thread in a much broader tapestry.

Twenty minutes in, signaled by Tom removing his coat in preparation to lay himself bare to us, our relationship to the danced movement shifts. Filmed differently from other scenes, Branson comments:

I wanted to bring the audience to a much closer relationship with him there. Using a 360° camera allowed for more organic and dynamic camera movements in conjunction with the choreography—it’s much more of a duet, which makes you feel more *with him*, in his proximal space.¹

The choreography of the camera and the movement work deeply together here, so that the space in the film appears to extend with the movement rather than the body extending into the space... Our relationship to the space becomes the space's relationship to ourselves, and by this converse perspective of relationship, we come to be everywhere. We are in every parallel universe, embodying every possible self.

Revealing of the human condition, a particularly poignant dream scene about half-way through shows a young boy standing beside and then climbing over a cliff edge. It's for the first time here, that we hear lyrics in the score; a female vocal suggests themes of motherhood, bringing with it a mode of protection, while also hinting at familial bond between the man and child. The image of a toddler in immediate danger has our hearts in our mouths and we find ourselves prioritizing our care for the welfare of the child over the various adult Toms—In the same moment, we are enlightened to our own experience of apathy toward our adult-selves—our tired despair—and we relate to Tom's lack of motivation to save himself. The use of lyrics in the score here not only renews a conventional connection to more mainstream viewing, but also works with the imagery of a young boy alongside adults to activate the mind of the viewer to draw upon associations and symbolism regarding care, tenderness, and protection.

Borrowing from the horror genre allows Branson to utilize yet another mechanism to maintain a portal of accessibility to the non-dance, mainstream film viewer. A sequence in which Tom again meets his darkest fears and self-loathing in the elevator, which then follows him, creates a moment of terrified anticipation. The beating that ensues is traumatic viewing. It is relentless. Tireless. And yet—not a mark on Tom—a reminder that this is a context of the psychological. Who hasn't 'beaten themselves up' before? The invisible and brutal inner destruction of depression is given a palpable dimension that cuts deep, and in the lack of bruising and bloodiness that would inevitably occur in reality, *Tom* places value and legitimacy on physicality as a descriptor, embodiment, and signifier of meaning. Emotions made manifest in the body are given voice in their nuanced posture and the particular shine, or lack thereof, that they produce behind the eyes.

There is a sense of helplessness and despondency in Tom that resonates loudly in the viewer within the historical moment of the pandemic, and which makes the emotional impact of the image both difficult to watch, and difficult to ignore. Our shared—yet separated—experience of isolation makes us painfully able to relate these ideas to our own person and also allows us to generate a sense of empathy and concern, or acknowledgement, for the suffering of others trapped with their own destructive thoughts. Through the articulation of loneliness, we somehow gather a sense of camaraderie and understand that in our individual suffering, we are sharing in what is in fact, a largely collective experience.

The film arcs into a resolve as Tom settles in a room and plays with the toddler. We return to our inner child and are left with a sense of healing—through their eyes we are

able to see ourselves without judgement. The spectacular destruction of the world in which we've lived for the past 55 minutes feels magnificent. There is a sense of loss, but we can celebrate its destruction in the idea that it's all just a construct of our own minds. The return to images of the workshop brings this home, reminding us how much labor we put into building those walls around ourselves.

Tom is innovative for screendance in how it seamlessly merges multiple genres—and their particular language and relationship to the viewer—to direct the viewing experience. Its use of 360° filming, photogrammetry, and layered accumulation of multiple image-making processes is an insight into how technological developments might advance the potentials of dance film—or at least, how we might approach pursuing those potentials; how we might consider or implement the act of choreographing for camera is opened up to vast new possibilities.

It is also exciting to see in *Tom*, how screendance can successfully engage viewers for a longer duration, and its hailing by *The Guardian* as a 5-star “sublime, slow-burn study of isolation,”² should liberate screendance-makers to explore new potentials. Even without dialogue, there is a strong sense of narrative content in *Tom*. Though abstract, we follow a clearly articulated inner journey to which we can all relate. The lyrics in vocalized sections of the score might be seen to act as a kind of modern Greek chorus, adding dramatic impact and anchorage to emotional milestones in the dramaturgy. Recurring and developing visual motifs of birds in flight, trains, and high rises, when contrasted with a remote island, accumulate symbolic meaning and generate a pacing and kind of motor that drives us right the way through. This is perhaps what makes this film feel so accessible to a mass audience—there is plenty to follow. Slower moving than other dance films, the understanding we gain of a character by spending this time with them is something we can rarely achieve in an eight-minute work. Traditionally screened on television, dance film has been constrained by the limited time slots offered to short films—am I mad to think that this wouldn't be out of place on Netflix, Mubi, or on BBC Two, or Channel 4? I don't think it would get X factor ratings—but I believe it has potential to gather a significant following and in as much expose screendance as a medium and genre of work that can speak to vastly diverse sectors of the global community.

Biography

Jo Cork is an independent dance artist, choreographer and screendance-maker, drawing on exploration of the human experience to create her work. She is interested in the territory between choreographic practice and film composition and in finding

effective ways to use digital formats of work to bring screendance to broader audiences and more diverse venues.

Jo completed an MA in Screendance in 2020, studying at London Contemporary Dance School. She has worked both independently and as choreographer for Studio for Electronic Theatre. She is a guest lecturer at London Contemporary Dance School, Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts and London College of Music and is currently engaged as screendance mentor to One Dance UK's Young Creatives programme.

In 2016, she completed the award winning dance film, *Sensate* and has since developed numerous screendance works including films, multi-screen/device and hologram installations, and pieces utilising QR codes and elements of augmented reality. Her works have been shown across the globe in festival settings, art galleries and museums, as well as in less conventional spaces including pubs and restaurants.

Current projects include the outdoor screendance installation, *Finding Ground*, independent dance films with film/TV choreographer Anthony Van Laast, and with director Phil Taylor, and a research project exploring the potentials of using haptics in screendance, in partnership with Studio Wayne McGregor.

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Notes

¹ Branson, interview with the author.

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