

Blogging choreography: Using the Internet to collaborate transnationally

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How does the use of Web 2.0 technologies, social networking tools, and self-produced media redefine the possibilities for choreographic collaboration? Using the Post *Natyam* Collective's working process as a case study, we look at how Internet tools enable cross-border collaboration and build grassroots artistic communities.

The Post *Natyam* Collective is a transnational, web-based coalition of women dance artists who critically and creatively engage South Asian dance. Our members include Sandra Chatterjee (Munich/Salzburg/India), Shyamala Moorty (Los Angeles), Cynthia Ling Lee (Los Angeles), and Anjali Tata (Kansas City), with Sangita Shresthova (Los Angeles/Prague) as an affiliated media choreographer.

Meet Post *Natyam*'s members through their dance-for-camera video, "Cyber Chat Revisited": http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSY5o4P_-vI&feature=player_embedded.

Our Internet-based collaboration does not emerge from aesthetic interest in cutting-edge technology and avant-garde intercultural networks, but out of a lack of resources. Self-taught, we utilize free Internet tools, such as blogging, video posting, Skype, email, and Google Documents to stay connected across the distance despite being chronically underfunded. The Internet functions "as a grass-roots medium connecting people of lesser means and political agendas on a global level" (Wulff, 2004).

We collaborate transnationally because there are very few contemporary South Asian choreographers in Germany and the United States, let alone ones who engage critically with postcolonial and feminist-of-color issues.¹ By bridging geographical isolation, the Internet makes it possible to build grass-roots artistic communities, affinity groups, and networks of exchange around specialized niche interests, making it possible "to disaggregate 'culture' from specific territorial boundaries" (Chatterjea, 2011).

Our creative process is centralized on our blog,² which has become our online workspace. Each month, we rotate giving choreographic assignments. After posting our responses, we then provide feedback to each other through blog comments. In addition to our creative assignment process, the blog has proved useful for sharing research notes, references, and links; to give

¹ According to feminist-of-color Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist movements have been challenged on the grounds of cultural imperialism and of short sightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle-class, white experiences, internal racism, classism, and homophobia" (Mohanty, 2003). Feminism-of-color foregrounds these critiques of Western feminism while refusing to define women of color as a monolithic, homogenous group; rather, Mohanty frames a coalition of women of color as a "viable oppositional alliance [based on a] common context of struggle rather than color or racial identifications" (Mohanty, 2003).

² www.postnatyam.blogspot.com

reports on exhibits or talks that we attend locally; and to share and archive lecture-demonstrations, performances, and workshops that we present locally. All this is available online to the public.

Several key aspects characterize our online choreographic exchange:

1. *Horizontal, peer-to-peer learning exchange*: encouraging multiple voices and providing supportive feedback.
2. *The public nature of our creative process*: demystifying artistic process and informally creating an online South Asian contemporary choreographic curriculum.
3. *Mediatization of artistic product*: videos, sound scores, art books, poems, and scripts supplement live dance.
4. *Collaboration over singular authorship*: our “open source” policy encourages collective members to “creatively recycle” each other’s material (Chatterjee, Lee, Moorthy, & Tata, 2011).

As we continue collaborating across distance, we have become interested in alternative ways of presenting work, such as developing transmedia artistic manifestations and using web-streaming and Web 2.0 tools to supplement live performance. We also plan to expand our assignment process beyond the collective by inviting guest artists, peer choreographers, and audiences into an interactive, networked exchange surrounding contemporary South Asian dance. We hope that this will foster a creative exchange between isolated contemporary South Asian choreographers worldwide.

In sharing our methodology of non-hierarchical, online, open-source, choreographic collaboration, we hope that other groups of people with specialized interests will take inspiration, deploying Internet tools to build much-needed community.

Keywords: Internet, collaboration, choreography, transnational, grass-roots

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Cynthia Ling Lee (MFA, University of California, Los Angeles) instigates thoughtful, friction-filled dialogues between American postmodern dance and North Indian classical kathak. Her

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