

Kinesthetic Empathy: Conditions for Viewing

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Kinaesthetic Empathy: Conditions for Viewing

Karen Wood

“The person who watches dancing does none of the physical work themselves but in perceiving the performance they experience the rhythm of it as though it were in their own body.”

- Adesola Akinleye, “Geography of the body,” p.21, emphasis added

The above quotation is a perfect articulation of what one can experience when watching dance, referred to in this chapter as kinaesthetic empathy. Kinaesthetic empathy can be loosely defined as the sensation of moving whilst watching movement, where the viewer can sense, as Ivar Hagendoorn points out, the “speed, effort, and changing body configuration”¹ of the dancer, as if performing the movement themselves. The word “kinesthesia” is derived from the Greek word *kine* (movement) and *aesthesis* (sensation). Combining kinesthesia with “empathy,” this concept emerges as an empathetic interaction between performer and viewer that embodies aspects of the performer’s movement. This interaction is a sensory experience, perhaps facilitated by emotion, memory, and imagination.

In particular, ideas of narrative and defamiliarization emerge as key filmic devices relating to the evocation of the kinaesthetic in screendance. For the viewer, aspects of emotion and memory become ways of kinaesthetically enhancing engagement with the medium. This chapter will further highlight audiences’ motivations to watch dance and seeks to explicate filmmakers’ techniques, such as “kinaesthetic defamiliarization,” as a key component in the kinaesthetic experience of the spectator.

Kinaesthesia, Kinaesthetic Empathy, and Perception

As a viewer, I have experienced sensations and emotions from empathising with and appreciating dance. Ann Daly has called dance a “kinaesthetic art”² and audiences’ experiences of watching dance are articulated by kinaesthetic, emotional, empathetic, and pleasurable responses. One might kinaesthetically experience the twists, turns, and jumps in a choreographic work, focussing on the dynamic qualities of the movement, or admiring the physical characteristics of the performer, appreciating the aesthetic form of the dancing body. Hagendoorn suggests that one creates motor imagery that connects movement positions together and that one can kinaesthetically experience the dynamics of the movement sequence by utilising our motor imagery.³ Dee Reynolds employs the term “kinaesthetic imagination”⁴ to suggest how viewers might participate in the energy and rhythms of a dancer. This indicates that viewers of screendance may engage in employing motor imagery when kinaesthetically experiencing a screendance performance.

Smyth, writing on kinaesthesia and communication in dance,⁵ incorporates neuropsychology into her research and considers whether kinesthesia is a communication channel on its own or a product of the other sensory channels. She questions whether what Charles Sherrington calls “exteroceptors” and “interoceptors”⁶ are involved in kinesthesia.⁷ Exteroceptors give us information about the external environment and interoceptors are concerned with one’s internal sensations. Smyth⁸ examines the information gained from other people’s movements and how this impacts the observer’s own movement system or kinaesthetic experience. She suggests two ways in which kinesthesia is involved in movement observation:

... one suggestion is that the perceptual input links to the motor command and somehow gives rise to sensations which actually are from the observer’s body,

and another is that the input links to stored memory representations of what movement feels like without involving the motor commands.⁹

Smyth points out that this does not account for people who cannot make the movements they are watching and suggests that kinaesthetic imagery is “flexible enough to make this only a minor objection to the second account”.¹⁰ Her suggestion of employment of memory representations is an interesting one and raises the question of whether kinaesthetic experience is enhanced by being able to perform the movement ourselves.

Reynolds has a unique approach to kinaesthesia and kinaesthetic empathy. She uses Rudolph Laban’s principles of weight, space, time, and flow when analysing effort and energy in movement, arguing that “we experience movement sensations resulting from effort attitudes to space, weight, time and flow.”¹¹ Like Smyth, she suggests that kinaesthesia is the ground for the senses’ “operation and interaction.”¹² Reynolds draws from the fields of philosophy and critical theory to explain kinaesthetic imagination in relation to consciousness and the body. She argues that dance spectators “need to experience participation in the performer’s movement rhythms” in order to consciously “activate their kinaesthetic imagination.”¹³ Kinaesthetic imagination as a concept is important to this chapter as it provides an interesting perspective on the viewing experience of the spectators of screendance who participated in this research. Although Reynolds discusses kinaesthetic imagination in relation to new technology, her work is based on theoretical considerations and not on empirical research.

It is important to note that all the scholars mentioned so far have written in this field with reference to live dance rather than screendance, and that these scholars are in the fields of aesthetic theory or cognitive neuroscience. There is little empirical qualitative research conducted on screendance in dance studies and no research to date in dance or film studies on

the kinaesthetic experience of watching screendance. However, there is research on emotion elicitation in film studies, which is implicitly linked to kinaesthetic empathy and which will be discussed below. Spectators often report that they experience an emotional response to part of a live or screen performance, or that they participate in the emotion portrayed to the audiences by the performers. My enquiry will explore how emotions facilitate kinaesthetic empathy.

Emotional Empathy and Engagement with Film

Emotions are often shown through facial expressions; people can empathise and sympathise with others' emotions through reading and interpreting known expressions on their faces. Vittorio Gallese, following his discovery of mirror neurons with Giacomo Rizzolatti in 1996, has continued to research empathy in response to art works. He refers to "embodied simulation" as a mechanism for empathetic responses to facial expressions and images.¹⁴ He posits that people have a "we-centric dimension,"¹⁵ which enables us to share the body state of the observed person through witnessing their behaviour, emotions, and displayed feelings. He clearly states that: "we do not accomplish this type of understanding *only* through explicit inference from analogy,"¹⁶ meaning that we use the embodied simulation mechanism to share the other's affective state and through this, gain direct understanding.

Gallese's research on facial expressions indicates that people imitate the facial expression of the observed person.¹⁷ Specifically, our mirror neuron system activates the same area of the brain as if we were feeling the emotion and expressing the same emotion being observed in the other. David Freedberg and Gallese,¹⁸ too, explore empathy and aesthetic experience and suggest that the beholder of the image "might find themselves automatically simulating the emotional expression, the movement or even the implied

movement within the representation.”¹⁹ Freedberg and Gallese’s theory of empathetic responses to art works entails the mechanisms in the brain, such as the activation of the sensorimotor cortex, that have been brought to the fore by the research on mirror neurons and the neural mappings of empathy and embodiment.

Taking these theories into consideration, empathetic responses to film could similarly lead to the simulation of emotional expression and movement as suggested by Freedberg and Gallese. Watching film can allow the spectator to look more closely at the movement, permitting a more detailed and intimate gaze at the action on screen and therefore engaging with emotional expression. Emotional engagement is closely linked to memory and may facilitate kinaesthetic empathy that one experiences. Research in the field of film studies offers many insights into the issues of emotion elicitation and emotional engagement as they relate to film spectatorship. Carl Plantinga discusses emotion elicitation as a principle motivator for viewing films. Describing the fundamental component of the film experience, he states that “expression and elicitation of emotion ... is worthy of study in its own right.”²⁰ He devotes one chapter of his book, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience* to “The Sensual Medium,” where he considers affect and mimicry in the context of film viewing. My ideas on kinaesthetic response in screendance audiences are indebted to Plantinga’s arguments in this chapter.

One might argue that most people can empathise with another person’s emotions and gestures because one experiences them ourselves. Experiencing empathy can be a key aspect of viewing dance performance. A performer is required to portray emotion and exaggerate gesture to depict a narrative, such as when ballet dancers have to tell the story of *Swan Lake* through their performance of the narrative elements. Emotions and gestures are sometimes emphasised on screen due to the ability to focus in and get close up to the action with the camera. What will now follow is a section that will elaborate on the aforementioned

theoretical underpinnings by drawing on viewers' and filmmakers' discussions and my own textual analysis of particular pieces of screendance. It will focus on kinaesthetic responses from the participants and will consider how the participants' experiences of kinaesthetic stimulation are the effects of filmmakers' techniques.

Audience responses; filmmakers' intentions

Kinaesthetic response is intertwined with other senses that produce the sensate body through which all experience flows. Emotions are inseparable from this embodied experience; kinaesthetic response is a consciously cognitive and reflective experience bound up with the activity of the senses. Plantinga's approach is valuable in understanding emotional elicitation in film. He asserts that the "emphasis on the importance of narrative as the governing element in eliciting emotional response" evokes other bodily responses.²¹ Plantinga's emphasis on the strong bond between emotion, narrative, and bodily responses is crucial to the analysis of spectators' responses to dancefilm. Viewers look for stories, even when there may not be an intended narrative. These implicit stories could create meaning whilst at the same time allowing the viewer to connect emotionally and corporeally.

Our sensate body provides the information that, through cognitive processing, produces an emotional response.²² Viewers capture the mood of the film through sensorial experience. However, challenges to kinaesthetic interaction and the kinaesthetic sensibility of the viewer are exposed in Alex Reuben's film *Linedance*.²³ Reuben employs lines to represent the human figure, made possible due to computerised motion capture software. The lines, or performers, are placed in limbo in space and there is no measure of gravity because a horizon line²⁴ is not present in the frame. This technique is unusual in screendance and creates a defamiliarised experience for the viewer. One research participant and audience member,

Julia, explicitly comments on the moment when she realised that what had been upsetting her was the deficient measure of gravity:

... It was the moment towards the end where one of them dropped through 2nd position down into a squat... it was such a shock after all that kind of standing, socialising, yea that was really sociable, it was just like oh. So that stages the memory and the thing about suddenly becoming aware of the floor in that... drop through, in that drop of gravity. There is no floor in the film and I realised that actually somewhere in me it had been upsetting me, the fact there was no spatial context to it and that they could be... so that the line of thought went 'oh my god yea that's right' I was sort of... what I experienced when he... it... he... I do not know... when that figure dropped down was 'oh there's the floor' ... (whispered the word God)²⁵

The habitual mould was broken for Julia and upset her viewing. Her relationship with gravity was challenged and the sudden realisation of the absent floor forced Julia out of this moment. The dancing figure's relationship with the floor disturbed her experience and the spatial context was the aspect of the film that defamiliarized Julia's experience.

In addition to spatial context, the defamiliarized experience happens with the form of the dancing figure in *Linedance*. Defamiliarization generates an unexpected reaction in the viewer, as the physical and physiological attributes of the human form are missing. For Patricia,²⁶ another participant, this caused confusion as to whether they were actually real people. She comments on the use of technology and is quite adamant about how they cannot be real people.

Conversely, Joanne's understanding was:

I think it was shot with real people and then something to do with the computer, because they were so natural... I thought no this must be, they were really dancing perfectly with the music, which I know very well, so I knew what was coming and when I saw them dancing I thought yes, they really are dancing naturally.²⁷

Joanne had prior knowledge of the music and through computer technology she was able to see the fluidity of the movement and go beyond the representational lines; her viewing experience was informed by her memory of the song and the rhythmical qualities within it. These qualities perhaps induced Joanne's ability to employ her embodied imagination and kinaesthetically empathise with the lines or stick men. In contrast, Patricia could not. Her conscious understanding of the film was literal; she saw lines and that is what they were. Their dialogue continues:

Patricia : For example the hips were straight, the line and then the other line and I couldn't see how they could be humans.

Joanne: When they were dancing they were moving very naturally.

Patricia and Joanne are trying to explain to each other their different perspectives of the film. Joanne claims that the lines moved very naturally and that she engaged with the dancing lines through her embodied imagination. Embodied imagination allows the viewer to create meaning and imagine their human presence on the screen. Informed by the other senses, embodied imagination brings the image on the screen to life and is personified in the present moment of watching. Straight lines are problematic and do not "move naturally" unless one imaginatively converts these lines into a representation of a form we know can move in the same way. Our own embodied existence is called forth to enhance the viewing

context. In an instance such as this, viewers may question the information they consciously hold about their embodied existence in an attempt to understand the defamiliarized experience.

The concept of defamiliarization is useful for thinking about some of the views that the artists expressed when they were asked about kinaesthetic empathy and about their consideration of the viewer's experience of their work. The concept of defamiliarization is not generally used to critique film, and specifically dancefilm. One of the few scholars to have written about defamiliarization in film is Paul Coughlin, who states:

The concept of defamiliarization revolves around the concept of seeing an everyday occurrence brought to focus through representation, thus, drawing attention to the act or object which is normally taken for granted because of its perceived banality or ordinariness.²⁸

Defamiliarization, therefore, compels the viewer to halt the process of habitualization and forces a greater degree of alertness to the otherwise commonplace. The viewer is forced to see regular objects and artefacts from a different vantage point. This concept has been very influential in art criticism and Brechtian theatre,²⁹ and is relevant to the work of several of the artists I am discussing.

I would argue that defamiliarization was one of Reuben's intentions as he claims he wants to make his audiences see things in different ways and challenge the expectations of dance. His chosen title is somewhat paradoxical; "*Linedance*" implies that one will see dancing in lines rather than lines that dance. The spectators' expectations are immediately challenged when the lines appear as dancing figures on the screen. Peter, a viewer, comments on the challenge of how he sees the movement in this film: "it does make you think about movement in a different way. It's not just being about what we do with the body." He implies that the film has made him think differently about movement and how the body can be

represented to audiences. His statement, “what we do with the body” offers the considerations that perhaps dance is not just about virtuosic performance but also about how the connection between the spectators and performers is encouraged in general.

The connection between the spectators and performers, then, is affected by embodied imagination and the haptic visuality³⁰ of the image. The viewers connect to the images on screen through their corporeal knowledge and kinaesthetic sensibility to surfaces and gravity. *Linedance* in particular indicates employment of embodied imagination; in the following section, I will build on this by looking at the film’s relationship with kinaesthetic response and the synchronicity of the performers with the music.

Kinaesthetic Response and Synchronicity

Kinaesthetic response can be affected by the synchronicity of the performer’s rhythms and can be a key motivation of the spectator to invest in the viewing. Reason and Reynolds discuss spectators’ motivations and the pleasures of watching live dance in relation to kinaesthetic response.³¹ They propose that kinaesthetic response may be the foundation to spectators’ motivations for watching dance and the pleasure gained from the experience, stating:

The consideration of pleasure alongside that of kinaesthesia allows us to recognise that for one spectator the empathetic response might be to allow themselves to be bodily carried away by an escapist flow of movement, while for another it is to feel viscerally involved in an awareness of effort, muscle and sinew.³²

Pleasure gained from kinaesthetically connecting with the dancer suggests that the spectators may admire, appreciate, use their imagination, and have an emotional response to the dancers. This means that the spectators use their embodied knowledge to connect with and compare

themselves with the physicality of the dancers before them. However, when there is absence of human, physiological, and physical attributes, such as skin, flesh, and bone—as in *Linedance*—it leaves the spectators little with which to empathise. Yet, because of the synchronicity of the movement and sound, spectators can kinaesthetically engage with the film. This type of engagement is shown in Peter’s comments:

...Erm, the thing that really stood out for me, was this idea of flow through the film... the representation of the body in constant movement but the body wasn’t the body because it was an action of an image. It was sort of removing the physical whilst still representing it, which was quite strange for me. There is nothing to empathise with and yet I can still feel that sense of flow, which was odd for me because the bodies had physically been removed, there weren’t any bodies there ...there was lots of sympathy between the movement that had been shown ... this abstraction of image... look at what we can do and we can still think it’s a human body... you know, we can even turn them into little dots and you think they’re human bodies.³³

The sense of flow that Peter mentions is described by Reason and Reynolds as “kinaesthetic contagion,”³⁴ whereby the spectators participate in the uplifting feeling of the movement and respond in an “immediate emotional manner.” The movement, which Peter discusses, is mediated through the screen rather than live performance and is not in human form. However, our embodied vision reaches beyond the physicality of the human form and can invest such details on a non-human form with qualities similar to human movement ability.

In addition, Lauren’s comments give another example of kinaesthetic contagion:

They were really, really fluid and I really liked how that made me question myself again...it felt to me really rhythmic and made me want to sway and tap my toes and I don't know if that was the music or if it was the fact that the images were still moving.

Lauren further mentions that she likes her expectations to be challenged and the impetus to question herself is part of her viewing strategy. The title of the film set up her expectations but surprised her pleasantly and provoked further questioning about what the movement contained. The implied social context in the film evoked the feeling of engagement in the dancing figures' social behaviour and provided additional information to imagine these figures as embodied, human beings. Furthermore, the movement and the music synchronised and, through their shared rhythm, kinaesthetically engaged her in the film.

I think part of my expectation was also based on the title *Linedance*, which it was not what you expect to what you saw. They [the figures]... seemed nonchalant in the way they interacted with each other and that was a nice little... a very social atmosphere like they could almost reach out and someone else could join in with them. So I just really liked the contrast between these inanimate, in my head, lines but they felt really human and social.³⁵

The synchronicity of the music and the movement in this film has provoked lively debate on the Watching Dance Project's website.³⁶ The film was part of a discussion thread in which people were asked to comment on their experience of watching. There were many comments on the synchronous relationship between the movement and the music, resulting in statements such as "wanted to join in with the dancing"; "felt myself mirroring the dancers in how they moved—basically, I wanted to join in"; and "made me feel loose, wavelike, and sunny." These expressions imply kinaesthetic engagement with the film, which is facilitated

by the music. To elucidate further, these comments, along with those collected from the viewers, highlight the relationship between the music and the movement and suggest participation in the rhythmic qualities of the film. Therefore, when musical rhythm and movement rhythm synchronise in this film, spectators engage with these qualities and a kinaesthetic response may be stimulated.

This view is supported, in part, by Vivian Sobchack's description of how all the senses combine to enable the spectator to embody the film experience. She states that the sensorium is an "amalgamation of the senses" involved in what we perceive.³⁷ Her work draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who claims that "all senses communicate through their significant core", which is the lived body.³⁸ Sobchack argues that it is the ability to incorporate all of our senses when one views a film that enriches our experience, which becomes embodied. What is not accounted for in Sobchack's theory is participation in synchronised music and movement in a film and how this can affect the sensorial experience. Spectators may gravitate towards synchronicity as soon as it can be seen/heard/felt in a film. The comment below, from Joanne, suggests that she is aware of looking for such synchronicity:

Yes, I realise that I have reactionary thoughts because I always look for harmony. It is weird because theoretically I wouldn't, but my instinct tends to look for harmony with the music and dance and images as well ... my own sense of harmony seeks to find it there where I watch.³⁹

Even though one may engage with a film through aspects that are defamiliarized, such as the technique of motion capture, if one can find synchronicity with strong elements such as the movement and the music in *Linedance*, it is more likely to stimulate a kinaesthetic response than the defamiliarized aspects alone. The participation in a rhythm external to that of our own body, which in this case is the rhythm of a film, produces sensations mediated through embodied vision that may be kinaesthetic. Embodied engagement and kinaesthetic

response is therefore affected by synchronicity, haptic visuality of the image, relationship to gravity, and participation in external rhythms.

Defamiliarization and Filmic Techniques

Shelly Love's film, *The Forgotten Circus*,⁴⁰ demonstrates more complex and intricate camera work and production. Love's use of colour, costumes, and set in this film are aesthetically appealing to the viewer. Dark red, green, black, and white are colours often seen in this film that are worn as tired, old costumes as Love tries to revive her apocalyptic vision of the circus. *The Forgotten Circus* is filmed with a dark background depicting a derelict house; the performers are dressed as clowns or circus performers with their faces painted. The floor on which the performers fall or tumble is covered in straw and the sound of the straw underneath them is very noticeable. This immediately alerts the aural sense and one can feel what it is like to land or roll on the surface. Acrobatics are performed on vertical poles and a performer walks up the poles before sliding down and up them, the latter being the reverse action (sliding down the poles is the only possible way of moving along them—when they slide up them, the footage is in reverse). Love reveals that “it is mesmerising to watch things backwards”⁴¹ and there is certainly something attractive about the sensual nature and characteristics of this film. There is a feeling of enclosure captured by its setting, which Sobchack specifically refers to when discussing her experience of watching *The Piano* by Jane Campion.⁴² She says that that our sensual modality enables us to “feel a visual atmosphere envelop us; to experience weight, suffocation and the need for air; to take flight in kinetic exhilaration and freedom even as we are relatively bound to our theatre seats.”⁴³ Our sensual experience is brought into being through a multitude of processes, from confusion, recognition, familiarity, and imagination. Love explicitly refers to wanting audiences to “enter

into a world that they might not necessarily experience ... creating an altered state ... using an imagination in the fantasy world.”⁴⁴

Part of experiencing the fantastical world is the performance of acrobatics in *The Forgotten Circus*. One may recognise the difficult physicality of these acts and this may stimulate kinaesthetic sensitivities. In watching this film, I remembered seeing a street performer doing the same thing. When I watched the street performer, I remember watching in detail, up close, what strength he needed to hold himself, the technique he was using to climb the pole and the risk he was taking when he released himself towards the floor with no net to catch him if he fell. My experience was one of anxiety for the performer and an admiration of a skill that he had, which ultimately was experienced through my kinaesthetic sense. The admiration of a skill does not mean that one is necessarily experiencing kinaesthetic empathy, but one can be empathic about the skill required for carrying out the feat. However, because of the involvement of physical movement, this can translate into a kinaesthetic experience of admiration for the performers' skills.

Love's use of the acrobatic movements combined with the mood of the film in the surrounding environment in *The Forgotten Circus* attempts to send audiences to a different place by creating an altered state. Audiences are required to use their imagination and fascination for a fantasy-like world. Love has an embodied awareness that shows in her practice and in the artistic nature of her work. Her films show defamiliarization in the employment of gestures with filmic techniques that create elements of surprise.

Love employs movement to supply narrative in another of her films, *Delia and George*.⁴⁵ She claims that she wants the audience to experience the narrative of this film through gestural movements alongside character and action. *Delia and George* has a less obvious narrative as story, as previously commented on by the participants, and is more open

to interpretation by the viewer. The film contains small, subtle guidance in the gestures, such as eating food and reading newspapers and actions including pedestrian movements.

Movement guides the narrative in this film, the gestural actions constructing the movement narrative. One participant, Patricia, comments on the movement narrative in *Delia and George*:

I think... it was important that for a big part of the video there is no real dance, there is movement, but not like natural everyday movements of the times ... So I think it was cool because it was unexpected and not traditional dance for a big part of it because they danced only at the end ... there was so much more than just dancing and movement there was a kind of story, I didn't pay attention enough to know if it was a proper story.⁴⁶

Patricia recognises the actions as “non-traditional,” gestural movement and enjoys the moment of unexpectedness in the film. She brings attention to aspects of the film that made it pleasurable for her: not just the dancing and movement, but a story from the movement. Although she admits she did not pay much attention to the story, she was aware of a narrative structure within the film. Patricia enjoys the openness of the film, perhaps letting her imagination wander into the fantasy world that Love claims she wants to create for her audiences. Patricia particularly engages with the visual aesthetics and gestural movement. This is a crucial element of Love's work, as she claims: “I want my audience to experience gesture and movements and everyday moments, from the character and acting alongside the movement material.”⁴⁷

Love claims to emphasise gesture and movement by appealing to the sensuality and imagination of the viewer. She constructs narratives in her films that engage the spectator through the identification of gesture, movement and character. Sherril Dodds asserts that,

“in narrative fictions, the way in which the text is structured causes the spectator to identify with certain characters.”⁴⁸ I would extend this further to suggest that the spectator does not just identify with the characters but with the gestures and movement as well. Identification with gestures and movement goes beyond identification with narrative; it becomes an embodied experience as it is familiar to our own gestural knowledge. The spectator has a kinaesthetic relationship with familiar gestures and movements and can appreciate the effort required to carry out these everyday gestures. The gestural movement may affect the spectator kinaesthetically and emotionally because viewers watch with an awareness of their own body.

Narrative Structures

Narrative structures have previously been mentioned because of their relationship with defamiliarization and kinaesthetic empathy. In this section, I want to focus on narrative structures and their relationship with kinaesthetic empathy when viewing screendance. In particular, I will focus on how the filmmakers employ narrative structures to engage their audiences kinaesthetically and what filmic techniques are used to do this.

Narrative brings to the fore the question of empathy and the notion that empathy happens when one identifies with people, places, emotion and action. In addition, empathy may invoke emotional reactions and one may identify with emotions portrayed in a performance. Emotion, perhaps, assists in facilitating empathy and kinaesthetic engagement. Emotion can be the linchpin to engaging the audience and narrative can be a key factor in this. Filmmaker, Rachel Davies uses narrative structure to engage viewer's emotion. Viewers relate to narrative through personal experience and they often want to find a story or meaning in a performance: to connect emotionally and kinaesthetically through narrative structures requires juxtaposing film clips to tell the story.

For the purpose of discussing narrative structures and kinaesthetic empathy, I will start with Davies' film, *Gold*.⁴⁹ Her work flits between moments of realism and anti-realism. In *Gold*, for example, she reveals the lives of two young gymnasts, which is autobiographical for Davies. The film follows two young gymnasts at home and at training. It cuts from the girls seated on their sofa at home to doing gymnastic movements on the beam in the gym and vice versa. Davies cleverly links the girls somersaulting off the beam but landing seated on their couch. This is achieved through an intricate process in editing: matching the clips for the delicate moments where the girls start to fall from their somersault off the beam in the gym so that their descent is caught and quickly switched to them landing on the sofa in a completely different outfit and environment. What becomes clear is that the film is about two girls at home and at training sessions, but there is nothing glaringly obvious to suggest a storyline; it is suggested by the juxtaposition of the film clips that the audiences must connect individually.

However, the realism of *Gold* is enhanced by the filming of some scenes from a static camera position, creating distance and a slightly voyeuristic perspective. There is an early scene in *Gold* where the camera is situated across the road from a line of houses, with a road and roundabout in between, and the viewer sees a boy riding his bike and a car driving on this road. Another moment where the camera is static is when the girls are training in the gym. One of the girls holds a handstand while the other girl performs other gymnastic movements; at the same time, some smaller gym students roll a mattress across the gym in the background. The girls eventually join together in simultaneous movement, holding handstands in the frame. There are also shots of memorabilia on the wall of the gym, which include black and white pictures of previous gymnasts at competitions. All of these examples demonstrate the style and feel of a documentary, where the camera position creates distance and a feeling of looking in on a person's world. The viewer is given the opportunity to take in

the whole picture. This film has moments of a documentary style combined with more abstract moments; Davies admits, “it [the film] was more about my experience, some kind of autobiography ... a reminder of what my childhood was like in Stockport.”⁵⁰ The film captures instances in the lives of the performers, displaying these personal moments.

Gold contains close-up shots of the performers, changing camera angles in shots, clips edited in black and white and tracking shots. The film uses an amalgamation of techniques. Davies employs a mixture of straight cuts and changing angles of the camera to form the narrative. The narrative is not completely apparent nor is it linear, but it captures the essence of an emerging story. There are elements in the film that invoke memories of being a teenager: doing sporting activities, lounging around in the home under the watchful eye of the father, and experiencing banter between friends. Equally, young teenage gymnasts performing acrobatic feats encourage admiration for their virtuosic capabilities. These elements provide a loose structure of a narrative and allow a certain amount of freedom for interpretation by the viewer.

Davies employs social realism and abstract narratives to connect, as she claims, emotionally and kinaesthetically to the viewer. Screendance has developed its own relationships with narrative structures that may engage the viewer emotionally, kinaesthetically and through memory and imagination. These aspects of engagement, when combined with movement, become more ambiguous than realist structures. According to Allen Kaeja,⁵¹ narrative is often used as a structure in screendance and is employed to invoke memory and curiosity in the spectator. The filmmaker can emphasize ideas or themes when an occasion for disjointed or fantasy-like narrative occurs, which can contribute to the storytelling. The dance filmmaker can use narrative to exaggerate experimental and fantastical ideas to encourage the spectator to be curious. What can grip the spectator is an

opportunity to use his or her imagination and to let his or her subjective interpretation have the freedom to play out.

In screendance, narrative focuses attention on gesture, action, and full bodily movement. In addition, there is tension between following the narrative and engaging with the narrative components. Spectators' engagement with gesture and movement may be informed by kinaesthetic and embodied knowledge. Movement in narrative may be recognised from past experiences that are rich with embodied and kinaesthetic knowledge that one sub-consciously employs to deepen our desires in viewing film. Of course, the reflection of real experience in film is often idealised and exaggerated through narrative structures and cinematography.⁵² Therefore, when considering audiences' responses, narrative has an important role to play in relation to the stimulation of kinaesthetic empathy and audiences' motivations for watching screendance.

Conclusion

Viewing conditions of kinaesthetic empathy are what bring audiences to participate in watching and are a measure of the investment they are willing to offer. Making sense of a film, challenging one's interpretation skills, and seeking curiosity and attachment are conditions of our motivations and our investment in engagement with the media. Barker states: "a film is not simply a 'film' to a high investor—it is a source of ideas, images, imaginings that can be transported out of the world of the strictly cinematic into other areas of a person's life."⁵³ In addition to cinema, this can be applied to the viewing of a reality television programme, where investment is high due to the obligation to follow the story for the duration of the programme and whether one takes the position of fan.⁵⁴ Equally with television audiences, investment can be extremely low due to the viewing context and

fragmented viewing. However, for both cinema and television viewing, motivations offer the viewer ideas, images, and opportunities to integrate imaginings and reminders into their personal experience. The level of investment and indeed motivations as conditions of engagement for viewing impact on kinaesthetic empathy experienced with dance on screen as a viewing pleasure.

Kinaesthetic empathy as a key viewing pleasure, then, changes our understanding of engagement with media through filmic techniques, viewing strategies, and social and personal values. Filmic techniques, such as the employment of close-up shots, defamiliarized camera angles, and editing that juxtaposes images for kinaesthetic effect, enhance kinaesthetic experience. Viewers' responses suggest that these techniques may promote the disappearance of boundaries between the screen and the viewer, thus entering into the realm of the unconscious state. The active, pre-reflective, non-conscious state has an importance in the kinaesthetically empathetic experience. For the viewer to have the boundaries blurred between screen and self requires an active participation with filmic techniques.

In addition, narrative as a filmic technique is a way of engaging the viewer through anticipation, imaginings, reminders, curiosity, and attachment. Narrative structures facilitate access to the kinaesthetic qualities of dance on screen. When the viewer embodies the kinaesthetic qualities, their viewing strategy may be embedded in personal and acculturated history. Personal memories from past experiences are triggered by moments in the media that contain familiar elements for the viewer. Interpretations and meanings are made from memories of similar happenings, familiar music associated with a past experience, a familiar expression or emotion, and an imagined desire to be what one sees on screen. We watch media situated in a body of socially and personally acculturated inscriptions and memories.

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Abstract: The aim of this chapter is to use the concept of kinaesthetic empathy as a framework to investigate the production and reception of dance made for the screen.

Discussion of kinaesthetic empathy is central to dance research that explores responses to live dance performances, but it has been little considered in relation to the experience of screendance and if there are synergies between them. As a concept, kinaesthetic empathy describes the experience of dance as something that is embodied and experiential. This chapter employs kinaesthetic empathy as a key focus through which to analyse choreographers' intentions in making, and audience responses to watching, screendance across a range of formats and styles, and whether there are common contributors to the viewing experience. The research for this chapter is part of a recently completed PhD thesis examining kinaesthetic empathy and screendance audiences. Qualitative methods were

employed to gather information from filmmakers and audiences (a pseudonym will be used when referring to conversations with the audience members), to investigate the creative process of making screendance and to explore the experience of the spectator. These methods were in the form of interviews with filmmakers and focus groups with viewers. The findings revealed that viewers bring different experiences and histories with them to a viewing experience; however, there are shared conditions when experiencing kinaesthetic empathy.

Keywords: kinaesthetic, empathy, embodied, audiences, viewer, dancefilm, screendance, movement.

Biography: Karen Wood recently completed her PhD dissertation at the University of Manchester, entitled “Kinaesthetic Empathy and Screendance Audiences,” as part of the Watching Dance: Kinaesthetic Empathy Project. She is an independent dance practitioner based in Manchester, interested in educating, researching, and performance. Her main interests lie in the training of dancers and, in particular, how supplementary training helps to improve dancers’ knowledge of their body and thus improves performance. Other interests include how dancers acquire kinaesthetic sensibilities and how this affects embodied knowledge and dance performance and the act of viewing dance. She also holds an MSc in Dance Science from Trinity Laban, London.

Notes

¹ Ivar Hagendoorn, “Some speculative hypothesis about the nature and perception of dance and choreography,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11 (2008): 79-110.

² Ann Daly, “Dance history and feminist theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the male gaze,” in *Gender in performance: The presentation of difference in the performing arts*, ed.

Laurence Senelick (Hanover, NH, Tufts University/ University Press of New England, 1992), 239-259.

³ Hagendoorn, "Some speculative hypothesis," 79-110.

⁴ Dee Reynolds, *Rhythmic subjects: Uses of energy in the dances of Mary Wigman, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham* (Alton: Dance Books, 2007).

⁵ Mary Smyth, "Kinesthetic communication in dance," *Dance Research Journal* 16, no. 2, (1984): 19-23.

⁶ Charles Sherrington, *The integrative action of the nervous system* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1906).

⁷ Smyth, "Kinesthetic communication in dance," 19.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects*, 185.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 187.

¹⁴ Vittorio Gallese, "Empathy, Embodied Simulation and the Brain: Commentary on Aragno and Zepf/Hartmann," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 56, no. 3 (2008): 769-781.

¹⁵ Gallese. "Empathy, Embodied Simulation and the Brain," 771.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, "Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience," *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences* 11, no. 5 (2007): 197-203.

¹⁹ Freedberg and Gallese, "Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience," 198.

²⁰ Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American film and the spectator's experience* (London: University of California Press Ltd, 2009), 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

²² Antonio Damasio, *The feeling of what happens: Body, emotion and the making of consciousness* (London: Vintage Books, 2000).

²³ *Linedance*. DVD. Directed by Alex Reuben. (England: MJW Productions Ltd, 2004).

²⁴ A horizon line gives the viewer judgment of space, something to measure the dancer against and a depth to the frame. See Evan E. Siebens, "Dancing with the Camera: The Dance Cinematographer," in *Envisioning dance: On film and video*, ed. Judy Mitoma (London: Routledge, 2002), 218-223.

²⁵ Julia, interview with Karen Wood, research focus group interview (Manchester, February 17, 2010). Ellipses are in the original transcript. A "position" in dance where the feet are usually a foot and a half length away from each other.

²⁶ Patricia, interview with Karen Wood, research focus group interview (Manchester, February 17, 2010).

²⁷ Joanne, interview with Karen Wood, research focus group interview (Manchester, February 17, 2010).

²⁸ Paul Coughlin, "Sublime moments," *Senses of Cinema* 11 (2000).

<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/11/sublime.html>. Retrieved July 14, 2010.

²⁹ Victor Erlich, *Russian formalism: History – doctrine* (Stoughton, M.A.: The Alpine Press, 1965).

³⁰ For a more detailed explanation of this concept, see Laura Marks, *Skin of film: Intercultural cinema, embodiment and the senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

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- ³¹ Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds, "Kinaesthesia, empathy and related pleasures: An inquiry into audience experiences of watching dance," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2, (2010): 49-75.
- ³² Ibid. 72.
- ³³ Peter, interview with Karen Wood, research focus group interview (Manchester, February 17, 2010).
- ³⁴ Reason and Reynolds, "Kinaesthesia, empathy and related pleasures," 71.
- ³⁵ Lauren, interview with Karen Wood, research focus group interview (Manchester, February 17, 2010).
- ³⁶ See www.watchingdance.org.
- ³⁷ Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal thoughts: Embodiment and moving image culture* (California: University of California Press Ltd, 2004), 60.
- ³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, cited in Sobchack, *Carnal thoughts*, 71.
- ³⁹ Joanne, interview with Karen Wood, research focus group interview (Manchester, February 17, 2010).
- ⁴⁰ *The Forgotten Circus*. DVD. Directed by Shelly Love. (England: M.J.W.Productions Ltd., 2008).
- ⁴¹ Shelly Love, personal interview with Karen Wood (London, October, 2009).
- ⁴² *The Piano*. Film. Directed by Jane Campion. (Australia. Jan Chapman, 1993).
- ⁴³ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 65.
- ⁴⁴ Shelly Love, personal interview with Karen Wood (London, October, 2009).
- ⁴⁵ *Delia and George*. DVD. Directed by Shelly Love. (England: M.J.W. Productions Ltd., 2005).
- ⁴⁶ Patricia, interview with Karen Wood, research focus group interview (Manchester, February 17, 2010).

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- ⁴⁷ Shelly Love, personal interview with Karen Wood (London, October, 2009).
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- ⁵⁰ Rachel Davies, personal interview with Karen Wood (London, December, 2009).
- ⁵¹ Allen Kaeja, "Moving memories," in *Screendance: The State of the Art*, ed. J. Vokoun, American Dance Film Festival Conference, Duke University, Durham, N.C. 6-9th July, 2006.
- ⁵² Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*.
- ⁵³ Martin Barker, "I have seen the future and it is not here yet...; or, on being ambitious for audience research," *The Communication Review* 9, no 2, (2006): 123-141.
- ⁵⁴ See Henry Jenkins, *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), as well as Jolie Jenson, "Fandom as pathology: The consequences of characterisation," in *Adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media*, ed. Lisa. A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 9-26.