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Learning to be Creative: Experimenting with Visual Media in Dance Ethnography

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Abstract

I. Introduction

The documentary, pedagogical, and artistic values of visual media are widely recognized in the field of dance as a means to capture what is an otherwise ephemeral phenomenon.[1] Photography and film have eased the historical predicament of documenting dance in a familiar and effective way,[2] while the availability of cheap, mass-produced visual equipment and products has enabled people to access dance more easily than ever.

Given this paradigmatic shift in the way dance is preserved and shared, I

1) Philosopher Francis Sparshott specifies the alleged reasons that dance has been neglected in philosophical discussion as the lacks of occasion, of authority, of familiar repertory as well as the notion of dance as a female art, and the influence of Puritanism. The lack of notation is suggested to be conducive to the lack of authority. See *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance*, Francis Sparshott(1988), pp. 3-23.

2) Allegra Fuller Snyder. "Documentation." Website of the Council on Library and Information Resources. http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub84/documentation.html. Accessed on Jan. 15th, 2008.

was surprised when I learned that dance scholarship has not fundamentally accepted the use of visual media as a relevant research tool and more.[3] Although dance scholars expect that visual media will grow in importance in the field, it is also true that many of them have been hesitant to embrace it. Even when they incorporate photography and film in their research processes, these efforts are more often than not limited to supplementing the existing methodological and theoretical paradigms rather than reconsidering epistemological issues in dance studies. In other words, visual media generally function to illustrate one's arguments rather than to generate new perspectives.

The aim of this study is to explore through an ethnographic case study what possibilities visual media allow in dance academe, and specifically in dance ethnography. 'Dance ethnography' is a methodological term referring to the 'study of dance through field research,' floating across various anthropological disciplines including ethnology, visual anthropology, ethnochoreology, and folklore studies.[4] As ethnography emphasizes the process of a research—how to gather data and for what purpose—as much as its result, it seems to be an adequate realm to explore the characteristics of visual media rather than taking a specific theoretical position. Thus, I aimed to examine how the use of visual media, such as photography and film,[5] influence the theoretical and methodological nature of dance ethnography, and what it further suggests in regard to ethnographic knowledge and academic dialogues in dance studies.

Conducting fieldwork on the creative process in a choreography class at Temple University, I adopted three different media—note-taking, still photography and video recording—and observed the students' processes of

3) Felicia Hughes-Freeland(1999). Dance on Film: Strategy and Serendipity. *Dance in the Field*. p. 111.
4) Theresa J. Buckland(1999). Introduction, *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*, Edited by Theresa J. Buckland, p.1.
5) In this paper, I refer to both film and video as "film" unless I specifically make a comparison between them.

making solos as well as of presenting their works for the mid-term evaluation. I used one medium in each session in order to examine the characteristics and limitations of each medium. Also, I videotaped two group reflections/ interviews with or without reference footage on which they reflected their creative processes. In addition, I conducted two short video interviews with the instructor and one of the students. Out of these fieldnotes, photographs and video footage, as well as the reflection interview footage of students and the instructor, I created an ethnographic film called *Learning to be Creative* (2007)[6] and this very research paper.

II. Theoretical Discussions on Visual Anthropology and the Use of Visual Media

My inquiry initiated from the hesitance toward the use of visual media pervaded in ethnographic practices, yet this particular attitude is not a given fact but a result of the intertwined relationship between the visual and anthropology. Although it is impossible to cover the history of anthropological field in this study, I will discuss the status of the visual in anthropology.

Despite the currently undervalued status of visual media in anthropology, it is significant to recognize that the visual and visual media have been mainstay in anthropology since the birth of the discipline in the nineteenth century. In the discipline emerged in the Western colonialism that desired to conquer the "hitherto unknown" worlds, early anthropologists also sought to describe and document whatever they observed in those foreign cultures. Not surprisingly, photography was an essential part of anthropology in the late nineteenth

6) The film can be seen at http://blip.tv/file/509924. The total running time of the film is 19 minutes and 42 seconds. The Total length of footage is approximately 250 minutes.

century[7] and newly invented film equipment was quickly adopted as a data collecting tool. Those anthropologists viewed photographs and films as objective, realist, scientific, and therefore advanced methods of representation while failing to recognize the constructedness of those images.

As the evolutionist, descriptive perspectives of the early anthropology was criticized from the structural-functionalism in the mid-twentieth century, the use of visual media was also discredited as the remnants of the evolutionist approaches. In addition, the shift of focus from the visible (e.g., rituals and material cultures) to the invisible (e.g., oral tradition and social organiziation) also contributed to the predominance of notebooks to cameras as an adequate tool. This text-oriented episteme has dismissed the academic validity of the visual as 'too subjective, unrepresentative and unsystematic.'[8] However, the postmodern critique challenged anthropological assumptions and biases in the late twentieth century so fundamentally that even the reluctance toward visual media was attributed to a Western bias against the visual or the phenomenal.[9] In this atmosphere the use of visual media is also reconsidered, which invoked the formation of visual anthropology as a discipline that puts the visual forward.

The formation of visual anthropology as a subdiscipline of sociocultural anthropology proves this regained significance of the visual in the realm of anthropology. According to anthropologists Howard Morphy and Marcus Banks, visual anthropology consists of two focuses: one is to concern the use of visual material in anthropological research and the other is to study visual systems and visible culture.[10] In other words, the former utilizes visual media as research methods, while the latter analyzes pre-existing visual products

7) Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy(1997). *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, p. 6.
8) Sara Pink(2001). *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, p. 7
9) Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy(1997). Ibid., p. 14.
10) Ibid., p. 1.

such as movies, advertisements and postcards. The former can be further divided into data collecting strategy and research products including ethnographic film and photographic essay. Anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch's dialogic style of filmmaking ushered the reflexive filmmaking as a way of understanding culture in the 1960s, and contemporary visual anthropologist David MacDougall also demonstrates the possibilities of reflexive, participatory, and indigenous media that 'develop alternative objectives and methodologies'[11] of using the visual rather than adjusting it to the existing paradigm.

However, utilizing visual media as research tool is not easy, due to technical barriers. Setting aside complex technologies like filmmaking, even taking photographs requires a certain level of mastery of knowledge and technical skill. Moreover, ever-changing technology and equipment surely dissuade many scholars from attempting to use it in their academic research. In fact, this has been a challenge even in visual anthropology. As early as in the 1960s, visual anthropologist John Collier Jr. acutely questioned, "How good a technician do you have to be to use the camera for research? And how professional does your equipment have to be?"[12]; forty years later, MacDougall seems to answer this question when he compares 16-millimeter filmmaking with the digital filmmaking. According to MacDougall, digital filmmaking not only eases many obstacles of ethnographic filmmaking, e.g., film crews, complicated equipment, and funding, but also creates a new paradigm of "one-person filmmaking" that will fundamentally influence the dynamic process of ethnography.[13]

11) David MacDougall(1997). The visual in Anthropology, *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, edited by Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy, p. 293.
12) John Collier, Jr.(1967). *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*, p. 105.
13) David MacDougall(2001). Renewing Ethnographic Film: Is Digital Video Changing the Genre? *Anthropology Today*, 17(3), pp. 15-21.

When it comes to dance ethnography, visual media has been largely neglected due to the tendency that dance scholars prefer representational systems such as dance notation to visual media.[14] If they adopt visual media, it is more often than not for a supplementary function of recording without rethinking the inquiry itself. Moreover, dance scholars have developed various descriptive strategies of writing rather than employing visual media. Yet, analyzing four well-known dance scholars' models for cross-cultural dance ethnography—those of E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Judith Lynne Hannah, Adrienne Kaeppler, and Avanthi Meduri—dance anthropologist Sally Ann Ness argues that none of these models is, despite its ambition, truly "objective" in describing different cultures.[15] What Ness remind of us is that only when the limit of any method is acknowledged can the research object be fully appreciated. In this regard, as visual media should be rethought a method as valid as other dance notations and models of dance ethnography.

Despite the general neglect of visual media in the realm of dance study, dance scholars such as Elsie Ivancich Dunin and Felicia Hughes-Freeland have innovatively and reflexively employed visual technologies for more than two decades. Dunin is a dance ethnographer and living witness of the development of dance ethnology at the University of California, Los Angeles. As she pursued fieldwork on Romani dance culture in Macedonia for thirty years since 1967, she actively adopted new recording technology available then, including reel-to-reel audio tapes and 16-millimeter film cameras. What inspired Dunin to adopt those mechanical tools is that she found them not only efficient to but also substantial for the purpose of studying a dance event in its

14) Felicia Hughes-Freeland(1999). Dance on Film: Strategy and Serendipity. *Dance in the Field*. p. 111.

15) Sally Ann Ness(1996). Observing the Evidence Fail: Difference Arising from Objectification in Cross-Cultural Studies of Dance. *Moving Words: Rewriting Dance*. pp. 248-269.

context. According to her, film, unlike notation, makes a dance event more 'tangible' and even records 'spontaneous' dances. Moreover, film frees researchers from depending upon 'the vagrancies of memory' or 'drilling native dancers to perform their dances repeatedly.'[16] In this sense, Dunin finds that film is not only an efficient recording tool, but also enhances the authenticity of the event by minimizing "out of context" settings that are inevitable in notating dance.

Meanwhile, Hughes-Freeland is an anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker who have studied on Javanese performance in Indonesia for over twenty years. In the article "Dance on Film: Strategy and Serendipity," she reflects on her project making two ethnographic films on Javanese court dance since 1987.[17] According to her, while initially aiming to produce 'a visual counterpart to the verbal account of dancing presented in her PhD thesis,' she soon faced numerous obstacles in translating an expansive research to 50-minute-long moving image. Instead, she finds that film provides particular values that are impossible to achieve in writing—e.g., 'a sense of the tempo of dancing in the different contexts of social interaction.'[18] Moreover, she also realizes that film, which lets others speak directly, endows agency to research subject, while not only making of the films but also the audience' responses to it engender new and interactive meanings and insights.

As pioneers of using visual tools in dance ethnography, both Dunin and Hughes-Freeland advocate the particular values that visual media has as a research tool. While Dunin highlights the particular values of film, compared

16) Elsie Ivancich Dunin(2006). Romani Dance Event in Skopje, Macedonia: Research Strategies, Cultural Identities and Technologies, *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, edited by Theresa Jill Buckland, pp. 179-180.
17) Felicia Hughes-Freeland(1999). Dance on Film: Strategy and Serendipity, *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*, Edited by Theresa J. Buckland, pp.111-122.
18) Ibid., p. 118.

to those of writing and notating, at the stage of gathering data, Hughes-Freeland focuses on the stage of interpretation as she had already written PhD thesis on the subject. Given that, I became intrigued how visual media constitutes, not supplements, the way a researcher views his or her field. In other words, I think visual media is not a mere "tool" useful at data-gathering or data-sharing, but also is a way of knowing at the first place. Therefore, I attempted this study to be experimental and preliminary to see how visual media stimulates theoretical and methodological insights on dance.

III. The Anagram of the Fieldwork

In the following section I will discuss my experimental fieldwork in the form of an anagram. An anagram is wordplay that generates disparate meanings by rearranging the order of the letters. The anagrammatic form became well-known with the publication of *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, a legendary film theory book by American avant garde filmmaker Maya Deren. In this book, she argues that an anagram allows simultaneity and relatedness, rather than linear succession, between various elements.[19] Likewise, my discussion consists of six segments that are interrelated vertically and horizontally: the columns represent the placement of agency while the rows represent the creative process (Table 1). The distinction between the researcher and the subjects in columns is necessary because, while discussing the subjects is of the primary concern in an ethnographic study, discussing the researcher's experience is equally significant for this study's purpose of methodological reflection. Also, I find the threefold

19) Maya Deren(1946). *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*. Reprinted in *Essential Deren* (2005). p. 36.

<Table 1> The Anagram of the Fieldwork

	The Researcher	The Subjects
Intention	1A A Pencil, a Camera and a Camcorder	1B Finding an Artistic Intention
Event	2A Negotiating with the Subjects	2B Making and Showing Solos
Reaction	3A In the Editing Room	3B Watching Myself Dancing

distinction of creative process in the rows applicable both to the subjects' choreographic process and my research process, as each step of the process produces cultural text requiring encoding and decoding. Thus, the vertical alignment of the segments creates the researcher's meta-narrative (A) and the subjects' narrative (B), while the horizontal order creates the procedural stages of creative process: intention (1), event (2) and reaction (3). These segments, like an anagram, construct various meanings according to the order in which they are combined. As each segment is interrelated with all the other segments, I find this anagrammatic structure represents my multi-level discussion regarding the use of visual media in dance ethnography. Therefore, this research paper is neither a chronological description of the fieldwork nor a supplementary commentary on the film; rather, it attempts to provoke many questions about the way we understand dance *with*, *as*, and *through* the visual.

1A. A Pencil, a Camera and a Camcorder

In my ethnographic case study, the purpose of the fieldwork is to explore how a single dance ethnographer can utilize visual media as research tools and further catalyst for reflecting on dominant practices of ethnography. My own introduction to working with visual media was in filmmaking courses where I

gradually acquired the basic skills of videography. Although my ability of filmmaking is by no means professional, I am intrigued with the possibility that dance ethnographers with a rudimentary level of technical skill of videography can incorporate visual media into his or her fieldwork without being suffocated by technical elements. I believe that, as Collier Jr. suggested earlier, deep understandings of the subject matter weigh more than technical skill when it comes to the academic validity of ethnographic use of film. Therefore, it is desirable for dance ethnographers to be able to create visual data and products independently rather than relying on professional filmmakers or photographers. Dance ethnographers should themselves become a particular kind of "professional" in a sense that the way they create and utilize the visual is firmly based on their understandings and perspectives as ethnographers.

Having this methodological inquiry as my primary concern, I conducted fieldwork upon a course called Dance Composition I, at Temple University in Philadelphia, U.S., which I currently attend. The course is offered for sophomore students to choreograph their own solo dances for the first time in their college curriculum. The one-and-half-an-hour class happens every Monday and Wednesday at 10 minutes past 1 o'clock in one of the dance halls at Temple campus, and I observed a total of ten sessions of the course from September 17 to October 24, 2007. Thirteen students in their early 20's were enrolled, and a modern dance instructor taught the course. In order not to interrupt their class activities as much as possible, I restricted my observation to their class duration, except two extra interviews, one with a student and the other with the instructor, done outside the class.

Surely the decision to do fieldwork in one of the dance courses in my school was made out of practicality, for I could not conduct long-term fieldwork in another place during the semester and it made more sense to use an existing

setting of subject for my research. Yet, it is also a decision that is fundamentally grounded in my perspective of ethnography and anthropology. As the critique of imperialist origin and the suspicion of objective truth has rendered the field of anthropology as reflexive and subjective as ever, contemporary anthropologists have started to look into their own communities. This allowed them to discover disparate meanings and to see the co-existence of heterogeneous communities. This tendency also has a significant implication for dance ethnography in that dances and rituals of non-Western societies have been popular subjects of traditional and often imperialist ethnographic approaches. However, contemporary dance ethnographers attempt to include hybrid perspectives in face of the multicultural condition that objects of ethnographic study speaking back.[20] Uttara Coorlawata emphasizes split and hybridity, as opposed to integral wholeness, of research subject[21], while Anthony Shay emphasizes hybridity in the field and suggests to see it as what he calls "parallel tradition" rather than as "holy grail."[22] In this regard, I consciously chose the typically contemporary dance practice as the topic of my fieldwork: people go to school to learn to be creative choreographers. To me, this institutionalization of the creative process is a phenomenon that represents the episteme of Western dance culture, since creativity is highly valued and yet it is also regarded as "learnable." On one hand, I feel like an insider as the convention of dance

20) For more well-rounded discussion, see the transcription of a roundtable discussion among dance scholars presented at the Dancing in the Millennium Conference, "Dialogues. Dance Ethnography: Where Do We Go From Here?" published in *Dance Research Journal* 33/1, 2001.

21) Uttawa Coorlawala. Speaking Back. As a part of "Dialogues. Dance Ethnography: Where Do We Go From Here?" *Dance Research Journal* 33/1, 2001. p. 93.

22) Anthony Shay. Spreading the Net. As a part of "Dialogues. Dance Ethnography: Where Do We Go From Here?" *Dance Research Journal* 33/1, 2001. p. 94. The concept of parallel tradition, coined by Shay, is discussed in his article, "Parallel Tradition," *Dance Research Journal* 31/1, 1999, and also in his book *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power*(2002).

course in college is the cultural element that both the researcher and subjects are familiar with, despite the differences of their ethnicity, gender, age and sexuality.[23] On the other hand, I also feel like an outsider since, as a person who majored ballet with not much emphasis on choreography in college in Korea, I am relatively distanced from creativity pedagogy in dance. In this way, my fieldwork that erases distinction between insider and outsider reflects what those contemporary scholars envision as the new territory of dance ethnography.

1B. Finding an Artistic Intention

The field of ethnography does not exist *a priori*, but comes to exist only when the ethnographer identifies "the field" and records what happens in front of him or her. In September 2007, I entered a dance studio in dance department building in order to capture the creative process of a choreography course. My intention of looking at a common dance practice from an ethnographic perspective transformed the quotidian dance class into the "field," and undergraduate students with whom I encounter everyday at school into "research subjects."

I observed ten sessions of the course, in addition to two extra interviews with a student and the instructor conducted outside the class.[24] Throughout those sessions, it was obvious that the course consistently and synthetically proceeded toward specific goals. In the second session (September 19),

23) I, the researcher, am Korean studying in the United States, while the instructor is Taiwanese and students are American citizens with diverse ethnic background.

24) In this paper I do not specify the subjects' identities since the purpose of this paper is a meta-discussion of the fieldwork in which individual subjects are portrayed as examples of my argument rather than given the full agency. In the film, however, the same subjects were identified with their first names since the sense of anonymity as in the written paper is not possible in film. I will discuss this issue further in 3A section.

students sat in a circle and discussed the prospective themes of their choreographic pieces; in the following three sessions, they worked on their pieces while receiving individual feedback from the instructor. Also, they compared choreography styles of two famous choreographers on video, while a guest artist who had danced with one of them discussed her process of working with the renowned choreographer. Throughout these sessions, students were expected to grasp the particular kind of creativity it takes to be a choreographer and to acquire the ability to create a dance (See Table 2).

It was repeatedly emphasized throughout the course that one should find one's sincere self and artistic intention and deliver it to the audience effectively. The instructor explained to me that he assigned students solo choreography about themselves because, "Compared to a group work, solo work is more difficult to communicate what you want. Particularly, to express about oneself is really difficult."[25] He also assigned students not to use music, as it could make them arrange movement superficially upon the tempo instead of forcing them to find deeper meaning and inner musicality. Discussing the dance work of choreographer Jiri Kylian during the class, he commented that, "Second piece (Kylian) was more predictable. Then, what holds the piece together? Intention...Singing for the God. Kylian uses lots of movements. However, not just being structure, movements, but going back to humanity. That's something that I want you to investigate." The instructor's comments distinguish between the physical and the conceptual and further presuppose a hierarchical relationship between them; students were challenged to go beyond the physical to grasp the conceptual and the intentional.

Using this guidance, students came up with their own topics: self-confidence, everyday life, the journey from childhood to adulthood, the feeling of being a burden on another person, and so on. However, the strong emphasis

25) Personal interview with the instructor while videotaping. 2008/10/17

<Table 2> Summary of the ethnographic fieldwork

Session (date)	Class activity (subjects)	Fieldwork (Researcher)
1 (9/17)	Solo exercise showing with comment and discussion Exercise to put different solos together into a group work	Note-taking of the atmosphere of the class including physical condition of the dance hall and subjects' characteristics
2 (9/19)	Watch dance video-recorded works of two choreographers Pina Bausch and Jiri Kylian Discuss ideas about solo choreography project	Note-taking of the interaction between students and the instructor
3 (9/24)	Individually work on solo work The instructor gives spontaneous comment upon the request of individual students	Note-taking of individual students' processes of creating movement sequence Getting into their working space
4 (9/26)	Working day 1 while the first half of the class show their works to the instructor (The hall is divided into two areas)	Photographing the whole and partial scene of the working process Getting into their working space
5 (10/1)	Working day 2 while the second half of the class show their works to the instructor (The hall is divided into two areas)	Videotaping the discussion between the instructor and students. Spontaneous interviews with a few students upon their processes (50 min.)
6 (10/3)	Discussion with the guest artist who danced with the choreographer Jiri Kylian	Note-taking of the discussion between the guest artist and students
7 (10/8)	Solo choreography showing day	Videotaping of the solo presentations from various angles and perspectives (70 min.)
8 (10/10)	Discussion and assessment of the solo project upon the instructor's tripod-shot documentation of solo presentation	Note-taking of the dialogues and reflections between the instructor and students in front of the screen
9 (10/15)	Small group video interview (six students) Discussion on the creative process (The instructor on leave)	Videotaping on tripod of the students' reflection (30 min.)
Extra 1 (10/17)	No class	Video interview with the instructor in the media room upon video footage of the class (40 min.)
Extra 2 (10/17)	No class	Video interview with a student in an office (20 min.)
10 (10/24)	Large group video interview (all class) Reflection on the photos and video taken of their processes	Large group video interview upon the still photos and video footage of the students' working process (40 min.)

on intention and identity sometimes suffocated students. For example, one student confessed during an interview that she felt stuck with the pressure that every movement should have a meaning. Comparing it to improvisation where the intention comes out naturally, she struggled to translate meaning into in her choreography. Similarly, another said that he sometimes used "meaningless" movement when he could not find "meaningful" movement at the last moment. In this sense, what students struggled with was the idea that their intention should be clearly recognizable in their dances and deliverable to the viewers.

2A. *Negotiating with the Subjects*

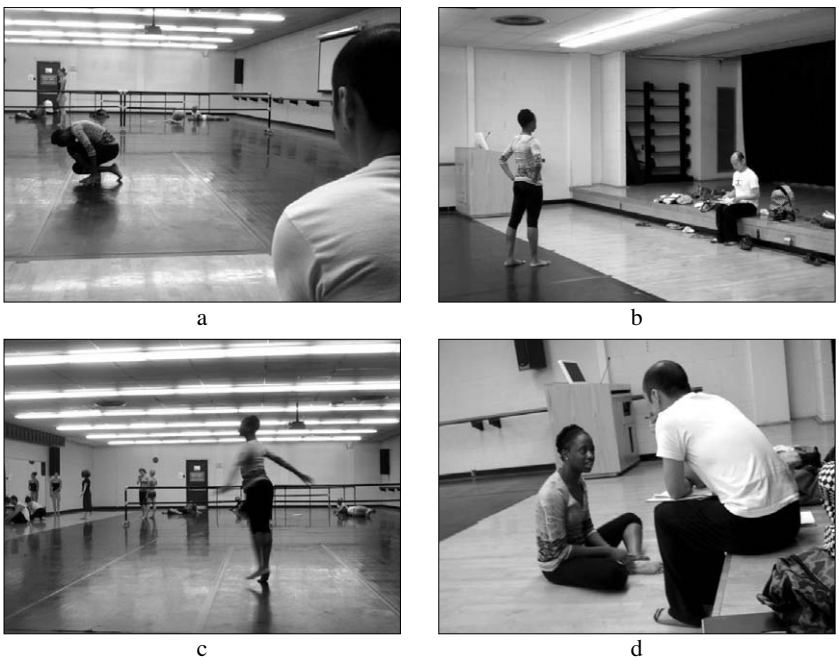
During the ten sessions, I observed the class, alternating the recording medium between notes, photos and videotaping. In the first session in which I took notes, students did not seem to be alert to my presence, possibly because they were already acquainted with me in the same dance department and, moreover, because half of them had taken my ballet course in the previous year. This familiarity surely created an easier atmosphere for me to observe their working process.

As I began to use still and moving cameras, however, it became obvious that they were more conscious of the cameras pointing at them. When I was about to take a picture of a student, he told me, "Hmm, I don't want to be taken a picture today." "Why not?" I asked. He replied, "Because I look terrible today." Frankly, I would not have gone further if it were not the beginning of the class and if he were not the first person that I tried to take a picture. Thus, I further tried to negotiate while saying that, "Maybe I can take a picture of you, and you can see how it looks like." I took a picture of him smiling at me and showed the camera screen to him. Luckily he liked the

picture and allowed me to continue taking pictures of him. Playback, the simple function of a digital camera that allows the subject to check his or her image on the spot, can facilitate interaction between subjects and the researcher, as subjects can understand how they are portrayed and researchers can be allowed to make further images. This is also true with digital video cameras that can play back the footage on the spot, although many filmmakers hesitate to break the time code of the DV tape.

The most interesting experiment was when I altered the medium from text to photography to film during three successive sessions from session 3 to 5 in which students worked individually on their solo pieces. As the sessions were similar in their formats, my various methods of recording demonstrate what each medium could or could not represent. In session 3, I took notes and what stood out to me was the proximity between people. Working on solos, students maintained the distance from each other, whether contemplating on the floor or trying out movements. In session 4 that I took photos, the use of space stood out as the class divided the studio in half, physically and symbolically. Placing the barre in the middle of the studio, one end was reserved for a student to show his or her piece to the instructor and get feedback, while the other end was crowded with everyone else working on their pieces. Also, the inter-personal distance between the instructor and the presenting student was clearly maintained when showing the "piece," while it dramatically shrank when they sit side by side to discuss.

I tried to capture this contrasting use of inter-personal space with describing, drawing, photographing and videotaping. Among these, I felt that the sequential photographs were the most useful, although similar observation could be excerpted from digital footage that efficiently showed how the distance between people changed over a short period of time. As seen in the pictures below, the student presents the summary of her piece (Picture 1.a),



a b c d

<Picture 1> Sequential photos of inter-personal space between the student and the instructor during session 4. Photos by Ok Hee Jeong

presents her work in distance (Picture 1.b-c), and discusses her piece in a close distance (Picture 1.d). The conventional "front" of the dance studio is the student's left, where mirror wall is located, yet she uses the spot where the instructor seats as the "active" front. Comparing <Picture 1.b> and <Picture 1.d> clearly shows that an imaginary "proscenium stage" emerges upon the edge of black rubber floor when presenting the piece, even though the floor is flat. This imaginary stage further reveals that the particular kind of dance practice that they are making is meant to be viewed from the front in distance. Here, the sole instructor represents the whole audience, while the presenting student is observed and evaluated. In comparing the "point of view" angle (Picture 1.b) and the frontal angle pictures (Picture 1.c), I can see, even without a wide-angle lens to exaggerate the distance, the exact distances I was

addressing: the former between the student and the instructor, while the latter between the presenting student and the rest of the students in the background. In this sense, my use of photography and film not only captures the passing moment of reality, but also illustrates my simultaneous findings understanding of the particular meaning that I intended to deliver to the viewer via the medium.

Nevertheless, it is also dangerous to assume that these sequential photographies can definitely deliver my findings faithfully to other viewers, as the image-based medium is, despite its indexical ability, open to diverse interpretations. For example, I just drew an interpretation regarding the distances among subjects from the pictures above, which became the "evidence" of my argument. However, unless I explain my argument in text, it is impossible to guarantee that readers will catch the same message from looking at these photographs. Also, moving images of film are not much different from still images in that some parts of the film reveals the distances among the subjects, yet not every viewer will catch that point. Therefore, one should remember that, while photography and film might be regarded more effective and credible than text as containers of knowledge, they are also endlessly open to interpretation.

Holding a camera pointing at the subjects, I noticed their various reactions to it. Reflecting upon the footage of themselves, a few students mentioned that they were very aware of the camera, becoming self-conscious of how they would appear so that they got stuck with what they were doing at that moment. Another student commented that, "I don't like working surrounded by people so I do nothing, but then when I see the camera pointing at me, I feel like I should do something." While these are general reactions to both still camera and video camera, the latter allowed subjects exert a better sense of agency. For example, in the small group video interview, one student commented that

her piece was about her experience of having OCD. When I asked what the initials stood for, a few of them simultaneously answered, "Obsessive Compulsive Disorder." Not long after one second of awkward moment passed, another student asked her, "Do you have OCD? Would you like to explain it to the camera?" The first question was meant to lead to the second half-joking question, which let everyone burst to laugh. By addressing directly to the camera and having their agency upon the gaze, they escaped the uneasy situation of talking about too personal matters in front of the camera.

While I fully manipulated my cameras, the instructor set the department-owned video camera on a tripod to record the students' pieces on the showing day. Because of the existence of this fixed camera besides mine, I noticed that the students' attitudes toward both cameras were not the same. While keeping distance from my camera with uneasiness, they played with the other camera with funny gestures and catwalks even though it would soon record their solo pieces to be evaluated. The difference, I think, is that my camera has more "illustrative" elements to be viewed by unknown viewers while the other camera is more "representational" to document their dances to be viewed among themselves. More significantly, my camera records their "processes" while the other camera records only their "products." This distinction between "process" and "product" were particularly significant as the assigned projects were personal and they felt "vulnerable" to be seen of this personal stage.

Finally, I found that videotaping my verbal interaction with subjects in the fieldwork, including informal dialogue and formal interviews, was particularly beneficial for lessening cultural barriers that might have existed between me and the subjects. As a non-native English speaker, I could not remember or capture the exact comments of subjects in English and I was afraid that I would unintentionally distort their words. In this regard, although holding camera may have influenced their comments in the first place, I found that

film's representational capacity to document the exact words to which I can always refer is a big merit of sound-recording medium in ethnography.

2B. *Making and Showing Solos*

Earlier, I mentioned that the assignment of making solos about themselves challenged students to delve into conceptual intentions and meanings; they were also challenged by a learning environment that was not what they thought of the ideal for making solo dances.

> He [the instructor] said, 'make it personal,' but then you are packed in a room full of people. I don't want to 'emot' [show emotion] here. I don't want to do that right now. It just didn't feel like the place or time to do it. And it just felt like you were forced to do it. I mean I know it is a class and I have to do it. But I would rather choreograph under different types of circumstances just me, nobody else is around, nobody else to see you that vulnerable.[26)]

What was shared among the students is the notion that creating a very personal dance should not be done not in this public space but in either open space or secluded space such as nature or their own rooms. Particularly, as this was the first opportunity for many of them to make their own dance rather than to learn someone else's choreography, I think that the sense of vulnerability increased as if revealing one's inner softness in front of others. That is why another student commented that she wanted to hide everything she did until the actual presentation, as she felt uncomfortable revealing the process to others. Her comment also reveals a distinction between the practice and performance of their pieces even though both were done in the same studio with the same people around. When I asked whether they felt comfortable on showing, the students affirmed that in "performance" they could do whatsoever movement without feeling vulnerable.

26) A comment made in the small group video interview. Oct. 15th, 2007. (11'17"in the film)

Although they spoke about the difficulty of pursuing creativity in a public environment, I also noticed how disciplined they are in harmonizing these two seemingly conflicting values. When I first observed the class, students presented small assignments one by one in such a structured manner: a student introduced his or her intention and then presented the piece in the middle of the studio (pretending it to be on stage) while others sat in front of him against the mirror as if they were in the auditorium; once the piece was done, everyone clapped; audience students commented on what worked, what they liked most, or what should be done more, on which the instructor added more commentaries and suggestions. Similarly at the showing day, students presented their solos by alphabetical order written on the attendance record book. When his or her name was called, the student went into the center stage facing the recording camera and everyone else, briefly introduced the theme of his or her solo, and made the starting pose. This could be a simple and habitual practice, yet it still shows that their creative processes are rendered into disciplined activities that are identifiable, measurable, and comparable units. The students were expected to do certain things on certain dates, regardless of their inner state or physical condition, which caused conflicts particularly when it came to do with personal emotion. One student recalled an ironic situation in an improvisation class where the instructor asked them to make happy dance on the worst day of his. Similarly, the students recognized the irony that the class on creating a solo is the most difficult circumstances to create a solo. It seems that what holds together is the embodied discipline that is gained though in the educational system.

3A. *In the editing Room*

After the students presented their pieces, I conducted two group video

interviews in the ninth and tenth sessions in which visual media were used both as a means to let them reflect on the event and as a tool to document the interview events. In the small group interview, I simply videotaped the interview on tripod; in the large group interview, I showed them both still images and video footage while videotaping their reflection. The resulting footage of both interviews reveals that the various settings of visual media created different dynamics in these interview processes.

First, the use of visual image as pointers of the event seems to lead the subjects directly to the circumstances of the given image, to evoke their spontaneous reflections and reminiscences, and to generate excitement and cheerfulness among them, e.g., laughing at funny pictures. Meanwhile, the video interview without reference images tends to make the subjects more contemplative, self-reflective and aware of the camera pointing at them. They felt a bit uncomfortable sitting in front of the camera and yet they also made fun of it, which is a dynamic different from the interview with reference images in which they easily become unmindful of the camera. It seems that reference images provides them with the stronger agency, albeit transient, to interpret the images' meanings as well as to draw new insights on the event beyond their previous understandings.

Second, whether subjects are looking at pictures (still image) or videos (moving images) also affected the dynamic of the interview. In the group interview with images, the subjects were much more actively involved in commenting and dialoguing with each other upon still images, while becoming passive upon moving images. My interpretation of this difference is that the continuous flow of image and sound distracts the subjects from what they were talking about at the contemporaneous moment. In other words, before fully elaborating spontaneous thoughts, they are constantly given new information to interpret. Compared to moving images, still images give them

all information at the same time, which allows them more time to build their own interpretation and expand it. Once they finish watching the moving image, subjects become more generally reflexive on the whole experience of watching. In sum, although it is impossible to say that one medium is better than the other or that one way of using it is better than the other, researchers need to understand that their choice of setting up the interview condition creates different dynamics between subjects.

Once these experiments with video interviews were completed, I became to recognize a more fundamental issue regarding the use of visual media. As intending this case study to be as open-ended as possible, I entered the field without knowing what I would do with the collected data—in other words, I had no clear intention of what to do with research outcome since it was an experiment project. While the lack of hypothesis enabled me to gain expansive and reflexive insight, the lack of the intended form of the outcome made it ambiguous to materialize findings of the research. Ethnography includes the stage of "writing up" in which the ethnographer, returning from the field, compiles the vast amount of fieldnotes and data into a single written narrative to share with others.[27] My case study, however, did not specify neither the targeted reader/viewer (e.g., dancers? anthropologists? general audience?) nor the form of the outcome (e.g., a film? a research paper? a film with an accompanying paper or vice versa?) nor the context of this study within the larger academic practice (e.g., mere a personal experiment? a journal article? conference presentation?). Especially as I decided to make a film independent from this paper, I realized one significant issue resulting from the fact that film footage is irreversible. As I shot only for the purpose of capturing the field itself, I did not pay attention to the quality of the shot during the fieldwork:

27) For more discussion, see chapter 3 to 5, Writing Up Fieldnotes I-III, in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, Linda L. Shaw.

shifting from extreme close-up shots to jerky camera movement, omitting to take environmental shots, sacrificing image to capture sound when shooting conversation scenes without a wireless microphone, and lastly, not caring the aesthetic quality of the shot to the extent that I set up a camera on tripod and did not care whether the interviewee's face is out of the frame. When played back, all of these seemed disastrous to my film-trained eyes, and I realized that the biggest fault was that I began with film as research footage and ended up with film as the end product.

Having difficulties in transforming footage into a film, I reviewed how other visual anthropologists have dealt with this issue and found out that they also distinguish the characteristics of footage and film. In the midst of various terms coined by scholars, such as 'representational film and illustrative film (J.H. Prost),'[28] or 'film as the object and film as the concept (Marcus Banks),'[29] what penetrates is the distinction between the representational aspect whose primary function is to capture 'reality,' and the cinematographic aspect whose primary function is to be viewed and appreciated by others. As this distinction presupposes that the purpose of the research determines its form and content, Marcus Banks argues that researchers should be clear of intentionality such as 'what and who was the film made for' in order for them to exert the full agency. At the same time, however, intentionality cannot be the sole criterion of defining ethnographic film since the medium itself influences the nature of the research. Discussing the difference between film and video media in making ethnographic films, David MacDougall notes that video changes the way he approaches both content and form. Video allows him to take risk to explore 'unfilmic' material and unconventional structures.

28) Jack H. Prost(2003). Filming Body Behavior, *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, Paul Hockings, ed., p. 285.
29) Marcus Banks(1992). Which films are the ethnographic films? *Film as Ethnography*, Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton, eds., p.118.

Similarly, I also find my open-ended approach to ethnographic fieldwork makes me more reflexive on the research itself, particularly with the use of video camera. The best result of this attempt would be that the same footage satisfies both representational and illustrative values of the outcome. However, this ideal of harmonizing both aspects of film is hard to achieve in reality, which seems to discourage ethnographers from being both makers and thinkers of the ethnographic film.[30] In that the process itself is also a significant part of the research, I argue that researchers can more fundamentally recognize how ethnographic knowledge is constructed in the field.

Once I started editing the footage, I realized that, although video footage was the primary source for editing, the written note informed the film's approach and structure while photographs were inserted into the image timeline. In many ethnographic films the narrator in many cases the researcher himself guides the viewers what to see and how to interpret it in the given image; in that sense, the narration is similar to ethnographic papers read. However, I chose not to use narration but to have the subjects' own words as the backbone of the film. Everyone spontaneously talked about various aspects of the creative process, which I arranged into interrelated yet different puzzles of vignettes. Consequentially, the more they spoke out the more they stood out in the film, while those who did not speak became less visible. Meanwhile, photographs were more conventionally used as the illustrative reference of what the subjects discussed. For example, when one student talked about how difficult to make dance in a crowded room, a few pictures showing them in tight proximity were shown. Particularly due to the digital video technology that easily freezes moving image into still image, I could maximize the ability of pictures that arouses reflective mode in the viewers upon the subjects'

30) Jay Ruby(2000). *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film & Anthropology*, p. xi.

reflection.

While exploring how each medium would function within the editing board, I also realized that my editing practice is significantly influenced by the conventions of filmmaking. For instance, I noticed myself envisioning the sequence with various cinematic concepts such as establishing shot, character introduction, point of view shot, reaction shot and so on; in doing so, I saw each student not as an informant but as a character of the film. This shift in my perspective results from the distinction between ethnographic footage (raw material) and ethnographic films (products meant to be shown to the viewer). Consideration of the viewer fundamentally transforms the meaning and implication of the same footage when put in a film, as it serves the researcher's purpose to get his or her argument across to the viewer. Although anthropologists have tried to minimize this constructed nature by employing particular stylizations such as long sequence shot and wide-angle shot, these are still cinematic devices that operate within the filmic convention. In this sense, Jeff Todd Titon argues that no matter how realistic and natural the sequence is shot and edited, 'these strategies should be understood as a different set of conventions meant to represent reality.'[31] Also, David MacDougall argues that no matter how ethnographic a film may seem, it still follows certain formal conventions of shooting and editing that 'reflect European expectations of causality, chronology and interpersonal behavior.'[32] Both of the scholars acknowledge that the logic and rhetoric of filmmaking are indispensable parts of ethnographic films because ethnographic films are not free from the cultural convention of film practice shared by both its makers and viewers.

31) Jeff Todd Titon(1992). Representation and Authority in Ethnographic Film/Video: Production, *Ethnomusicology*, 36(1), 90.
32) David MacDougall(1992). Complicities of Style, *Film as Ethnography*, Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton, eds., p. 93

Having learned of documentary filmmaking as well as cinema theory, I even felt that "cinematographicness" predominated over "ethnographicness" in the editing room. To make the sequence flow smoothly and effectively, I edited sound and image as if I use ellipses or quotation marks in writing removing unnecessary words or pauses from the interviewee's comments, or imposing a few significant images upon the streamline of a single footage. Moreover, to increase the integrity of the video/audio quality as well as to protect the informants from the delicate information while still keeping the overall comment, I felt that it was necessary to manipulate footage. As long as I aim to produce a film instead of footage, I need to consider the viewer's sake of watching an interesting film as well as the subjects' sake of protecting themselves from possible disadvantage from exposing them.

Then, the issue of manipulation naturally leads to the issue of ethics. Is filmic manipulation epistemologically unethical in ethnographic films? Peter Loizos claims that, 'manipulation of the visual image can be more subtle and covert, but distinctively ideological.'[33] His comment implies that, regardless of the degree of aesthetic transformation, manipulation reveals presupposed ideal that the researcher envisions, which reflects the ideological ground. In this sense, what really matters is not so much the external alteration of image and sound as the internal and ethical meaning amplified by doing so. Producing a film and a paper upon my experiment, I also notice the different ethical implications of them. Unless superimposing mosaic on the informant's face, the sense of anonymity as in the written paper is not possible in film. It is because, even with a slight hint of voice tone or their behavioral gesture, it is easy to recognize the subjects' identities. This is why I put the individuality of

33) Peter Loizos(2003). Video, Film and Photographs, *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*. Edited by Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, p. 95.

the subjects at the forefront of the film. However, in this paper I did not specify the same subjects' identities as the purpose of this paper is rather a meta-discussion of the research in which individual subjects are portrayed as examples of my argument rather than given the agency. This is my own decision and I think each ethnographer can choose his or her modules of constructing an ethnographic "fiction."

3B. *Watching Myself Dancing*

On the showing day in the seventh session, the instructor observed and evaluated students' presentation of their pieces with his own eyes from the center spot. Yet, he also set up a video camera on a tripod right next to him for the purpose of reviewing. The next session was devoted to reviewing the video record of their dances and discussing what worked and what did not work. In that sense, his footage is purely representational. Figures on screen, tripod-shot in distance, were small and unclear, yet as far as they were recognizable, the footage satisfied the purpose of reviewing.

Watching oneself performing dance from a third-person perspective is a kind of awkward and embarrassing practice to which dancers have to be accustomed. And this sense of awkwardness becomes stronger when they dance not a given choreography but their own pieces. Watching it in the class and discussing on the success of the pieces, students were learning how to distinguish the dancing self and the dancing self that was viewed by others, just as singers distinguish the voice that they hear themselves and the voice that is heard by others. Sometimes, they were satisfied with the objectified self. One student commented that she actually thought, "Wow, that's kind of cool!" upon her dance record as she realized that the piece came out differently, and even better, from what she imagined it would look like. In this

way, she was learning to distinguish the dance she think she makes and the dance that is actually viewed by audience in distance. In that they learn to make dance while considering the presence of the viewers, their choreographic practice parallels with my filmmaking process.

While the instructor documented the students' presentation of their pieces with a camera on a tripod, I also shot the same event. Yet, unlike his recording, I consciously experimented with various camera angles, zooms and movements and showed students the footage on the tenth session while doing a group interview. Interestingly, the subjects' reactions to both tripod-shot and hand-held-shot footage were quite different. The tripod-shot footage made the subjects discuss on the dance itself while hand-held-shot footage made them focus more on the effect of the record of dance. Watching dance that was shot behind them, as if shot from the back of the 'stage,' a student commented that, while she knew the dance was meant to be viewed from the front, watching it from an unexpected angle created a strong, or even stronger impact on her how the same dance can have different nuances. Likewise, unusual shooting reminded them of the fact that what they were seeing is an aspect of the dance, not the dance itself.

In the group interview, I showed the subjects both still photos and video footage of their processes making dance. Watching the process once the assignment was done was liberating yet at the same time frustrating experience for them. One student reflected this as follows:

> When I was in it [creative process], I felt really productive. And then, after performing it and getting feedback and now looking back at it, I get frustrated because I feel like a lot of it is so much of waste of time. Because I didn't end up liking a lot of what I did. And watching it I got really frustrated seeing my process, knowing that I thought I was going to be really productive when I don't feel I was.

Reflecting upon the process is not always pleasant, particularly when one is

aware of the outcome. Yet, this sense of frustration may also means that they departed from the original place.

IV. Conclusion

This whole project began as a methodological inquiry on the potential of visual media for understanding dance. Approaching a common dance practice of choreography class from an anthropological perspective, I transformed the quotidian dance activity into the "field" and sought to understand how students gain the distinctive concept of creativity within the institutionalized learning system. For this ethnographic fieldwork, I employed text, photography and film not only as tools for data collection in the field but also as indicators of perception and interpretation. In doing so, I explored the potential of how these media could become, as Sarah Pink notes, 'cultural texts, representations of ethnographic knowledge, sites of cultural production, social interaction and individual experience that themselves form ethnographic fieldwork locales.'[34] What I realized in my experiment is that written text, jot-down fieldnotes in particular, is a medium just as particular as visual media. More often than not, ethnographers treat text as if it were a default epistemological state of gathering data and producing knowledge, but it is mere a set of conventions that shapes how we see and understand a given phenomenon. In order for visual media to be more openly accepted as a knowledge-producing practice, rather than as an illustration for an existing argument, dance scholars should acknowledge the relativity of all texts, whether written or visual.

In recognition that doing fieldwork is a mediated practice—no matter which

34) Sarah Pink(2001). *Doing Visual Anthropology: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, p. 1.

medium the researcher may study, among text, photography, film or any other—ethnography is full of subjectivity, medium convention, and creativity. I was particularly interested in creative parallels of my fieldwork and subjects' choreographing solo dances, as both require accepting cultural conventions and negotiating new ones. While the students explored creativity on the textual level, I explored creativity on the contextual level of this project. My creative product is now to be received by the readers. Their reaction and academic dialogue will enrich the whole cultural production.

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국문요약

무용 민족지법에서의 시각매체 활용에 대한 연구: 안무법 수업을 대상으로 한 사례연구

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현재 춤계에서는 시각매체의 예술적, 교육적, 학문적 가치에 대한 관심이 높아지고 있다. 그러나 그 활용 방식을 볼 때 기존의 연구패러다임 내에서 보조적이고 부수적인 역할을 하는데 그칠 뿐 새로운 지식과 관점을 생성하고 나아가 연구 자체에 대한 고찰을 끌어내는 경우는 드물다. 이처럼 한정적인 시각매체의 존재성은 무용학만의 특성이라기보다는, 문자텍스트가 학문에서 가지는 권위 및 시각매체에 대해 학자들이 경험하는 기술적 장벽 등 보다 학계의 일반화된 경향 때문이라고 볼 수 있다. 이러한 상황에서 본 연구자는 무용을 이해하는 방식에 있어 시각매체가 가지는 의미 및 가능성을 조명하고자 했으며, 이를 민족지적 사례연구를 통해 얻어진 실질적이고 구체적인 경험들에 비추어 논의했다.

템플대학교 무용전공생을 대상으로 한 무용안무법 수업을 10회 참관하면서 본 연구자는 문자, 사진, 영상이라는 각기 다른 매체를 통해 기록하고 연구했으며, 그 결과물로서 본 연구서 및 영상소품을 제작하였다. 다소 평범하게 보이는 안무수업, 즉 자기성찰적 독무라는 과제에 따라 학생들이 창작, 연습, 토론, 발표, 평가한다는 과정을 인류학적 시각으로 접근한 본 연구자는 개인의 개성 및 창의성이 학교수업이라는 제도화된 환경과 대조를 이루면서도 상호 공존하는 독특한 문화를 형성함을 알 수 있었다. 연구방법으로 선택한 민족지법은 각 매체의 특성을 잘 드러냈다. 예를 들어 연구자에게 떠오르는 가설을 기록하고 현장의 사건을 요약하는데 문자가 효과적이었다면, 사진과 영상을 활용한 중층 인터뷰 방식은 학생들이 개인적 감성과 사회적 요구를 절충하면서 겪은 내적 갈등을 섬세하게 짚어내는데 효과적이었다. 그러나 매체들의 고유성을 강조하더라도 이들이 서로 배타적인 관계를 이룬다고 섣불리 단정할 수는 없다. 왜냐하면 본 연구자의 경험에서도 드러나듯이 문자를 통해서 이미지를 묘사하고 행위를 서술하는가 하면, 사진이나 영상을 통해 이미 개념화된 지식을 카메라의 시각적 프레임으로 담아내었기 때문이다. 이렇게 볼 때 시각매체를 유의미한 학문적 인식의 틀로 삼기위해서는 무엇보다도 문자매체를 당위적인 인식의 기준점으로 삼는 학문적 관습에서 벗어나 이 역시 상대적이고 특수한 문화현상의 일부임을

상기하는 것이다.

방법론적 문제에 대한 반성적 고찰을 꾀했던 사례연구를 통해 본 연구자는 특히 무용학자가 시각매체의 특성을 인식하고 이를 활용할 수 있다면 영상매체 전문가에게 의존하지 않고도 무용에 대한 새로운 시각을 생성하고 소통할 수 있으리라 생각하며, 이에 대한 보다 풍부한 후속연구가 이루어지길 기대한다.

주제어: 시각매체 (visual media), 영상인류학 (visual anthropology), 무용민족지법 (dance ethnography), 창의성 (creativity), 안무교수법 (choreography pedagogy)