**Pop Moves: Dancing the Politics of Pleasure**

**Conference Proceedings- circulation of abstracts**

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**Panel 1- Genered Pleasures**

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**Swapping the Pleasures? An experiment in dance-role-swapping within two-sex couple dancing of Kizomba**

The teaching of Afro-Latin partner dance forms including Salsa, Bachata, Cha ChaCha and Kizomba routinely encourages participants to perform their gender within a rigid paradigm of heteronormative power-relations. Although many dancers are challenging the conventions of male-leading and female-following, through initiatives such as queer-tango and same-sex ballroom dance, there is virtually no evidence of social dance role-reversal within mixed-sex couples ie. women leading men. As a public artist working in the field of socially-engaged practice who is also an experienced Afro-Latin social dancer, I wanted to see whether dancers were open to dance-role reversal within a heterosexualised context and how they would respond to the experience. To this end I used methods drawn from socially-engaged art practice to organise and run a series of role-swap dance classes for existing dancers of Kizomba in Leeds in the North of England. My premise was that by allowing dancers to experience social kizomba with swapped roles in a supportive environment they would have an opportunity to experience the physical, emotional and conceptual aspects of the roles without recourse to parody, as would generally be the case within a heteronormative space. Classes ran weekly and included a social dance period after each class.

This study draws data from: questionnaires completed by dancers who attended the classes; ethnographic observation of the process and it’s outcomes; interviews with members of the larger kizomba dancing community. The most significant results were the relative ease with which participants adapted to the new roles and the feelings of pleasure that many, particularly the men, reported from the experience. Several of the participants went on to occasionally dance socially in role-swapped couples during, and after, the period of the classes. There were also some interesting linguistic effects in terms of the evolution and use of gendered and non-gendered language during the process.

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**The Allure of the Offbeat: The choreomusical games of a beatfreak**

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**‘We’re all in this together’: Spectacles of community and kinship in male street dance crew performances on televised talent show competitions**

From gravity defying backflips to high octane ‘attention-deficit’ choreography, televised talent shows in the U.K continue to generate mass viewing pleasure and large audience figures through the visual spectacle of dancing bodies in competition, overloading the viewer with images and encouraging economic transaction through voting and the buying into the multiple commodities on display. In particular, male street dance crew performances continue to populate and progress within such competitions, wowing audiences with highly synchronised and unified choreography, and drawing upon a range of styles such as hip hop, funk, house dance, martial arts and gymnastics.

Building upon the original ethos of the Hip-hop movement, as well as socially driven narratives featured within popular cinematic representations of hip hop, televised talent show competitions place narrative emphasis upon spectacles of community and brotherhood; a subversion of the negative connotations of the term ‘gang’, and far removed from media spectacles of mass youth violence, such as the Tottenham riots in 2011.From the tight unison choreography of the performances to the verbal references of friendship and fraternity, these crew performances instead offer pleasurable images of family friendly collectives, where equality, friendship and ‘dancing with my brothers’ juxtaposes the reality television theme of the neoliberal strive of the individual trying to achieve self-fulfilment.

Through a dance on screen analysis of crew performances from 2009-2013 within Got To Dance and Britain’s Got Talent, this paper therefore considers the spectacularisation and commodification of the themes of community, fraternity and kinship, calling into question the parallels between such spectacles and the U.K Coalition government’s political ideology of the Big Society. In addition, this paper considers the pleasures generated through thecommunal connection forged by the remote viewing audience through their viewing and voting experience during the programmes.

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**Panel 2- Screens and Skins**

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**Negotiating pleasure in Egyptian screen: Oriental dance and dance bodies in Egyptian cinema**

Oriental dance and the female oriental dancer constituted a popular phenomenon that marked forty years of film production in Egypt. This paper braids the negotiations that oriental dance underwent in order to become a popular cultural phenomenon on screen. These transformations were happening during a period in which oriental dance was considered a pariah’s work and carried moral stigma and social prejudices.

Since the 1930s until the 1970s a vast production of Egyptian cinema contained oriental dance numbers under several formats. A great number of dance scenes were recorded under the genre of the musical, while another great number of dance sequences did not follow any apparent narrative logic, but were included in the films due to the high demand of dance by the audience. On the other hand, researcher Karin van Nieuwkerk depicted the life of the oriental dancers during the twentieth century in hard words, showing that the oriental dancer's profession was a difficult and a socio-cultural deployed female activity in the real world (Nieuwkerk, 1995). Opposite to Van Nieuwkerk’s research, oriental dance on screen showed a glamorous and an escapist aspect that attired the audience until a point that many producers were reluctant to produce a film without dance or dancers (Boukhemal, Chahine 2006). Gifted and talented dancers such as Naima Akef, Tahia Karioka and Samia Gamal, as well as a big amount of less known dancers as Hermeen, Nabawaeya Moustafa, etc. starred an oriental dance form and performer’ body which comprises several cultural anxieties and aspirations. These were related to the modernisation of the country, the role of women and the role of dance within the popular culture after gaining independence.

The discussion will highlight how contemporary dilemmas toward the profession and the performance of oriental dance in Egypt carry several inherited rejections against this popular female performance, while the pleasure of watching the dance on screen, developed a veritable national scopophilia (Mulvey, 1997) toward the dancer and the dance. Pleasure is here related to the visual as well as to the kinaesthetic, while the whole paper will enter the area of feminist studies.

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**Facing Pleasure in *So You Think You Can Dance***

In everyday life the face occupies a central position within human expression and social interaction, and across film and television the camera has long been fascinated with the face through the framing device of the close-up. With dance, too, the face plays an important role, in that its expressive capacities are composed according to a range of performance styles and genres. With screendance, the face is subject to a “double choreography” as it both displays the codes and conventions of the particular dance idiom, and also the compositional modalities of camera work and editing. I turn to the popular reality television show *So You Think You Can Dance* to examine how the face signals, negotiates and disrupts pleasure through a complex matrix of close-ups. I focus on how pleasure is deployed and resisted through facial interactions that reinforce and critique normative values. To do so, I draw upon a single audition clip, which features Brian Henry, a 22-year old African American man from Brooklyn, New York, who specializes in krumping. To support my analysis, I employ Gilles Deleuze’s study of the close-up in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (1986), through which he examines the face and motion. He characterizes the facial close-up as “pure affect,” deterritorialized in time and space, and I use his idea of the “reflective” and “intensive” face to analyze how pleasure is constructed and negotiated through the montage of competitor, judge, and spectator interactions. This dynamic framework of exchange produces a “choreographic inter*face*”; while Henry’s intensive face provides opportunity to critique the assumed pleasures of the reality television format, his reflective face enables the pleasures of social and cultural norms to be sutured into the viewing experience.

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***Airotica*: Dance, Sex, and Pleasure**

Bob Fosse’s number *Airotica* from the 1979 film *All That Jazz* reflects the shift in sexual politics, and feminist and queer movements of the 1960s and the 1970s with a sensual spectacle of movement, choreography, lighting, and camera work. The number presents sex as an essential element of creating and expressing identity. Employing Andre Lorde’s idea of the erotic as a source of power, a replenishing and provocative force this presentation aim to examine the ways choreography of sexual and sensual pleasure may serve as a source of power and agency and pose a challenge to notions of heternormativity. Dance materalises the feeling of sensual experience with explicitly sexual choices in movement abstracted by virtuosic technical dance movement thus analysis of choreography and the setting and atmosphere of the number may illustrate the power of the erotic through affect theory. The number, within the larger context of the film, critiques the mechanisms of the economics of commercial dance and film with displayed and embodied erotic pleasure.

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**Panel 3- Partnering Pleasure and Politics**

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**Pussy Power and Batty Riders: Performances of Material and Erotic Pleasure at the International Dancehall Queen Competition**

This presentation will explore, in the context of the researcher's recent fieldwork at the International Dancehall Queen Competition in Jamaica, the body, and particularly the 'batty', as site of embodied pleasure. It will look at the competition participants' motivations to engage with their bodies and take part in this cultural phenomena by mining the significance of the corporeal and visceral experience of pleasure when investing in the act of dancehall movement.

At the competition the all-female competitors celebrate their kinaesthetic sense and revel in corporeal pleasure. They visualise the dynamism of dancehall music as they vibrate, beat, shake and rotate the invaluable expressive tool of their buttocks. They perform for short, intense moments like an electric guitarist's solo, during which they treat themselves to and share with the audience their expertise; allowing artist and audience alike to experience pleasure in artistic form. The Dancehall Queen's art form stimulates an aesthetic appreciation for the materiality of her existence. Further, primarily for the performer, there is also the inner-experience of kinaesthetic pleasure, when she "finds [herself] in a physically amplified state that has a certain pleasurable 'feel' [or]... 'groove'" (Matthias, 2014).

Often, when critically analysing erotic performance, interpretations sit on the side of the viewer and in the age of the hyper-pornographic global economy; female erotica is perceived rather reductively as denigrating sexual objectification. She is assumed a mere object to the active patriarchal gaze. Although there is weight to such arguments, to what extent is her own experience of the performative moment valued when we critically engage with such performances? Is the phenomenological experience of her involvement appreciated in her depiction as subject/object?

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**Performances of Protest, Power and Pleasure: improvising liberty in the early cancan**

The early working-class performers of the cancan in 1820s Paris existed within what Danielle Goldman has called a ‘tight place’ (2010). Their control over their own lives and futures was limited not only by their poverty and repressive employment practices, but by the increasingly authoritarian monarchy of Charles X. The failure of the previous generation’s revolutionary zeal to materialise into concrete improvements for the French working class had planted the seeds of liberty but tainted political means of achieving it. Goldman argues that in such circumstances of material, social and ideological constraint, bodies can learn to negotiate between limitations and freedom via performances of improvisation. By improvising outside the repertoire of steps condoned by the dancing masters, early cancan dancers subverted the control over their bodies exercised by the authorities in the rest of their lives. The movement material from which their improvisations drew – Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Bohemian and Haitian dances performed on the stages of the popular theatres – reflected their desire to imagine and embody alternative worlds, in which slaves overthrew their masters and the codes of decency imposed by the French bourgeoisie did not apply. Such performances of insubordination were considered a threat by a monarchy haunted by memories of Revolution, and therefore dances such as the cancan were forbidden under Article 330 of the French Penal Code (Affronts to Public Decency). This ban initiated what Michel Foucault has termed “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure” (1985, p. 45), in which the French authorities took pleasure in the performance of power, while cancan dancers improvised, performatively, logistically and semantically to retain the pleasure and power of liberty. A choreography of “capture and seduction” (ibid.) called the cancan emerged which became the focus of an economy of pleasure, and a performance of national identity by the late nineteenth century.

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**Panel 4- Return to the Body: A Reassessment of the Pleasures of Dance**

Panel abstract:  
This conference call goes to the heart of our project ‘Modern Moves’ and our conviction that ‘we are not yet post-pleasure’. It is usual in contemporary cultural criticism to be skeptical of pleasure-producing activities. The commonly invoked bases of criticism are the lines of thinking derived from Frankfurt School suspicion of ‘mass culture’- that the commodity culture of modernity and the capitalist machine somehow deadens our critical faculties. Pleasure is seen as frivolous, with the implication that melancholia and other ‘negative affects’ are somehow more serious and worthy of cultivation and analysis.   
  
These critiques become even more pronounced when the pleasure-producing activities in question are of Afro-diasporic heritage, as their origins in the dehumanising practices of slavery have confounded critics (e.g. Saidiya Hartman) attempting to work out whether the pleasure of these dance and music forms is in any way separable from the practices of coercion, humiliation and pain that attended their genesis on the Plantation. Taking this difficult entanglement as our starting point, we would like to explore the complex relationship of pain and pleasure as the intrinsic legacy of Afro-diasporic and contemporary African social dance. Taking cues from African intellectuals such as Paul Gilroy, AchilleMbembe and Kofi Agawu, moreover, we also consider circum-Atlantic conversations crucial when assessing this legacy.   
  
Drawing from both Africa and the African diaspora, then, the papers in this panel argue that ‘dancing the politics of pleasure’ must find ways of analyzing the positive affect of pleasure while acknowledging the politics and commemorative necessity of not forgetting the pain. Indeed, the dancing body, as the convergence of positive and negative sensations and affects, enacts a process of reconciliation and reparation that is always already political in being pleasurable.

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**The Pleasure of dance: A political power in Mali’s independence era**

In Mali around 1960, post-independence disillusionment notwithstanding, a desire for happiness, as manifested in pleasure, was evident among the new urban youth. This desire was embodied through modern music, dance and fashion. Since nightclubs and dancing bodies were considered as decadent by the established power and not in compliance with the requirements of nation building, this new way of life was used by youth as a way to struggle against the state. At the same time, the new socialist politics were also attempting to control the masses, and especially youth, through artistic and sporting activities. National Youth Weeks encouraged (or obliged) young people from all over the country to practice dance, music and theatre.

Dance and music, according to their diverse sources of inspiration, and the way they were invested in by youth and/or by the state, were able to be used either as apolitical tools (both for the fight for independence and for the socialist attempt to control the youth) or as a political product (for instance, the creation of national musical repertoires through state-sponsored festivals and national orchestras). This paper will explore the values and roles of pleasure through music and dance, and analyse their multi-layered meanings and different (sometimes contradictory) instrumentalisation by the various stakeholders of Malian modernity.

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**Work — With An *E*: Performance and the Pleasure of Queer Labor**

“*Work!*” is easily one of the most circulated words in the Black and Latino queer underground performance lexicon, introduced in large part to the mainstream with RuPaul’s 1993 hit single “Supermodel (You Better Work!).” In a decidedly queer context, what does it mean to “work”? Is there a difference between *work* and *werk*, here spelledthe way it usually is within queer of color discourse?

At face value, *werk* looks like a meaningless misspelling of “work,” the term we use to indicate the labor bodies do to sustain themselves in a capitalist society. However, I will show that where queer performance is concerned, *work,* spelled with an *e,* is less about survival in capitalism and more about pleasure and the effect of one’s own creative labor.

Drawing on an analysis of queer club culture and international voguing scenes, from Washington, D.C. to Berlin, I will show that *werk*, with an *e,* is about the pleasure of queer creative labor. By using the body, fashion, movement and *ovahness,* queer *werk* suggests how time, energy, and creativity come together in the making of oneself as one’s own aesthetic object. I will show that queer *werk* is essentially reclaimed labor, and the importance of reclaimed queer labor lies in the way that queer bodies and queer labor are frequently devalued if not totally hidden. Queer labor, in short, is about how pleasure, art, and beauty are created in states of duress. The broader implication is that *work* can have a certain liberating potential after all.

This paper makes contributions to the fields of performance studies, American studies, queer studies and ethnic studies.

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**The ambiguous strategies of pleasure politics of Angolan kuduro**

*Tá a kuiar ou não tá?* (“Is this fun or not?”) is a common call used by kuduro animators to hype up the crowd during spectacles of this electronic dance music genre from Angola. In the early kuduro hit *A felicidade* MC Sebem runs down a list of everyday *makas* (“problems”) of civil-war-torn 1990ies Angola only to emphasise in the chorus *A felicidade, todos nós queremos. A felicidade, todos nós sentimos* ("Happiness, we all want it. Happiness, we all feel it").

Adrenaline-fuelled joy, transgressively acrobatic and explicitly sensual dance in the overall spirit of competition drive kuduro shows. During performance, kuduristas regularly use dance vocabulary to clarify the erotic aspects of lyrical double entendres. The very same artists offer well-rehearsed ripostes in media discourses to defend their respectability (Lindsey 2013) against critics who constantly hurl a religiously motivated morality discourse at them. Kuduro music and dance are the most popular youth culture in today's Angola. The country has been run by the same president for over 30 years and its abundant oil revenue hardly reaches the precarious *musseques*, informal neighbourhoods that are vital hotbeds of kuduro (Moorman 2014).

The ambiguous strategies of pleasure politics in kuduro range from empowering kinetic pleasures (Kabir 2012) of sensual dance (Cooper 1995) of female and transgender performers like Noite Dia, Titica and Gata Aggressiva to a bread-and-circuses use of collective euphoria on a larger political level during and beyond election times.

In this paper examine the ambiguity of pleasure politics (Morgan 2013) in Angolan kuduro dance spectacles through a close reading of video material I filmed in Luanda in 2011 / 2012. For context, I triangulate this footage with findings from interviews and participant observation at rehearsals, (tv) shows and video shootings.

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**Is popular dance beautiful? A method to assess pleasure in dance**

The experience of pleasure in viewing dance is usually addressed in the field of phenomenology. Here we present a tool to address pleasure quantitatively. Philosophers agree that beauty is pleasure (e.g. Kant; Santayana). Vale and Pelli (2014) have developed an app to continuously record the observer's self-rated pleasure while looking at an image or listening to music. Their analysis focuses on the decay of pleasure after the stimulus ends. Afterwards, they ask the observers whether they had the feeling of beauty. On trials in which the observer had the feeling of beauty, pleasure lingers: still above 3 out of 10 at 30 s. On trials in which the observer did not feel beauty, the pleasure decayed more quickly (less than 3 at 30 s). We are applying this method to look at dance, measuring the time course after the end of the dance, to decide whether the dance produced the feeling of beauty. Our lecture will include audience participation, allowing each person to use his or her smartphone to record their own pleasure during our video presentations of dance. The data stream will be projected live during our lecture.

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