

Emerging Trends in Research on Classical Indian Dance

August 25th, 2020

Kathakali, a creative approach to dramaturgy through the play *Le rêve d'Urmila*

Sylvie Belleau – PhD candidate, Université Laval, Québec, Canada

Basically trained in kathakali as a young adult, kathakali has been part of my creative tools since the beginning of my creative life as a professional stage artist. This communication will present how kathakali impacted the artist body and the creative process of *Le rêve d'Urmila* (*Urmila's Dream*), a creation presented in September 2018 in the context of my doctoral project at Université Laval, in Quebec City. As part of my research on cultural hybridization through kathakali, I've trained a group of western artists to dance and play with the codes of Indian dance. I will present how we trained and explored various elements of the kathakali performance: the four *abhinaya*, rhythmic and musical elements, etc. I will introduce the translation process that I underwent to construct gestural scores with *mudras* to support the spoken text; how we explored the *navarasa* through improvisation and how these elements were integrated to the production.

In conclusion, I'll propose a reflection on cultural hybridization in the creation performing artist body through intensive training in traditional performing arts linking the reflection with my creative process.

Uyir, Communities of Practice and 'national' culture?

Magdalen Tamsin Gorringe – PhD candidate, University of Roehampton, UK

Nationalism is on the rise. Not only in Britain, with the nationalist fuelled Brexit, but in America, Russia, India and Turkey to name a few, a parochial nationalism, it seems, is the new status quo.

Amidst such a politics of separatism, what is the place of the arts? Of dance? Of Indian classical dance...in Britain? Historically, these dance forms (particularly bharatanatyam) have more often than not themselves been aligned with an exclusive (Indian) nationalism. Questions are asked today, within both Britain and India, about what grants a practitioner a 'right' to perform. Can these forms be legitimately performed by someone non-Asian; non-Indian; non-Tamil?

In the face of such a rhetoric of exclusion, British dance groups such as Stella Uppal Subbiah's Uyir posit an identity born of the common surrender to the particularities of an art form rather than a surrender to the vagaries of nationalist or racial prejudice. Rejecting equally a glib cosmopolitanism and a dogmatic nationalism, Uyir celebrates the identity born of the common labour shared by communities of practice, thereby pointing a possible way to a cherishing of particularity without insularity; of distinctiveness without separateness and of nationality without cultural exclusivity.

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Gender expression or forced masculinity?

Giridhar Raghunathan – PhD candidate, University of Roehampton, UK

Bharatanatyam is an Indian dance form widely taught, practiced and performed in India and across the globe. This presentation examines the construction of masculinity in creative performance by selected male bharatanatyam dancers during home confinement related to covid-19 pandemic.

‘Should bharatanatyam performances adhere to societal norms of gender expression?’ In an attempt to answer this question, this conference paper turns to the recent virtual performances of some millennial male dancers. Within the frame of confinement of identity and identity amid confinement, it analyses the construction and representation of masculinity by the dancers in their concert dance format live performances on Instagram (a popular social media service) during the lockdown between the months of April to July 2020.

Principle of Movement: Upanishadic Teaching and its Relevance to the Study of Adavu

Dr. Sreelatha Vinod - PhD in Bharatanatyam, Tamil University, Thanjavur, India

Movement is an integral part of human existence and in dance, this very movement finds expression using the body as its primary tool. The adavu is the building block for all movement in Bharatanatyam. Although the human body is the main tool for communication, fact is that it is not achieved only on the plane of physicality. The body emotes and therefore is capable of feeling. The feeling arises from thoughts that stem from an inner understanding that gives each individual a unique identity. This is governed by many factors including the genetic makeup and the environment that has a profound effect on that individual. When there is total awareness of this, there is deep satisfaction and joy in the movement and therefore also in the adavu.

All these principles are dealt with in the Upanishads through the concept of the pancha-koshas or 5 realms of existence. This is a fundamental source of reference to understand the movements as we see it, the relationship of the movement with the surroundings and finally the course of the movement in relation to the larger self.

These theories lend themselves to be implemented in the chosen field so as to make meaning of the study, which in this case is the study of the adavu and all that goes into making it both functional in nature and add a new dimension to the art form.

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Arrested Movements!?! Analysis of the Dance – Image Relationship of South Indian Temple Reliefs

Sandra J. Schlage, PhD candidate, University of Bonn, Germany

“Without a knowledge of the art of dancing, the rules of painting are very difficult to be understood” (Kramrisch 1928: 31). This might be the most frequently quoted and probably also the most over-interpreted sentence from the *Citrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, a manual on the creation of images. Especially, dance scholars who worked on Indian dance imagery used this quote for claiming that dance reliefs would truthfully depict the performance traditions at the time of their creation.

Most research on Indian dance imagery focused on the study of the 108-*karaṇa* series. Those reliefs which can be found at four different South Indian temples depict dance units which were described in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, an approximately 2000-year-old manual on performing arts. The enthusiastic study of this selected type of dance images in academic research is opposed to the general neglect of other types of dance reliefs. A closer look at the remaining types suggests different readings on the working process of the artists and their dependence/independence of the dance tradition.

Based on the study of dance reliefs at 30 temples of the region between Chennai and Madurai from the Pallava period (8th century) up to the present, this lecture shall identify alternative theories on the relationship between dance and visual arts. This includes an introduction to the varying content of dance reliefs, a rough analysis of their connection to textual sources and a discussion of art-historical theories and tools for their study.

All are welcome!

For access to the Zoom conference please send an e-mail including your full name to Sandra J. Schlage: schlage@uni-bonn.de. We will provide the Zoom link one week before the conference.