

# A Note Towards

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## Abstract

Some reflections on the development of screendance since the launch of the International Journal of Screendance almost 10 years ago, taking the long view with regards to the relation between innovation, knowledge, history and teaching.

**Keywords:** invention, knowledge, non-knowledge, knowledge maps, Georges Bataille

The provocation in this issue by Katja Vaghi<sup>1</sup> led me to think about invention now and in the future of screendance. As Vaghi notes, inventiveness was at the heart of the International Journal of Screendance launch in 2010; so was the desire to be provocative, to invite debate, reflection, and challenges, whilst showcasing new work and new writing.

Vaghi makes a positive assessment of the field since 2010, but questions the sense of deficiency that continues to permeate some of the writing. She asks, “How can we still be lacking something?”<sup>2</sup> I propose that we turn this impatience into a creative impulse, and posit that screendance will always be incomplete and in the making, invented over and over and over again.

As suggested in the provocation, we can safely argue that screendance has reached a critical mass, and is proliferating in many ways and many places. In 2019 we have quite a good sense of the 20th century artists who contributed to what we now call screendance, and the dynamics that shaped the field. We have many discursive threads becoming refined over time on representation, mediation, intermediality, and criticality. We will not, however, have a definitive account, neither should there be one. Does an artwork not need to challenge what went before and shouldn't a curatorial project rethink the histories it works with, and imagine new pathways?

History can always be rewritten, and knowledge is not a pillow we can rest on. The French philosopher Georges Bataille challenged our concept of knowledge and the limits of reasoning. He proposed ‘non-knowledge’ as another kind of knowing, distinct from knowledge gained through rational enquiry.<sup>3</sup> In *Inner Experience*, Bataille plunged deep into experience and subjectivity, challenging the conventional notion of seeing as a path to knowledge, and arguing that knowledge hides and makes us blind. He rejected the kind of mastery promised by knowledge, claiming that it was limiting, and



not enough. But what is the relation between the rational mind and the non-rational, and how do they interact? Bataille wrote:

Non-knowledge lays bare, therefore I see what knowledge was hiding up to that point, but if I see, I know. Indeed I know, but non-knowledge again lays bare what I have known.<sup>4</sup>

Bataille used the notions of 'non-knowledge' and 'laying bare' to describe a different kind of seeing or knowing, which is perhaps more like sense recognition from an embodied, intuitive point of view. Bataille described this also as "half-blind movements" and as "movement from the heart."<sup>5</sup> The body and movement are of course central to screendance, and these metaphors may speak to those who are trying to make sense of the art of screendance and what it portrays. They are however metaphors for fleeting modes of understanding and we may need to accept that non-knowledge cannot be explained. However, the term serves to challenge what we understand by 'knowledge' and to point to its limits. As Bataille argued, knowledge is not only grasping something which we can therefore categorise and order, but knowledge also hides and masks the fugitive aspects of experience. Furthermore Bataille highlighted a circularity of this process, whereby knowledge is unmasked by a sense of non-knowledge, sense recognition or experience, which inevitably turns into knowledge as we reflect on that experience, until it is challenged again by a sense of the limitations of what is knowable, and so ad infinitum.

The work each of us does is marked by these cycles; through the work we navigate the unknown and shape our knowledge, sometimes through sound and image, and sometimes through words. Everyone has to find their own way, not unlike squirrels who are, apparently, not taught how to crack nuts but have to work it out themselves. Over time each artist and maker refines her or his approach, sometimes developing a recognisable body of work.

And where does this leave the teaching of the Masters Course in screendance, or, as Vaghi asks, "do we finally know what screendance is in order to teach it?"<sup>6</sup> A teaching space that concerns itself with an artform is perhaps mainly a space for research and experimentation, which is why Schools and Universities are so vital. Teaching and learning in this context mean developing and sharing tools with which to formulate questions and with which to test ideas and explore possibilities. There are knowledge maps of various kinds of course, but these are not written in stone. Knowledge is at best the little crumbs which helped Gretel map her way into the dense forest, and find her way back out.<sup>7</sup>

What I suspect is that future debates in screendance will be less concerned with form or history—although we will occasionally undo what we have done. Instead, screendances will continue to engage with the politics of space and place and the experience of time,

and envisage and represent multiplicities and diversities—as well as our relatedness, interdependence, strengths and fragilities—in order to investigate our lives inside an extraordinarily complex biosphere. Screendances will always be a chance to protest, to provoke and to dream, and to make new futures from the images and fragments of the past. In the first issue of the *IJSD* I referred to Rachel Moore’s insightful comment, that “the pleasure of the spectator resides not in the pure fantasy of illusion, but in providing a screen on which to exercise the ‘ebb and flow’ between the real and the copy.”<sup>8</sup> In the 21st century screens have very much become part of our lives, and our real and screenic worlds are forever intertwined. How screendance curates and exercises this ebb and flow, between who or how we are and who or how we might imagine to be, is its project and its challenge.

## Biography

Dr Claudia Kappenberg is a performance and media artist and Principal Lecturer at the University of Brighton, UK. She is a founder of *The International Journal of Screendance*. Recent writing has been published in *Art in Motion: Current Research in Screendance* (2015), *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies* (2016), *Syncope in Performing and Visual Arts* (2017), *Repères, cahier de danse* (2017) and *Performing Process: Sharing Dance and Choreographic Practice* (2018). Her performance and screen-based work consists of minimal choreographies which examine patterns of the everyday. At the heart of the practice is an interrogation into that which makes us human.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Katja Vaghi, “How Screendance Was Invented While We Were Busy Claiming It Wasn’t.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Batille, *Inner Experience*, 45-55.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, 52.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, 51.

<sup>6</sup> Vaghi, 127.

<sup>7</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex*, 153.

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Moore, *Savage Theory*, 87; cited in Claudia Kappenberg, "The Logic of the Copy," 39-40.

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