

In June 2015 I will have completed my Master of Arts degree in English at Concordia University and I am applying for admission to Concordia's PhD program in Humanities for September 2015. My Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Dance from the School of Contemporary Dancers in Winnipeg and my professional background in dance performance and choreography has informed my decision to embark on a project in which I will think critically about dance and the body, using the theoretical tools I acquired in my B.A. Honours and M.A. in English Literature. Literature and dance are already complementary art forms due to their interest in similar cultural objects and themes and the fact that they are both traditionally about story-telling, however my project does not take up the typical narrative lens through which performance is often viewed. My dissertation will draw from my experience in both fields to illuminate the non-representational function of the moving body in photography, film and new medias.

My PhD dissertation draws from three disciplines: English, Art History and Communications. The major field of concentration within the English discipline is Digital Humanities, and the minor fields are Feminist and Performance Studies within the discipline of Art History, and Film Theory within the discipline of Communications. My proposed doctoral study, entitled "Spectacular Kinetic Technologies: Emergent Media and The Body in Motion" will provide an historical account that tracks the ways in which the moving human figure has become an index for the functioning of new media forms.

My project will be rooted in the history of early cinema technologies (Dickson 1894, Hendricks 1964), especially as influenced by Thomas Edison and Auguste and Louis Lumière

(Vaughn 1990, Belloi 1995), and the importance of bodies and movement to the silent film era (Pritchard 1996, Auerbach 2007). I will track the presence of new technologies and the body through various dance films from the dawn of film history, such as the early Annabelle Moore and Loïe Fuller films (1894) and Edison's Kinetoscope projects with Ruth St. Denis (1894) (Terry 1969) and the Leigh sisters (1896). These early films demonstrate the importance of the body in motion to the development of cinema technologies, as well as a marked departure from the voyeuristic gaze long-associated with the dancer's body, towards a fusion of art, science and technology (Coffman 2002). Whereas in the tradition of burlesque, vaudeville and cabaret the female performer had always been defined by her sexualized body (Rothfield 1994, Banes 1998), an artist such as Loïe Fuller, with her experimentation with fabric and lighting, produced a completely new visual effect, transforming her corporeal femininity into a spectacle of pure motion and mechanics (Coffman 2002, Gunning 2003, Garelick 2007).

Also integral to my project are Modernist forays into cine-dance, such as the silent films of Josephine Baker (1927) (Dalton 1998), Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscopic movie musicals (1933) (Zimmer 2002), and later, Norman McLaren's experiments with animation, film and dance (1968). The Avant-Garde film genre, innovative in its very nature, can be linked to new forays into mediums and tools via the body (Greenfield 2002), and particularly the dancing female body (Rabinovitz 1991). Dance is still used, currently, to test emergent media forms. Canadian director Guy Maddin's dance film *Dracula: Pages From a Virgin's Diary* manipulates the camera in a new way, integrating the filmic gaze on the space of the stage alongside the dancers and within the dance action to produce an effect both emergent (in terms of the way we view classical ballet) and nostalgic (Maddin's film noir style) (Church 2009).

Chronicling the history of performance and the body alongside that of novel technologies allows for a new line of questioning in our current, digital age, in which performers affix cameras to their bodies or play with wearable devices that map movement and feed input; the body has become an “instrument of a dynamic environment in which realities are generated and processed” (Birringer xxiii). The avatar is another contemporary body of intrigue, and has often been manipulated into a state of mobility or performance to test the limitations of its architecture and animation (Featherstone and Burrows 1995, Balsamo 1995, Auslander 1999, Dixon 2007, Pritchard 2010). One example of the phenomenon of the dancing avatar is the "Cantina Crawl" video series, in which multi-user game players choreograph synchronized dance numbers using their avatars. In these video series, dance is used to test the possibilities of synchronization and spectacularize, rather than humanize, the animated bodies of the participants.

While my project is rooted in a historical survey, I will also approach my subject matter critically -- primarily through the lens of feminist performance studies. One thread that connects all my objects of study is the transformation of the dancing female body as erotic spectacle to female body in motion as a tool for experimenting with new technologies. From Fuller's re-invention of her own body in constant transformation as a prefiguration to colour film, to contemporary Canadian video-dance artist Freya Olafson, who utilizes elements such as green screens, projections and 3D glasses for the audience in her live improvisations with technology to embody a flickering, mediated identity, these performers and their works actively challenge the presumed organic (and sexualized) corporeality of the female body.

I believe the research project I am proposing makes a necessary departure from the study of dance and performance as an art form that seeks to portray the human body in strictly

representational or mimetic methods. Alternatively, my project focuses on the ways in which both early cinema and recent digital projects use dance to test the limitations of their medium. Rather than depict the dancer's body in a sexualized, realist or even human manner, the cultural texts that interest me reconfigure the body as a *tool* used to investigate and experiment with new techno-capabilities. This convergence between performance and technology also reflects upon our understanding of the "body" and its objecthood, organization, mechanics and the ultimate inseparability of its embodiment from the technical (Birringer 2008). For my proposed doctoral studies at Concordia, Dr. Darren Wershler (Dept. of English) will be the major field advisor and Dr. Charles Acland (Dept. of Communications) and Dr. M.J. Thompson (Art History) will be the minor field advisors. Each of these advisors has demonstrated their unique interest in my project, and I feel confident that the true interdisciplinary nature of this advisory panel will be instrumental in challenging and expanding my understanding of the cultural objects I propose to study.

My pursuit of this program at Concordia University is facilitated by the fact that Montreal possesses a vibrant dance and performing arts community and is host to many innovative projects, such as McGill University's newly established Moving Image Research Laboratory, which houses two state of the art viewing labs and data processing facilities used to explore the relationship between the "history of moving images and 20th century perceptions of the body and its movement" (dighum.mcgill.ca). There are many active scholars involved in aspects of research related to my own at Concordia (Monika Kin Gagnon, Erin Manning), Université de Montréal (Julianne Pidduck), and McGill (Thomas Lamarre, Alanna Thain). Moreover, the city's proximity to Toronto will allow me to consult with scholars such as Caitlin Fisher at York

University, a co-founder of York's Future Cinema Lab, which investigates the "future of narrative through explorations of interactive storytelling and interactive cinema in Augmented Reality environments" (yorku.ca).

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