

Screendance Africa (Pty) Ltd: *African Screendance made by Africans*

By Jeannette Ginslov

Abstract

Screendance Africa (Pty) Ltd (SDA), is a Screendance company founded by South African co-directors and co-curators, Jeannette Ginslov and Dominique Jossie, in Cape Town, South Africa, 2012. SDA's mission is to advance and encourage the making of Screendance in Africa, made by Africans. This may be thought of to challenge, reshape and tackle ideas about racial diversity in Screendance in South Africa, its representation and its curation at local and international Screendance Festivals. Before discussing how SDA does this, this chapter provides a short background on the history of filmmaking in South Africa and questions why Screendance never developed a strong voice alongside the growth of film and Contemporary Dance in South Africa. It then discusses how SDA attempted to promote Screendance in South Africa, using the method of PAR - practice as research or 'learning by doing', running workshops, online discussions and curating locally made Screendance for local and international Screendance audiences. Finally, it reveals issues around international collaborations and how the COVID19 Pandemic Lockdown and the phenomenon of Zoom has ironically accelerated and inspired a new generation of Screendance makers in South Africa, which reveal African voices and African bodies in front of African lenses.

A background

Screendance Africa (SDA) was founded by co-directors and co-curators, Jeannette Ginslov and filmmaker Dominique Jossie on 15 November 2012, in Cape Town South Africa (1). Both Ginslov and Jossie are native to South Africa. Ginslov has Danish heritage and is White, whereas Jossie is mixed race. Ginslov worked extensively with Black, White and mixed-race artists in South Africa during the time of apartheid (1948-1994), grappling with issues such as gender inequality, identity and race in her dance theater productions and later in her MA Choreography studies at Rhodes University in 1999 and her MSc Screendance studies at Dundee University in 2009. Jossie studied a BA degree majoring in Film, Drama and Media at the University of Cape Town (UCT) continuing to graduate with honours in Drama in 2009. She designed videography for live dance performances with Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre and coordinated the internationally acclaimed *Winnie: The Opera*, a multimedia opera about the life of Winnie Mandela. In January 2012 Dominique interned at the 40th Annual Dance on Camera Festival in New York.

The springboard for the creation of Screendance Africa, for both Jossie and Ginslov, stems from a desire to work across different media and their lived experience of apartheid and its effect on artists and the arts. The apartheid era in South Africa, was a time of legally enforced racial segregation under the all-white Nationalist Government. Non-white South Africans, the majority of the population, were required to live separately and use segregated public facilities, minimizing or eliminating contact between racial groups. This division extended to the arts, where artists of different races worked in isolation. The situation was further exacerbated by the global Cultural and Academic Boycott of South Africa from 1963 to the early 1990s, which left the country isolated and hindered its ability to progress alongside the rest of the world—particularly in technological advancements in the arts, such as dance on video or Screendance. However, from the late 1980's onward, local artists across the colour divide began to collaborate, form multiracial



committees and political alliances to rectify the inequalities in the arts. Ginslov was the elected Co-Founder and Dance Rep of the Dance Alliance South Africa & Performing Artists Workers Equity: Interim Committee, for example and helped re-write the White Paper for the Arts, for the newly elected African National Congress (ANC) in 1994. The election of the ANC spelled the end of apartheid and the beginning of Democracy and the visual arts, photography, multimedia installations, film, dance and the performing arts began to carve out uniquely multiracial South African voices and identities, such as the ones founded at the Dance Factory, the Market Theater in Johannesburg and exported abroad by artists such as William Kentridge and Robyn Orlin. The heinous stranglehold of apartheid on South Africa people, the Arts and Dance in South Africa was finally over. However, Screendance or Dance Film was not part of that trajectory and only began to take shape in 2007-2009 when Ginslov and Gerard Bester formed Montage Video Dance Festival, to be discussed in more detail below. However, in 2012 when Ginslov and Jossie first met in Cape Town, where Ginslov was teaching a Screendance workshop at UCT, they decided to join forces and create Screendance Africa to reflect and identify the need to find a unique voice for South African Screendance.

Since its inception SDA has had one mission: to encourage the making of Screendance in Africa, made by Africans. SDA is dedicated to the development, production, screening, and distribution of Screendance made in Africa, locally and internationally. SDA endeavors to push the boundaries of dance on screen giving audiences visual and visceral experiences of life through dance on the African continent. Its vision is to elevate the standard and quality of Screendance made in Africa by providing a platform for the crossover of dance and digital media, which explores all forms of dance and filmmaking, on screen and online distribution. It curates and presents Screendance festivals in South Africa, the African continent and around the globe, and conducts workshops, labs, lectures, outdoor screening events and residencies. SDA aims to be the link between international and African Screendance production and talent. Our vision is to become part of a global network of Screendance festivals, organizations, and online platforms.

Since its inception it has produced two fashion dance films, and using the method of PAR (2) conducted Screendance and augmented reality (AR) workshops, discussions online, curated and screened African Screendance for local and international audiences, providing differing views of African dance and ways of identity making, storytelling and representation through the medium.

However, first a very short background history of film in South Africa further provides a context for the emergence of Screendance in South Africa and SDA.

South African Film History

On 11 May 1896, the Empire Palace of Varieties, a cinema in Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, began screening international films to segregated audiences. (3) The local film industry flourished in the early 20th Century and locally produced films appeared from 1911. (4) In 1987, director Oliver Schmitz directed the film *Mapantsula*, (5) the first anti-apartheid feature film for and about Black South Africans, when South Africa was in a state of emergency. By 1997, South Africa, particularly Cape Town, became increasingly recognized as a popular destination for foreign and commercial film production, as the weather and locations are good, and crews are available at affordable rates. Since then, the South African film industry has produced award winning

mainstream feature films as well as experimental films and documentaries, (6) that are screened around the globe, securing an African voice for the medium of film.

South African Dance Film History

Paradoxically, with the successful development of cinema, dance on film never flourished in Africa, as it did in the United States and Europe. This is curious, as African culture and live performance is strongly associated with the expression of embodied experiences of being African, through dance and theater. Contemporary Dance in South Africa and other African countries have successfully and purposefully addressed issues of African identity, race, and culture since the 1980's. This begs the question why the making of Screendance in Africa has not developed alongside its dance and film industry, as it did internationally and why to date, there is no single annual festival dedicated to Screendance in South Africa nor in any other country in Africa?

The first local full-length ballet Dance Film to be made in South Africa was *Raka* (1967). Directed by South African Frank Staff, and distributed internationally by 20th Century Fox, this three-act ballet film is based on an epic poem in Afrikaans by South African N.P. van Wyk Louw. Since then, there have been no other locally produced full-length feature Dance Films featuring mainstream dance such as Ballet, unless it has been produced for social media purposes. However, the Dance Film *Hear Me Move* (2015) was reported as being the first South African Dance Film, to feature *Sbujwa*, a Johannesburg street dance style that uses house music, taunting, shouting matches and “a dance that requires every muscle in your body to work in order to complete moves,’ plus lots of creativity.” (Bukola 2012) Directed by Scottnes L. Smith, produced by Fidel Namisi and Wandile Molebatsi, with production taking place in Johannesburg by Coal Stove Pictures, it won best editing from the Africa Film Academy in 2016. Released at Ster-Kinekor Cinemas nationwide in South Africa, it also had international screenings via the Afrostream network in different countries including the United States. Soon after Jonathan Hofmeyr directed *Pop Lock ‘n Roll* (2017), a hip-hop Dance Film, which the Indigenous Film Distribution company distributed locally and internationally and nominated by the Africa Film Academy for best editing in 2018. The inspiration one can assume came from the flood of Dance Films featuring street dance styles that Hollywood produced during this time, such as *Stomp the Yard* (2007) and *Step Up* (2006 to 2014). Currently the dance company Darkroom Contemporary, founded in 2010, by Louise Coetzer and Oscar O’Ryan are leading the field in Screendance production and Jomba! Contemporary Dance Festival in Durban often screen works during their festival but it is not a platform dedicated to Screendance, but live performance.

However, the growth of Dance Video or Video Dance never flourished in the local South African Contemporary Dance community as it did internationally. One could assume that it was due to a lack of resources, or a local suspicion that the medium would replace live performance as expressed above. The use of video technology was, however, explored by Contemporary Dance practitioners in live performance from the 1990's onwards. Here Robyn Orlin and Author used video technology experimentally in live or interactive works. These were not Screendance works per se but provided visual digital backgrounds to enhance live performances and dance theater works. However, it may be safe to say that Ginslov conceived, choreographed and performed one of South Africa's first Video Dances, *Sandstone* (1988) (Image 1), directed by Byron Griffin.



Image 1: Ginslov in *Sandstone* (1989) jpeg, – Credit: Bob Martin 1990

Griffin entered *Sandstone* into the international Tokyo Film Festival competition that year but was not accepted. The dance video slid into obscurity only to surface again on Ginslov's YouTube Channel in 2010. However, in the 2000s, having discovered Screendance on the Internet whilst based in Johannesburg, Ginslov attended a self-funded Screendance Masterclass with Katrina McPherson at the Place, London in 2006. Inspired, upon her return, she created the *Montage Video Dance Festival* (2007-9), assisted by Gerard Bester in association with her dance theater company *Walking Gusto Productions* (2003-8), that received a three-year funding grant from the National Arts Council (NAC), South Africa. With this funding and collaborative support from *FNB Dance Umbrella*, Bester and Ginslov curated a roll of Screendance works from local and international Screendance makers for *Montage*. The works were screened alongside the *FNB Dance Umbrella* in Johannesburg (2007-9), at the *National Arts Festival* South Africa (2008 & 2009) and for *Jomba! Dance Festival* in Durban (2009). Disappointingly the auditoriums sometimes stood

empty, despite free entrance. Interested audiences were small but occasionally not appreciative of the medium. From a dance perspective, audiences who still pandered to European culture as the golden standard, sometimes reported that they could not relate to a digital version of live performance, arguing that Screendance should never replace live performance, or that the medium prevented a viewing of the whole body in motion, as the framing cut the body into different parts.

Disappointingly, funding for *Walking Gusto Productions* and the *FNB Dance Umbrella* evaporated, *Montage* was shut down and Ginslov began an MSc Screendance degree at the Duncan and Jordanstone College of Art and Design at the University of Dundee, Scotland (2008-9). This was headed up by Simon Fildes and Katrina McPherson. During her studies in 2009 Ginslov curated *Montage in Africa*, which was screened at the *moves09 – International Festival of Movement on Screen*, in Manchester, UK to great acclaim. This included the student works of Ginslov: *sanctum I* and *sanctum II*, that explore the sensitive issue of female genital mutilation occurring in Africa and elsewhere. Since then both films have been screened at over twenty different international Screendance festivals.

During this time, Screendance in South Africa became dormant and was still somewhat viewed suspiciously by local dance makers. However, after having taught Screendance in the Dansehallerne in Copenhagen, Oslo Art on Wires, Stockholm University, University of Wisconsin, Hong Kong Dance Festival, Dundee University and Kigali Art Centre (2010-11), Ginslov returned to South Africa in 2012, to teach Screendance at the University of Cape Town and to take up a Senior Dance and Screendance Lecturing post at the University of Grahamstown, for MA students. Acknowledging the dearth of Screendance makers in South Africa, Ginslov was motivated and determined to re-activate the production of a Screendance festival but needed a partner. Fortunately, Jossie and Ginslov first met at the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA) Dance and Film Colloquium, that Jossie and Professor Jay Pather Director of GIPCA, Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre and associate professor for the Centre for Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Cape Town (UCT), established. They invited Ginslov to present alongside other Screendance practitioners as well as local dancers and filmmakers. After a brief meeting in Cape Town Jossie and Ginslov identified the need for a local Screendance Festival that could promote the production of Screendance through screenings, lectures, and workshops, after which they founded *Screendance Africa (Pty) Ltd*, that was then and currently still is in operation without financial support, headed up by Jossie.

Back to the present

One of SDA's main aims from 2012 was to foster the creation of Screendance made in Africa, by Africans, thereby attempting to *decolonize* the practice. SDA takes the wider meaning of *decolonizing*, as the freeing of minds, culture and practice from colonial ideology and identity, by "addressing the ingrained idea that to be colonized [is] to be inferior". (7) SDA believes that *decolonization* is a performative act as "[p]erformativity is the power of language to effect change in the world: language does not simply describe the world but may instead (or also) function as a form of social action... Performativity, then, is the process of subject formation, which creates that which it purports to describe and occurs through linguistic means, as well as via other social practices". (8) It is understood as a process, in which we must rethink, reframe, and reconstruct our art practices through PAR, that unites the experiences and actions in the place it is derived. In this case it is Screendance, that internationally and locally we think, sometimes preserves, and operates

from a pre-eminent Eurocentric, colonial and cultural lens. Subsequently there are too many white bodies dancing in front of white lenses.

For SDA, *decolonizing* Screendance needs to take place through local Screendance practitioners actively engaging in interdisciplinary research, questioning their methods and processes by interrogating African or Other bodies and their representation on screen, alongside issues of identity, and diversity. Other ways to dismantle ‘colonial eyes’ is by viewing all forms of Screendance critically, either in a studio or online, or by attending workshops, collaborations, and discussions. Finally, it is by curating and screening locally produced works, in Africa and internationally, changing the ways that international festivals curate and control the viewing of Other bodies and their representation.

Learning by viewing and doing

Growing and learning about a *decolonized* form of Screendance on the African continent and screening it abroad, is not easy or affordable. Apart from a few examples, there are no paradigmatic African Screendance works to guide the form nor to learn from, so one starts from the bottom, and this is fortuitous. Screendance makers in South Africa have had to learn about the craft by attending a few workshops or by watching Screendance online, due to the lack of local Screendance Festivals. In addition, there are only a few Screendance workshops at university or college dance courses and with only a few Screendance Workshops conducted by SDA in the past, the aspiring Screendance maker in Africa needs to resort to other means to learn about the form – “learning by doing.”

For Jossie, international and local Screendance works screened at a few SDA festivals in South Africa (see below), may have inspired potential Screendance makers in South Africa, making them more aware of the form and what is expected in the production of Screendance for local and international screening events. They may also have been inspired by online Screendance works that are freely available. However, whatever is freely shared online, is often not current, nor are the most significant works available, as they are exclusively reserved and curated for real-time major Screendance festival attendees, usually in the United States and Europe. This stymies Screendance making in South Africa, and no doubt the rest of Africa, as there are no funds available to apply for to attend these festivals, nor is there any funding in local or national government level, for researching the creation of African Screendance. In other words, lack of exposure to excellent work and the confidence and finances to make good work, to experiment or reveal embodied stories through an African Screendance lens is underdeveloped. In addition, if mainstream works are screened in South Africa, for example *Nora* (2008) or *Pina* (3D) (2011), the African Screendance maker is, either overwhelmed by its sophistication or inspired to recreate it, but by not having the skills to do so, their Screendance outcomes are of low production value and content. Screendance from Africa therefore, if shown online or at international festivals is not respected abroad and is sometimes viewed as being crude, simplistic, without sophistication, intention, and meaningful subject matter.

Ironically, it is sometimes, but not always, that the negative attributes described above, draws an international Screendance audience’s attention. The more unsophisticated the capturing of the moving body is, the more haptic it is, and as a result the more empathic responses it draws from the viewer (9). The haptic is about tactility, texture, proximity, contact, and touch. They are felt

viscerally, and associated with motion, action, extreme close-ups that lose all identification of place or character, and/or disturbs the mastery of the reading of the image. Haptic images are therefore indirect and give rise to resonances and intimacy – ways of looking and experiencing through the caressing gaze rather than a voyeuristic control or mastery. Media theoretician Laura U Marks (2000) claims that the viewer engages with the haptic, rather than the narrative or character as it captures life forces as a politics of representation. Take for example the student films derived from SDA's Screendance workshops *uValo* (2012) (Image 2) and *Vulnerability* (2012), that were created intuitively and do not pander to the expectations of international Screendance festival curators. The Screendance makers here lean towards creating a new style with limited resources.



Image 2. Perf. Mpilo Khumalo in *uValo* (2012)
jpeg, - Credit: Jeannette Ginslov 2012

These works were screened and received positively at several international Screendance Festivals. Despite this, Jossie and Ginslov often found it was difficult to persuade aspiring Screendance makers in South Africa that these types of Screendance works, unsophisticated as they are, is where one starts, and often these beginnings are the most intuitive, remarkable, and memorable.

SDA Workshops

So far workshops by SDA have been conducted by the Author (Image 3) in South Africa, Europe and Hong Kong.



Image 3. SDA (2012) Ginslov teaching a workshop for Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre Company Durban jpeg, – Credit: Dominique Jossie 2012

SDA's workshop timeline:

2016

Africa in Motion at Dance Base, Edinburgh 01/11.

Screendance Africa roll of African Dance films and 90mins Screendance workshop

Tanzrauschen Dance Film Festival Screendance & AR Workshop, Wuppertal, Germany for the *Tanzrauschen Dance Film Festival*, Die Börse Kommunikationszentrum in Wuppertal Germany 28-31/01

Screendance Africa in the Loop Room:

2014

Vo'Arte InShadow 2014, Lisbon International Festival of Video, performance and technology. Masterclass 60secondsdance.dk and Screendance & AR Workshop

iDance Festival Hong Kong: Screendance Workshops 22-29 Nov

2012

University of Cape Town Dance Department: Screendance course for the Post

Graduate Choreography students throughout the year.
Durban University of Technology & Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre: Screendance
 Workshop Nov 22-28 Durban, South Africa
Rhodes University Screendance Residency: 06-11/08
Art on Wires Oslo Screendance Workshop: 30/07-04/08
GIPCA Cape Town Screendance Workshop: 18-22/07
Ishyo Arts Centre, Rwanda Kigali 15-22/04

SDA curation for local and International Screendance festivals

Ginslov, together with Jossie, guest curated a selection of films for each of the African and international Screendance festivals listed below. While some festivals made specific selections from our submissions, others screened the entire curated program, offering a range of perspectives on African dance and representations of the body. The works featured included Screendance pieces created in South Africa by South African artists, as well as through international collaborations. Below is the list of Screendance festivals that Screendance Africa contributed to, between 2013 and 2020:

2020: *Ruch Oporu* (Movement of Resistance), for *Kino Tańca* Online program
2020: *Screendance: Diversity & Representation Matters:* Online Conference
 Vrystaat Arts Festival, Bloemfontein, South Africa
2018: *Moving Image Festival* hosted by the Dance Department at Barnard
 College of Columbia University, *Moving BROWN body - Moving image*
Festival. New York, USA.
2018: *Cinedans*, Amsterdam, Netherlands
2018: *Moovy Tanzfilmfestival*, Cologne, Germany
2017: *Choreoscope:* Screendance Festival in Barcelona, Spain
2017: *Bodily Undoing:* Somatic Activism and Performance Cultures as Practices
 of Critique. Bath Spa University, United Kingdom
2017: *Afrikanska kulturdagar:* African Screendance Works for Afrikultur,
 Stockholm, Sweden
2017: *African Film Day* at Skarpnäcks Kulturhus, Stockholm, Sweden
2017: *Africa Day* and African Christmas Market in Bagarmossens Folkets Hus
 and Bagarmossens Library, Stockholm, Sweden
2016: *Tanzrauschen International Dance Festival* and Screendance Africa
 screening in the Loop Room, Wuppertal, Germany
2016: *Dança em Foco*, International Festival of Video and Dance, Rio de
 Janeiro, Brazil
2016: *Interdisciplinary Conference in Dance-Cognition-Technology*, Teatro
 Martins Gonçalves, Bahia, Brazil
2016: *Africa in Motion*, Dance Base, Edinburgh, Scotland
2014: *Chennai Women's International Film Festival*, Cape Town, South Africa
2014: *iDance Hong Kong Festival*, Hong Kong
2013: *JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Festival*, Durban, South Africa
2013: *Detours - University of Witwatersrand: Re –Visioning Dance Festival.*
 Johannesburg, South Africa
2013: *Transmissions Dance Festival*, Uganda

2013: *African Creative Economy Conference*, Cape Town, South Africa
2013: *National Arts Festival*, Grahamstown, South Africa
2013: *Durban International Film Festival*, Durban, South Africa

Online workshops and festivals

New ways of learning about Screendance making via online workshops and viewing Screendance festivals online, curated by international Screendance Festivals, have also made the form more accessible to aspiring African Screendance makers. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020-21), new ways of “learning by doing” and attending Screendance discussions and Festivals during Lockdown occurred via the Zoom phenomenon. Online workshops for the final year UCT Theatre and Performance Studies students, facilitated by Pather and Ginslov, in collaboration with other staff members, produced some remarkable Screendance works. Made with mobile phones using rudimentary editing techniques, in Lockdown and isolation, these students produced what *Screendance Africa*’s mission set out to do: produce African Screendance made by Africans.

The time in Lockdown and isolation gave these African student Screendance makers a chance to examine and reveal the more experiential African aspects of themselves. By experiencing things in isolation, the students were requested, by Pather and Ginslov, to *look inwardly* at their own experiences, their own South African histories and identities, or ways of being a South African, and in this way come one step closer to creating South African Screendance not seen before. These Screendance works were later screened online, on UCT’s YouTube Channel in 2021.

SDA hopes that this will inspire potential Screendance makers in South Africa to address issues of the *colonial lens* and why it is important to create Screendance through an African eye. It is questionable however that many aspiring filmmakers have the money to pay for online screening events and workshops, let alone have the bandwidth to do so, as the economic landscape of South Africa is dire, with many living in poverty. Artists struggle to make ends meet, and as there is a lack of financial support for the medium across the board, a DIY or “punk aesthetic” in Screendance has started to surface. Perhaps it is here that a unique South African Screendance voice will rise. This also seems to be an inherent feature of Screendance for most makers, at least at some point or at the beginning of their journey. Specific examples of what this kind of representation looks like on screen besides is difficult to find, due to the reasons above. It does not mean simply having the presence of South African dancers in the dance film but what PAR in relation to a decolonial attitude inspires. One example is *Lipstick* (2014) a Rhodes University Student Screendance workshop outcome. This collaborative Screendance work tackles the issue of being “other”: a homosexual Black male growing up in a misogynistic patriarchal Black Township and his desire to express his otherness and identity through dance. The film is haptic and autobiographical, dealing with the dancer’s lived experiences of current and remnants of the past. However, Ginslov, having experienced teaching at AFDA, the South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance (2003-8), came across film students who no longer cared for, nor examined their parent’s apartheid past in relation to their current film projects. It seems like a generation wanting to rid itself of a heinous past but not really assured of its current position. Having not been back in South Africa since 2014, the Author wonders if this has changed and if this will inspire a new generation of filmmakers and Screendance makers in the future?

International collaborations

The exposure and production of African dance on screen has also in the past been instigated by international Screendance makers, often European, collaborating with African dancers and dance companies. Through funds provided by their own foreign governments, they have created African Screendance through their own foreign perspectives and often for their own foreign audiences. These projects may have also been funded with the possibility of fulfilling EU government funding criteria, that may have insisted on the enabling and inclusion of Black dancing bodies. However, Wilson stated that “(o)ne can only speculate about funding criteria for EU Screendance makers as Black dancers in EU dance companies are currently experiencing feeling marginalized and their contracts fulfilling funding criteria”. (10)

Whilst this provides much needed international exchange and experience for African Screendance makers, authentic voices of African experience, of which there are many, are perhaps discounted in the pressure to produce inclusivity and diversity. Besides, how can an outsider speak for a local?

Too often the African screen dancing body is fetishized and the experience of being African, which is a multitudinous plethora of different perspectives, experiences, languages, dances, and identities, is sometimes stereotyped through colonial lenses. In other words, these dance videos expose audiences to a specific kind of streamlined African cultural identity and made to feel and see things about being African based on colonial, outsider or European eyes. This upholds a simplistic vision of African identity, one that is either in constant struggle, poor, broken and underdeveloped, or one that is idyllic, friendly, and exuberant, given the sun and outdoor lifestyle. Or sometimes mixed. For example, *Recycled Movement* (2015) (Image 4).



Image 4. Lee, B. (2015) *Recycled Movement* jpeg, Credit - Bob Lee 2015

Tagline: Shall we recall our forgotten memory? Shall we reuse our abandoned movement? And finally, our reused movement, embrace the abandoned world.

Cast and Crew:

Director: Bo Lee (Korea/Germany)

Country: Kenya

Producer: Bo Lee

Camera: Patrick Nyangena

Edit: Aline Juárez Contreras

Choreography: Bo Lee

Performers: Collins Matindi, Steve Onger, Mercy Kamoni

Sound design: Wonji Lee

Paradoxically, a few African Screendance makers aspire to these forms of Screendance, by recreating foreign visions of African identity to be accepted internationally. By doing so African Screendance makers relinquish control of their own identity and representation, foregoing a methodology that could reframe and reshape their own experience through their own lenses – PAR, a much harder route. These foreign-local productions, which may be collaborations, should be investigations and explorations through inquiries into diversity, identity, representation, and points of view, from an African perspective. To do so would grow the vision of making African Screendance through an embodied African experiential lens. This, however, requires re-education through workshops, experimentation and exploration which requires funding, time, and patience, none of which are currently available on the continent of Africa.

SDA online discussions

Other ways to *decolonize* Screendance, to reshape and tackle ideas about racial diversity in Screendance, its representation and curation at local, and international Screendance festivals, is to openly discuss these issues directly with makers and curators. To do so Ginslov, representing SDA, headed up an online Zoom discussion for the Vrystaat Kunstefees July 2020, called *Screendance: Representation and Diversity Matters*, inspired by the *Black Lives Matter* demonstrations after the death of George Floyd at the hands of a white US policeman. Presented on Zoom, it was open for free public online viewing. Invited artists presented their work, and after a panel discussion, with Jossie in attendance, a Q&A was opened to the public. The questions and issues raised now need to be rechanneled and worked through the medium of the African body, and an embodied African lens.

Vrystaat Kunstefees Discussion:

Screendance: Diversity & Representation Matters, presents and discusses the art form, Screendance. Screendance artists from diverse backgrounds have been asked to present their work, revealing what Screendance is, how they create it, and why it matters. It is also a panel discussion about the form of Screendance, the representation of bodies on screen, cultural diversity and the body's representation at International Screendance festivals.

Given the current socio-political climate we can no longer skirt around the issues of bodies, race, diversity, and their representation on screen. To date, this topic has never been discussed on a South African Screendance panel. Being highly contentious, these issues are often difficult to talk about and overlooked in favor of other discussions on funding and networking, for example. These are also important issues, but the representation of dancing bodies cannot and should not be a discussion held by academics behind closed doors. Yes, it may be uncomfortable to talk about race and representation, but this discomfort needs to be discussed as we cannot get away from bodies, their representation and context. They are the very medium of Screendance, entangled with the medium of cinema. So how do we overcome something that we cannot and should not ignore? How do we ask these questions in and with our work and how is this represented on screens internationally? There may be no answers, but at least let us try to talk about these issues. We have work to do.

Hosts

Author: Screendance, Embodied Technologies Practitioner & PhD Candidate
London South Bank University: UK
Georgina Thomson: Dance Programme Coordinator: *Vrystaat Arts Festival*
South Africa

Presenters

Omari Carter: Associate Lecturer and Screendance Practitioner: UK
Gabri Christa: Dance filmmaker, Associate Professor of Professional
Dance Practice Barnard College and Curator-Director of *Moving Body-
Moving Image Festival*: NYC, United States
Simon Fildes: Screendance practitioner, producer, curator and teacher:
Scotland
Robin Gee: Screendance practitioner, Associate Professor of Dance,
University of North Carolina, Greensboro: United States
Smangaliso Siphesihle Ngwenya: Screendance practitioner, writer,
choreographer and performer: South Africa

Conclusion

In conclusion, SDA, through the work of Ginslov and Jossie, has attempted to establish the medium and art of Screendance in Africa and to *decolonize* Screendance. There is no way of finding out if this has been successful as the issue has never been fully addressed. Questions such as: How does one *decolonize* Screendance? How does one elicit feedback from others in countries around the world about *decolonizing* Screendance? How does one engage in dismantling something that is invisible to many? These and other questions may never be answered. SDA, however, believes that it is only through performative actions such as PAR, curating, workshopping, discussion, dialogue, international exchange and residencies and the production of chapters such as this one, that these issues can be brought to light. It is our hope that it will do so.

Unfortunately, SDA has been dormant for a while as work and studies have pulled Author and Jossie in other directions. Since 2014 Jossie, always interested in incorporating dance narratives into her work, has gone on to producing and directing film and documentaries for e.TV and the narrative series DaNZ for Gambit Films, most notably *Rooilug* (2019) and *Rumba in the Jungle: The Return*. GInslor started her PhD studies 2017 at London South Bank University, Arts & Creative Industries Film and Media Departments, and completed in 2021. Perhaps others may take over the work that SDA began, by working in online production and on platforms such TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram, thereby expanding notions Screendance beyond local and international institutional/festival perspectives. It begs the question, however, does this online community not have another set of rules to follow, one that is steeped and driven by a globalized homogenizing aesthetic? So how can a unique South African Screendance voice be rendered and be revealed on these platforms? What innovative young makers are there in this space that we can identify as being African? We shall have to wait and see as the medium continues to grow and the makers find their own voices and true identities through Screendance.

References

Afolayan, Bukola. "South Africa: Sbujwa on the streets" Posted 7 Dec. 2012.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/07/south-africa-sbujwa-dance>

Azrak, Farah and Robin Bahhi. "Screendance. Screendance Introduction." Posted July 2014.

<https://screendanceblog.wordpress.com/introduction/>

Basler Afrika Bibliographien: Namibia Resource Centre – Southern Africa Library

<https://www.baslerafrika.ch/contents/culturalboycott/> n.d.

Cavanaugh, Jillian, R. 2018 "Performativity" Oxford Bibliographies.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199766567-0114>

Gutsche, Thelma. 1946 *The history and social significance of motion pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*. Doctoral thesis, University of Cape Town. <https://open.uct.ac.za/items/011de760-aed3-49ba-bf7f-644483f43f6f>

Lipstick Chor. Kamogelo Molobye Ed. Jeannette Ginslov Dir. Megan Wright 2014.

<https://youtu.be/MR72FJ16eZM?si=dXXa850YLKUe36e3> YouTube

Marks, L.U. 2000. *The Skin of the Film, Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*.

London : Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822381372>

Nelson, R. (2013) *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137282910>

O'Dowd, Mary F and Robyn Heckenberg. "Explainer: What is decolonization?" Posted 22 June 2020. <https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.gqnn4qf>

Paasonen, S. 1975. *Carnal resonances : affect and online pornography*. Spain:MIT

Rosenberg, Douglas. 2006. *Proposing a Theory of Screendance*. Cited in *Screendance: The State of the Art Proceedings. American Dance Festival*. Duke University, Durham, VOUKON, N.C. (ed.)

“sanctum I” Chor. Author. Ed. Author. Dir. Author. Perf. Vishanthi Arumugam. 2009. <https://vimeo.com/55685512>. *Vimeo*.

“sanctum II” Chor. Author. Ed. Author. Dir. Author. Perf. Vishanthi Arumugam. 2009. <https://vimeo.com/55753135>. *Vimeo*.

“Sandstone” Chor. Author. Ed. Byron Griffin. Dir. Byron Griffin. Perf. Author. 1988. <https://vimeo.com/43388612>. *Vimeo*.

South African History Online. 2019. “A History of the South African Film Industry Timeline 1895-2003”. Last updated 23 Sept. 2022. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-south-african-film-industry-timeline-1895-2003>

University of Warwick. Education Studies. 2018. “What is decolonizing methodology?” Accessed 16 June 2024. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/current/socialtheory/maps/decolonising/>

“uValo” Chor. Mxolisi Nkomonde. Dir. Akona Matyila. Perform. Mpilo Khumalo. 2012. https://youtu.be/8JNVuZB62YI?si=HHTf8sqN1EKt3_OW. *YouTube*.

“Vulnerability” Chor. Eugene Dushime. Dir. Ndoli Kayiranga. Perform. Eugene Dushime. 2012. <https://youtu.be/vdTDhAswveM?si=amWkJfjUz-x7N5t>. *YouTube*.

Wilson, Aquenne. “Where are the Black Bodies Dancing? Ep 1: unfolding racial structure in dance”. Kunststituut Melly. Posted 9 Apr 2021 <https://youtu.be/hyzipC21tI>. *YouTube*.

(1) Screendance: Rosenberg and Azrak & Bahhi, 1. Screendance is the umbrella term for three types of dance on screen each with their own set of different criteria: Dance Film (focuses on narrative and character arc in the dance film), Dance Video (where movement and the choreography are the most important elements and are created to be filmed) and Video Dance (the most experimental form of Screendance).

(2) Practice as Research: a methodology that encourages the practitioner/artist to construct knowledge whilst *doing* their practice, that is learning by doing. Nelson (2013) advocates researching between three types of learning, three different modes of knowledge making processes: “*know-how; know-what and know-that*”, a multi-modal epistemological process. Combined and interrelated, they inform and form a *praxis* where practice and knowledge merge and work together.

(3) Gutsche 1946, 511.

(4) South African History Online, 1.

(5) *Mapantsula*: meaning petty gangster and refers to a South African dance style from the Black Township, Soweto.

- (6) *My Octopus Teacher*, a South African documentary directed by James Reed and Pippa Ehrlich, took home an Oscar for Best Documentary at the 93rd Academy Awards 2021.
- (7) University of Warwick Education Studies, 1.
- (8) Cavanaugh, Intro.
- (9) Paasonen, S.
- (10) Wilson, n.p.