

Agency of the Camera - Inscription of the Performance

Proposal:

What agency does the camera have on my performative experience? Does that experience provide agency for inscription on myself?

While conducting research within my first solo sway, I became intrigued the agency video documentation had within my process. I was aware, for example, in the church service, that the camera was capturing my every move and reaction. I came to notice my own observation that someone else – a viewer of the Swag research – would see this video and respond to my movements. Thus, I shifted my reactions from instinctual to calculated reactions that I felt would serve as a better portrait. If the video recording had this much influence within this experiment, where else, how else, what else, and when else was I influenced by a camera?

If I assume, for research purposes, that every video recording has an audience on the other end, is the spectator on the other end of the camera's perspective my agency? Or is the agency my need to perform perfectly to that specter? How does this contribute to the inscription of my performative experience? How does that agency relate to my own kinesthesia? Within this Sway research I hope to explore some of these questions.

Other points of interest are how Zoom fatigue and digital performances have contributed to the monotony brewing within the realms of digital media performance. What agency does this have over my performative experience, choreographic process, and the audience's perception of the work? Am I always performing to the camera? Is the unseen labor of digital media the agency of inscription?

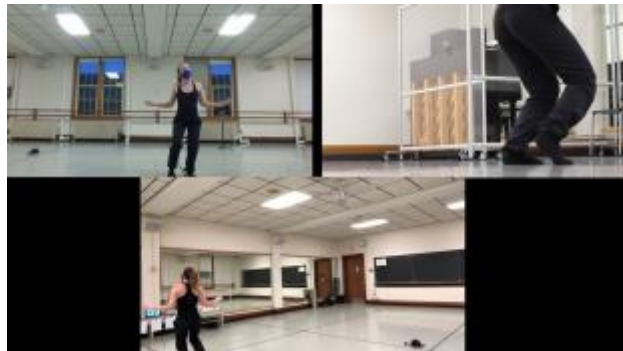
Using what I have collected in agency and inscription research during the first Sway, I will attempt to investigate, and potentially answer, some of these questions. Potential entry points or methods of research might include using multiple cameras at different angles to see how a movement score is influenced by difference in perspective; performing to unknown audiences behind untraditional performative cameras – such as a security camera in a store; using raw footage of Gala to investigate points of performative excursion; and recording photography or videography session to investigate the labor of the production process.

What do I know? What agency does that knowledge have?

"I would argue that certain performances have the ability to expand on what we 'know', that the expansion in knowledge comes from an exegesis of sorts, but starts with a physical engagement with the text and then reflection." (McMillian, 333) In considering this, I wondered how I might add my knowledge of dance film into this experiment. To do so, I will use a list of concepts as a movement score to drive my improvisational study. This score will consist of camera components such as depth, focus,

angle, range, proximity, etc; and body movement concepts such as lack of premium/ "front", spacial awareness, gestural focus, movement focus, levels, ect.

I am curious what knowledge of camera work and dance for the camera that I know. How does this influence the way I perform to a camera? By using multiple camera perspectives at varying levels and angles, I will attempt to investigate the aspects of knowledge I have instinctually gained throughout my years of working with the camera. "Choreography has specialized both in training dancers to develop kinesthetic expertise and in creating formats for spectators to access particular fields of movement experience." (Fabius, 331). I anticipate my way of moving will be influenced by my perception of the "shot." I will envision that a certain way of moving in front of the lens will be interesting to the spectator, thus I will proceed with that in mind.



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Being aware of the three cameras, I found myself dancing to them, changing which one was the primary source, and determining my own preference on which angle I thought would be the most interesting. When it came to floor work, I was drawn to the camera on the ground because I find interest in viewing dance from that angle. The wide shots were interesting to see view the full picture in. Even if I wasn't interacting with that lens, I found interest, as a spectator, in watching myself interact with another lens.

"It is perhaps instructive to think of choreographers' verbal (spoken or written) accounts of their processes as articulating their rationality in this way. What such accounts often do is to show the sense of the artist's action, that is, they expose the logic embedded in what was done which the choreographer may or may not have been reflectively aware of during the process itself ... They lay bare the practical reasoning embedded in the choreographic process." (Pakes, 14)

When I process through why I made the choices I did, it comes back to thinking about what the spectator will see. I think my own agency is to create pleasing visuals with the body through the lens of a camera. I strive to engage the spectator in methods of performance for the camera that have engaged my own viewership. "Kinesthetic response is intertwined with other senses that produce the sense of the body through which all experience flows." (Wood, 248) I've been influenced by my own perception and respond according to those influences.

I realize these performative methods for the camera come naturally to me, as I have grown comfortable as a person in front of a camera. The influence of the camera is so engrained in my own being that I do not acknowledge my own awareness of the camera anymore. My awareness of the camera has been inscribed in my body and being, and as a result, my way of knowing and producing is influenced by this.

“Kinesthesia allows us to correct recursively, refine, and experiment with the practices we have learned. The knowledge obtained through kinesthesia is thus constitutive of - not tangential to- the process of individualization. And yet despite the central role kinesthetic sensation plays, it is rarely treated as vital to the development of forms assumed by either culture or the self.” (Noland, 4)

*The music choice within the study was not intended to have a direct influence on the investigation. I simply wanted something feel good to drive my own movement and we all need a little Tennessee Whiskey sometimes.

Agency/Inscription?



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1 - Video footage used with permission by Eloy Barragan

In questioning the agency of film work and how it may cause inscription of the body, I reflect on the process of filming dance. It is repetitive. Just as a rehearsal process, it causes inscription of the body. "Yet if the writer performs the motion repeatedly, his own body will eventually be inscribed, the muscles and ligaments physiologically altered, by the gestural routine that expresses and confines his body at the very same time." (Noland) I think to the repetitive nature of Eloy's film shoot of Gala. We repeated the same movement phrase a number of time so he could get the right shot with the camera. Each time, I found new, possibly deeper, meanings in the movement. Could I make the 'collapsing' sensation appear less controlled, like my muscles had just given out? With each take, I dug into it a little deeper.

But then Eloy moved to film the dancer behind me, with the camera facing away from me, and my investigation stopped. I validated my reaction to "allowing my body to get a break" after many takes of pushing my body. But was that really the case? Was the movement investigation only important to me if it was caught on camera?

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Within this same idea, I reflect on another moment in Eloy's rehearsal. During a run through of his piece, Eloy took pictures on his camera. I found myself noticing where the lens was directed and the sound of the shutter when the photo was captured. Towards the end of the piece, after a six-minute long journey with the awareness, I knew the camera was on me and we came to a moment of high release in the movement. My natural instinct was to hold that high release, dig in deeper until I heard the shutter go off, knowing that Eloy had got the shot.

I questioned, on a physical level, what inscription this influence had on my body. This got me thinking about methodology of dance photography and performative acts that are not witnessed. I also wondered if this inscription was in result of unseen labor of the "performance" - with the performance being the photos. In dance photography, we see the lasting perfection of one single moment but, as a spectator, never see the moments and labor surrounding and producing that photo. In Srinivasan's *Unruly Spectator*, She addressed the labor that has been put into the performance that is rarely credited. *"Her thumb forefinger, and middle fingers were her principal performers, engorged with fat and fluid on the inner sides that lightened the color of the skin there. Clearly, they had labored intensely for her over the years."* (Srinivasan 65) I am wondering if the labor is part of the inscription. Does the spectator, of a photo, consider this when viewing?

I will investigate the routine and repetitiveness of a photo shoot. I will prepare a time-lapse video and include the resulting photos from each attempt. I anticipate my finding and focus to be on the physical body and what inscribing markers are discovered during this session.



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2 - Time-lapse of photo shoot investigations



3 - Photos taken during photo shoot investigation



4 - Photos taken during photo shoot investigation



5 - Photos taken during photo shoot investigation

Prior to this exercise, I thought I might focus on the physical inscription within these patterns. I thought it might relate to Sally Ness' description agency in a positive or possible negative manner.

"The dancer's body can be seen to form the "host material," a living tissue, for dancer's gestural inscriptions.... The question seeks to identify dance gestures that mold, carve, and otherwise impress their way into ligaments, muscles, and even bones, so as to bring about a transformation that is (ideally) not a weakening of the functional structures but a rendering of them as meaningful" (Ness, 6)

In predicting the findings, I assumed I would be able to relate the body to this process. I thought I would be able to speak to the "(ideally) not weakening" aspect of Ness' point by thinking about the high risk of injury during a photo shoot; major ally caused by lack of proper warming up of the body and dancer's insistence of pushing their bodies to the maximum to get the perfect photo.

However, I found myself questioning the process as a performance more. McMillian discusses, in *Performing Sacred Archive*, the aspect of performance as an event and the following documentation of performance.

"the Bible is not the event; it is a documentation of the event." I question if the performance was the physical act of setting the self timer for the camera on my phone, running back in the frame to get a full body photo as the number counted down, preparing to jumping or pose, jumping or posing, landing my jump or releasing my pose, walking back to my phone, and reviewing the photo to see if my timing was right or the pose was "good enough." If so, one could assume, buy McMillian's use of first-, second-, third-order performances. The physical performance in the studio be considered the first-order performance. The time-lapse and photos collected would be a second-order performance. Now, myself - writing a synopsis of the event, is a third-order performance. Right?

Or Does Peggy Phelan counter this?

"Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance." (Phelan 1993:146)

By Phelan's argument, the only performance was within the studio. To this I first ask, can performance be performance without a spectator to view? As Halsey studio are one person occupancy, my performance had no capacity to be viewed by another within an in-person modality. So, the other performance opportunity I have/had is through this recording and documentation.

Still, I am finding a difference to both Phelan (ironic use of name there) and McMillian when I consider that screendance is not a documentation of dance. It is the dance. It is not a documentation of the event, it is the event. The camera is an extension used to expand the spectator's vision of the movement (of body and frame). The event is not captured, to be revisited, but the spectator's view is replaced by a mediated version that the director/choreographer/editor intended for the audience to see. "Documentation is often thought of as simple unmediated recording of an event that maintains both its original intent and temporality.. Camera are prosthetic devices for extending one's range of vision," (Rosenberg, 9). This adds dimension to the event as part of the event; not a documentation of the event. These are predetermined ideas and projected intentions set before the creation process begin.

Under this manner of perspective in screendance, I wonder how my own awareness to the camera has inscribed this was of thinking about dance on film. What knowledge have I subconsciously gained through my experience with film and dance? What do I know? What have I shown I know? How is this portrayed to the spectator? Is portraying this knowledge of my body through the camera the best way of communicating it?

Identified Awareness

In understanding my awareness of a camera, I proceeded to identify situational instances where my movement, behavior, perception, and/or being.

"The watching audience is challenged to consider what is possibly being imagined by the seated person, and to explore how the perception of dance cannot be reduced to its visual properties" (Fabius)

I think about this quote in terms of the watching audience, Sway Viewers, is challenges to consider that is possibly being viewed by the potential viewers behind the security camera. And explore how the difference of perception [the presentation circumstances] of the dance cannot be reduced to its visual properties [solely what the viewer is seeing on film]. In this way, I am thinking about the analysis of me and my moving body by the viewers through the other side of a lens.

I am always performing to a camera because I am thinking about the viewer on the other side? If so, what am I telling them? Why am I acting in a certain manner? and Why do I need to be perceived, by the viewer, in this manner?

I was struck by Wood's idea of kinesthetic relationship to gesture to possible find clarity.

"The spectator has a kinesthetic 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 kinesthetically and emotionally because viewers watch with an awareness of their own body." (Wood, 255)

With in this idea, I wondering if I conduct my own responses to the awareness of the camera because of what I know the spectator will perceive. Do I smile because I know (or assume) the spectator will perceive me as happy? I believe the answer is yes, that there are subconscious agencies occurring in these circumstances. I reflect on my own history and acknowledge that this awareness have been inscribed into my own being and way of knowing. Thus as a choreography, I am writing this knowledge into my work and onto those who participate within my work.



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6 - When looking over footage - I was surprised to see myself it in. Had I forgotten or ben unaware of the camera here? Or did I not realize Trevon was still record as I gave notes to the dancers?

Looking forward to further research

I've been brewing an idea for my Spring Semester's Independent/Qualifying Project. I am curious about using projection as a way of showing dance, while using the body as a way of displaying the projection.

First, I was wondering if it was even possible, so I set up an experiment solely focusing on the technological capabilities and production tasks. I had no intention of sharing this footage at the time but during the experiment and following, I felt the need to articulate findings that were in conversation with my Sway research.

While participating in the experiment through movement, I began to consider what the spectator might see. After conducting this previous research, I was aware of the agency of the camera. I shifted my own bodies reactions so the spectator would be able to view the projection.

What I did not predict, and what I found so interesting about this footage, was the perception that my own body was translucence. Or that I had laid other footage with a low opacity over the footage being projected. As a spectator, I was interested in the movements there the physicality of the body were made visible, like the shadow on my stomach, showing my abs. This almost felt like validation for the spectator that I was a really human, performing right then and there. Or the times I move closer to the camera and the projected video become blurry on my skin. This offers the spectator visibility into depth and context to what was happening.

This was not an agency or outcome I had predicted.

I think further research in this project has the potential to use kinesthetic empathy to defamiliarize the spectator's view.

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