

Choreographing The Archive: Interfaces Between Screendance & Archival Film Practices

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Introduction: Returns And Reinvention

“I believe that ghosts are a part of the future.” - Jacques Derrida¹

Over the last 20 years, with the advent of social media and online platforms, archives have taken a variety of forms and functions. Historically, archives were stored away, conserved and seldom seen, but today, thanks to online sharing, archives are more widespread and prevalent in daily discourse. Moreover, since the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns, it is by no means a coincidence that archives have enjoyed a renaissance within many artistic disciplines. Artists have had the time and mental space to look back at bodies of work and many have chosen to delve into past or unfinished projects while confined to domestic quarters.

The title for this section, “Choreographing the Archive - Interfaces between Screendance and Archival film practices,” finds its origin in those screendance films which adopt a choreographic approach in their treatment of archival material. From this viewpoint, in the words of Anna Heighway, dance is perceived as “a flexible concept”² and “choreography as a transposable process.”³

The thematic section explores a range of archival approaches and was initially imagined as a space for reflection on the growing number of international screendance projects created from archival and found footage⁴. However, the papers submitted here reflect a much wider framework of research beyond the archive as source material that inspire readers to question the very notion of the archive itself.

What is an archive? Dictionaries will tell us “the place where records are kept.” The Western imagination will likely conjure images of great libraries where documents are classified and safely stored. But longstanding global traditions also demonstrate that sound, movement, thoughts and memories are powerfully lodged within the body as archive, serving as a site of cultural transmission and transformation. As a result, our understanding of the archive is currently undergoing a number of important shifts.

The International Journal of Screendance 13 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.18061/ijsd.v13i1.9196>



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First, the growing acknowledgement of how indigenous cultures and the African diaspora have contributed to archival practices and philosophy has guided our perception away from viewing the archive as a fixed object of the past. This replaces the rigid dichotomies of past/present and traditional/contemporary into a less linear approach that sees the body as a living archive where past, present and potential futures all intersect. Additionally, the present era continues to raise questions regarding the rise of media archeology and digital archives. How do electronic archival storage and access provide filtered returns to the past that result in new visions?

In the late 20th century, Jacques Derrida was one of the first Western thinkers to question the nature of the archive, underscoring that archives generate a practice of abandoning as much as they do a practice of conserving. In this sense, Derrida described how being and haunting converge to disrupt the present and remind us of possible futures. In a similar fashion, with editing at the heart of most screendance archival compositions, the tension between absence and presence enters into constant dialogue. Blas Payri provides an overview of editing techniques and effects that contribute to this temporal dislocation of the archive by returning to unscripted films of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His article provides an overview of various movement motifs facilitated by early editing effects and how they continue to offer dynamic choreographic possibilities to archival filmmakers today.

Keeping within Derridean territory Luisa Lazzaro's article analyzes Miranda Pennell's use of deconstruction as part of the artist's compositional method, adopted in relation to personal archival images and those from the archive of the oil company British Petroleum (BP) in her film *The Host*. Pennell's performative and editing approach to archival stills allow her and viewers to shift among different temporal and spatial dimensions. The paper highlights opposites that Pennell explores within and outside of the images.

An interview with Astero Styliani Lamprinou offers insights into the integration of archival images featuring the city of Brussels from the 1900s with purposely filmed footage in her screendance work, *Secret City* (2020). The archival stills in *Secret City* emphasize the element of non-chronological time and provide a new perception of the past. Similarly, choreographer Jacopo Jenna provides a new return to images and footage he amalgamates from different web sources and periods of time as explained in Ariadne Mikou's in-depth study of his choreographic practice. Mikou also reflects upon the wider question of ownership and copyright of archival materials in the act of "borrowing" as part of choreographic process.

As co-editors of this section we too have "borrowed" images to create a gallery of archival stills from films by various international artists. We have featured a number of contemporary artists (Camille Auburtin, Franck Boulègue, Billie Cowie

and Gabriela Alcofra, Becky Edmunds, Salvatore Insana, Stuart Moore and Kayla Parker, Rapahel Montañez Ortiz, Carla Oppo) who approach archival material in different ways: exploring autoethnographic memory, news and historic archival footage, integrating archival material from different sources, time frames and formats, as well as experimentation with cutting archival material. We would like to express our gratitude to the contributing artists for their collaboration and the permission to publish their images here.

Shifting towards a wider understanding of the archive and the roles it plays in contemporary screendance, Sonia Yorke-Pryce's paper investigates the aging body as a site of archival material and challenges aesthetics of western dance culture by revisiting her own stage work, *Tristesse* leading to the development of the film *Does the Dancing Have to Stop?* Jeannette Ginslov provides additional insights into new approaches to archival material in screendance by describing a collaborative research practice that focuses on creating an archive of dancers' emotive states and embodied memories, which are further expanded via interactions with software technology.

Finally, Kaixuan Yao applies French philosophy to broaden our understanding of the archive and its potentialities in an analysis of the nostalgic affect of cine-choreographies within two narrative films and their "corporeal" access to specific historical events (the Cold War and the German Autumn).

While dance is often mislabeled as an ephemeral art form, gone within an instant; images tend to be considered on the opposite end of the spectrum, as a lasting resource capable of freezing time. While both of these commonly held assumptions are oversimplified and often overturned by dance and visual studies scholars, use of the archive further complicates the temporal relationship between artistic media. As a result, creative processes and temporality in relation to archival material are shared elements among all contributions to this section. The papers published here reveal the interconnectivity between time and archival material in unexpected ways that demonstrate diverse relationships to circularity, ephemerality and permanence that amplify what the present, past and future may look or feel like. True to the nature of the archive's capacity to question the nature of time, the films discussed within this section provide additional layers of movement, both within and of the image, interweaving potential futures amidst their embodied and embedded historicities.

We would like to extend our warm thanks to the board of the *ISJD* for their support of this thematic section, with particular gratitude to Kyra Norman for her generosity and assistance as journal editor.

Biographies

Marisa C. Hayes is an interdisciplinary Franco-American maker and thinker based in Paris. Currently, her research explores ecology and the Anthropocene within the

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performing arts and moving images. She has contributed articles and chapters to *The International Journal of Screendance*, *Alternatives Théâtrales*, *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies* (ed. Douglas Rosenberg), *La Septième Obsession*, *Dance Magazine*, and *Dance International*. A chapter from her master's thesis on screendance pedagogy at La Sorbonne was also published in the book series *La creación híbrida en videodanza* (Mexico).

the book *Art in Motion: Current Research in Screendance* (Cambridge Scholars, 2015). Since 2016, Marisa has served as editor in chief of the dance research journal *Repères, cahier de danse* at La Briqueterie, National Choreographic Development Center. Her first monograph was published by Liverpool University Press in 2017 and analyzes the use of Butoh dance and Japanese theatre in Takeshi Shimizu's film, *Ju-on*. She is the founding co-director of the Festival International de Vidéo Danse de Bourgogne, which is currently preparing its 14th edition. Marisa travels regularly to teach and speak about screendance at art institutions and within higher education (the Louvre, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Theater Freiburg, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Inchicore College, Dublin; and the Hanoi Cinematheque, Vietnam; among others.). Her own films, created in collaboration with Franck Boulègue, have been screened internationally.

Luisa is an Anglo-Italian artist and a movement professional with a keen interest in film. Following a career in performance she began experimenting with film in 2009 and pursued this interest, obtaining an MA screendance from London Contemporary Dance School in London in 2020. During the MA she became particularly interested in editing archive material, a historical screening as part of the student-led screendance festival Frame Rush 2019, and edited a series of archive-based films to mark The Place's 50th year anniversary. Luisa collaborates as a film maker with dancers and choreographers, filming and editing a series of short films that have been exhibited internationally in festivals and galleries. Recently Luisa was invited to guest co-edit (together with Marisa Hayes) the section "Choreographing the Archive - Interfaces between Screendance and Archival Film Practices" for *The International Journal of Screendance*. Luisa is currently completing a Netflix-led training course (via Safe Sets) for the position of Intimacy Coordinator for Italian TV and film, and is relocating to Italy to start working on a series. She will also be continuing her independent research in Screendance.

1 Jacques Derrida in *Ghost dance*, director Ken McMullen, Channel Four Television, 1983.

2 Highway Anna, "Understanding The "Dance" In Radical Screendance", *The International Journal of Screendance*, Vol.4 (12-03-2014): p.51

3 Highway Anna, "Understanding The "Dance" In Radical Screendance", *The International Journal of Screendance*, Vol.4 (12-03-2014): p.46

4 Following volume 7 of the *IJSD* dedicated to David Hinton and Siobhan Davies' film *All This Can Happen* (2013), created entirely from archival photographs and film footage.

Erratum

9/13/2022: Corrected author's name to Kaixuan Yao.