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Abstract

This paper navigates through the author's process of photography and screendance during two specific cross-cultural collaborations in an effort to understand more deeply her creative process. In these dance projects, she analyzes and positions the camera as a witness and as a dancing body with attention to kinaesthetic empathy, improvisation, framing, and editing. This analysis explores the possibilities of co-creating with the camera and dancer in a current technological and internet landscape. She situates this analysis as a negotiation between her relationship with the camera and her own subjectivity as a Kathak dance practitioner within the context of dance and film in India. This paper detours from perceiving the camera as a passive, ethnographic, and historical experience in India and centers the discussion around the relationship between the moving body and the camera. The author then describes her pedagogy for the university classroom which arose from her creative process. By proposing the camera as an instigator to provoke an inquiry-based filmmaking process for students, she facilitates new ways to see, listen, create and connect in their tumultuous and unsteady pandemic world of 2020.

Keywords

camera, body, space, self-study, reflective practice, mediation, in-between, dance pedagogy, pandemic

Biography

Sumedha Bhattacharyya is an interdisciplinary dance artist, educator, researcher, dance filmmaker. She is an Academic Tutor and a Teaching and Research for Intellectual Pursuit (TRIP) Fellow at Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, India. Her artistic practice brings a fresh viewership of the camera as an artistic process for caring and contemplation, an enabling space for intergenerational bonding, and a narrative tool for dance pedagogy which challenges the existing formal qualities of 'seeing' dance. She is a current awardee of Kolkata Centre for Creativity Art Fellowship in Dance with her practice-based research project Duet with Camera that explores the space and spectatorship between the dancer and the camera.

Introduction

There is no denying that dance is witnessing an unprecedented mediation with technology. The body and technology have long been intertwined through mediatized engagements such as social media, publicity, content creation, online teaching, recording, documenting, and archiving. With the current Covid-19 pandemic, we also see a transformation in knowing, making, creating, and imagining dance in new ways. In these innovative interactions, there emanates a negotiation of how both the mediated body and the camera move through and create space together.

This paper is three-part; a short analysis and introduction of Indian dance film in relationship to my identity as a female Indian Kathak dancer and screendance filmmaker, a self-study reflection and analysis of my creative process in a photographic project and a dance film, and an analysis of my experience teaching screendance at the university level before and during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. In this paper, I ask: "How does the camera serve as an artistic tool for stimulating creativity which in turn can inform pedagogical action?" To answer this question, I bring forward my artistic interplay with the camera in which I explore and propose the camera as 'witness' and 'dancer.' Then, I outline my use of the camera as an 'instigator' to provoke students in their creative process.

Context: Locating My Nomadic Subjectivity

Since this paper aims to outline a movement-based pedagogy that arises from my creative process of dance for the camera, it is important to first locate my subjectivity and embodied experience in the Indian classical form Kathak and the hybrid art form of screendance. I turn to feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti's nomadic theory to articulate my in-betweenness within my artistic space. Braidotti writes about subjectivity "in terms of power as restrictive (*potesta*s) but also as empowering or affirmative (*potentia*)" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 4). My process of becoming an artist is rooted in negotiating these in-between spaces of power as a woman holding the camera in a male-dominated profession of filmmaking. This in-betweenness is also constructed by the pull between the restrictive space of the classical and the creative space of the hybrid mediatized environment. In my artistic work, my preliminary concerns are about spectatorship in dance as all my previous performances had been proscenium based with a clear distance between the performer and spectator, a "natural, real, and indeed privileged mode of representation" (Bleeker, 2011, p. 13). Clearly, in the filming of Indian classical dance performances, there is a "dominance of one model of vision" (McKinney, 2018, p. 102-118), that of the disembodied and static viewer. My artistry asks how these traditional modes of representation can be disrupted, not only in performance, but in the creative process as well.

Similarly, discussions and discourse around dance and film in India most often consider the camera merely as a passive, ethnographic, or historical capturing object. It becomes important to underline that the interaction of the camera with dance in India began as a purposeful galvanizing force of national pride. This was especially so in the post-independence Nehruvian era, wherein dance was to play the role of binding a very diverse country. A year after the French invention of the camera in 1839, daguerreotype cameras were advertised in Calcutta. Photographic societies in

Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras were beginning to appear on the scene, organizing events and building community from the 1850's onward. Since the arrival of the camera in India, the foundational base of this new medium, leading to photography, film, and television, has only grown stronger and more powerful over time.

India's dance film culture began as early as 1931 with Ardeshir Irani's *Alam Ara,* the first sound film to use music, song, and dance. Pioneering filmmaker Hiralal Sen's first film in 1902, *The Flower of Persia*, included a dancing sequence. He filmed many dances and performance-based films with his close connection to the Classic Theatre in Kolkata. His *Marjina Abdulla*, in 1907, complete with all its dances, unfortunately, perished in a fire with other Hiralal creations. Noteworthy are the cinematic experiments of the 1940s in Uday Shankar's *Kalpana* and Sadanand Menon's *Chandralekha* which worked with dance designed specifically for the camera. The pivotal importance of *Bala,* a dance documentary film on the Bharatanatyam dancer T. Balasaraswati, by Satyajit Ray in 1976, presented dance through a documentary lens. Satyajit Ray's *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* is also important to consider. His dreamy ghost scene builds a profound relationship with dance and the aesthetic of the screen by editing the film in a rhythmic process to heighten and present the choreography in a new way.

In *Bollywood* (formerly known as *Bombay Cinema*), a popular film industry based in Mumbai, the stories depicted are set within multiple and massive choreographed song and dance sequences. Women depicted in these stories can be perceived as a dancing body "mediated as an object of desire" (Chakraborty, 2016), voyeuristically via the camera eye. This current and popular voyeuristic relationship prompts me to consider the female dancing body in this Indian cinematic context. Were women always and only dancing in front of the camera in Indian film? No. Some women were behind the camera as empowered creators of dance for the screen. For example, in the 1920s, Fatma Begum was one of the first female filmmakers of her time. She defied male-dominated boundaries as a director, screenwriter, and actor. Anusuya Kumar, a writer and researcher, describes Fatma Begum's work by stating:

> Fatma Begum's choice of a Persian tale for her film instead of the Hindu mythological material used by her male precursors was remarkable for the way it first opened up rich imaginal fields from India's multicultural Parsi and Armenian communities and drew them into popular focus on screen. (Kumar, 2020, para 6)

She became a pioneer of fantasy cinema where she used trick photography to create early special effects. No known copies of her 1926 film *Bulbul-E-Paristan* exist despite her own established production house, Fatma Films. Further, another lesser-known and unacknowledged film is Pramod Pati's *Explorer* made in 1968. The unique rhythmic edits are entirely overlooked in the discourse of dance and film but are particularly interesting as they change the way choreography was perceived on screen. Despite the few films that utilized new editing strategies for capturing dance, most films continued to capture dance using the camera as a passive observer to document the autobiographical narrative of a dancer and recorded only the full-body dancing from a frontal perspective.

I contend that dance performance for the screen, in the current Indian context, especially classical dances, has an opportunity to go beyond

spectacle or novelty and to be seen and understood as an artistic process in relationship with specific cinematic technique. I believe this idea of the camera as an artistic process has not been fully initiated, let alone researched in-depth for dance in the Indian context. Further, the mutability of the role of the dancer becoming the cinematographer, director, and also editor has not been thoroughly explored. Because I find that the dancer most often remains a lone subject for the filmmaker, my choreographic research emerges at the intersection of dance and technology in order to explore the subjective experience of dancing not only for the camera, but also with the camera as an artistic process.

Dancing with the Camera: Camera as Witness

In 2017, as an Indian Kathak dancer and photographer, I collaborated with Iranian underground dance artist Hediyeh Azma in a dance project entitled *Imkaan* as an exploration of visual storytelling. Through our cross-cultural connection, we attempted to interact and move, as photographer and dancer, to witness and record the ambiguity of the moving body in transition. This was our first international photo project where I remained a dancer behind the camera exploring how a rectangular photographic frame could capture the ephemeral form of dance through a series of frozen photographic moments. *Imkaan*, which means possibility in Persian and Urdu, uses the camera as a witness to explore both transformative self-performance and identity creation in multiple landscapes.

Figure 1.

Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2017) *Separation*. From Imkaan.

In this project, I questioned what it meant to 'not dance' in locations where dance is illegal and to 'not dance' because the female body is limited and veiled. In Iran dancing is illegal and the female body, to be precise, cannot dance legally. This perspective is unlike India, where dance is most

often celebrated and the female body is seen as an embodiment of the nation. This idea was explored in the photographs we created by considering in-betweenness, moments in and out of time, shadows, and transition. This aesthetic and process are best mirrored through T.S Eliot's poem *Hollow Men*, which was used as an inspiration for *Imkaan*'s self-published photobook.

> Between the desire
> And the spasm
> Between the potency
> And the existence
> Between the essence
> And the descent
> Falls the Shadow (Eliot, 1925, stanza 5)

To explore this in-betweenness, we began by sharing our stories of displacement from our homeland. From our stories, we then consciously chose locations for each shot and framed these locations as our 'still imagery.' As we worked in each location, I merged my perception and movement with the eye of the camera, and together we became a witness to the story and movement of Hediyeh Azma.

Important in this project and our artistic process was the idea that everyone and everything is constantly under the shadow of socio-political and cultural transition. This is especially true during our current global Covid-19 pandemic. Transition is inevitable. Here Azma's choreographed body is juxtaposed over street graffiti, caged inside wired enclosures, or enmeshed between tangled foliage (Figure 2 and 3). Particular attention is given to the affective qualities of these spaces in this work.

Figure 2.

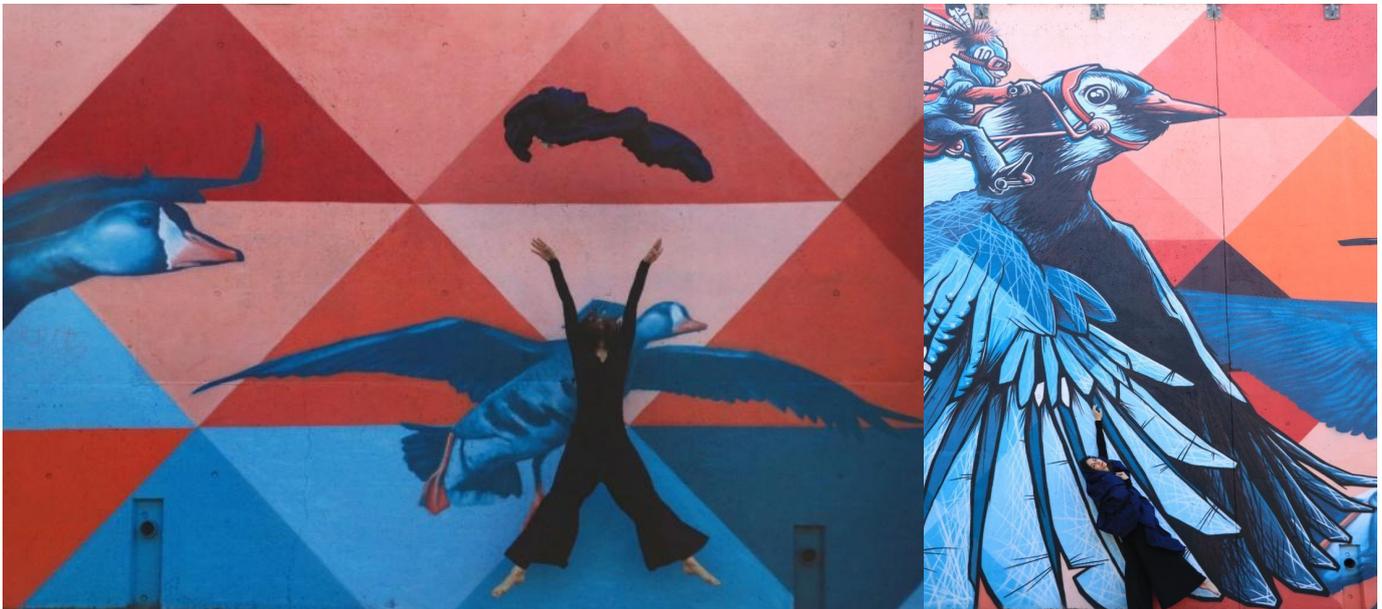Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2017) *Aggregation.* From Imkaan.

Figure 3. Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2017) *Margin.* From Imkaan.

In *Imkaan*, body and space cleverly co-produce one another through practices, gestures, and events. The moment when the shutter of the camera clicks, a fleeting experiential moment is witnessed. This instant moment is turned into a tangible representation, a flash of performed self-encounter. This liminal twinkling, when reality is turned into an unreal image, is what facilitates the witnessing of this artistic self-reflection. As art critic Geoffrey Batchen (1994) succinctly states, *"Photographers intervene in every photograph they make, whether by orchestrating or directly interfering in the scene being imaged; by selecting, cropping, excluding, and in other ways, making pictorial choices as they take the photograph"* (pp. 48). A photographed moment, thus, has the unique ability to draw attention from the obvious to instead witness obscure instances of experiential and transitional states of identity through the mediated body and the movement of the photographer. As I reflect upon my analysis of this project and its process, I ask: "How does the body sense and feel

when in transition?," "Is the body here nor there as it is witnessed and captured via the photograph?," "And, how does the body desire, believe, and embody an image and space of freedom?" I view *Imkaan* as a re-conceptualization of liminality. For me, this means the transition and ambiguity of the passing of the body through an in-between space.

Dancing with the Camera: Camera as Dancing Body

During my graduate studies, I took a course taught by Dr. Heike Salzer, entitled *Mediated Choreography,* at the University of Roehampton. Hediyeh and I continued our collaboration in this course and created *Saraab*, our first screendance film. I considered this screendance as an opportunity to create a multi-sensorial experience with an emphasis on kinaesthetic empathy to trigger somatic reactions for the viewer. Further, I was most interested in how *Saraab* might enable the viewer to feel qualities of movement in their own bodies on a muscular and visceral level and

ultimately to perhaps understand the work as an invitation to dance.

Saraab, which means mirage, is about a relationship between a father and a daughter and is a reflection of Hediyeh's experience of her father's death. The film attempted to capture the feeling of constant fluctuation between imaginary spaces where one feels the departed, but also the real spaces in which they miss their presence. As our project unfolded, my work behind the camera became a kind of moving and listening. As I responded to Hediyeh's choreography in relationship to Iranian composer and pianist Negin Zomorodi's music, I was no longer a collaborator, but an empathetic listener responding in movement with the camera. *Saraab* became an experience in which I, the cinematographer, without having a subjective experience of death, could feel and react with an empathetic response to the dancer's movement as seen through the camera.

Karen Wood explores Vittorio Gallese's approach to emotions and interpretation in her chapter on *Kinesthetic Empathy.* She writes, "He posits that people have a "we–centric" dimension, which enables us to share the body state of the observed person through witnessing their behavior, emotions, and displayed feelings" (Wood, 2016, p.

246. For me, as the observer holding the camera, it became important to engage with the essence of this imagery being presented and to emote the feeling that is otherwise overlooked via my moving camera. During our process, we identified that it was the fluctuation of imagery that would help us to communicate and embody the emotions being explored. We called these moments in our work 'movements of flux.'

To investigate these movements of flux, we utilized a series of locations to modify Hediyeh's dancing in order to explore the "movements, qualities, or connotations" (Walon, 2016, pp. 322) that emerged in her dance. We chose two locations to echo the imagery, stories, and movement; a natural space and an abandoned space. Figure 4 shows a still shot of our first location, the sanctuary in Richmond Park, London. This natural space helped us show the reality of living and our existence, which became a stimulus for the performance. The second location, as shown in Figure 5, was an abandoned space, a Methodist Church in Southall, London. This space represented a kind of space that is real and unreal at the same time, a nostalgia of the past, yet abandoned, a heterotopia.

Figure 4.

Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2018) *Richmond Park, London.*

Figure 5.

Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2018) *An abandoned place in Southall London.*

Next, I offer a specific shot from this screendance, as shown in Figure 6, which demonstrates the movement of flux. We were inspired to create this shot from our curiosity about how to translate a feeling of dreaminess and the act of waking up in a two-dimensional space, in a rectangular frame, with the moving body and camera. Since a person can be most vulnerable while sleeping, we set out to create this establishing shot and perspective for the film that could prompt the viewer to feel the intimacy of unsteadiness in getting up from a sleep state.

Figure 6.

Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2018) *Establishing Screenshot of Hediyeh Azma.* From Saraab.

To achieve something so ephemeral was beyond just a choreography or film technique, but required an aesthetic to transform the kinaesthetic confluence of both disciplines of dance and film. We found that with the negotiation between framing, fixing the right settings for the desired framing, and treating the camera as a dancing body, I was able to negotiate between the movement and rotation of the camera, Hediyeh, and myself. In the creation of this shot (Figure 6), I also had to match her sleeping position on the ground and move the camera in tandem with the rhythm of her body rising up from the ground. I became a dancer behind the camera and the camera also became an extension of my dancing body.

Next, we collated the edited footage with the music by our collaborator Negin Zomorrodi and decreased the speed of the footage to a bare minimum. At this moment we were able to finally connect the dots between the dreaminess and the haziness of the act of waking up. Equally, we also became more aware of the rhythm, the timing, and the movement in this editing process. I also noticed that my stability in holding and moving with the camera while not being shaky came from core training and fitness as a dancer. It was clear that enacting the camera as a dancer required my dancing sensibility, experience, and technique.

Figure 7 is a still from *Saraab* which we named a 'liminal shot.' We considered it to be liminal as it acted in transition and helped to create space in-between two locations imbued with the feeling of being neither here nor there. My previous body memory of *chakkars,* or spins in Kathak, were instrumental in exploring the feeling of circularity through the spinning, rotation, and three-dimensionality of this liminal shot.

In this shot I explored movements with the camera, moving around the dancer vertically from the ground, and I worked to change the spectatorship of the spin (*Saraab*, 2017, 1:40). This space, real and unreal at the same time, also acted as a heterotopic space, contradictory in its realness and dreamlike state. This choreographic transition from reality to dream, or imagined reality, and back is not a straight line. It is bumpy, hazy, and all over the place. It is two places at once and sometimes a clear divide between the two. Together we juxtaposed this divide and feeling with the rhythmic music.

Figure 7.
Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2018) *Liminal Shot.* From Saraab.

Creating a Future Pedagogy: Camera as Instigator

In this section, I focus on two examples of my experience as an educator of screendance at a university level. The pedagogy in these two examples was created from my artistic process in dance and film. It is important to note that these examples take place in a university setting where students are encouraged to think beyond their disciplines. In my teaching, I am curious about how the camera can become an instigator to provoke questions and creativity in learners as they think about the role of spectators, observers, social media, kinaesthetic empathy, and listening in their artistic creations.

Teaching with the Camera: From the Eye to the Screen

My first experience of teaching embodied knowledge and technical strategies of screendance began when I was invited to conduct a workshop at Jawaharlal Nehru University in India for the graduate course *Dance, Body, and Society* led by Dr. Urmimala Sarkar in the Theatre and Performance Studies Department. The idea of creating a three-day *Dancing with the Camera* workshop for this course arose from a conversation with Dr. Sarkar about screendance in which we watched some dance films while discussing their relevance.

Figure 8.
Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2019) *Framing Exercise, Students and Dr. Sarkar.*

The workshop I devised was divided into three segments: Viewing, Writing, and Editing. I was nervous and excited as this would be my first experience teaching screendance filmmaking, and Dr. Urmimala Sarkar suggested I start by sharing with students the story of my process making *Saraab* and other screendance projects. Hence, the initial step in creating this workshop was to explore my subjectivity and share my vulnerabilities and challenges of using the camera. I found that mapping these personal memories and sharing about the process helped to infuse emotional engagement and introduce a space for listening and relationality in the classroom. As an educator, I find that the personal is more real and connected; in this situation, sharing the personal reality of my work helped to facilitate closeness and curiosity about the subject, especially when most of the students were not from a background that encompassed either dance or film.

In my storytelling, of the process of creating *Saraab,* I explained different kinds of framing used in film: wide medium, close-up, extreme close-up, big close-up, and mid-shot. This led to working in groups for a framing exercise. The intention behind this exercise was to understand differences and similarities, and possible confluence between a frame and a shot. In this workshop we closely read, interpreted, and analyzed Hilary Harris's *Nine Variations on a Dance Theme*, to get a sense of how choreography is deeply rooted in editing and framing. Additionally, the students were invited to position themselves as spectators during an improvised duet as I filmed Dr. Sarkar moving in the classroom space.

In one of the workshop's sessions, we also focused on shooting in a landscape or horizontal orientation, along with some editing tips and hacks. Students were given a task to explore different points of view when capturing the body via the camera which led them to reflect on ways of thinking, seeing, and perceiving a subject. In this task, each group had to complete a five-minute shot in which group members took turns holding the camera and being in front of the camera. With the memory of the films watched earlier, students could find a new engagement with the camera through this intensive exploration. After we gathered back to share what we created, we found that there was an unexpected, surprising, and diverse set of screendance shots within such a short time.

Teaching with the Camera: Seeing and Listening

In 2020, I also designed a course entitled *Screendance* at the Centre for Performing and Visual Arts at Ashoka University in Sonepat, India. This course consisted of twelve sessions, meeting once per week for two hours. This was my first time working with undergraduate students from a liberal arts institution in India, but more specifically, students who had not had any kind of dance/movement or film-making training. Keeping this in consideration, I planned to approach this differently than teaching a dance technique class. Instead, I chose to work on 'choreographic thinking' tools with the students, specifically seeing and listening. This choreographic and participatory approach was intended to create a collaborative space for students to partake in learning as well as the teaching process.

The conceptual framework of this course was built by integrating "improvisational choreographic approaches with technology"

(Nikolai & Bennett, 2016, p. 66) that further connect the viewing and perception of the moving body and camera to students' immediate space. I worked to be student centered as I led students through activities. Peter Moss describes this approach (2015, as cited in Gibbons and Nikolai, 2019) as "participatory, open, fluid and contextual, rather than expert-led, predetermined and decontextualized" (pp. 306). Anne Burnidge (2012, as cited in Gibbons and Nikolai, 2019) highlights that this kind of open pedagogy allows "for discussion and doing, moving/reflecting/discussing as somatic dance pedagogy does" (pp. 302).

The first classes began with introspective exercises and watching screendance films from the global and historical Indian context. Next, I introduced an individual and paired exercise, *Colombian Hypnosis*, an exercise from the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal's *Forum Theatre* for "tactile sensitivity" (Boal, 2005) which helps students think and feel more about their sense of touch. The exercise, as seen in Figure 9, involves working in pairs, one participant leads with their hand and the other follows. "Its aim is always to stimulate debate (in the form of action, not just words), to show alternatives, to enable people 'to become the protagonists of their own lives'" (Jackson, 2005, pp. xxiv). *Forum Theatre* thus became a pedagogic tool to develop spatial awareness with choreographic techniques. These kinds of activities help to improve proprioception and the body's relationship with space and time. In this course an adequate amount of time was spent to understand different ways of seeing, looking, and viewing movement of the body in space, as well as how it occupies and moves through space.

Figure 9.
Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2020) *Colombian Hypnosis Exercise.*

Next, I modified the *Columbian Hypnosis* exercise in order to initiate the role of the camera in our social and political lives. Instead of a student leading another by the hand, students were asked to walk with the mobile camera in their hands. The camera offered qualitatively different perspectives that opened our senses as composers to detail as it panned, zoomed, and framed the space (Nikolai J. R., Bennett, Marks, & Gilson, 2018, pp. 137-152).

The following session incorporated improvisational exercises from *Image Theatre* by Augusto Boal*,* a "series of exercises and games designed to uncover essential truths about societies and cultures" (Jackson, 2005, p. xxii). These exercises are intended to evoke "the *multiple mirror of the gaze of others* – a number of people looking at the same image, and offering their feelings, what is evoked for them, what their imaginations throw up around that image" (Boal, 2005, p.175). I consider it important to incorporate exercises from *Image Theatre* by Augusto Boal as it primarily helps students to experience the act of looking and being looked at, concurrently. Specifically, I led students through the sub-exercises of *Image Theatre* entitled *The Modelling Sequence* and the *Image Games* where they were invited to "make still images of their lives, feelings,

experiences, oppressions that enabled students to think about the process of composition" (Jackson, 2005, p. xxii). The intention of these exercises was to first initiate a bodily understanding of a frame and a shot before applying it to the camera. To achieve this students were divided into groups of five, and those not in groups were "spect-actors," a term coined by Augusto Boal that refers to the audience as performers also, not just passive observers.

Combining film with an interdisciplinary lens of dance, my intention was to help students experience kinaesthesia, or sense of movement, in order to provoke them to notice and emanate sensations that accompany our movements while filming. The kinaesthetic elements I introduced to the students were emotion, memory, architecture, chaos, and contrast. I also made sure that each session had one viewing of a screendance film and a group discussion on the previous topics covered as a practical and embodied exercise. Students were able to learn from a wide range of screendance films such as Uday Shankar's *Kalpana*, Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for the Camera, Mass* by Fu Le, 4~ by Rodrigo Rochas Campos, *Nine Variations on a Dance Theme* by Hilary Harris, *Letter* by Zeljko Bozic.

Figure 10.

Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2020) *Watching Maya Deren's A Study in Choreography Of The Camera at Ashoka University, India*

A later session was based on the choreography of sound that began with listening to the body and space and creating inner monologues. One of the most integral parts of perceiving sound is the art of listening. Students were asked to lie down on the floor, relax their body, and let go of tension in each part of their body. Tanpura music was played to guide them through the process, and they were asked to place one hand near their chest to listen and feel their heartbeat, the origin of rhythm. Next, I began what I call, *Childhood Room Memory Mapping Exercise*, where students were asked to imagine and follow their visual memory of their home. I used this as an initiation to explore their understanding of rhythm, perception, and kinaesthetic empathy. Following this exercise, students shared about their experience; some common responses were:

- It was therapeutic.
- I did not know I had so much tension in my body.
- It was so nostalgic to revisit my childhood room.
- I stood exactly where I began tracing my room.
- I didn't know I could sense the same room in different ways.
- I feel really good, after an exhausting day.

After this relaxation exercise, I shared my own exploration with rhythm and heritage and we watched John Varney's TedX video entitled, *A Different Way to Visualize Rhythm.* The intention was to help students understand the visual quality of rhythm. Next, I led students through a body percussion exercise where they created their own ensemble and body percussion in groups of three. We ended the class energized by learning a Zulu South African rhythm taught by my friend and colleague, Lindani Phumlomo. This physicality, as explored through rhythm, watching, and viewing provided a collaboration-centered learning

environment through which students were able to begin to think choreographically.

Teaching With the Camera: A Covid-19 Exigency

In March 2020, the course moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As we continued the course, each of us in different geographical spaces with fatigued bodies and restless minds, we continued to learn and find inspiration in dance and film. To explore the creative methodology of screendance online, without the liveness and physicality of being together, was a limitation but also a possibility. I created activities and camera based practical tasks, and we watched screendance films to inculcate a habit of learning by seeing and doing. In this content-based approach, I began a virtual dialogic process with the students through two-way feedback via WhatsApp utilizing video/audio messages and calls after each task was completed. It helped create a safe, accessible, and reachable space for students which I found was even more important during this time of crisis. This in-between virtual space between me and each student would not have been possible in the live setting of the classroom.

During the first week of online learning, we covered how to frame their everyday spaces with the camera. I sent them written material about framing and Rodrigo Rochas-Campos's film trailer entitled *4 ~* which had examples of different kinds of framing. The assignment each student submitted was part practical and part theoretical: five photographs to demonstrate their framing actions, and a written synopsis of the film trailer they watched. I shared more films like *A L L,* by Amy Wilkinson, and *The Knowledge Between Us,* by Pippu Samaya, to broaden their perspective of the possibilities that screendance holds.

In the next two sessions we covered the following concepts and maneuvers:

- Frame to Shot - a continuous shot without editing
- Pan - camera on a fixed point and the lens traverses left or right on the horizontal plane, mostly capturing a moving subject
- Tilt - camera on a fixed point while the lens traverses up or down on the vertical axis
- Track - camera moves through space in any direction
- Crib - camera moves up or down through space on the vertical plane
- Whip-pan - a very fast pan

Next, I led them through creative experimentation with storyboarding. Storyboarding is a shot by shot visual representation through sketching/coloring to outline the narrative of the film. Using my own film *Saraab*, I invited them to recreate *Saraab*'s storyboard, each providing a unique lens to the exercise. I also encouraged students to incorporate previous knowledge learned and to pick a moment that resonated with them in *Saraab*. They could then choose to respond to the moment they had chosen by either creating their own two-minute shot, recreating the existing shot, or reimagining it in their own way.

The last assignment for this course was working on the global, participatory, and inclusive [The Animal Kingdom Project](#) initiated by the multimedia dance platform *Numeridanse* and the *Akram Khan Company.* For this online project participants were invited to choreograph and film

their own performance embodying an animal of their choice. The students in my course, thus, created screendance choreography by physically responding to the prompt, "How do I move, embody, and sleep in a way that reminds me of this specific animal?" Then students framed and shoot the series of movements they created. My goal was to push students to use the camera as an instigator to provoke inquiry and create an autonomous and immersive space for themselves. This inquiry-based filmmaking process thus enabled students to find a relationship between their 'mindspace' and their immediate bodyspace(s). Examples of student work in this process is shown below in Figure 11. After students completed their creations I edited and submitted the final compilation, entitled Animal Kingdom, to Numeridanse TV.

To complete this assignment, students used social media as a space for reflecting on their process. I opened an Instagram page called *Duet with Camera* which became their visual archive to share not only with their peers but also with a larger community of screendance makers across the world. In Figure 12, via this Instagram page, a student shares a behind the scene moment of her sister who became a collaborator in his assignment. All students could access this account anytime, anywhere, simultaneously. This social media interaction also made them acknowledge and appreciate each other's processes, and thus kinaesthetic empathy arose in the symbiotic relationship between limitation and possibility.
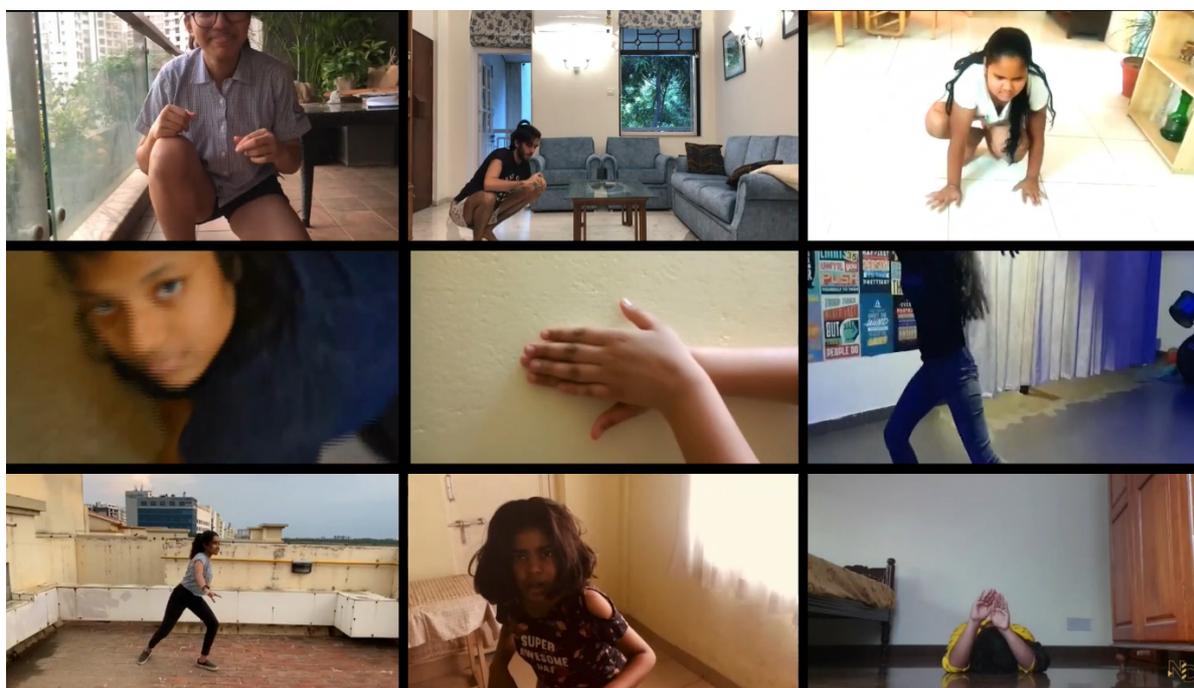

Figure 11.
Bhattacharyya, Sumedha. (2020) *Screenshot of Animal Kingdom.* Screenshot by author.

Figure 12.

Instagram (2020) *Duet with Camera Instagram Page.* Screenshot by author.

Since students were quarantined in their home space during the pandemic, it is important to note that the students were working with those who were immediately available, either a family member, a sibling, or domestic help. If household members were not available, I encouraged students to use the limitation as a possibility to explore individually with the camera or use inanimate objects for the assigned tasks. This pushed them to learn through improvisation and choreographic thinking about limitation and possibility as a symbiosis. I witnessed a creative collaboration and a reality they created for themselves with their family members emerge, which would not have been possible otherwise. In Figure 13 are examples of still shots from short films students created in their home spaces.
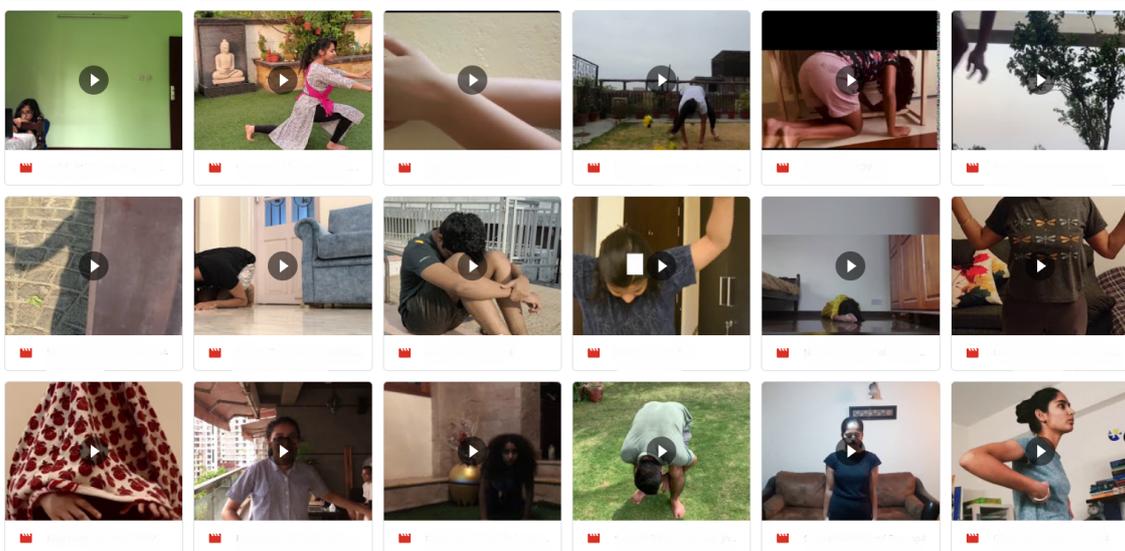

Figure 13.

Google Drive (2020) *Google Drive listing submissions by students for Animal Kingdom.* Screenshot by author.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the screendance course in May 2020, I was able to review course evaluation feedback from the students. Most of the students mentioned their surprise that screendance provided an opportunity to express themselves while building confidence along the way. Some mentioned learning body movements and cinematographic techniques to convey a variety of feelings. Some shared increased personal body-positivity as this course made them less shy and inhibited in front of others. For a few students, this course provided a way to connect to the space around them. From this feedback, I was able to understand how screendance, and learning the form, because of its hybridity, could open many possibilities of perception. Further, it expanded the way in which students could explore the visual representation of the moving body in which the camera becomes a witness, a dancing body, and a mirror to "stimulate artistic approaches that harness the immediacy of the technology" (Nikolai, 2016, p.131). I believe this quarantined situation helped students understand the concept of screendance as a fluid and permeable form that could include a community that otherwise would not engage in this art form. Further, the domestic space also became an in-between dialogic space for digital interaction for the mediated moving body.

Susana Temperley describes dance and its relationship with technology by stating, "Dance in interaction with technology, far from being the illustration of a priori concepts, consists of an experience incarnated in the body" (2016, pp. 511). Screendance encompasses this intersectional inquiry of dance and film through which new movement aesthetics can emerge. The camera facilitates possibilities through the mediation of the body to explore processes of inhabiting and exploring empowerment, new modes of spectatorship, in-betweenness of identity, transition/transformation, empathy, flux, and intimacy. Further, I value the "subtle uncertainties, family dynamics, intuitions, connections, and imbalances'" (Bhattacharyya & Bhargavi, 2020, para 6) that are part of the current screendance processes and reality of today's world. Most importantly, this kind of inquiry led me to create a movement-based pedagogy that guides students through processes of self-discovery while exploring their immediate environment and community. This was especially important during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, a time of urgency and uncertainty.

Overall, this research helped me to understand the ways in which I weave my embodied context as an Indian Kathak dancer with my screendance creative processes, and then how I can apply these processes within my pedagogy. I believe this approach, one in which the camera can be used to explore the extension of the self and personal identity, has potential to extend to various dance practices and movement-based forms. Further, within pedagogical spaces, the exploration of the moving body intersecting with the empowering space and eye of the camera can enliven students' abilities to see, listen, and create in new ways.

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