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Editorial: Field Perceptions

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This sixth volume of the International Journal of Screendance started as an [open call](#) in which we sought contributions that might “test, provoke and challenge screendance work and practices, debates, and theoretical positions.”¹ We hoped—and continue to hope—that IJSD might become a platform through which artists, students, scholars, and audiences are able to address, contextualize, and reflect on experiences and philosophies of dancing with, on, in front of, and next to screens, and how these screens may or may not matter to our creative and intellectual lives.

In volume 5 of IJSD—and our first as editors of the journal—we asked what and who the screendance community might include and involve. This was, in part, a concerted editorial effort to be less precious about the edges of the screendance community, and to recognize that our dancing lives are saturated by screens of all kinds. We did this by including a range of articles, interviews, and opinions, from conventional scholarly writing to first person points of view. In volume 6 we continue this approach to IJSD in order to continue to expand the scholarly and artistic discourses that surround screendance practices and thinking.

Editing submissions based on an open call is indeed a curious and *messy* experience: it is neither controlled nor ordered. Every call demands a response, but an open call is an invitation to the unknown. Our open call *landed* with the contributors gathered here, and in answering our solicitation, they returned our open call with a diagrammatic echo of the field. With a positioning *ping*, each contributor offers a perspective in and on the field we collectively create and share. But how to make sense of this seemingly arbitrary collection of authored ideas, writings, thoughts, and images? As we engage with the authors and their writing, a shape begins to emerge. At times it appears vaguely epidemiological—as if we are not only observing what is there, but also trying to make sense of the patterns, forms, and relationships that exist between and across the materials. Our understandings, biases, research priorities, and tastes (as editors) are consequently shaped by the people who have taken the time to submit to IJSD, who answer its call. Having issued an invitation, we understand that our primary role

as editors is to listen and respond to the shifts, changes, and plasticity of the field, and in particular the practices that build and stretch the field from the ground up.

Within the context of our editorial role, we have tried to give further shape to the contributions gathered in this issue, to pull out themes and points of connection, to organize them into a collection of ideas that resonate together, even as we recognize the contemporary habit of reading journal articles as stand-alone entities. Standing back, and with the privilege of having first eyes (and ears) on this collection of articles, points of view, interviews, and reviews, there seem to be four distinct *containers* that reveal the connections between our authors' arguments, methods, interests, and practices. These are:

- Reflections on practice and process
- Screendance pedagogy
- Dance on the popular screen
- Screendance festivals and disciplinary debate

Reflections on practice and process

Jennifer Nikolais reflects on her improvisation practice working with *camera-dancers*, and more recently with motion capture technology, in order to propose a type of camera dramaturgy. She positions her thinking and practice in relation to Maya Deren and Dziga Vertov.

Ruth Way and Russell Frampton place anthropological and phenomenological lenses on their film project *Blind Torrent* which itself calls on histories of site-specific and somatic movement practices. Their "critical praxis"² joins a growing body of practice-as-research texts that artist-scholars use to frame their work and share key aspects of research and artistic processes.

Sarah Friedland casts a critical eye on the ways in which gestures—acts that approach meaning—are used as the "choreography of film genre."³ Her perspective reflects on the thinking and writing of Roland Barthes in particular, film studies more generally, and calls attention to the ways in which viewers recognize—and embody—gesture in genre films.

Sylvie Vitaglione investigates locations in screendance films by Isabel Rocamora, Thierry de Mey, Jukka Rajala-Granstubbon, Orsola Valenti, and Wim Vandekeybus. Her perspective distinguishes site-specificity from the ways in which the material characteristics of sites provide tangible links between the body and location.

Friedland and Vitaglione's articles both conceive alternative ways in which to imagine and watch the work of other practitioners. Their writing asks us to render our

experiences and languages as choreographers and movement specialists in relation to moving images on screen.

This volume of IJSD contains three reviews, and each—to a greater or lesser extent—invites questions about the nature of choreographic practice, and how those practices are directly or indirectly mediated by screens and digital technologies. In her review of Sarah Keller's book *Maya Deren: Incomplete Control*, Karen Wood responds positively to the way in which Keller emphasizes Deren's *incomplete* practices and willingness to give space to unresolved binaries.

Whereas Deren is widely regarded as a [key figure in the evolution of screendance](#) without, however, being a dance-maker, Bebe Miller is a choreographer in the usual sense of the word. Miller adapts her work and process to the small screen in her iBook *Dance Fort: A History*, turning to the ways in which words, sounds, images, and video might *contain* the tastes, experiences, and understandings of her stage-based work *A History* (which itself mines previous works for content). Hannah Kosstrin reviews the iBook, and responds to how the materials of Miller's work become mediated resources for others. It is a screen-based choreography of interaction, review, and exchange.

Finally, we turn to the practice of philosophy and choreographic thinking in relation to digital and mediated technologies. Ariadne Mikou reviews Stamatia Portanova's book *Moving without a Body: Digital Philosophy and Choreographic Thoughts* and is drawn to how Portanova articulates the ways in which software structures "underpin video dance, motion capture, and choreographic software."⁴ For Mikou, Portanova's work to rethink and extend the perception of movement and choreography is vital.

Together, these reviews reveal contemporary directions in screendance practice and scholarship, moving across platforms and media, abutting dance technology, revisiting canonical figures, and making new screen spaces available to movement compositions.

Screendance pedagogy

The growth of screendance is reflected by the popularity of screendance courses and modules in higher education institutions, and as the number of such courses grow, a robust conversation around screendance pedagogy is emerging. To foster and deepen this discussion, renowned screendance artists Douglas Rosenberg and Katrina McPherson organized and led the [Symposium on Teaching Screendance](#) at American Dance Festival in 2015 and the [Teaching Screendance: Creating a Practice-Based Pedagogy panel](#) at Dance Films Association in 2016. Inspired by these events, we conducted some interviews about current academic training in the UK and US.

IJSD co-editor Simon Ellis discusses experiences of assessing undergraduate screendance with his former colleague Arabella Stanger. Together they reflect on the

way students adopt *genres* in their films, the beautiful mix of film literacy and naïvety, and the ways in which opening and closing credits take on a life of their own. Co-editor Harmony Bench brings together a series of interviews with emerging and established screendance filmmakers—Jason Bahling, Ben Estabrook, Natalie Gotter, Ellen Maynard, and Eric Nordstrom—to reflect on academic training, professional life, the economics of screendance, and changes in the field. These discussions offer timely perspectives on screendance teaching and learning.

We find that interviews have become an important feature of this journal as a way to hear from participants in the field of screendance who might not otherwise be represented in these pages, and we will continue to look for provocative and useful conversations between screendance practitioners, scholars, teachers, and students.

Another new idea that has emerged with this issue is that of curated tours of historical and contemporary screendance works that can be found on the Web. We asked Katrina McPherson to trawl the Internet for some of her old and new film favorites. Her tour is broad ranging and surprising, and provides genuine insight into how influence is felt and transmitted in screendance. This model offers an alternate means of writing the collective and personal creative histories of the field and its practitioners, and we are eager to explore this idea further in future issues.

Dance on the popular screen

Popular film, television, and especially music videos continue to be important to how our readers and contributors write about, think, and practice screendance. These videos are readily available, include open and diverse ways of moving and dancing, and often unite contemporary choreographic forms with popular music. In this volume, there are articles that investigate specifically music videos.

Samuel Benagr and Terry Oforu consider the cultural value of the music video *Heyba* by Ghanaian artist Edem. They also discuss the presence of dance on television in Ghana and the ways in which Afrocentrism is influenced by western biases. Benagr and Oforu reveal that music videos continue to be a vital aspect of how we understand culture, identity, and dancing.

Melissa Blanco-Borelli takes us on a tour of the *spasm* as choreography in music videos by Talking Heads, Radiohead, and Atoms for Peace. She places the dancing spasm in the context of neoliberal production and productivity, and asks how the spasm might function as a way to resist overproduction.

The work of Michel Gondry—and in particular his music video *Let Forever Be*—is treated by Addie Tsai as a means to consider the way our lives and bodies shift between analogue and digital experiences. Tsai wonders to what extent Gondry's

visualization and treatment of the human body might be useful to screendance scholarship and practice.

Screendance festivals and disciplinary debate

We have three distinct responses to two different European festivals. Kyra Norman and Hamish MacPherson reflect on the [Leeds International Film Festival Screendance Competition](#), and Wyn Pottratz asks some questions of screendance that were provoked by her time at the [Light Moves Festival of Screendance](#) in Limerick, Ireland.

London-based artist Hamish MacPherson—speaking from a “little [choreographic] corner,”⁵ perhaps even as an outsider to screendance—wonders about the *rules* for the LIFF Screendance Competition, and also what work lies outside of “glossy but unimaginative examples of conventional contemporary dance in beautifully shot landscapes.”⁶ There are large questions here—questions that will be familiar to readers of *IJSD*—about curation, imagination, and even the value of screendance as a field.

For Pottratz, the question of understanding and defining the limits or edges of screendance is important. She asks, “[surely] screendance cannot be everything?”⁷ and then refers back to [Opensource {Videodance}](#), a meeting of artists and scholars first held in Scotland in June 2006. At that time, some of the people involved wrote a *(Hu)Manifesto* that Pottratz suggests might be worth revisiting at a similar event or conference.

Norman describes her own response to the LIFF Screendance Competition as a *review* of the “form of the event.”⁸ She values the ways in which festivals invite us to view screendances through other screen theories and practices, and discusses the point at which audiences don’t appear to be seeing what they understand the form to be. Whereas MacPherson seems to dissolve any *need* for screendance as a discipline, Norman’s interest is in continuing the debate(s) around disciplinary boundaries and how these both nourish the field and afford its possibility for change and adaptation. In pursuing this aim, Norman provides a meta-level discussion of how *IJSD* contributes to articulating the boundaries of the field, and thus provides a welcome opportunity for critical reflection.

The contributions gathered in this issue generate a composite image of the field—not a snapshot, but series of relations or a particular navigation. We imagine this journal as a city. We understand that from the outside looking in it is easy to believe that the values, agendas, and even tastes of the editorial team and board of *IJSD* form a type of screendance edifice, a “model of watertight compartments and segregated studies”;⁹ perhaps even a walled city. Indeed, we recognize that while, as editors, we wish to reflect the diversity of the field, the very gate-keeping and curatorial positions in which we find ourselves give us and *IJSD* the trappings of an institution. Further, it is

only with the support of institutions, specifically The Ohio State University and Coventry University, that we are able to engage in this editorial labor and provide the screendance field with open-access content. Though we rely on them, it is not a striated¹⁰ city of institutions in which we imagine ourselves. We do not fancy ourselves guides pointing out staid attractions to tourist-readers. How else might we understand cities and the creative and intellectual spaces IJSD tries to carve out?

The Situationists were the ‘free-radicals’ of urbanism – free artists and professional amateurs ... [who] theorised a city of situations that overlap, patch, collide, criss-cross, cluster, and punctuate a city by surprise. In the city, the past, present and future all overlap in a messy configuration ... hence all of the divergent factors of a city cannot be fully understood, far less controlled or ordered. This recognition of the complex interplay between elements, interactions and people provides a more dynamic way of viewing and understanding the city.¹¹

Screendance is not a field with only monuments to remark upon (though we have those too). The field, its points of reference, and its boundaries are not determined in advance. They are all a dynamic effect of participation, and, as Simon Fildes remarks about openspace technology, “Whoever shows up are the right people.”¹²

A field is an effect of relations, of proximities and distances between people and practices that emerge as distinct only against the background of the field. As Brian Massumi notes in his prelude to philosopher and dance scholar Erin Manning’s book *Always More Than One*, “We all chunk. We are all categorizers and users. Life’s conventional elements demand that of us. But we are also transcendental fielders. After all, a chunk is only a chunk against the contrasting background of the field ...”¹³ Can we grasp the field in its slippery amorphousness without requiring boundaries and defining edges? Can we conceive of the field of screendance as what Manning calls a *milieu*, inviting a “topological twist”¹⁴ into the field, where edges give way to surroundings, ends to middles, and boundaries to in-betweens? Is it possible to sustain a “field perception”¹⁵ that does not mistake the field’s products for the field’s production? Can a field perception further accommodate the different needs of festivals with their market pressures, audiences, scholars, and above all screendance makers? Patterns and affiliations emerge from creative practice, giving shape to the field and chunking out aesthetic and other domains. Yet creative practices necessarily escape the categories and themes they seem to generate (which, in any case, emerge in retrospect and not at the point of making), and screendance festival curators, audiences, and juries routinely reward artists who do not reflect the seemingly agreed-upon definitions of the field’s contours—its inclusions and its exclusions.

As a case in point, in February 2016, Harmony Bench attended a program of dance films curated by Mitchell Rose. [DANCE@30FPS](#) included *Home Alone (2013)*, a

promotional video for the internationally renowned Israeli dance company Batsheva. Directed by [Adi Halfin](#), *Home Alone* incorporates many framing and editing techniques audiences have come to expect of screendance. It has received numerous awards at dance film festivals worldwide, and received the Audience Choice award at DANCE@30FPS. And yet it is a commercial—an advertisement for Batsheva’s stage-based production. Just as some members of the audience were puzzled by the 2015 Leeds International Film Festival’s Jury Prize winner, Mariam Eqbal’s animated *Choreography for the Scanner* (2015), Bench was initially puzzled by *Home Alone*, and curious about what the inclusion of promotional content in dance film festivals might indicate about where screendance is headed. As these examples as well as the contents of this issue demonstrate, what falls within the larger container of screendance is up for debate—a debate that this journal has encouraged. The first volume of IJSD suggested that screendance had not yet been invented. Now in our sixth volume in as many years, we seem to be solidifying the suggestion that screendance includes any dance or edited movement onscreen, a position discomfiting for some of our readership—and at times, ourselves.

We recognize, however, that there is collective intelligence in the field, as with any self-organizing creative community. Tensions exist around boundaries and definitions, to be sure, and we offer the proposal that, while the maturation of the field is important, screendance needs to remain ambiguous to itself. There is fecundity in the unknowing, and the willingness to trust the distributed intelligence of the community foregrounds the collective labor involved in making a place in which to work. What we are emphasizing here can be thought of as a form of self-realization. That somehow, among economic, peer, industry, social, and political pressures, we come to understand our field through the act of making it. This is understanding from within as opposed to rules, criteria, and conventions imposed from without. At a stretch we can imagine that the Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume is hinting at the difficulties—even absurdities—of this kind of auto-awareness when he wrote:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.¹⁶

Audiences and filmmakers are only ever experiencing perceptions of screendance, not the thing itself. What actions and practices might such sensory perceptions afford? How do they feel? What might they help us say about our field? Implicit in Hume’s writing is a sense of connection and disconnection. That as observers and participants in the field of screendance our experiences, ideas, and actions are mediated through perceptual mechanisms, that are themselves filtered and adjusted through personal taste, desire, ambition, history, and memory. Portuguese neuroscientist Antonio

Damasio describes the human capacity to be aware of one's self while acknowledging the vastness and simplicity of the existential fine print, as *self coming to mind*.¹⁷ He regards consciousness as "Mind with a twist ... since we cannot be conscious without having a mind to be conscious of".¹⁸ If we can never catch ourselves without a perception, whether that is a field perception or a perception of an individuated chunk of information, how might we understand ourselves (as individuals and as a field) reflexively through what we perceive? Does field perception enable a field consciousness, a self coming to mind that comes to mind collectively through participation? We think so.

Our various—and current—sensory or perceptual worlds intersect with our remembered pasts to produce a kind of consciousness of the field. It is, of course, only partial awareness and our efforts to develop understanding of the nature of screendance are foiled by the limits of our imaginations and experiences. There is also no sense of unity in our perceptions of the field. Instead, there are capacities for relation. We find that the field moves—and we move with it—as we cultivate creative, scholarly, curatorial, pedagogical, and other techniques of relation. The screendance field's plasticity, resilience, and adaptive powers are unable to be contained; not by individuals, and certainly not by the contributors and editors of IJSD. Manning's description of dancing tango feels apt: "I am leading. But that does not mean I am deciding. Leading is more like initiating an opening, entering the gap, and then waiting to follow her response."¹⁹ We are both connected to and disconnected from the field itself. To what extent might we become conscious participants in such a distal kind of proximity? The temptation to suggest or state that *we know what the field is, and what it should and shouldn't be* is an effort to contain, and we imagine that this is a mistake. The implications of such a mistake are profound, and increasingly complex as new screendance artists keep asking how they might go about making work.

In her recent book *Artist at Work*, philosopher and performance arts theorist Bojana Kunst writes:

[The] emancipation of one's production conditions, the constant reflection on the models and protocols of production, is tightly connected to the contemporary models of production in the post-industrialised era.²⁰

Following Kunst's lead, perhaps it is the responsibility of screendance artists to understand the politics of their work by observing the conditions of production of their work. In other words, our community (however narrowly or broadly that might be defined) needs artists to continually challenge and question the means by which their work is made, framed, and presented. This demands energy and attention so that we remain open to as yet unthought of visions of performance, materials, screens, and presentation. It is a way of being with the world that is both cautious (lest we fall into the same traps as those before us) and willing to risk all. This is never more important

than at this time in our discipline when there is a striking tendency—in part rewarded by showcase festivals—for hyper-production in the aesthetics and feel of moving and dancing images. For independent artists, and new graduates emerging from screendance and film-related programs around the world, such modes of production—and perhaps even taste—are not sustainable.

In 2012 Tim Etchells—artistic director of UK-based theatre company [Forced Entertainment](#)—said this:

the good work in fact, the best of it, conforms to no agenda, is not a truly comfortable or fully compliant part of any scheme, plan or provision, that what you do as artists sets its own pace, place, aesthetic, [and] context ... and that the end, in the end, is the work you make, and that the work makes its own rules. Nothing less than this is good enough. Everything else is bullshit.²¹

This volume of the *International Journal of Screendance* represents a diverse cross-section of the interests, practices and curiosities of a screendance community that is developing and changing, and willing to question its own assumptions about the critical questions for the field. In its pages—or on your screens—we recognize that Etchells' words reflect that the cornerstone of screendance is the practice of screendance. Jaime Conde-Salazar writes, "the dance of the future keeps its ears open and this is why it always puts up a subversive resistance ... It never exists to reaffirm and feed institutions (such as authorship, culture, art, etc.) or disciplines (Dance, Work, etc.)."²² We must be conscious that the (screen)dance of the future, which can happen in any context, situation, moment, or relationship, does not pass unnoticed in front of us. Perhaps it might be that the goal of screendance practice is to "escape from the boxes ... to produce revelations,"²³ and that *IJSD*'s most useful struggle will be to try and keep up with the activity and change of the community.

We'd like to welcome and thank our new *IJSD* copy-editing team: Teoma Jackson Naccarato, Emilie Gallier, and Karen Wood. Thanks to Sarah Whatley of C-DaRE at Coventry University for this staffing support, and thanks to Ohio State University for their ongoing commitment to *IJSD*'s digital platform and distribution. In particular we'd like to acknowledge Ingrid Schneider and Melanie Schlosser, who have been so helpful in making this journal happen.

We hope you are able to find ideas contained within the pages of this journal that both support and provoke your thinking. The next volume of *IJSD* will be published in August of 2016. It is a special volume dedicated to writing about Siobhan Davies and David Hinton's film *All This Can Happen*, and is guest-edited by Claudia Kappenberg and Sarah Whatley, with editorial assistance from Becca Webber. We will also have an

open call in May 2016 for contributions to Volume 8 that will be published in Spring 2017.

Biographies

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Notes

¹ IJSD call for papers volume 6, <https://screendance.wordpress.com/2015/05/17/int-j-of-screendance-open-call-for-submissions-volume-6/>

² Way and Frampton, "Imagined Archaeology," 113.

³ Friedland, "The Meaning of the Moves," 39.

⁴ Mikou, "Moving Without A Body," 215.

⁵ MacPherson, "What Are Screendance Competitions Even For?" 178.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Pottratz, "Screendance Cannot be Everything" in this issue.

⁸ Norman, "Testing Ground," 167.

⁹ Conde-Salazar, *La Danza Del Futuro*, 69.

¹⁰ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* for a discussion of smooth and striated spaces.

¹¹ Bostwick-Lorenzo Eiroa and Jones, *The Spatial and Social Constructs of Creative Situations*, 260.

¹² Qtd. in Pottratz, 184.

¹³ Massumi, "Prelude," xii.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. In *Always More Than One*, Manning explores autistic versus neurotypical perception. She suggests that an autistic critique of the neurotypical might be that of premature "chunking" of the experiential world into discrete subjects and objects, whereas autistic perception retains a less-differentiated field of perception. "Autistic perception [is] persistently reminding us not to begin with the pre-chunked. Begin in the middle! it says. Don't assume to know in advance how the chunking will resolve!" (220). In his prelude to the book, Massumi describes autistic perception as "field perception." The notion arises from Manning's text, but the phrasing is Massumi's.

¹⁶ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part 4, Section 6.

¹⁷ See Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*.

¹⁸ Idem., 5.

¹⁹ Manning, *Relationescapes*, 30.

²⁰ Kunst, *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, eBook.

²¹ Etchells, "ISDF Opening - Tim Etchells."

²² Conde-Salazar, 73.

²³ Idem., 70.

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