

Critical Reconsideration of the Discourse of Nonfictional Dance Media

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I. Introduction

The field of dance media is ironic in that, despite the prevailing uses of dance media products in dance scholars' research and teaching practices, critical discussion on it seems meager. Ten years ago, in their respective reviews of *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*(2002), Kent de Spain¹⁾ and Johannes Birringer²⁾ brought to light the deficiency of theoretical and critical considerations of dance media in dance scholarship. Although several textual, online, and media sources for making video dance³⁾ and shorter publications such as articles or

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1) Kent De Spain(2005), *Dance and the Camera: "Envisioning Dance on Film and Video,"* *Dance Chronicle* 28(3), pp. 407-411.

2) Johannes Birringer(Winter 2003 and Summer 2004), *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video,* *Dance Research Journal* 35(2) and 36(1), pp. 176-181.

3) Katrina McPherson(2006), *Making Video Dance: A Step-by-step Guide to Creating Dance for the Screen* (London and New York: Routledge), p.xxvii. In the introduction, McPherson states that, "I wrote this book because I could not find one like it."

conference proceedings on dance and technology have come out intermittently since then, the overall condition has not changed dramatically.⁴⁾ In his doctoral dissertation published in 2005, Marc Downie defines the field of dance technology as “a domain with many practitioners, few techniques and almost no theory; a field that...has literally hundreds of citable pieces and no canonical works; a field that is oddly disconnected from modern dance’s history...and that has no influence on the prevailing digital art paradigms...that it consumes.”⁵⁾ Also, in her book published in 2010, Erin Brannigan pointed out the lack of development in the discourse of dance media and attributes it to critics and scholars who, trapped in the institutionalized disciplinary boundary of dance, fail to address the in-between realm and to actively engage with film theory.⁶⁾ This shows that theoretical and critical dialogues surrounding dance media from a broader perspective seem to remain rather dispersed and cursory.

While the lack of critical consideration is a prevalent condition of dance media, what I found more problematic is that the existing dialogues tend largely to fall on the creative and technical aspects of dance media—which is variously called “video dance,” “screen dance,” or “dance on camera.” The popularity of video dance seems to be grounded in the rationale that it offers what live dance cannot by exploring cinema’s capacity to slow down, accelerate, or reverse time in order to extend the dancer’s choreographic potential. The concentrated attention to video dance is noticeable from the trend of book publication, as recent books on dance media written by single authors were primarily about the aesthetic and technical aspects of dance media; e.g., Erin Brannigan’s *Dancefilm*, Sherril Dodds’s *Dance on Screen*, Katrina McPherson’s *Making Video Dance*, and Johannes Birringer’s *Performance, Technology and Science*.⁷⁾ Brannigan is interested in how choreographic elements inform cinematic operations in “dancefilm (Brannigan’s term),” while Dodds theorizes “screen dance (Dodds’ term)” as an independent

4) One of the major conferences on dance media in the United States was Dance for the Camera Symposium, held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Departments of Dance and Interarts & Technology, February 9-13, 2000.

5) Marc Downie(2005), *Choreographing the extended agent: Performance graphics for dance theater*, (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology), p. ii.

6) Erin Brannigan(2011), *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image*, (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 6.

7) Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm*; Katrina McPherson, *Making Video Dance*; Johannes Birringer, *Performance, Technology and Science* (PAJ Publications, 2008).

discipline. While both of them introduce the history of dance media and touch upon its diverse modes, their discussions lead to theorizing of “screen dance” or “dancefilm.” Meanwhile, McPherson is practical about writing a textbook on how to make video dance, while Birringer is contemplative on the aesthetic issues of the convergence of dance and new technologies in interactive, networked, and virtual environments. Moreover, Brannigan estimates that six books were published in last sixteen years around the world, all of which I found were about video dance.⁸⁾ Despite their disparate approaches to dance media, these authors share the primary concern with aesthetic and technical modes of dance media.

Regarding the current atmosphere as the “renaissance” of dance media, Douglas Rosenberg also warns that its potential hazard of phenomena would be “ghettorization” that “privileges form over content, tools over practice, and is a modernist construct in a post modern era.”⁹⁾ Bearing Rosenberg’s warning against the unbalanced discourse of dance media, this study problematizes the marginalization of nonfictional dance media in the larger discourse of dance media. Nonfictional dance media embraces multifarious phenomena, from strict documentation of dance performances to documentary TV programs or film with dance footage. While the distinction between fictional and nonfictional media is not a simple relationship of dichotomy, nonfictional media can be distinguished from fictional media for its reliance on indexicality—the ability to convey something of the real. Considering the rich discussion on media’s indexicality in the academic realm of film and studies, the lack of attention in the dance field should be interrogated.

This study aims to reconsider the discourse of nonfictional dance media, both philosophically and critically, and to provide suggestions for more critical approach to it. To do so, this study problematizes the notion of treating nonfictional dance media as a culturally neutral and perhaps obsolete arena. While the digital

8) Besides McPherson’s and Sherril Dodds’s, she also mentions: Judy Mitoma, ed.(2002), *Envisioning Dance: On Film and Video* (New York, London: Routledge); Jordan and Allen, eds. (1993), *Parallel Lines: Media Representations of Dance* (London: John Libbey & Company Ltd.); Elisa Vaccarino(1996), *La Musa dello scherno freddo* (Genova: Costa and Nolan); Claudia Rosiny(1990), *Videotanz: Panorama einer intermedialen Kunstforum* (Zurich: Choronos Verlag).

9) Douglas Rosenberg(February 9-13, 2000). Anthology Film Archives. Proceeding of Dance for the Camera Symposium. The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Departments of Dance and Interarts & Technology, p. 87.

revolution made dance media much more ubiquitous and accessible, we often forget that media is—just as dance is—a phenomenon with cultural, economic, and political implications and imbalances. Although the photochemically produced footage of dance stands as an indexical sign of a dance that exists in reality, the meaning that we draw from it encapsulates virtually all issues surrounding knowledge, history, and representation. Documentary scholar Michael Renov lists the key questions of nonfictional media as “the ontological status of the image, the epistemological stakes of representation, the potentialities of historical discourse of film.”¹⁰⁾ His comment indicates that nonfictional dance media could be the strategic point upon which to reconsider not only dance media but also dance as a sociocultural construction.

Methodologically, this study is a literature analysis, providing the large scope of the field of nonfictional dance media. If the Chapter 2 and 3 are theoretical analysis of a few selected literature within the field of film studies, Chapter 4 is an analysis of the major book publication on nonfictional dance media in the dance field. To make the discussion manageable, I delimit the analysis subject to books on dance media. While admitting that items such as research journal articles and conference proceedings are invaluable sources of burgeoning discourse, I also see that books represent its maturity and depth. Since no book on dance media has been published in Korea, I inevitably delimit my discussion on books published in English.

Chapter 2 provides philosophical interrogation of the binary and hierarchical relationship between live dance and its mediatization. Based on the discussions of theorists including Philip Auslander and Noël Carroll, I argue that the notion that mediatized dance is ontologically inferior to live dance should be reconsidered. Chapter 3 critically interrogates the dichotomy of subjectivity-objectivity that parallels the distinction between fictional and nonfictional media, while overviewing the critical discourse of nonfictional media from film and documentary studies. Based on these philosophical and critical reconsiderations of nonfictional media, Chapter 4 questions whether the current discourse on dance media is critical enough to acknowledge the multi-faceted aspects of nonfictional media or still operates on the narrow premise of nonfictional media. In conclusion,

10) Michael Renov(1993), Introduction: The Truth about Non-Fiction, *Theorizing Documentary*, edited by Michael Renov (New York, London: Routledge), pp. 1-2.

I will summarize the discussion and provide suggestions for future study.

Examining nonfictional dance media against the dominant presence of fictional dance media is not just about finding an academic niche based on the rationale of shedding new light on a hitherto neglected area; rather, I believe nonfictional dance media's status as the "stand-in for live dance" has much to do with the way we think of dance and media in a specific context. I presume that this interrogation will provide fascinating insights into how the potential of media shapes, and is shaped by, the discourse of dance within the specific sociocultural context.

II. Philosophical Interrogation of Live Dance and Its Mediatization

This chapter problematizes the binary and hierarchical relationship between live and mediatized dance, and reconsider the ontological depreciation of mediatized dance in the dance field.

It is no doubt that media has become a vital contributor in making, theorizing about, and teaching dance, yet what is easily detectable in the dance field is an ambivalent sentiment toward it. On one hand, media is cherished as if it were an omnipotent tool to surpass the ephemeral and physical confinement of dance. Tally Beatty's meta-temporal leap in Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) has become the symbol for various efforts to challenge the norms of dance beyond the limit of the proscenium stage. Also, many dancers approach with optimism the subject of dance as a preserving tool, as seen in choreographer Daniel Nagrin's book, *How to Dance Forever*, within the chapter called, "How to *really* dance forever" (emphasis added), by responding as follows: "It's easy. Get videotaped. You and all of us can finally become history."¹¹ As revealed in Nagrin's assertion, media is often viewed as the vehicle for the future of dance, in which the limitedness of dance in physical time and space can be easily abolished.

On the other hand, however, not every aspect of media is readily welcomed within the dance field. Rather, persistent suspicion surrounds the ontological value of mediatized dance as opposed to that of live dance performance. According to

11) Daniel Nagrin(1988), *How to Dance Forever: Surviving against the Odds*, (New York: Quill × William Morrow), p. 341.

one famous anecdote, Isadora Duncan refused to be filmed at all, because she considered filmed dance to be a parasite on the art form and would only damage the sacred power of dance.¹²⁾ So, although Nagrin found preservative value in a simple recording of dance through filmic media, Duncan devalued it for being ontologically deprecating to the phenomenon of dance.

While dancers like Duncan who completely refuse to be filmed might be few in number in a contemporary culture dominated by the ubiquity of various digital and interactive media forms, it seems that many people in the dance field still have mixed feelings about media; while embracing media's usefulness, they remain rather wary of its recent dominance over live dance. Thus, the live and filmed dance camps remain divided. For example, *Washington Post* dance critic Alan Kriegsman began his review of a dance film as follows:

Neither the video nor the movie camera is a substitute for the living eye in the appreciation of dance, but they sure can get us to places we might never have a chance to visit otherwise—places that aren't just geographical, but psychological and historical too.¹³⁾

This single sentence intriguingly reveals Kriegsman's ambivalent attitude toward media; he affirms media's usefulness, yet only to the extent that it does not interfere with a viewer's appreciation of "real" dance. Positioning the unmediated appreciation of dance with the living eye and the mediated appreciation of dance in a mutually exclusive relationship, Kriegsman assigns significance to the filmic record of dance only as a means of doing something that is unattainable through eye witness. In other words, filmed dance cannot compete with dance *in situ*. Refusing to endow filmed dance with a significant ontological value equal to that of live dance, Kriegsman puts filmed dance in a position subsidiary to, and separated from, live dance performance. Moreover, he reveals a humanist wariness against the mechanical rendition of dance in his argument that it (alluding particularly to concert dance) should be experienced with the "living eye."

Many other dance critics seem to share Kriegsman's divisive attitude toward media, especially depreciating the faithful adaptation of a stage dance work through media. Clive Barnes suggests that dance on media lacks the element of risk that live performance has,¹⁴⁾ which embodies the "liveness" that live dance

12) Anne Hollander(1999), *Feeding the Eye: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), p. 3.

13) Alan M. Kriegsman(April 24, 1980), Moving Pictures, *The Washington Post*, p. D6.

has. Also, Jennifer Dunning provocatively declared that, “I would rather do laundry than watch a ballet on anything but a three-dimensional stage.”¹⁵⁾ These dance critics acknowledge that dance media gains ontological value only when it does something that live dance cannot do. In other words, dance and dance media should be viewed as separate modes of expression. In so doing, the relationship of live dance and filmed dance becomes binary and even hierarchical.

Interestingly, the binary and even hierarchical relationship also exists between live dance and video dance. In *Dance on Screen*, Sherril Dodds also finds that critical responses to video dance—or, what she refers to as “screen dance”—range from celebration to disdain. Witnessing that live-dance-oriented views have inevitably produced partial and biased approaches to screen dance, Dodds argues that screen dance should be conceptualized as a discipline in its own right.¹⁶⁾ With this rationale, Dodds proceeded to theorize about the special realm of screen dance as independent from the codes and conventions of dance on stage, reflecting the current tendency of dance media scholarship. As the niche of dance media has become a new interdisciplinary field, its foremost inquiry is charged with defining the essence and potential of the amalgam of dance and media in its own right as if it is shouting, “Dance media is different from stage dance!” Johannes Birringer’s contemplation on media technologies¹⁷⁾ and Kent De Spain’s analysis of *Ghostcatching*¹⁸⁾ are a few notable examples of this tendency.

However, the seemingly oppositional relationship of dance and dance media should be more critically examined. Referring to this idea as the binary opposition of “the live and the mediated,” media scholar Philip Auslander challenges the conventional assumptions that “the live event is ‘real’ and that mediated events are secondary and somehow artificial reproduction of the real.”¹⁹⁾ Proving that the live and the mediated events intersect and resonate with each other, Auslander argues that there is no clear-cut ontological distinction between the live and the mediated

14) Clive Barnes(May 1985), That’s dancing, *Dance & Dancers* 425, pp. 12-13.

15) Jennifer Dunning(May 12, 2006), Pas de DVD: Ballet Leaps Out of the Box, *The New York Times*, p. E5.

16) Sherril Dodds(2001), pp. 16-22.

17) Johannes Birringer(Jan., 2002), Dance and Media Technologies, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 24, pp. 84-93.

18) Kent De Spain(Summer, 2000), Dance and Technology: A Pas de Deux for Post-Humans, *Dance Research Journal* 32(1), pp. 2-17.

19) Philip Auslander(1999; 2008), *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 3.

and suggests that their relationship should be regarded as historical and contingent.

Problematizing the binary and hierarchical opposition of live dance and mediatized dance leads to the reconsideration of the ontological depreciation of mediatized dance in the dance field. In fact, this is not a problem specific to the dance field, but a general tendency found in modernist aesthetics in which disparate art genres should define their unique realms and differentiate them from other genres. Art critic Clement Greenberg is influential in spreading the notion that an art genre is defined by its medium, which further determines the autonomous avenue of proper artistic efforts. In other words, painting is all about flatness, while sculpture uses three dimensions. The reason that modernist aesthetics play a role in reconsidering the dichotomy of live dance and filmed dance is because this logic of legitimizing an art genre influenced not only the discourse of film but also that of dance. As much as theorists of photography, film, video, and digital media have also legitimized these new forms as art by situating them within (as well as differentiating them from) the conventions and realms of existing art genres, dance critics and scholars have promoted dance as a prospective art by emphasizing its unique qualities, such as corporeality and embodiment.

Aesthetician and film theorist Noël Carroll summarizes modernist aesthetics as “the medium specificity thesis,” stating “each art form, in virtue of its medium, has its own exclusive domain of development.”²⁰⁾ Examining how film, video, and photography newly gained the status of art in the genealogy of arts, Carroll analyzes the medium specificity thesis in terms of an internal component and a comparative component. According to him, “the internal component considers what a medium does best of all the things it does. The comparison component considers what a medium does best compared to other media.”²¹⁾ However, Carroll discredits both components, because he sees them rather as social rhetoric to legitimize the medium as art and, once a medium is accepted as art, the issue of specificity naturally loses its significance. In other words, once film is accepted as art, artists can do whatever they want to do, regardless of whether their work intersects with theatre, dance, or video.

While Carroll’s objection to the medium specificity thesis helps us perceive the binary opposition of dance and dance media historically and comparatively in the

20) Noël Carroll(1996), *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press), p. 25.

21) Ibid., p. 8.

larger context of art genres, the aspect of Carroll's argument that particularly drew my attention is that the medium specificity thesis promotes "not a given medium per se, but briefs in favor of certain styles, genres, and artistic movements."²²⁾ In other words, medium specificity has legitimized certain styles, genres, and movements within an art genre, rather than legitimizing the whole medium. This informs us that, while we tend to consider fictional dance media as the essential or normative qualities of dance media, it is indeed historical and contingent upon technical, aesthetic, sociocultural, ideological, political, and economical contexts. Carroll's insight leads us to perceive the discursive shape of dance media as a unique cultural construction.

This chapter examined the hierarchy between live dance and its mediatization and challenged the premise that nonfictional dance media is an index of the live dance, only its poor substitute. Based on this philosophical interrogation, the next chapter will provide a discursive interrogation of the binary distinction between fictional and nonfictional media. Referring to many postmodern film theorists, it will argue that, even when nonfictional media proves the existence of the profilmic object, it guarantees neither that the viewer unequivocally understand it nor that there exists a correct way to understand it.

III. Discursive Interrogation of the Objectivity of Nonfictional Media

Although this study proceeds based on the distinction between fictional and nonfictional media, it is a mere strategic tool to shed light on nonfictional dance media that had been overshadowed by the boom of video dance. Summarizing the discussions in film and documentary studies, this chapter will dismantle the premise that fictional media is subjective while nonfictional media is objective, by demonstrating that this distinction is not a pre-given condition but a discourse involving complicated cultural implications. Focusing on media's indexicality—the ability to convey something of the real—this chapter will trace the shift from the traditional to the critical discourses of the objectivity of nonfictional media.

Filmic media's objectivity largely relies on its indexicality. Indicating or

22) Ibid., p. 19.

attesting to the existence of something, “indexicality” is a semiotic term along with an icon and symbol. Charles Sanders Peirce identifies three kinds of signs according to their relationship with the object: iconic (pictorial), symbolic (arbitrary), and indexical (causal). Unlike iconic and symbolic signs, indexical signs testify to the existence of the subject. Within the film field, the concept of media’s indexicality was generalized by Andre Bazin, a French film theorist in the 1940s. Premising the pre-givenness of the concrete, objective *real*, Bazin specifically argued that film has special capacities to convey qualities of the profilmic reality. Simply speaking, film’s indexicality demonstrates that film offers a minimum of the presence of the real objects it represents. As Rosen explains, “In cinema, indexicality designates the presence of camera and sound-recording machinery at the profilmic event, which, in turn, guarantees that the profilmic really did exist in the past.”²³⁾ Due to its causal relationship with reality, media’s indexicality became a major concern within nonfiction filmmaking, particularly among documentary filmmakers. Working upon the belief that “film’s essential nature... is to record and project the world around us with as little interference as possible,”²⁴⁾ traditional documentarians essentialized the concept of indexicality as the rationale to distinguish their endeavor from the manipulative mainstream narrative cinema. The pursuit of indexicality and its maximization via objective representation naturally resulted in the dominance of the realism tradition in the discourse of documentary.

Traditional documentary filmmaking could be described as the pursuit of realism, which reached its peak with the movement of “direct cinema” in North America and its parallel movement of “cinema verité” in France in the ’60s. Unlike their predecessor documentarians such as John Grierson who first coined the term *documentary film* and promoted documentary as art, direct cinema practitioners such as Richard Leacock proceeded to observe real events rather than influence the subject. As expressed in the tropes of being “in the right place at the right time” and “a fly on the wall,” concepts of nonintervention, observation, unmediated access to reality, and authenticity are emphasized. Meanwhile, French counterpart cinema verité practitioners, notably Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin,

23) Philip Rosen(2001), *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press), p. 86.

24) Karen Backstein(1996), *Dancing Images: Choreography, the Cinema, and Culture* (Ph.D diss., New York University), p. 8.

chose the opposite strategy of full absorption into the subject to emphasize reflexivity, just like “a fly in the soup.” Despite their opposite filming styles, both movements can be considered followers of realism, since they share the aim to present the real and to encourage the viewers to think for themselves, instead of telling them how to interpret the scene.

Interestingly, however, while Bazin defined indexicality as an innate capacity of filmic apparatus, he did not believe that indexicality should be the primary goal of filmmaking. Rather, Bazin observed that indexicality became a crucial aspect of the cinematic image due to the viewer’s obsession with realism. This implies that realism, or the agenda of both direct cinema and cinema vérité to deliver the real world as it is, does not describe a teleological goal of film, but presents just one way of engaging with reality. Then, it tells us that documentary filmmakers became obsessed with realism, not because media’s indexicality is the goal of filmmaking, but because it has much to do with the knowledge claim for reality. Documentary theorist Michael Renov says that, “The documentary ‘truth claim’ (which says, at the very least: “Believe me, I’m of the world”) is the baseline of persuasion for all nonfiction, from propaganda to rock doc.”²⁵⁾ Since realist films make use of straightforward recording, the knowledge claim due to the epistemological promise of referential image is what penetrates them, in “that what we see refers to an existing reality and we can thus ‘know’ a certain landscape, a suburb, a room, or a farming method.”²⁶⁾ In other words, nonfictional media presupposes the knowability of the subject.

Traditionally, the knowledge claim of media’s indexicality presupposes the objectivity and authenticity of its representation, a phenomenon film theorist Brian Winston identifies as scientism. Tracing the genealogy of film’s scientism back to the invention of photographic image, Winston contends that scientific and evidentiary connotations are profoundly innate to nonfictional film as it inherited from the early years of photography.²⁷⁾ Film has naturalized photographic authority by perpetuating the notions that “seeing is believing” and that “the camera never lies.” In this regard, Winston argues that, despite the opposite styles of direct

25) Michael Renov(1993), p. 30.

26) Ivone Margulies(2003), *Bodies Too Much, Rite of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, edited by Ivone Margulies (Durham and London: Duke University Press), p. 1.

27) Brian Winston(1993), The documentary Film as Scientific Inscription, *Theorizing Documentary*, pp. 37-57.

cinema and cinema vérité, scientism penetrates both in that it “urg[es] us to believe that what we see is evidence, evidence of documentarians making a documentary.”²⁸⁾ This shows how the discourse of science has operated in legitimizing film as the indelible imprint of the real.

No matter how thoroughly and innovatively the practitioners of direct cinema and cinema vérité experimented, however, their yearning for truthfulness could not be achieved. Direct cinema filmmakers promoted their endeavor as the objective evidence, while cinema vérité practitioners promoted their endeavors as reflexivity. However, both of them failed because the epistemological ground of knowledge itself shifted from positivism to postmodern critique. While film’s indexicality has been considered an evidentiary visual form fixing the relationship between the signified (profilmic reality) and signifier (film), postmodern critique challenges its fixity and further interrogates its knowledge claim. Ivone Margulies argues that what seems like a transparent record is now regarded as not always a naïve or deceptive form of representation, and the relationship between the clarity of vision and of meaning is questioned. In the postmodern epistemology, scientism is not a legitimizing ground but an ideological burden for nonfiction filmmaking.

This shifting ground for nonfictional media’s knowledge claim resonates with the shifting notion of knowledge in critical theories. Influenced by Nietzsche, Foucault, and others who were interested in tracing how particular sets of knowledge are engendered, maintained, and appropriated in a given society, critical theorists argue that the pursuit of knowledge, which has been taken for granted as the ultimate value of the traditional western philosophy, is no more the holy grail of scholarship. Instead, research is considered inseparable from politics and power, and intellectual writing is considered a form of fiction.

Responding to the postmodern reconsideration of knowledge, nonfiction film also loses its scientific legitimization in its knowledge claim as well as the belief that objective portrayal will deliver the truthful aspects of the object. Indeed, the discourse of nonfiction filmmaking underwent a huge transformation whose major polemics can be summarized in two points.

First, postmodernist theorists contend that there is nothing intrinsic to nonfictional filmmaking. Semiotic film theorists such as Christian Metz are inspired by Roland Barthes and Hayden White, who emphasized linguistic and

28) Ibid., p. 53.

rhetorical aspects of narrativity, and argue that all films are fiction and that fictional and nonfictional films share key conceptual and discursive characteristics with each other. For example, documentary's idiosyncratic filming styles, such as shaky camera movements and the use of interviews and self-portrayal, are widely used in Hollywood films (e.g., *Paranormal Activity* [2007], *The Mist* [2007]) while documentary and fiction film share discursive forms and methods, such as the establishing shot, point-of-view shot, and match-cut editing. In view of these commonalities, nonfiction film was acknowledged to be as manipulative as fiction film. Criticizing the "naïve realism," Trinh T. Minh-ha argues that documentary has become a "style," and these stylistic techniques—e.g., the personal testimony technique, the plain-folks technique, the bandwagon technique, and the card-stacking technique—have become "so 'natural' to the language of broadcast television today that they go unnoticed."²⁹⁾ Trinh contends that documentary abides by the conventions of naturalism rather than portraying an attitude toward life. Michael Renov argues that "all discursive forms—documentary included—are, if not fictional, at least *fictive*, this by virtue of their tropic character (their recourse to tropes or rhetorical figures)."³⁰⁾ This perspective indicates that, at least in the formal aspect, fictional and nonfictional forms are enmeshed with each other.

Second, postmodern scholars also argue that media's indexicality, even when proving the existence of the profilmic object, guarantees nothing. Renov points out the predicament that, "[The] images were understood to be inviolably 'real' even while their meanings came to be vehemently contested."³¹⁾

Feminist film theorist Claire Johnston argues as follows:

It is idealist mystification to believe that "truth" can be captured by the camera or that the conditions of a film's production (e.g., a film made collectively by women) can of itself reflect the condition *of its production*. This is mere utopianism: new meaning has to *be manufactured* within the text of the film.... What the camera in fact grasps is the "natural" world of the dominant ideology.³²⁾

Similarly, art historian Brian John Tagg argues that the evidentiary connotation of photographic media is socially constructed. He says,

29) Trinh T. Minh-ha(1993), *The Totalizing Quest of Meaning, Theorizing Documentary*, p. 99.

30) Michael Renov(1993), Introduction: The Truth about non-Fiction, *Theorizing Documentary*, p. 7.

31) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

That a photograph can come to stand as evidence, for example, rests not on a natural or existential fact, but on a social, semiotic process.... [W]hat Barthes calls “evidential force” is a complex historical outcome and is exercised by photographs only within certain institutional practices and within particular historical relations.... The very idea of what constitutes evidence has a history.... The problem is historical, not existential.³²⁾

These theorists argue with the proposition that nonfictional media, unlike fictional media, is the evidence of the real, asserting that this view cannot be supported anymore, not only because fiction and nonfiction are enmeshed with each other but also because nonfictional indexicality itself cannot guarantee its knowledge claim.

This clash of ideas results in the collapse of the simplistic dichotomy of fiction and nonfiction media. In fact, some radical theorists suggest abolition of the distinction between fictional and nonfictional media at wholesale; yet, others attributed the distinction of fictional and nonfictional media to their respective contextual and ideological relationships with reality. This once again brings the discussion back to media’s indexicality. Michael Renov, while emphasizing the shared narrativity of nonfiction and fiction films, distinguishes the former from the latter by “the extent to which the referent of the documentary sign may be considered a piece of the world plucked from its everyday context rather than fabricated for the screen.”³⁴⁾ Also, Bill Nichols similarly suggests that fiction film is story-based, while nonfiction film is argument-based. He makes a particularly useful distinction between fiction and nonfiction films in their respective orientations toward *a* world as opposed to *the* world.³⁵⁾

While disagreeing with Renov or Nichols on the view of nonfiction film as fictive, nevertheless Noël Carroll similarly argues that the distinction should be approached as a matter of social sign and designation rather than that of essence.³⁶⁾ This tells us that the division between fiction and nonfiction is socially constructed

32) Claire Johnston(1985), “Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema,” *Movies and Methods II: An Anthology*, edited by Bill Nichols (University of California Press), p. 214. Quoted from Trinh T. Minh-ha(1993), pp. 106-7.

33) John Tagg(1988), *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press), p. 5. Quoted from Renov(1993), p. 28.

34) Michael Renov(1993), p. 7.

35) Bill Nichols(1991), *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), pp. 107-133.

as well as that nonfictional media is as discursive as fictional one, even if it vies to adequately represent a given reality.

Given these philosophical and discursive reconsideration of nonfictional media, the next chapter will critically review what has been written on dance media, and examine whether the discourse of dance media still operates on the binary and hierarchical relationship between fictional and nonfictional media or has moved on to reflect the critical discourse of media.

IV. The Critical Analysis of the Discourse of Nonfictional Dance Media

Dance scholar Randy Martin warns that the empirical collection of all that has been written about dance does not guarantee dance studies as an academic discipline.³⁷⁾ The same logic can be applied to the realm of dance media. Dance media did not form an academic discipline until the early 1990s, when books on dance media had predominantly been catalogues of credit information of commercially available dance media resources. Until then, information on dance media has long been fragmentarily and pragmatically addressed, rather than presenting a coherent narrative. This is well shown in the reference listing on dance film that was published in the newsletter of the CORD in 1971.³⁸⁾ The list provides book chapters and periodical articles, but no book devoted entirely to dance film; instead, it included seven issues of differing periodicals that are devoted entirely to dance films and six doctoral and masters' theses on dance film. Indeed, with a few exceptions, meaningful discussion attempting to interpret and explain dance media phenomenon as a newly emerging discipline could not be located until the mid-1990s. Therefore, I will selectively summarize a few

36) Noel Carroll(1996), p. 238.

37) Randy, Martin(1998). *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politic*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press), p. 181.

38) CORD News 3(2), 1971, pp.37-40. The periodicals whose issues are devoted entirely to dance films include *Dance Index* IV (May 1945); *Dance Perspectives* 30 (Summer 1967), *Impulse* (1960), *Dance Film Newsletter* 1(1) (November 1967), *Dance Magazine* (April 1969; September 1965), *Dance Index* VI(8) (1947). Authors whose doctoral or masters' theses on films are: Saul Gilbert, Mary Jane Hungerford, Allegra Fuller Snyder, Louise K. Turner, and Peggy Wallace.

meaningful examples rather than gathering everything written on dance media.

One of the earliest precursors of the burgeoning inquiry on dance media is *Parallel Lines*, co-edited by Stephanie Jordan and Dave Allen published in Britain in 1993. Announced as “the first book which attempts to collect together accounts of how dance and dancing have been represented specifically on public television in Britain,”³⁹⁾ it provided a historiography that, while fragmented, is noteworthy for a few reasons. First, despite its pioneering status on promoting dance media, it consciously avoided a technology-oriented spotlight on media and examines dance representation on television as a sociocultural and economic phenomenon. Second, in terms of dance genres, its contributors moved out of canonic dance historiographies focused on ballet and modern dance and also included popular dance forms via diverse TV formats, including light entertainment programs, music videos, commercials, and documentaries. Third, with regard to British TV, it acknowledged the dominant influence of Hollywood cinema, as Dave Allen stated that the Hollywood model of cinema practice became “the most influential form... and continues to exert an influence over a wide range of screen practices both within and outside the United States of America.”⁴⁰⁾ In sum, what is special about *Parallel Lines* is not so much its “trailblazer status” as its scope and agenda to frame dance media as a cultural practice, ideology, and industry. Thoroughly embedding dance media in society by focusing on dance representation on TV, this book, however, does not include in its scope the anthropological documentaries featuring non-Western, non-theatrical dance forms.

Acknowledging that dance media quickly became a burgeoning field of inquiry since the publication of *Parallel Lines*, Sherril Dodds provides another overview of dance media in UK in her dissertation-turned-book *Dance on Screen*. Dodds’ book differs from *Parallel Lines* in its attempt to create a “comprehensive introduction to the diversity of *screen dance forms* through cultural, economic, critical, artistic, historical, technical, and theoretical perspectives (emphasis added).”⁴¹⁾ Distinguishing the term “screen dance” as a form of dance specifically made for media from the more general term “dance film,” her overview of dance media history functions as a preliminary framework for discussing screen dance. Chapter 2 provides rich examples of diverse forms of dance media, moving from

39) Stephanie Jordan and Dave Allen, eds.(1993), p. ix.

40) Dave Allen(1993), Screening Dance, *Parallel Lines*, p. 5.

41) Sherril Dodds(2001; 2004), p. xviii.

the commercial end, including Hollywood movies, music videos, and art dance on television, and the rest of the chapters focus on dance specifically conceived for television. In this structure, the move from commercial to art dance programs bears the implications of a developmental model. Dodds' historiography, suggested as the cultural background from which a theoretical discussion of screen dance and other creative/future-oriented dance media emerges, is a common device found in books that are devoted to the technological possibilities of dance media. This makes evident that the polarization of commercial programs and art programs inevitably induces a progressive historiography of nonfictional dance media.

Meanwhile, in the United States, a meaningful edition to theorizing dance media emerged with the publication of *Envisioning Dance* in 2002. An outcome of the six-year project of the UCLA National Dance/Media Project, it aims to "identify, develop, and support outstanding works in film and video" in response to the "thoughtful debate on the long-term needs of the field."⁴²⁾ Although there had been diverse essays, articles, conference proceedings, and periodicals' special issues on dance media prior to its appearance, this book signals the epistemological shift that envisions dance media as a proper academic inquiry within the North American dance field. Although it is difficult to draw a coherent argument from this edited book that is filled with personal reminiscences and short reports of diverse practitioners in the field—it has 55 chapters, each of which does not exceed 10 pages—it certainly represents a collective effort to theorize and contextualize dance media within the North American dance field.

While these three books on dance media opened up the academic interrogation of the field of dance media, what I want to examine is whether the current discourse of dance media is critical enough to move beyond the deep-seated binary and hierarchical views of live dance and its mediatization. Unfortunately, I observe that, although there exist discernable junctures and frame shifts from the traditional to critical modes of dance studies, the discussion of nonfictional dance media seems to reside somewhat awkwardly in between.

As one of the most recent monographs on dance media, Erin Brannigan's *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* proves that nonfictional dance media is still marginalized in the discourse of dance media. Of special interest is

42) Judy Mitoma, ed.(2002), p. xii.

that she provides a historical overview of dance media thoroughly within “the techno-aesthetic genealogy dominated by the spectre of the cinematic apparatus.”⁴³⁾

This enables her to reconfigure the historiography thematically based on rhetoric devices and genres, such as close-up, gesture-dance, musicals, and so on. While this structural strategy departs from the conventional chronological causality, it itself does not guarantee critical historicity. For example, Chapter 1 is determined to take “a more central position” for Loïe Fuller within the genealogy of dance media, rationalized by the assertion that “the art of Loïe Fuller exceeded the possibilities of early cinema.”⁴⁴⁾ However, considering that, as Brannigan herself acknowledges, Loïe Fuller has already been regarded as the pioneer of screen dance and considered central to discussions on the interfaces between modern dance and cinema, for different degrees,⁴⁵⁾ her revisionist rationale does not seem as groundbreaking as it does a demand for rectification. Instead, what stands out to this study’s purview is that her delimitation of techno-aesthetic genealogy rationalizes her exclusion of straight documentation of dance performance from the research, which perpetuated the marginalization of nonfictional media within the discourse of dance media.

While Brannigan’s monograph reveals the epistemological hierarchy between fictional and nonfictional dance media, another epitomic case can be located in Beth Genné’s article, “Teaching Dance on Film and Film Dance,” published in *Teaching Dance Studies*.⁴⁶⁾ As an edited book containing various topics and inquiries on dance pedagogy, *Teaching Dance Studies* metacritically reconsiders dance studies; indeed, the publication of this book itself proves the critical and reflexive undergirding of the way dance has been taught. Considering that each contributor summarizes the general issues found in his or her area rather than pursuing personal arguments, Genné’s article should also be understood as the widespread attitude toward dance media among selected dance educators.⁴⁷⁾ Given its representative position, Genné’s article reveals the persistent evidentiary conceptualization of nonfictional media that is based on a traditional view of dance

43) Erin Brannigan(2011), p. 36.

44) Ibid., p. 36.

45) As Brannigan acknowledges in Chapter 2, theorists such as Clare De Morinni, Sally Sommer, Dee Raynolds, Felicia McCarren, Rhoda Garelick, Ann Cooper Albright, and Jane Goodall examined Loïe Fuller as the central figure of the early cinema and modern dance.

46) Beth Genné(2005), Teaching Dance on Film and Film Dance, *Teaching Dance Studies*, edited by Judith Chazin-Bennahum (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 77-90.

and media. Discussing problems as well as the potentials for using dance media in the classroom, she made a few propositions, including that “We [dance teachers] must rely on film, video, and, more recently, digital imagery to ‘illustrate’ dance studies,” that “film dance, for the first time in history, preserved what had been an ephemeral art form,” and that “they [audiences] need to know about them [famous choreographers] before they’ll want to come… that is our job… [to] form an alliance of dance educators to negotiate with the holders of dance resources… to make visual examples available to dance historians.”⁴⁸⁾ If these reflect common attitudes toward dance media among dance educators, I perceive that they rely on traditional assumptions of dance, including the notion of dance as ephemeral art, the pursuit of the “real” or “authentic,” and the vision as the primary basis of knowing. Although I agree with her assertion that the availability of dance media shapes what kind of dance history is taught, researched, and written about, I remain a bit skeptical of her inference that dance history or world dance could only be properly appreciated with illustrative film footage, a viewpoint that negates various other resources, such as notes, pictures, drawings, oral histories, notations and kinesthetic experience. Also, making an analogy between museum-going and theatre-going, Genné contends that exposure to art via replica only increases a person’s desire to experience the originals, the “*real* Raphael, Botticelli, Michelangelo… [italic original].” Here she not only relies on the dichotomy of the live and the mediatized, which I discussed in Chapter 2, but also extends the logic of authenticity to rationalizing dance advocacy. Genné’s arguments may suit the traditional mode of dance studies, yet they bear many assumptions that are considered problematic from the critical mode of dance studies.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Aldrich’s “Documentation, Preservation, and Access: Ensuring a Future for Dance’s Legacy,” another article included in *Teaching Dance Studies*, illustrates that preservation is the dominant discourse of nonfictional dance media. As the executive director of the Dance Heritage Coalition, an alliance of major dance collections formed to document and preserve America’s dance, Aldrich represents the official agenda of the organization. Summarizing the history and major issues of dance documentation, preservation, and access in the North American dance field, she provides conceptual

47) E.g., Bill Evans writes on movement analysis, Susan Foster on dance theory, Ilene Fox on notation, Linda Tomko on dance history, and Elizabeth Aldrich on archiving.

48) *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 83, 88.

frameworks as well as practical tips for individual dancers and companies as they create and maintain their archives. I want to point out that the main premise of her article—that archiving is essential to ensuring America’s dance heritage—could be further interrogated from a critical view. Aldrich treats dance preservation as a prerequisite for securing “America’s dance heritage,” yet she neglects to acknowledge that “heritage” is a term not self-evident and indisputable but contentious, involving political issues of how heritage is defined and who and what genres are included or excluded from it. Also, she somewhat simplifies causality by arguing that the lack of easily accessible methodology leads to what John Martin called a “limbo of illiteracy” that results in the neglect of dance in academe.

If Aldrich’s article naturalizes the need for dance preservation, Helen Thomas’s article, “Reconstruction and Dance as Embodied Textual Practice,” summarizes critical reconsiderations of the politics beneath the fad of dance preservation.⁴⁹⁾ In other words, while Aldrich continues to question how dance can best be preserved, Helen Thomas explores the inquiry on a more reflexive level, asking, “what and who gets performed and recorded? What are the political and ethical consequences of reconstructing past dances?”⁵⁰⁾ Declaring that dance preservation has become a minor industry, Thomas interrogates its historical and ideological undergirding, a subject particularly relevant to this study’s stance. Based on her post-positivist and critical view, Thomas argues that the discourse on dance preservation, which nonfictional dance media is expected to supply, is closely tied to “the concern to create a usable past on which to establish a firm dance heritage.” However, Thomas finds not only that the model of historical inquiry operating here is positivist, selective, and exclusive in “filling in the ‘blanks’ of the dance ‘story,’” but also that assigning permanency to ephemeral dance is rationalized often based on a trope of the universality of dance. Furthermore, examining various terms of dance preservation (i.e., revival, reconstruction, re-creation, co-authorship, and reinvention) she exerts that the distinctions and hierarchies among them rely on the modernist and essentialist notion of art, authenticity, and originality. Viewing dance preservation not as sacrosanctity but as a contingent and ideological construction, Thomas’s article opens up more critical approaches to nonfictional

49) Helen Thomas(2005), Reconstruction and Dance as Embodied Textual Practice, *Teaching Dance Studies*, pp. 32-45.

50) Ibid., p. 36.

media, which is often missing in the current discourse of nonfictional dance media.

In sum, although critical reconsiderations of nonfictional dance media have gradually emerged, this is still nascent compared to the rapidly shifting epistemological ground of dance studies. Even if we acknowledge the historical affinity between the traditional mode of dance studies and the invention of dance media, an inescapable truth based on the critique is that thorough critical reflections have been scant on this area.

V. Conclusion

Nonfictional dance media, assumed to be a neutral and stable reproduction of dance, was doubly marginalized in the discourse of the dance field. While the hierarchy between liveness and mediatization, which is further based on the idea of authenticity, rendered nonfictional dance media inferior to live dance, the medium specificity thesis also made nonfictional dance media inferior to the manipulation of media, namely video dance and other media-oriented performances. This marginalization formulated the paradoxical status of nonfictional dance media, since, while being cherished for its usefulness, its ontological value was largely overshadowed by the predominance of creative experiments and technological innovations in dance media. Presupposing that this particular landscape of nonfictional dance media is deeply seated in discourse of dance, this study problematized the long-lasting instrumentalization of nonfictional dance media either as merely a preserving tool or a stand-in for dance.

Due to film's indexicality, nonfictional dance media is generally understood as the compensation for the ephemeral nature of live dance. Yet, due to its apparent recognizability, it falsely alludes that one can understand it clearly and unequivocally. The rhetoric of "seeing is believing" has devalued nonfictional dance media as merely an apparent replica of the "real" dance, yet I had argued not only that the visible (dance media) should be connected with the invisible (its context), but also that seeing alone does not necessarily guarantee believing. I believe that no one in the dance field today believes, to the core, in the rhetoric of media's indexicality any longer, such as "The camera never lies," or "Seeing is believing." Yet, my analysis has shown that much of the way we interact with

media still relies on them, and I hope that this study has suggested a more nuanced and critical look at the way we preserve and represent dance via media. This study suggests approaching nonfictional dance media as a social construction that is formulated within a particular context and as a crucial participant in shaping the definition, function, and purpose of dance. If there is a simple conclusion, it certainly is that seeing, alone, is not believing. Rather, what we see in the media image of dance is more likely to be either what we want to see, or what we are accustomed to seeing—the projection of our beliefs and desires.

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논픽션 무용 미디어담론에 대한 비판적 고찰

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무용 미디어 분야는 최근 가장 각광받는 장르이기도 하지만, 동시에 이론적으로는 여전히 진지한 논의가 부족한 영역이기도 하다. 특히 “비디오댄스”, “미디어댄스” 등으로 불리는 예술제작에의 실험현상이 심한 나머지 무용을 기록하거나 재현하는 논픽션 미디어는 이론적 논의에서 한층 더 소외되어 왔다. 이에 따라 본 연구는 논픽션 미디어를 둘러싼 통념들을 철학적, 담론적으로 재고찰하고, 무용 미디어에 대한 그동안의 논의를 분석함으로써 논픽션 무용 미디어에 대한 보다 비판적이고 섬세한 접근이 필요함을 역설하고자 한다.

우선 철학적으로는 논픽션 미디어의 유용성을 인정하면서도 실제 무용현상에 비해 존재론적으로 열등하다고 여기는 양가적 태도를 고찰한다. 모더니즘 미학에 근거한 매체 특수성 테제가 설득력을 잃었다고 주장하는 노엘 캐롤과 라이브 공연과 미디어화된 공연이 이분법적인 관계가 아니라 사회문화적으로 얹혀있음을 주장하는 필립 오슬랜더의 이론에 따라 픽션 및 논픽션 미디어를 동등한 관계로 재설정한다. 한편 담론적 분석에선 픽션 미디어는 주관적이고 논픽션 미디어는 객관적이라는 통념을 비판적 미디어 이론의 흐름에 따라 재검토함으로써 논픽션 미디어의 객관성의 기반이 되는 인덱스성(indexicality) 및 지식주장(knowledge claim)이 그리 단순하거나 즉각적인 방식으로 현실과 관계 맺지 않음을 조명한다.

논픽션 미디어에 대한 철학적, 담론적 재고찰을 바탕으로 무용 미디어에 대한 주요 저서들을 비판적으로 검토해 볼 때 현재의 논픽션 무용 미디어 담론은 논픽션 미디어가 지닌 다층적인 의미를 담아낼 만큼 충분히 비판적이지 않음을 알 수 있었다. 산발적이고도 단편적으로 논의되던 무용 미디어가 90년대 이후로 하나의 학문분과를 형성했다면, 현재 무용학에서 감지되는 무용 미디어에 대한 담론은 여전히 픽션-논픽션 미디어 간의 위계적이고도 이분법적 관계를 재생산하고 있음을 알 수 있다. “보는 것이 믿는 것이다,” “카메라는 거짓말을 하지 않는다”는 명제들이 그 효용성을 잃은 오늘날 여전히 이러한 명제 위에서 작동하는 논픽션 무용 미디어 담론에 대한 재고찰이 시급하다. 오랫동안 무용현상을 보조하는 수단으로만 단순 치부되어 온 논픽션

무용 미디어에 대한 새롭고도 비판적 논의가 활성화될 때 비로소 무용학이
보다 풍성해지리라 기대한다.

주제어: nonfiction dance media(논픽션 무용 미디어), medium specificity
thesis(매체 특수성 테제), indexicality(인덱스성), realism(사실주의),
knowledge claim(지식 주장)