

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND AESTHETICS ANNOUNCES

A Talk by Prof. Ananya Jahanara Kabir

Kinetoscapes: Archives, methods, and reasons for studying the global dance floor

At SAA Auditorium

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Ananya Jahanara Kabir, Professor of English Literature at King's College London, is a literary and cultural historian who works on memory, embodiment, and post-trauma in the global South. She has also taught at the universities of Cambridge, California (Berkeley), and Leeds. She is the recipient of The Infosys Prize for the Humanities (2017), and of fellowships from The Rockefeller Foundation, The British Academy, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

The 'dance floor' - a space, typically situated in a club in a city, which people visit to dance and dress up for - is now a global phenomenon. It has generated vast transnational industries of fashion, branding, and music, as well as innumerable local scenes through which people enjoy themselves on weekend evenings. From Motown to Bollywood, popular songs celebrate its pleasures and urge us to embrace them through by losing ourselves to the beat. But how did the dance floor emerge? What is its relationship to labour and leisure? Why is there still something highly desirable yet faintly illicit about spending our time in this fashion? And why should we pay any academic attention to the dance floor? In this lecture, I will unveil the secret history of the dance floor, moving from drum circles on sugar plantations, through Paris Noir and New York's Jazz Age, to the proliferation of clubs worldwide. Desire, sexuality, and race will all be in the mix, as will the concept of the 'kinetoscope', that extends Arjun Appadurai's formulation of 'mediascapes' et al in his book, 'Modernity at Large'.

This talk will draw on the wide comparative analysis I have been conducting on African-heritage partner dances through the ERC-funded project, 'Modern Moves', which I direct. As the project moves through its final year, it will be an occasion to share challenges and successes on both methodological and conceptual levels.