Chapter 5

Technological Mediation in Odissi Dance:
A Transnational Perspective of Digitized Practice and Pedagogy in a Traditional Artistic Community

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ABSTRACT

The practice of teaching in an online composition class might potentially eliminate interpersonal inter-activity in a classroom community. Digital mediation can be problematic for functional collaboration in a virtual class. The problem that online instructors might face is one that some traditional Odissi dance teachers also experience. In order to explore the conflict between tradition and mediations with technology, this study focuses on Odissi, an Indian classical dance, and examines how digital technologies of teaching, like CDs, DVD, online videos, and synchronous videos, are transforming the practice and teaching of this traditional dance. A qualitative research of the field of Odissi dance revealed that technologizing the dance might be unavoidable, but to some practitioners it may be disrupting Odissi's traditional values. This chapter reasserts the position of the teacher in an online pedagogic space and argues that the presence or simulated presence of bodies might be vital in learning and composing collaboratively.

INTRODUCTION

Within the last three decades, advances in computing have impacted pedagogies related to the teaching of traditional arts. Scholarship in the field of Rhetoric and Composition on online pedagogy has explored the problems of online teaching and has sought solutions that can remove the problems caused by the physical absence of the teacher and students in mediated pedagogies. My observation of teaching Composition as well as Indian classical dance online shoes that when

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teaching happens through online courses or training videos, the teacher and students are no longer directly interacting with one another. In online classrooms, participants forge new relationships within the pedagogic "space." In a classroom where there is no direct physical contact between teachers and the students, some of the positive outcomes of face-to-face pedagogies might be lost. These problems can include fostering immediate and personal involvement with the students and creating a collaborative learning environment. In my own teaching practices, I have attempted to respond to the problems of online learning and teaching by reflecting on the pedagogic values of a traditional practice that is a part of my cultural identity. This chapter investigates these questions on remediation of traditional pedagogic performances: how are traditional arts, such as Odissi dance and writing, preserved, practiced, and taught across various media? And with what consequences? I argued the inclusion and use of technology is creating tensions in both fields. It is pointless to judge whether we should or should not use technology. It is important to understand the impact of technology on traditional values in order to use it most effectively to reach the pedagogic goals in a way that is most satisfactory to the student and the teacher.

The presence of computers in pedagogical spaces still has not completely replaced the importance of the immediate presence of the teacher and the "sacred"-ness of ritualistic space where online pedagogy and practice is performed. This chapter shows how digitally mediated pedagogies of Odissi dance can shed light on conversations concerning digitally mediated pedagogies. It asserts that the instructor's presence may be pivotal in creating engaging collaborative learning spaces for students. To demonstrate this, I detail the ways in which digital technologies have transformed the teaching and performance of traditional dance when remediated in videos, the blogosphere, and

in virtual performative and pedagogical spaces, such as Second Life (SL) and online dance teaching Websites. These mediations have a controversial though important influence on the survival of traditional dance performance and teaching. The digital mediation of traditional pedagogies may be potentially harmful to underlying values of sacredness that most Indian classical dancers often associate with this practice. In traditional pedagogy, such as Odissi dance, the teacher and the student are engaged in direct interpersonal interactions in a close classroom space. The moments of collaboration between students are also immediate. I found in my qualitative research study, that in the act of teaching and learning dance, most practitioners value the immediacy of the bodies in an exclusive "sacred" space. A networked knowledge community NKC of dance practitioners (students and teachers) is formed in these exclusive spaces.

By drawing the connection of form, argument, and medium in modernist art with Composition pedagogy, Geoffrey Sic (2002) revealed the value of interdisciplinarity in understanding composition pedagogy in networked environments and in networked knowledge communities (NKCs). In *English Composition as a Happening*, he writes, "So the parallels between writing instruction and the visual arts, both seen as composition, are compelling. The allegory I present in this book—looking at the spaces of writing instruction through/as spaces associated directly and tangentially with the Happenings movement…" (p. 19). The allegory refers to the composing space of the art as "definitive" (p. 61), "transitional" (p. 169), "sublime" (p. 1), "happening" (p. 1). My interdisciplinary study of mediation in networked knowledge communities (NKCs) in online spaces evokes these understanding of value systems in sacred composing spaces, in both Rhetoric and Composition and Odissi.

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