

IJSD Volume 7 Editorial: On *All This Can Happen*

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All This Can Happen (ATCH) had its first public screening at Dance Umbrella, London's international dance festival, on the 13th October 2012. Since then, the work has been screened internationally, reviewed in dance and film journals and online, and been the subject of a symposium at the Freie Universität Berlin.¹ This issue of the IJSD builds on this extensive circulation, and dedicates, for the first time in the history of the journal, the whole issue to one work of art. A comparable venture in the publishing realm is the *One Work* series from Afterall Books, in which publications are dedicated to exploring a selected piece of work. However, a single writer or critic authors *One Work* projects. The selection of writers included in this issue brings together some of those who have screened the work in their respective venues or festivals, some of those who have contributed to the Berlin Symposium, and others who have engaged with it in their scholarly work or reviewed the film for the wider press. In this way, different voices and perspectives are gathered around one focal point. Besides enriching our understanding of the work in question, this commonality of focus also serves to highlight the extraordinary richness of dialogues that occur in the multidisciplinary field of screendance.

The extent and intensity of this conversation is in itself a testimony to Siobhan Davies and David Hinton's remarkable collaboration, artistry, and craft. There is no doubt that over time the film will be a marker and milestone in the evolution of screendance and its canon, and will be referred to time and again, both through the work of subsequent screendance makers and in the discourses around the practice.

One of the many compositional strategies of *All This Can Happen* is the play between still and moving images. This play unfolds simultaneously as well as sequentially through the constant opening and closing of frames, and it scatters movement across the screen. The effect is like seeing, not one or more moving bodies, but an infinite number of movements appearing and disappearing within a seemingly infinite digital space. Furthermore, images from across different decades and origins are brought together to form one continuous stream. The ongoing unpredictability of arrest and flow, and of as-if-movement, holds the viewer like a cat on a string, tugging and

teasing in a tantalizing chase. Every now and again however, a still image quietly occupies the frame and invites, according to Laura Mulvey, a more pensive spectating and a reflection not only on what is in the image, but on the nature of cinema.²

Agreeing with Mulvey, Miranda Pennell has argued that the still image should be considered as a choreographic gesture, which disrupts the cinematic flow out of a delight in material for its own sake, material which is not in the service of (narrative) progression.³ As Pennell noted, “there is a special pleasure derived from [this] ‘constructedness’ of choreography, as there is of avant-garde film. Avant-garde film and dance can draw us into the materiality and construction of the body or of the film and its projection.”⁴ This pleasure is not Dziga Vertov’s kino-eye, which would give us access to a world “without a mask, a world of naked truth,” as Mulvey wrote.⁵ It is rather the fascination with an artifice of simulated stills and implied movement, of images which deliberately stray away from the narration in order to do their own thing.

Film theorist Annette Michelson speculates on what lies behind this fascination with the filmic construct:

To describe a movement is difficult, to describe the instant of arrest and of release, of reversal, of movement, is something else again; it is to confront that thrill on the deepest level of the filmic enterprise, to recognize the privileged character of the medium as being in itself the promise of an incomparable, and un hoped for, grasp upon the nature of causality.⁶

Already in its prologue, *ATCH* calls on this filmic enterprise, and sets up an uncanny analogy between the jerky movements of the body on screen—a patient in a hospital bed—and the quick alternation, or stuttering, of still and moving images. The parallels are so strong that we cannot be certain whether the repetition of the patient’s head movements is part of an original film clip, and therefore a symptom of the traumatized patient, or an effect produced in the editing, a cinematic construct. The stuttering body mimics a filmstrip that is stuck in the projector, and both resemble a broken record player with the needle stuck somewhere in the grooves. The cinematic play questions the representation and challenges what we think we see.

When something is broken, our perception of the thing changes. As Maurice Blanchot argues in an essay titled *Two Versions of the Imaginary* (1985), objects and utensils that are tied into a habitual purpose tend to be invisible to our consciousness, but in a damaged or dis-functional state they appear to us as image, they become present to us.⁷ “The utensil, no longer disappearing in its use, appears. This appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: one might say it is its double.”⁸ Drawing essentially on Heidegger in this argument, Blanchot links the category of art in general “to this possibility objects have of ‘appearing,’ that is, of abandoning themselves to pure and simple resemblance behind which there is nothing—except being.”⁹

Describing such an image as a 'thin ring,' Blanchot places it in-between the solid object and the nothing, arguing that in the becoming image, value and signification are lost:

Now that the world is abandoning it to worklessness and putting it to one side, the truth in it withdraws, the elemental claims it, which is the impoverishment, the enrichment that consecrates it as image.¹⁰

An object which no longer fulfills its signification, which no longer masters its existence, is claimed, or reclaimed, by something more elemental and exposed to time and to transformation. In *ATCH*, a set of images show women on a street in frazzled archive pictures; the images are half eaten by time and full of marks and blank areas, barely representing their subjects. Instead of making present what is in the image they merely refer to their subjects, offering a resemblance. The women themselves remain distant and part of an intangible past. This distancing effect is enhanced by the splitting of the screen into multiple images, therefore denigrating the images to fragments, which can no longer tempt us into believing that we see the real thing.

This distance between the image and what it refers to interferes with how we see. According to Blanchot: "Not only is the image of an object not the meaning of that object and of no help in comprehending it, but it tends to withdraw it from its meaning by maintaining it in the immobility of a resemblance that has nothing to resemble."¹¹ In *ATCH* we see this, for example, through the images of the traumatized soldier, whose fall is caught and frozen within a still image. In becoming an image, he becomes a double of himself, a grotesque copy whose meaning is put into question.

Throughout the film, the flow of still and moving images and the narrative flow of people and places appear only to disappear, barely gaining significance. The narrator himself, always walking and wandering, is also caught within this transience as someone who merely gathers images and sounds and brief impressions. In moments the narrator-author addresses his own transience and foregrounds an ambivalence with regards to being "just" a walker: "Left of the road here, a foundry full of workmen and industry causes a noticeable disturbance. In recognition of this, I am honestly ashamed to be merely out for a walk while so many others drudge and labour."¹² An instant later, he denies his embarrassment, suggesting that he has no problem with being found out. But then again the narrator is fiercely critical of everything that smacks of capitalist gains and industrialization. He says:

Speaking of thrashings a countryman deserves to be well and truly thrashed because he is not hesitant to cut down the pride of the landscape, namely, his high and ancient nut tree in order to trade it for despicable, wicked, foolish money.¹³

By contrast, the observer Walser abandons himself to worklessness. He walks through space, but he does not belong. Instead, he appears more like an image of himself, a resemblance. Perhaps Walser observed and wrote both in search of meaning as well as in defense of meaninglessness. As part of a generation that was traumatized by war and its human cost, he can be seen as an advocate of purposelessness, defending values that reside outside of the spheres that are dedicated to productivity. Numerous figures of 20th century literature and philosophy have been concerned with this quandary. For example, "To be useless is today for man the most difficult thing," wrote Martin Heidegger in 1963; "The useful is understood as that which is practically useful and of immediate technical purpose, like that which produces an effect of some kind with which I can do business or trade. However, that which is most useful, is the useless."¹⁴ Walser appears to have walked partly in order to observe and record, but also to practice uselessness, in a fervent defense of what it means to be human. *All This Can Happen*, transposing the complexity of a stroll that is so little and yet so much, allows the viewer to both engage with Walser's thoughts as well as to take their own journey through the myriad of images, sounds, and scenes and to gather their own observations. Almost 100 years after the publication of *The Walk*, the material has lost none of its relevance.

In their original film proposal for the British Film Institute, Davies and Hinton lay out the film's structure and propose a cinematic collage that is built through a complex layering of observational, analytical, and emotional threads. It is therefore no surprise that the work invites many different responses from its audiences and from the authors included in this issue. There are engagements with the relation between text, image, and moving image; contributions to dance scholarship; film historical analysis; and investigations into the wider social and cultural context of modernity as well as personal notes. The issue opens with a literary contribution by writer and curator of film Gareth Evans (Whitechapel Gallery, London UK). His essay offers a personal response to the film and invites a reflection on the processes of transposition that occur when a text becomes a moving image work which is then seen, heard, and felt to become a text again. The writer W.G. Seabald was an admirer of Walser's prose, and Jürgen Simpson, curator of Light Moves (Limerick, IE, compares Seabald's own use of still images as elements which disrupt and destabilize text with the use of archival images in *ATCH*. This is part of a wider investigation into the relation between the cinematic medium, the narrative thread, and the sound world.¹⁵ Reflecting on the diversity of reading modes available throughout the film and drawing on the notions of hypermediality and foto-films, Simpson proposes that the work defies immersive mechanisms through the overt employment of archival materials and its foregrounding of artefact.

Numerous reviewers and bloggers have commented on the movement in *ATCH*, proposing that movement is what it is all about. Hartmut Regiz from the German *Tanz*

Magazine had a more nuanced response: describing a scene in which the gesture of a newspaper seller, represented threefold, fuses into that of a fine lady who is paying for her cab, he wrote, "Time and again the camera chases the heels of someone, only to suddenly, and most casually, arrest the flow in order to create, through the coincidence of stillness and movement, a very peculiar tension."¹⁶

As a medium of movement, cinema is life-like, therefore any arresting of its flow touches us deeply, reminding us of the contiguity of life and death and the fragility of the human endeavor. There are three articles in the issue that investigate this elemental condition and its choreographic potential through dance and screendance scholarship. A conversation between Erin Brannigan (Senior Lecturer at University of New South Wales, AUS) and Cleo Mees (PhD researcher, Macquarie University AUS) echoes the collaborative spirit of the *All This Can Happen*. Brannigan and Mees discuss the film as a choreographic object and ask what contributions corporeality has made. Drawing on film theorist Laleen Jayamanne's proposition of the film as performance—as filmic performance—they trace the presence of breath and weight in the composition as an inscription of the body onto screen space and time. German scholar Maren Butte engages with the act of walking as a fragile bodily movement and leitmotif of both *The Walk* and *ATCH*. Considering walking as an activity that takes the subject into the "midst" of things, and as a process that synchronizes stepping and thinking, Butte theorizes the activity not only as locomotion but as an affective bodily activity that is formative of modernity. Drawing on the work of Brian Massumi, she argues that walking and the myriad of variations, such as balancing and wobbling, slipping, running, and hurrying, co-generate live space and screen space as well as the experience of these spaces. Florence Freitag, screendance artist and convener of the Berlin Symposium, further develops the investigation into the movement of and through images by drawing on Maya Deren's terminology of film as *unstable equilibrium* which draws the viewer in. Freitag investigates its affective potential through Miranda Pennell's notion of *nowness* and presence of cinematographic gestures, of images and their in-between.

Another set of scholarly contributions are informed by psychological and historical discourses. In view of the mental illness from which Robert Walser suffered in his later years, independent filmmaker and Assistant Professor of Film Studies in Connecticut Ross Morin argues for a psychological reading of the work and its cinematic elements. In a close reading of the film, he draws parallels between the visual structure, episodic narration, and flashbacks and the medical symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in returning soldiers. The film, according to Morin, foregrounds the traumatic effects of war. Nicolas Villodre, an expert on experimental cinema from the Cinémathèque de la Danse in Paris, provides a rich historical perspective on the many artistic movements and cinematic developments that have informed *ATCH*, some of which date back to the Avant Gardes of the 1920's and the 1960's. His

discussions of compositional approaches are furthermore embedded in the wider cultural history of the 20th century, its dance, theatre, and literary traditions. In order to facilitate access also to French readers, this article is published in both English and French. Simon Roloff, Junior Professor for Creative Writing at the University of Hildesheim, Germany, contextualizes the film by bringing in Walser's earlier novel *Jakob von Gunten*, a text which encapsulates new techniques and practices of administration around 1900 and highlights the transformative exertion of institutional power over the modern individual. This novel thereby offers a new perspective on both *The Walk* and *ATCH*, in particular on Walser's fascination with the meticulous recording of minute details of small events. Drawing on biopolitics, Roloff mines this historical context to draw parallels between the narrative and the visual patterns of the film and the repetitions and constraints of modernity.

The theoretical articles are followed by an extended conversation between Siobhan Davies and David Hinton with Claudia Kappenberg. Published in two parts, the first portrays the collaborators through a set of autobiographical "snapshots" of themselves as artists at this point in time, and of the wider cultural and creative context in which they work. The second part discusses aspects of the making of *ATCH*, in view of the first funding proposal for the project that was submitted to the BFI in 2012, and which is reprinted in this issue. This is followed by "ATCH on Tour and in the Press," a list of all the screenings of *All This Can Happen* between its premiere in 2012 and the summer of 2016, making an astounding register of over 80 public events. This document also includes a list of reviews and blog entries from the wider press that demonstrates the international interest the film generated. This includes a couple of review essays on *All This Can Happen* which are already in the public realm: Kyra Norman's "Still Moving, Reflecting on *All This Can Happen*" (2014), published in an earlier issue of the *International Journal of Screendance*,¹⁷ and Ximena Munroe's "*All This Can Happen*: Narrativas Alógicas a Través de la Coreografía de Imágenes en Movimiento" (2015), published in *Memoria Histórica de la Videodanza* (2015) by the Ibero American Screendance Network.¹⁸ The issue concludes with the reprint of three of the reviews of *All This Can Happen* from the wider press, by Sukhdev Sandu ("The Mighty Walser," *Sight and Sound* 2013),¹⁹ Sanjoy Roy ("Review of *All This Can Happen*, by Siobhan Davies and David Hinton," *Aesthetica Magazine* 2013)²⁰ and Priscilla Guy ("Screendance as a Question: *All This Can Happen* and the First Edition of the Light Moves Festival of Screendance," Center for Screendance Blog, 2015).²¹ We are grateful for the permission to reprint their writing.

The ambition of the IJSD is to inform, witness, and critique, and to provoke and to take risks in order to stimulate growth and debates in the wider field. We hope that this issue with its different accounts, discussions, and topics demonstrates the extraordinary complexities and curatorial potential of screendance practices, as well as the diversity of scholarship which screendance affords. The issue is intended to add a

new impulse and further challenge current parameters. The journal also pursues and celebrates excellence. We are therefore most indebted to Siobhan Davies and David Hinton for engaging in this conversation with us and for allowing access to their archives, and we are delighted to be able to celebrate their work through this publication. German filmmaker Peter Delpout described Hinton as “the founding father of found choreography”²² and Davies has been designated as an institution by Flora Wellesley Wesley: “while Davies is a prominent feature of the Contemporary Dance establishment, her work has come to be characterized not by prevailing aesthetic values but by being of pioneering ilk.”²³

We look forward to what else they will make happen.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my thanks to Florence Freitag for convening the Berlin Symposium which sparked many conversations that eventually led to this special issue. I would like to thank Harmony Bench, Simon Ellis and the editorial teams at Ohio State and Coventry Universities for ensuring the continuity of the journal and expanding its constituencies. I would also like to thank Editorial Assistant Rebecca Weber for her contribution and rigorous copyediting, and Professor Sarah Whatley from Coventry University for supporting the production of the issue, and for contributing a Postscript that situates ATCH within the wider body of Siobhan Davies’ choreographic work and in amongst the shifting relations between art-, dance-, screendance-, film-, archival- and documentary fields.

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Biography

Claudia Kappenberg is a performance and media artist and Course Leader for the MA Performance and Visual Practices at the University of Brighton, UK, as well as founding editor of *The International Journal of Screendance*. She has published widely on performance and screen-based work, including in *Anarchic Dance* (Routledge, 2006), *The International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* (2010), *Art in Motion* (Cambridge Scholars, 2015) and the *Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies* (Oxford University Press 2016). Her performance practice consists of minimal choreographies which have been shown across Europe, the US, and the Middle East in the form of live interventions, gallery-based performances, and screen-based installations.

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Notes

¹ Research Group BildEvidenz, Geschichte und Ästhetik at the Freie Universität Berlin (12/07/2014). Directed and chaired by Friedrich Balke and Florence Freitag.

² Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 186.

³ Pennel, "Some Thoughts on 'Nowness' and 'Thenness.'"

⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 181.

⁶ Michelson, 'From Magician to Epistemologist,' 104. Also quoted in Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 182.

⁷ Blanchot, *Two Visions of the Imaginary*, 1981.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81. (Italics mine.)

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹² Walser, *The Walk and Other Stories*, 61.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger, Zollikon Seminars*, 159, 160.

¹⁵ See for example: Seabald, "Le Prometeur Solitaire" and Scime, "The Walk by Robert Walser."

¹⁶ Regiz, "All this can happen - Ein bewegter, ein bewegender Film von Siobhan Davies und David Hinton", p 6. Translation mine.

¹⁷ Norman, "Still Moving, Reflecting on All This Can Happen."

¹⁸ Munroe, "All This Can Happen: Narrativas Alógicas."

¹⁹ Sukhev Sandu. "The Mighty Walser."

²⁰ Sanjoy Roy, "Review of *All This Can Happen*."

²¹ Sanjoy Roy, "Review of *All This Can Happen*."

²² Delpout, "Found Choreography."

²³ Wellesley Wesley, "Interview: Siobhan Davies."

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