FESTIVALS

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Edited by Cara Hagan

Table of Contents:

1. Letter from the Editor 1-2
    - Cara Hagan

Articles and Reflections:

2. Moving Pictures: A Moment in Time: The Rise and Untimely End of Canada's First Dancefilm Festival 3-18
    - Kathleen Smith
3. Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival 19-28
    - Sarah Elgart
4. About Constructing Curatorial Practices as a Collage 29-39
    - Mauro Cacciatore
5. Dance Behind the Screen in the Social Media Era: Saying NO to the BOX with the kNOwBOX dance Film Festival 40-49
    - Azaria Hogans, YeaJean Choi, Reyna Mondragon, Martheya Nygaard
6. *Opine Dance Film Festival*: The Little Festival that Could 50-56
    - Britt Whitmoyer Fishel
7. Pivoting Through the Lens: Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema's Journey in a (Post) Pandemic World 57-74
    - Michelle Bernier and Rosely Conz
8. *grounded*: A Lens on COVID through Screendance 75-82
    - Claudia Kappenberg and Fiontán Moran
9. Lone Mountain College's San Francisco Dance Film Festival 1976-1978 83-101
    - Clare Schweitzer
10. A Democratization of Screendance Curation: The Value of Curating as a Group Versus an Autonomous Curatorial Approach 102-119
    - Jo Cork, Luisa Lazzaro, Gitta Wigro

11. Screendance Africa (Pty) Ltd: *African Screendance made by Africans* 120-135
    - Jeannette Ginslov

12. Tracing The Disappeared Videodance Festivals of Italy 136-145
    - Ariadne Mikou

13. *The Impetus* 146-154
    - Dawn R. Schultz

14. The Third Coast Dance Film Festival and COVID-19 Adaptive Programing in 2021 155-162
    - Rosie Trump

15. VideodanzaBA Festival: Almost Three Decades of Pioneering the Field in Latin America 163-179
    - Silvina Szperling, Mauro Cacciatore, Mariel Leibovich

16. Choreoscope: Anatomy of a Festival 180-188
    - Loránd János

Interviews:

17. Getting Emotional/Strange with filmmaker Laura Taler on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of *the village trilogy* 189-199
    - Kathleen Smith

18. Reflections on Dance Camera West 200-201
    - Cara Hagan

19. Interview with the 2021 Curators for the Third Coast Dance Film Festival – A companion to *The Third Coast Dance Film Festival and COVID-19 Adaptive Programing in 2021* 202-204
    - Rosie Trump

Letter from the Editor

By Cara Hagan

When I set out to write my book, *Screendance from Film to Festival: Celebration and Curatorial Practice* (McFarland, 2022), my goal was to share the particular work we do as screendance festival directors, programmers, and curators from a personal perspective. I wanted to share my journey to discovering my interests and concerns in the realm of the festival, and how, over the course of a little more than a decade, I worked to address them. In preparation for that work, not only did I mine the archival material of Movies by Movers, the festival I started as a solo director/curator back in 2010,[1] I interviewed many other people in the screendance festival community in hopes of illuminating the connections and lineages between various festivals and the people that run them. I also hoped to situate screendance festivals on the continuum of screendance history and cinema history more broadly, demonstrating their importance to the cinematic ecosystem. To an extent, I did that. However, I realized that telling the story of the entire circuit, much less a few festivals, would be bigger work than I could take on myself. Upon publishing the book, I told myself that I needed to return to the subject of screendance festivals, but next time, alongside many voices.

Overall, there has been little written about the inner workings of screendance festivals, their histories, and the shape of their activities from an infrastructural perspective, in comparison to writings about the films and artists they support. One could argue that this is true of other artistic genres, where the various forms of scaffolding that support the art often get left out of conversations where the artists and products themselves take precedence. Artists and artistic products are important, of course, but it bears mentioning that the labor and the resultant platforms that provide visibility, community, learning, and opportunity, are intertwined; they do not exist without each other. And while screendance festivals are not the only places where dance films may be screened, they have historically acted as sites where the form is defined and reified such that over time, people have come to have an understanding of the genre as one worthy of recognition.

In convening this special issue of the International Journal of Screendance, festival histories, descriptions of specific programs and special curatorial endeavors, and the stories of what inspired members of the screendance community to start or become involved with festivals, mingle. They help to paint a nuanced picture of the screendance festival landscape. Pivotal moments, such as the shift from analog to digital media, COVID-19, and the inception, growth, and termination of festivals over their lifespans offer insight into how people do the work and what effect their efforts have made on the field. Many of the essays possess a reflective tone indicative of the personal nature of starting or maintaining a screendance festival, often alone or with a small group of people. Those pieces that take a more objective route present important historical material that helps to enrich our understanding of screendance as a practice with a long and distinct history whose stories are still being excavated.

[1] Movies by Movers began as a graduate school practicum in 2010. It came under the auspices of the American Dance Festival in 2016, where Doug Rosenberg had been holding the Dancing for the Camera: International Festival of Film and Video Dance since 1996.

This collection is important in that *not* telling our stories, we risk losing them forever. This is poignantly demonstrated in several of the essays in this issue. My ultimate hope with this collection is that it inspires more people in the field to tell and preserve stories about screendance festivals and the crucial moments that inevitably change the trajectory of the art form. Screendance – its practitioners, its advocates, and its audiences – deserve access to screendance's layered existence through its stories, and a chance to acknowledge their roles within those stories.

Moving Pictures: A Moment in Time

The Rise and Untimely End of Canada's First Dancefilm Festival

By Kathleen Smith

Abstract

This memoir by co-founder Kathleen Smith offers a brief history of the Moving Pictures Festival of Dance on Film and Video, a screendance event and touring program that took place annually in Toronto from 1992 through 2006. Though ground-breaking in its interdisciplinary approach and popular with both audiences and artists, the pressures of unstable funding, changing urban landscapes and a labour-intensive format ultimately made the festival unsustainable. This essay chronicles the highs and lows of festival development in the dancescreen sector at a crucial moment in time.

Moving Pictures: A Moment in Time

The Moving Pictures Festival of Dance on Film and Video ran annually in Toronto between 1992 and 2006. It was never supposed to be a festival. It began as a one-off event, instigated by Marc Glassman, a Toronto renaissance man of the arts who was programming films for the National Film Board (NFB) at the time, and me, a journalist writing about arts and culture, mostly dance. Marc and I ran in the same social circles in a town where friendly connections matter greatly if you're trying to support and animate local cultural activity.

Inception

In the 90s, Queen Street West was the city's cultural frontier. A wild mix of mostly humble clubs, shops, galleries and restaurants, the street running roughly from University Avenue to Bathurst Street was ground zero for Toronto artists and filmmakers. Here, rents and rehearsal spaces were cheap and plentiful leading to a small but vibrant arts community. It was very concentrated (some might say exclusive); everyone seemed to know everyone else, regardless of the disciplines they worked in. On this strip, Marc was involved with the NFB John Spotton Cinema, his own Pages Bookstore and the Rivoli restaurant and nightclub run by mutual friend Andre Rosenbaum. It made sense to program early Moving Pictures events into these familiar spaces.

We recruited projectionist Hans Burgschmidt from the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). He would set the festival's technical standards high, teaching us all about formats and the nuances of resolution and keystoning. We also worked with multi-media artist Laurie-Shawn Borzovoy on a custom projection platform for the Rivoli club space.

That first year, we looked mostly to Europe and the UK for programming, following bright lights from the live performance scene who were delving into film and video. We discovered London filmmaker David Hinton and brought over his *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, an important full-length work made with the UK's DV8 Physical Theatre. We looked to BBC's Dance for Camera series, PBS' Alive-TV in the States and distributors that specialised in performance on film and TV, such as Argos in Belgium and RM Associates in the UK, as well as Canada's own NFB and Cinema Libre. Through the Film Board, Marc discovered

Evelyn Hart: Moment of Light, a documentary about the luminous Canadian ballerina directed by John Reeve.

On July 8, 1992 we launched a joyful 4-day community gathering powered by family and friends, a brash mix of live performance, super8 and 16 mm film and video. Audiences filled our tiny cinema spaces, and they were boisterous and engaged; local newspapers wrote about us. At our closing party, dancer friends improvised into the wee hours. Magic.

Party polaroids by Gregory Nixon; l to r: Hans Burgschmidt, Marc Glassman with Vanessa Harwood and Linda Maybarduk, Veronica Tennant

Early Years 1993-1999

Flushed with the success of the initial event, we impulsively decided to launch an annual festival. Funders seemed enthusiastic, filmmakers were over the moon – buoyed by all the good vibes, we had no idea what we were getting into.

For the second festival in 1993, we initiated thematic programs. That year we became friends with American filmmaker Elliot Caplan, then-videographer for the Merce Cunningham Company and Foundation. We programmed Caplan's stunning black and white *Beach Birds for Camera* (1993), building a program of related modernist classics around it: Dave Wilson and Martha Graham's *Seraphic Dialogue*, made for the Bell Telephone Hour on NBC in 1971; Ed Emschwiller and Alwin Nikolais' *Totem* (1963) and *Merce By Merce By Paik* (1978) made by Merce Cunningham, Charles Atlas and Nam June Paik. Caplan came to town for the screening. My memory that he set fire to his hotel room trying to prepare a kosher snack may be unreliable, but he definitely taught a camera workshop and won our hearts with his quirks and expertise.

In the earliest days, the festival was supported with small project grants from the Toronto Arts Council (TAC) and the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), modest sums of cash that acknowledged the hybrid nature of the festival by splitting funding responsibilities between dance and media arts divisions. There was also a significant amount of in-kind donation and sponsorship from the immediate community. For example, the Rivoli offered us space for free and even threw in snacks, refreshments and drink tickets for audiences and crew. Many distributors waived or lowered rental fees, and films arrived from France via diplomatic pouch courtesy of the French Consulate in Toronto. Well-connected friends volunteered or kicked in goods and services in the spirit of getting Moving Pictures off the ground. It's

unlikely we could have built what we did without this kind of help and support, which continued throughout our 15-year run.

Later, the Canada Council for the Arts, several private foundations, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Ontario Film Development Corporation contributed regular operating and project funding. We began to charge a modest submission fee for those who could afford it, as well as charging admission to screenings (alongside numerous complimentary entries, of course). Each year after the first two, our budget was a mix of revenue from government and foundation grants, in-kind donations, fundraising events, box office and entry fees. Marc and I took honorariums at the beginning and we hired various people on short-term contracts for festival production. Towards the end of our run I took a salary (Marc never took one) and our part-time festival administrator Jennifer Watkins managed touring activities and served as a programming assistant. Moving Pictures remained mightily understaffed for its entire life, especially considering that our programming activities never stopped expanding. Thankfully, finding volunteers to help out was never a problem: Toronto residents have made the city an enthusiastic centre for cinema, independent and otherwise, and we absolutely benefitted from that in so many ways. The dance community in Toronto is similarly philanthropic with their time and energy – choreographers and dance artists pitched in too.

Modelling local film festivals we were already involved with as founders, board members, writers and reviewers – notably TIFF, the Images Festival of Independent Film and Video and Hot Docs – we branched out in 1993 with a few ancillary activities. We introduced panel discussions, presented a video installation called *Isadora Speaks* by Elizabeth Chitty and held a special presentation of Ron Mann's documentary *Twist*. Looking back, the ambition seems breathtaking. But, internationally at least, the material was available to go even bigger. As curators, we also began to follow our individual interests. Marc's pet program in 1993 was *Psych(o)delia: The Kinetic Factor*, a series of avant garde films from artists like Stan Brakhage and Norman McLaren, all inspired and informed by dance and movement. My special project involved shorter works by British filmmaker Peter Greenaway, including *Rosa*, choreographed by Anne-Teresa de Keersmaeker, and *Not Mozart*, made with dancer/choreographer Ben Craft.

In the months preceding this edition of the festival we had sent out a national call for submissions that also yielded material. Word of mouth resulted in local filmmakers such as Gariné Torossian dropping preview tapes into my home mailbox (we programmed her early experimental 16mm work *Platform*). Eventually, Canadian independent work would come to dominate the programming.

In 1994, we moved the festival from July to October, mostly to better align with arts council funding cycles and to uphold the idea that serious arts festivals could not happen in the summer months in Toronto. We opened this edition with Montreal filmmaker Bernar Hebert's lush *Velazquez's Little Museum* featuring LaLaLa Human Steps. In a special presentation, we premiered *The Burning Skin*, directed by Srinivas Krishna and choreographed by Roger Sinha. And we inaugurated a festival tradition with the Canada Dances screening: all-new films and videos culled from the annual call for submissions. We also introduced our audiences to expat film artist Alison Murray, born in Nova Scotia, resident in the UK, with a retrospective program of her gritty avant garde short films, including *Kissy Suzuki Suck* and *Wank Stallions*.

In 1995, Murray came over for the festival to teach a workshop in person and show a new short called *Sleazeburger* as part of a program devoted to UK artists like Margaret Williams, Deborah May and Sarah Blunt.

That year we added another theatre to our roster, the 200-seat Jackman Hall at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Here we opened the festival with a black and white double bill – Laura Taler's *the village trilogy* and Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's *Achterland*. Film prints both, one 16 mm and one 35mm – this was the kind of screening that solidified our commitment to film as a presentation medium, even as the landscape was beginning to shift in favour of video and digital technologies. There would be fewer and fewer film prints to screen as time went on, but we always gave them the utmost care and attention when they showed up in cans at the projection booth door.

Photo of Laura Taler in the village trilogy by Stacy Clark. The film won the inaugural Cinedance Award in 1995.

Working with film at the Jackman also required us to be supervised by the Ontario Film Review Board (formerly the Ontario Censor Board). Thanks to years-long pushback from the Toronto's film festival community, we were able to post a blanket statement limiting audiences to over-18s rather than physically submitting individual films for Board approval. Still, I remember one dance artist who arrived at a screening with his new born baby in his arms – ushers were forced to deny him entry. This really wasn't our style at all – but provincial oversight was just part of being a film festival in Ontario in the early 90s. Eventually, most artist-run organisations and independent festivals stopped paying attention or bothering with compliance, with few repercussions.

Other films shown that year included *Dido and Aeneas* by Mark Morris and Barbara Willis Sweete (not technically a film, but shot on film with what could be considered a feature film

budget by Canadian standards) and *The Last Supper*, Cynthia Roberts' 16mm adaptation of the remarkable Hillar Liitoja play about a choreographer ending his life. With minimal movement and only allusive references to dance, *The Last Supper* wandered around the extreme end of Moving Pictures' total-seconds-of-dance criteria (we had somehow settled on three seconds). Back then we tried to push the boundaries of what could be considered dance film as far as they could go, mostly because Marc and I were both cultural omnivores ourselves and formal hybrids were interesting to us.

Another important innovation in 1995 was setting up the inaugural Cinedance Award for the festival film that most successfully combined choreography with camerawork. The prize was a $10,000 package of film goods and services, all of it donated by Toronto's well-established and generous film production community. Filmmaker Atom Egoyan, former ballerina Veronica Tennant and video director Curtis Wehrfritz made up the jury. Later, with a cash donation by dance and opera journalist Paula Citron, we added the Citron Award for Best Choreography for Camera. Still later, the competitive program *The Pitch* was introduced. A staple at larger film festivals, pitch sessions gather funders and distributors to hear filmmakers pitch new projects in person, offering feedback and awarding the most promising with a prize package of film production services to get it made.

Managing the awards jury each year became a focus for Marc – he would host boozy restaurant dinners overflowing with animated conversations about art. Wrangling sponsorships and prize money was a year-round effort for our tiny team and we were always astonished by the goodwill and generosity our little festival seemed to generate. A matinee screening of the award winners, alongside curator and audience favourites, became a much-loved tradition on the final day of each festival.

At the 5th edition of the festival in 1996 we showed a diverse group of new Canadian films: *No Guilt/Non coupable,* John Faichney's half hour documentary about dancer Susan MacPherson passing on a solo by Paul-André Fortier to Peggy Baker; the breathtaking three-minute short *Nomad* by dancer Philip Drube and filmmaker Sarah Willinsky, and works by Alejandro Ronceria and Nick de Pencier. International content included Deborah May's *Plane Song*, set in Namibia, and Mike Figgis' riveting *Just Dancing Around?* a bio-pic of sorts featuring William Forsythe and his Frankfurt-based ballet company. We closed the festival with a screening of Clara van Gool's *Enter Achilles*, choreographed by DV8's Lloyd Newson (who quietly attended the screening we found out later).

Great films all, but 1996 was even more notable as the year we started our touring program. *Moving Pictures on the Road* packaged selections from the main festival to tour the country during the winter months. Artists were paid additional screening fees (very small in the beginning) and sometimes went along to represent their work and engage with regional artists and audiences. Initially we teamed up with colleagues of Marc's, presenters with a long-standing interest in Canadian independent filmmaking and the arts: Jim Sinclair at the Pacific Cinematheque in Vancouver, Dave Barber at The Cinematheque in Winnipeg and Tom McSorley at the Canadian Film Institute in Ottawa. One of the main reasons for Moving Pictures' ongoing success I believe was the strength of our relationships with established film presenters, distributors and production organisations. We partnered with lots of dance organisations also, but it was the cinematheque system at home and internationally that really understood what we were trying to do, offering support for touring films and artists and drumming up regional audiences curious about this new hybrid of choreography and

camerawork. The touring program eventually became a separate revenue stream as it allowed us access to different types of arts funding at national and regional levels.

In 1997, we opened the festival with a documentary, the Academy Award-nominated *Suzanne Farrell: Elusive Muse* at Jackman Hall. Moving Pictures had always made room for docs, as a preference of the curators, but also for the incredible value that archival footage of dance holds for the community. Farrell attended the screening and spoke of her legendary relationship with George Balanchine while fans in the audience showered her with flowers. Another full-length documentary we showed that year, Efin Reznikov's *Terpsichore's Captives*, revealed the flip side of ballet glory with its stern examination of the classical Russian training system. More experimental offerings built around documentary content included Laura Taler's *Heartland*, Nick de Pencier's *The Road to Halifax*, and Dennis Day's short film *Heaven or Montreal*. That year we also showed *Men* by Margaret Williams and Victoria Marks, shot in Banff with non-professional performers, Norman McLaren's optically printed classic, *Pas de Deux,* and *Cornered,* a black and white film experiment by former ballet dancer Michael Downing and performer Susanna Hood, that was presented with live sound mixed by Brennan Green. All of these were solid examples of hybrid art-making that took dance off the stage and into new expressive territory.

This edition of the festival marked a kind of watershed moment in which the range of dance on film and its potential for innovation finally became apparent to a broader audience. In Toronto at least, a lot of doubters reversed course at this time – the evidence of interest, energy and imagination within the screendance genre, *the potential*, finally solidified. We started seeing line-ups outside our venues, queues snaking along the sidewalks in advance of the most popular screenings. Our audiences were never enormous – we programmed for very small venues with room for 30 patrons and larger ones like the Bloor Cinema, that could seat 800. Sometimes those venues were full, but many screenings were sparsely attended (which didn't seem to bother those who were there). Local talent always drew the most support and matching programs with venues for optimal audience satisfaction and box office revenue became more and more important, the subject of much thought and discussion for Marc and myself.

The 1998 edition of the festival continued to build on that newfound screendance potential with partnerships. One of the most important was with BravoFACT!, the independent foundation wing of Bravo!, a Canadian arts broadcaster affiliated with CityTV. We made an agreement with them to premiere short films funded by the foundation at one of the few surviving Depression-era repertory cinemas in Toronto, the 400-seat Royal on College Street. The collaboration (which continued until 2005) was a high-profile celebration of Canadian artists with an old-time marquee out front, the smell of popcorn in the air, lots of press and a TIFF-style cocktail event afterwards. The BravoFACT! showcase, with its aura of star power and swish catered party, introduced the festival – and thus the hybrid phenomenon of dance on film – to hundreds of culture vultures and production industry-adjacent big wigs.

As the stakes got higher, so did the anxiety around projection – we rented and installed our own equipment and sound systems when the old rep houses couldn't handle the new digital formats. Hans Burgschmidt and an entire generation of technicians who trained with him hand-built systems in raw or under-equipped alternative spaces. To be honest, some of our screenings looked bad, the filmmakers bravely supporting their films after tear-filled sound checks. Audiences cheered regardless. But we worked hard at making our programming look as good as possible. Compilations of short films were painstakingly made and checked –

mixing formats such as VHS, betacam and digibeta in both native and international standards needed constant adjustment and attention. The materiality of film and these earlier video formats required human intervention for transportation and delivery. Anyone in the office with a driver's license got to play courier, the same way anyone with muscles would be recruited for cable pulling and teardown late at night post-screening. With the exception of actual projection, sound mixing and stage management, which we left to the pros, our tiny team did it all.

Projection quality became even more vital as we chased down world premieres. Premieres lend cachet and profile to any festival; for us they allowed important outreach to introduce something largely new and niche. When people discovered us through one of these high-profile premieres (films like Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood Hollywood* or Dan Geller and Dayna Goldfine's *Ballets Russes*), they almost always expressed delight at the novelty: "Dance and film together? Of course. How wonderful!"

Along with films from the UK, France and Canada, the big gala moment for Moving Pictures in 1998 was the opening night premiere of *Dancing in the Moment*, a documentary recounting the final dancing days of the National Ballet of Canada's beloved ballerina Karen Kain. Produced by Veronica Tennant and directed by Joan Tosoni, the event filled Jackman Hall with love and emotion, all the key players on hand.

Much less prestigious than world premieres but equally exciting for us was the inauguration of a new live event we called *The Anatomic Cabaret*. A nod to live performance with a focus on the body and movement, the Cabaret was also a chance to showcase the rich performance art tradition in Toronto, with practices ranging from Louise Liliefeldt's endurance works to Keith Cole's sly political drag. Some performances included projection or filmed components, many did not. *The Anatomic Cabaret* was often comical, sometimes outrageous. One year, parkour aficionado/filmmaker Justin Lovell and performer Troy Feldman literally jumped out of the screen to disrupt the event with a display of live physicality, bouncing off walls and wielding a head-mounted live-streaming GoPro. Another time, Cathy Gordon's video series *Inappropriate Dances* was augmented by the artist herself dancing inappropriately in the aisles. Basically, the Cabaret became a staged free-for-all hosted by local celebrities such as Olivia Chow, then a councillor, now mayor of Toronto and acclaimed dancer Peggy Baker.

In 1999, at the end of the 20th century, Moving Pictures consolidated past innovations and embarked on one major new one. We continued the partnership with Bravo!FACT and mounted a second Anatomic Cabaret. We presented a video-based installation, Irish artist Rachel Toomey's *Grave Dancing*, at V-tape, a video distribution hub that had become a regular festival partner. We presented Eileen Thalenberg's feature-length documentary, *Can't Stop Now*, that looked at ballet dancers over the age of forty. International gems included Isaac Julien's *Three*, choreographed by Ralph Lemon and Bebe Miller, Thierry De Mey and Michele Anne De Mey's *21 Etudes à danser*, Sasha Waltz's *Allee der Kosmonauten* and Philippe Decouflé's magical *Abracadabra*. We also added Peterborough, ON and Victoria, BC as touring stops and agreed to present a screening installation at Calgary's HIgh Performance Rodeo. This was ample activity for a tiny organization. But the biggest step we took in 1999 was getting into film production ourselves.

As one-fifth of a Toronto-based arts collective known as i-culture, Moving Pictures signed on to a group film production project we dubbed *Quintet*. It consisted of five short film shoots

representing five distinct arts organizations: the new music ensemble Arraymusic, Bill James' site-specific dance group Atlas Moves Watching, feminist vocal collective URGE, Thom Sololoski's Autumn Leaf Performance … and us, Moving Pictures. With a budget provided by the federal Department of Canadian Heritage and Bravo!FACT, Moving Pictures and friends oversaw production, a logistical feat that was also a rite of passage. Presented at the 1999 festival as a gala screening, *Quintet* would not be our last walk on the continuum between creation and presentation.

Photo of Jesse van Rooi by Vanessa Harwood; catalogue design by Lisa Kiss

Into the 21st Century

The first festival of the new century consolidated local and international relationships that had been brewing over some time. Acclaimed Toronto designer Lisa Kiss contributed to stylish branding for festival materials using imagery derived from the very first festival trailer, a black and white effort featuring b-boy Jesse Van Rooi, directed by Gregory Nixon. *In the Round* was much more than a typical compilation of submission clips; rather, in one minute flat, it conveyed the tone and brash energy that the festival was noted for. Distributed as a broadcast PSA and used as advertisement by presenting partners, movie theatres – and even in the subway system – the trailer and promotional materials were the first in a series of striking annual marketing campaigns.

In addition to throwing a third Anatomic Cabaret at the Rivoli, we collaborated with Vtape on hosting *100 dancefilms: a temporary videotheque* with private screening stations and a library of Canadian and international screendance work. In fact, the entire festival embraced the idea of the archive as a vital source of both cultural preservation and creative inspiration. Patrick Bensard, filmmaker and director of the Cinémathèque de la danse in Paris, arrived to participate in a panel discussion called *Preserving Dance in a Disposable World*, with a suitcase full of treasures for public screening. Among them were early Lumiere Brothers clips, excerpts featuring Josephine Baker, the work of Roland Petit and Maurice Bejart, Loie

Fuller's Serpentine Dance, Anna Pavlova's Dying Swan solo, and several Jean-Paul Goude *bande annonces*. The Cinémathèque returned the favour in 2001 by inviting Marc and I to present a series of contemporary Canadian dancefilm screenings at the Palais de Chaillot, home of the Cinémathèque francaise in Paris.

Also in 2000, Moving Pictures curated programming for the annual Brighton Festival in Brighton UK, consolidating important partnerships and friendships with that festival and with UK organizations such as SouthEast Dance, The South West Film and Television Archive, Channel 4, and the Lighthouse Centre for digital technology.

Additionally, a blossoming relationship with Riccione TTV, a multidisciplinary festival in Riccione Italy, led to *Viva Italia*, a program of Italian video artists curated by that festival's director, Fabio Bruschi (who would visit Moving Pictures in person in 2002 with a second Italian showcase). An audio/video installation by Bologna-based artists Anna de Manincor, Anna Rispoli and Massimo Carozzi, *N.K.Never Keep Souvenirs of a Murder*, rounded out this energetic Italian takeover. Bruschi later welcomed a small team from Moving Pictures to his festival on the Adriatic. Here, in the warm embrace of Italian hospitality, we joined other international screendance practitioners to meet each other, watch and present work and participate in discussions both public and informal on a wide range of topics.

Photo of Jenn Goodwin by Vanessa Harwood; catalogue design by Lisa Kiss

Moving Pictures reached for the stars for its 10th anniversary in 2001, connecting the dots between dance, media and new technologies. The body/machine conference ran from October 26-28 at York University, immediately followed by a downtown festival edition from October 29 through November 3.

The conference featured roundtables, papers, installations and lecture demos by Yacov Sharir (EKG sensory collection technology and performance in *The Wearable Computer*) Isa

Gordon and Jesse Jarrell (creative cybernetic research in *The Psymbiote Speaks: On Generating the Cyborg Body*) and UK multimedia designer Terry Braun (*The Java Dance Project)*. Conference films included the documentaries *The Liberation of the Body: Following in the Tracks of Jacques Dalcroze and his Students* and *Cyberman* by Peter Lynch. Installations around the York University campus and various downtown locations included *Estranged Body*, a collection of sculptural elements, images and video by Kinga Araya, the single-channel video *Strange Brew* by Gunilla Josephson, *Body@Rest*, an interactive performance installation by Mark Jones, *Touch* by performance artist and disability activist Petra Kuppers, *Bodysight* by Edinburgh-based interdisciplinary researcher Sophia Lycouris and *Alternate Interfaces* by the iconic Australian performance artist Stelarc.
As I go through the records of this lineup I am a bit unsettled - "how did we do all this?" The conference themes accurately reflected our growing interest in technology and performance for sure, but how we mustered the resources to pull off an international academic conference and a full-on festival and tour within the space of a few months is truly beyond me. It's no wonder Moving Pictures couldn't be sustained.

Following the conference, the 2001 festival opened on October 29 with *The Nureyev Gala*, an ambitious fund-raising event and exhibition that paid tribute to an international ballet superstar who had a lasting impact on the Toronto dance scene. Wallace Potts, Rudolf Nureyev's former partner, and filmmaker/research archivist with The Nureyev Foundation, came to town and charmed everyone in attendance at a photo exhibition, gala reception and film screening of rare clips (including bootleg teddy bear-cam super8 footage of Nureyev dancing at Toronto's O'keefe Centre in the 60s) and a restored 35 mm print of Nureyev's *Don Quixote* at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre.

The international nature of this 10th festival continued with a master class from guest artist, UK filmmaker David Hinton, documentary screenings of Sophie Fiennes' *the late Michael Clark*, Patrick Bensard's *Le Mystere Babilée*, and Chantel Ackerman's *Un jour Pina à demandé*. The festival also continued its collaborative ways with guest curators. Conceptualist Toronto filmmaker Deirdre Logue assembled a program dubbed *Instabilities***.** Her artist note reads: "A collection of short works dedicated to the unpredictable intersections and subsequent influences of experimental dance on experimental film/video and vice versa ... Elevator dances, unhappy businessmen and twister game players toy with the medium of film and video to teach us all a few new moves." Similarly energetic flirtations with experimental forms seemed to crop up each year – these were some of our favourite programs.

2002 marked a return to a more reasonably sized festival. We premiered a few feature films, notably Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood Hollywood* and Tunisian filmmaker Raja Amari's *Satin Rouge*. In association with the local Loop Collective, the festival presented *Liquid Bodies: An Evening of Experimental Cinema, Movement and Performance*, which explored the abstract body across media and disciplines. It included works by Amy Greenfield, Maya Deren, Ed Emschwiller, Doris Chase, David Rimmer, Sarah Abbott and Gariné Torossian. Although the programming was still diverse and thoughtful at this festival, I remember feeling that it was a relief to scale back for once.

The 2003 edition of what we had started referring to internally as 'Mopix' opened with world premieres of *The Firebird* directed by Barbara Willis Sweete, choreographed by James Kudelka and featuring the National Ballet of Canada, as well as the premiere of Veronica Tennant's short film, *A Pairing of Swans.* The screening took place at our favourite theatre in

the city, The Royal. As real estate development fever started to impact Toronto more violently, this Art Deco-era cinema had been saved by a private consortium that installed post-production studios on the third floor to keep the cinema going in its historic midtown Little Italy location. At the same time, south to Lake Ontario, Moving Pictures was setting up new digs in a reclaimed Victorian industrial complex known as The Distillery. Here, our year-round studio and office space in the former Case Goods warehouse for whiskey came with wide wooden plank floors, high ceilings, community-minded neighbours and a resident ghost. We shot a trailer featuring local dance artist Andrea Nann in unrenovated buildings from the 1800s just across the cobbled road. Being in this historical part of Toronto in a non-domestic studio space allowed us to branch out into new sites and venues and offer activities like *Beats for Brats*, with dance film programming aimed at kids aged 10 to 14. Alongside this event, curator Vicky Chainey Gagnon facilitated a dance video workshop for budding young filmmakers. We also launched the *Salon Series*, informal talks and screenings by artists and curators held in our new studio. Our first guests were Kelly Hargraves and Lynette Kessler from Dance Camera West in Los Angeles.

In the Canada Dances series, director Alison Murray made an impact with *Aeroplane Man* using an easy-going camera style to capture British-based writer-performer Jonzi D. riffing on the idea of homeland. In her film directing debut, choreographer Marie Chouinard's *Cantique #1* presented powerhouse performances by company dancers Carol Prieur and Benoît Lachambre. And on a program highlighting jazz dance, audiences were treated to historic footage of black American jazz dancers and musicians, including eighty-year-old archival footage of the Nicholas Brothers courtesy of the Cinémathèque de la danse in Paris. We took both programs to Montreal later in the year for a week's run at The Cinémathèque Quebecoise.

Moving Pictures' friendship with UK practitioners and presenters in London (The Place, BBC and Channel 4) and Brighton (SouthEast Dance, the Brighton Festival) had continued to grow with each festival and research trip we made to England. After showing several of Brighton filmmaker/performer Liz Aggiss' films in previous editions, Aggiss and collaborator Billy Cowie came over for a residency in 2004. They brought The *Men in the Wall*, a 4-screen, 3D installation which we presented in partnership with Trinity Square Video. The pair also taught a performance workshop for aspiring interdisciplinary performers.

Vicky Bloor, an administrator at South East Dance in Brighton joined us for several weeks to observe and help with festival coordination, including preliminary work on an international production project that would take place the following year. And SouthEast Dance Board chair, the respected BBC producer Bob Lockyer (who pioneered the presentation of short dancefilms on television in the UK) also visited, serving on the Awards Jury with filmmaker Evann Siebens and DJ/social justice crusader Zahra Dhanani.

Programs in 2004 included a tribute to flamenco superstar Carmen Amaya on screen, an NFB documentary about influential Quebec choreographer Jean-Pierre Perreault, and *Flail and Flower: Experiments in Movement*, yet another program exploring the intersections of experimental forms featuring work by John Oswald, Keith Cole and Michael Caines. The festival opened and closed at The Royal Cinema with the Bravo!FACT screening and party on opening night and a double bill of *A Delicate Battle* by Mark Adam and Matjash Mrozewski and *Circa* with Holy Body Tattoo and Tiger Lilies closing out the festival.

The big news in 2005 was the production and launch of 4X4, a series of films co-produced by Moving Pictures and BravoFACT in Canada and SouthEast Dance and Channel 4 in the UK. For this project, 2 emerging UK artists (Magali Charrier and Vena Ramphal) and 2 Canadians (Jenn Goodwin and Marlee Cargill) joined forces in Toronto to make their films under a shared production umbrella. The resulting short films – *Tralala*, *Dress Code*, *Stuck* and *Fold* – were then screened in Toronto, Brighton and London and broadcast on Channel 4 and Bravo! The project was exhilarating and educative for all concerned but, as is the way with production, went over budget. Not by much, but it added to the existential precarity for Moving Pictures.

4 X 4 Dress Code by Marlee Cargill. Photo by Gregory Nixon; postcard design by Lisa Kiss

When it came time to mount the festival, an exhausted Moving Pictures team also supported the Canadian premiere of Alison Murray's first feature film *Mouth to Mouth*, featuring Elliot Page. Canada Dances was moved into the intimate and atmospheric Camera Bar on Queen West in an attempt to scale back on the workload and create a different, more informal kind of screening experience. We premiered *Blush*, a feature by Wim Vandekuybus and the Ultima Vez company from Belgium, there as well. Our experimental showcase, *Fractured Fairy Tales: Experiments in Movement* took us back to our roots at the tiny (now gone) John Spotton Cinema. The scaling back strategy did not work - key Moving Pictures staff (specifically me) were burned out, fed up, tired after years of going full tilt with limited resources and keenly feeling the insecurity of all arts presentation in Canada. Although we had acquired annual operating support from all levels of arts councils over the years, funding never felt truly stable. Advocates came and went and things could change suddenly when a new government was elected and started implementing new policies. Each new festival programming innovation required separate project funding that involved labour-intensive grant applications created from scratch with no guarantee of success. Grant results seemed to arrive later and later each year necessitating tough decisions about whether to risk going ahead with projects without money in the bank. More and more of our time and energy was being funnelled into fundraising and strategic development research, areas in which, I at least,

had no interest. The drudgery of certain tasks and thoughts of 'do we have to keep doing this forever' began to offset the genuine excitement we had for presenting new work in new ways. We had come far from our roots. Perhaps too far.

We started thinking about what closing down could look like. Could we digitize our collections? How would we handle artist permissions? Where would this digital archive live? What about the physical artifacts? How would we devise a transition in a way that wasn't shocking to the community we had painstakingly built over the years. We consulted with veteran archivist Theresa Rowat and started looking around for support to create a legacy archive.

It was with this in mind that Moving Pictures threw itself a fundraising gala to present Dana Goldfine and Dan Geller's glorious documentary *Ballets Russes* ahead of its Canadian theatrical run in December of 2005. The event itself was amazing: former Ballets Russes soloist Raven Wilkinson came to Toronto to introduce the film, sharing dramatic stories about being a black artist on tour with the classical company in the segregated American South of the 1950s. But the funds we raised were minimal, not enough.

2006. The fifteenth and final festival. We returned fully to our Queen Street West roots and consolidated all of our events under one roof, the gloriously re-purposed and arts-friendly Gladstone Hotel on West Queen West. Word got out that this was the last festival, and the opening night event held in the capacious Gladstone Ballroom was packed with fans and artists, many of whom had launched careers at Moving Pictures.
With a compact programming schedule over three nights, Moving Pictures ended with a showing of the old - *Fifteen Candles*, selected films from a decade and a half of curation – and the new – *Dancing Shadows,* a final Canadian showcase of premieres. The board and staff carved up an enormous birthday cake and poured champagne for the entire audience at intermission, and it was over.

Wrapping It Up

Over the years, we had moved to ever larger venues, added symposia and pitch sessions, developed a juried and people's choice awards program, dipped into the production of commissioned works, and undertook a cross-Canada touring program. Internationally, we partnered with Canada House, SouthEast Dance and the Brighton Festival in the UK, the Cinémathèque de la danse in Paris and other dance film friendly presenters in France, Greece, Italy, Germany and Monaco to bring the work of Canadian screendance artists to the world.

We weathered the disruptive transition from hand-delivered film print submissions to online screeners and new digital formats for projection. Fifteen years later, worn out by the annual grind, still having to resist expansion because we were still under-resourced, we threw in the towel. Anticipated transition funding never transpired. We packed everything into boxes that went into storage for the next decade. Those materials were eventually donated to Dance Collection Danse, Canada's dance archive.

We consoled ourselves with the certainty that some enterprising person or organization would step up to replace Moving Pictures, and we were mentally prepared to support them. It just never happened.

Legacies: Dancefilm in Toronto Today

Although Moving Pictures is long gone, many in Toronto remember it fondly. A festival of its scope and scale has not returned, but there are several sturdy forums for making and exhibiting dance on film and video. During the pandemic much of the action went online and this persists post-pandemic. Many more people can watch dance-based works on YouTube or Vimeo or other bespoke platforms, though it's not quite the same as old school screenings in a proper cinema with a concession stand in the lobby and real people to talk to after the show. But that's just part and parcel of changes within the industry, new approaches to screen technologies and a growing tendency for audiences to consume arts and entertainment at home alone or with a few friends. The pandemic cemented these behaviours and it's uncertain if audiences will ever fully return to theatres.

Since COVID, several Toronto dance presenters – including Fall for Dance North (until 2025), DanceWorks, and DanceOntario's Dance Weekend – have started commissioning and presenting screendance in theatres and online. Annually, the RT Collective commissions and presents a number of new works by local artists. And every second year, the dance: made in/ fait au canada festival (d:mic/fac) launches an extensive film series, for both in-person and online audiences. I've been programming these films and the festival is directed by dance artist Yvonne Ng, a vital player at every single Moving Pictures festival, including the first. Moving Pictures' DNA is embedded in d:mic/fac and that feels good. We even named our juried film award *The Moving Pictures Award*.

Further afield, the festival of recorded movement (aka F.O.R.M) in Vancouver, the Guelph Dance Festival, and the WildDogs International ScreenDance Festival in Calgary continue to create, show and disseminate new Canadian work. The scene in Montreal and Quebec is very robust, with screendance getting prominent exposure at the annual Festival International du films sur l'art and the nomadic francophone screendance festival, Cinédanse. In 2023, the Montreal and Gaspé-based organization Mandoline Hybride curated and launched an ambitious online archive of Canadian screendance works, *Collection Regards Hybrids*.

Artists who were featured at early Moving Pictures festivals are thriving in a range of hybrid practices. They include Allen and Karen Kaeja, who continue to make screendance works, individually and together. Choreographer William Yong has a prolific career as both a director and dancemaker; he recently presented his first ballet commission with the National Ballet of Canada. Philip Szporer and Marlene Miller continue to create dance films and documentaries together through Mouvement Perpetuel, while Miller also works with composer/performer Sandy Silva on a series of body percussion and dance-based community engagement film projects through *The Migration Project*. Laura Taler, who won the festival's very first Cinedance Award for *the village trilogy* back in 1995, has a hybrid practice that blends screen work with installation, sculpture and performance. Evann Siebens is working with large scale projection installations in Vancouver and internationally. Alison Murray makes feature films showcasing an enduring passion for dance forms such as tango. Nick de Pencier, who shot and directed many of the Canadian works presented at Moving Pictures in the early days, enjoys an international career making documentaries with his partner Jennifer Baichwal. And so on.

Today, for me, The Moving Pictures Festival represents a moment in time, a different time, when the real estate market didn't determine the intensity of cultural production in cities like Toronto, when competition for government arts funding was a little less stiff and politically

fraught, when it was still possible to harness social capital and community spirit to achieve the vision of an annual screendance party fueled by exuberant interdisciplinary collisions and collaborations.

Kathleen Smith *is a Toronto-based writer, filmmaker and web designer with an interest in the arts.*
As a writer, she has investigated issues in performance and culture for many publications and platforms,both print and online. Smith was Editor in chief at The Dance Current and thedancecurrent.com from 2011 – 2014.
As a film producer at Hellhound Productions, Smith worked on short films and features for Channel 4, TV Ontario, the Sundance Channel, Bravo! and the Knowledge Network and presented festival premieres at Hot Docs, Toronto International Film Festival, Regent Park Film Festival and Buenos Aires International Film Festival.
Prior to getting into film, Smith was Artistic Director at the Moving Pictures Festival of Dance on Film and Video from 1992 – 2006. More recently, she was on the programming committee for the online Collection Regards Hybrides, launched in 2023 and continues to program film at the biannual dance: made in / fait au canada festival. Smith also teaches video dance and intermedial performance at York University in Toronto.

Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival
By Sarah Elgart

Abstract

In this essay, Choreographer/Director Sarah Elgart, Founder and Artistic Director of **Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival** (**D2D**) discusses her introduction to dance film, the trajectory of her career, the history behind her festival, the genre of screen dance, and its elevation into a viable and internationally recognized art form.

I've always experienced dance as a life force that lives in all of us, indistinguishable from our quotidian experience as human beings in motion. As a choreographer and dancer, I have long believed that dance is a universal language so powerful and seminal that, much like a fingerprint, every individual has a specific movement voice or DNA which is unique unto them. I have also always believed that dance can and should be made by and for, every & any movable body, at any age, and that it should be able to be witnessed and realized anywhere.

When I began choreographing professionally in my 20s, I was fresh back in the US from a life-changing year spent in Germany at Folkwang Hochschule, the school later run by Pina Bausch, and where I had seen dancers of all sizes, shapes, cultures, backgrounds, and ages, largely doing just that.

Pina's influence was seminal – in Germany as a whole, certainly at Folkwang, and for me personally. What she did in her work – crossing boundaries between formalized dance and quotidian movement, younger dancers and older dancers, and between dance, life and all of its absurdity and beauty – was completely foundational within the fields of dance and theater. As is the way with truly great art, it felt to me to be at once utterly surprising and completely familiar — making perfect sense within the worlds it created. Her predisposition to incorporate seemingly random imagery, props, astonishing production design, actors, spoken word, highly demanding technical dance and pedestrian movement, to create an experience that was completely other yet somehow made perfect sense was extraordinary. Within her world, seemingly any circumstance, subject matter, body shape, age, movement phrase, music, etc. could coexist as part of dance. By eschewing most traditional expectations for her milieu, Pina's work made the theater a platform in which dance and life were completely inseparable. It created a world in which you could expect the unexpected, and one that inherently cried out in favor of inclusivity before that was even a thing.

My life was forever changed.

Enter FILM.

The birth of Dare to Dance in Public Festival (**D2D)** is very much intertwined with my own professional trajectory and introduction to and involvement with film. The daughter of two visual artists, I had, from an early age, been exposed to a plethora of foreign "art house" films by the

likes of Fellini, Cocteau, Bergman, De Sica, Kurosawa etc. Most of them had moments of simple but sublime kinetic imagery, much of which did not make any obvious narrative sense or contribution to a story in a literal way, but – to me anyway – made absolute sense. These images stuck in my head as creative fodder, and later on in my work began to merge with dance, which, as far as I'm concerned, was what they were.

Returning to Los Angeles after my year in Germany, I began choreographing, and seizing every available opportunity for developing and presenting my own work. Having also spent time studying and performing in New York, I felt certain that some of the same ideas that I had experienced working there, e.g.using alternative spaces like lofts, galleries, etc., could also work for presenting dance in LA, which was perfect for emerging choreographers with little to no viable funding like myself. I put together a small company and began presenting regularly in lofts, galleries, parking lots, performance spaces, and more. My performances led to more opportunities to perform, as well as reviews. Reviews made you "real," and allowed your work to be considered and become part of a dialogue.

In 1981 I stumbled into a part time gig working with non-dancers – mostly marginalized communities, beginning with women inmates at California Rehabilitation Center and the California Institution for Women (CIW), a state prison housing medium and maximum-security women inmates. What began as a one-day-a-week gig turned into an Artist Residency funded by the California Arts Council for 4 years. Because most of the inmates there had little dance experience, I worked with them to create a movement vocabulary based on gesture and organic, quotidian, "pedestrian movement." I wanted them to feel that they could create dance with what they knew as human beings in motion and to have a sense of expertise as such.

This was an incredibly charged, challenging, and fruitful period for me. At CIW, I had one small group of six or seven "closed custody," Maximum Security inmates that was particularly challenging, in part because it included two women from the Manson Family who had not spoken to each other for ten years. We had begun working on a piece called "Marrying the Hangman," based on the poem of the same name by Margaret Atwood. It was a breakthrough work for me personally and also for the inmates involved.[1]

In 1983, I was awarded a fellowship through the Long Beach Museum of Art, which allowed me to explore the intersections of dance and the camera. Over a period of about a year, I would hire someone to shoot video in rehearsals at CIW (it was no small miracle that I got clearance for this), and later with my company in rehearsals and performance doing the same work. Over this period, I was experimenting in editing sessions at EZTV, working with Michael Masucci and the late John Dorr. I remember crafting an edit that went back and forth from rehearsals with the inmates to rehearsals with my company- sometimes playing with time and repetition. This was my introduction to the magic of dance combined with the camera and the tools of editing, sound, and music.

[1] Later, after my own company performed the work and it won the Vanguard Award for Choreographic Innovation, it was invited into the Olympic Arts Festival of 1984, which was an incredible triumph for the inmates. *Read more about this: https://www.culturaldaily.com/poetry-murder-dance-manson-women

In 1984, I stumbled into my first job doing choreography for a music video. It was the beginning years of MTV, and also the beginning of a cultural exploration of what elements might be used as content for this new genre - a new kinetic short film form that was, basically, an advertising vehicle for recording artists. That job led to a working relationship with director David Hogan that spanned about 35 more music videos and blew open the world of film for me. Because Hogan would frequently invite me into telecine transfer,[2] color correction, editing, and even at times, throwing around ideas for developing concepts. I was getting a crash course in filmmaking while working as a choreographer. Beyond that, I was fascinated by how dance could be used to augment and/or tell stories and create an emotional landscape. And, I had a growing interest in expanding it.

Initially, for most music videos, dance was part of a simple narrative that was resolved in the 3 to 4-minute songs that inhabited MTV. It usually was a fairly simple narrative: Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back (or something like that). Often, at the apex of the music about two-thirds of the way through the video during an instrumental break, the rhythm would pick up and dancers would emerge at a key location for a rhapsodic or hard-hitting dance number. Suddenly, shoulders & hips started rolling, and a choreographed dance would emerge that was sometimes chaotic, sometimes in unison, usually exciting, fun, and incredibly popular with viewers. Over time, the quality of dance itself began to change within this format, using blends of formalized jazz movement with street moves, pushing or merging the boundaries of modern, street, break dance, acrobatics, and so much more. Soon there were music videos wherein dance was not just a side dish but the main course, like Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation, which integrated both rifts on pedestrian gesture, military style formations, and more formalized dance moves.

Like Rhythm Nation, music videos also began moving off of Hollywood sound stages into industrial locations or onto dark, gritty, and wetted-down city streets. Everyone was feeling the pulse of dance. It was connecting fashion, music, and youth culture. It began to pop up more and more in commercials where it would inform editing and styles of camera work as well, taking cinematographers away from the mandated head-to-toe coverage of dance, and editors into shorter cuts of body parts or B roll that embellished the work in other ways. Music videos were experimental, and most of them had no loyalty to continuity (*"F**k continuity… it's a Music Video,"* was a regular mantra on sets). Commercials and even episodic television began evolving to resemble this style of shooting and storytelling, and pretty soon began appropriating the hand held, gritty, shaky camera, documentary look that some music videos were taking on. I was learning a ton, and found it extremely exciting and lucrative to be part of a cultural zeitgeist that involved new ways of using, seeing, and experimenting with dance and the camera.

No longer did a film or music video have to be beholden to the head-to-toe,

completely unedited documentation of dance employed by Hollywood films of the 30s and 40s, or by theater presenters to "put butts in seats." Nor was it about preserving the way dance appears on a stage when viewed by the naked eye. Suddenly dance was everywhere. Every day people were getting exposed to it, what it could be, and how it was evolving in real time. For myself, I had fallen in love with the medium of film and the possibilities as it intersected with dance. I was fascinated by how, between camera movement, light, framing, editing, and more -

[2] An electro-mechanical machine that converts film image to a video signal.

dance could create its own visceral language that communicates beyond cultures, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds, and most importantly, beyond words. The medium of short music videos was wide open and without rules. Although I was allowed to push the boundaries of what was expected or asked for, I was thinking, "*it could be so much more."*

As a result of this momentum with dance and film during the 80's, a friend and colleague Julie McDonald (Senior Agent w/ McDonald Selznick Associates) decided to fill a niche and become an agent for dancers and choreographers. She called and asked if she could represent me, and I accepted. She has been fighting since then for dancers and choreographers to have fair pay, viable working conditions, and proper credit. The monetization of dance had begun, proof that it was beginning a new life on film and beyond. Unfortunately, to date, choreographers still are not recognized for Oscars at the Academy Awards, and do not have a union - although the Choreography Guild is fighting hard on all these fronts.

In 1987, I was awarded two years of being invited into the Sundance Institute's (no longer existent) Dance Film Labs. I was one of four nationally selected choreographers, and the only one from Los Angeles. We were flown in to experiment with dance and film over a period of three weeks in the mountains near Park City, Utah. Sundance was a miraculous and beautiful place where you wanted for nothing. We were provided with housing, food, studio space, professional dancers, directors of photography, editors, equipment, and mentors that included the likes of Stanley Donen, Michael Kidd, and more. There I was free to play and experiment at the intersection of both mediums to create a unique art form.

Stanley, Michael and I were always on the flights together, and as such we would engage in long dialogues – argue even – about dance and film. Donen was one hundred percent old-guard. He hated the quick edits and the lack of continuity introduced by music videos. He was absolutely against the concept that dance could be chopped up within a scene into a variety of close ups, medium shots, etc. He preferred the continuous, wide shots and long edits used in his films like "Singing in the Rain" and others, wherein the camera seamlessly followed dancers from place to place. Michael Kidd was much more open and welcoming of the new ways of seeing, and to experimenting with dance on film.

In film, all storytelling is kinetic, and at Sundance, in music videos, commercials, features and more, people were exploring the relationship of dance and even just simple gesture and movement with the camera as a storytelling and sales medium. As the music videos, commercials and other media morphed in various degrees, some using more literal narrative structures and others using abstraction. Dance was finding its way back into the consciousness of the mainstream, pulsing its way back into popularity like a weed pushing through cracked pavement. It was raw, it was real, it was visceral.

Unfortunately at that time, to be involved with making and presenting non-commercial stage and site work while also doing film and music videos, was deemed unacceptable. Many critics had a perfectly clear message that any commercial exploration of dance on camera was definitively beneath a "real artist", if not an outright sell out. Lewis Segal, then Chief LA Times

Dance Critic was definitively disgusted by it, and called me "The resident windbag of Los Angeles Dance," writing, "What happens to her now depends on her pursuing opportunities for growth; her talent has never been in doubt, only the nature of her ambitions."

Yet at the height of my commercial choreography career, I was learning an enormous amount. I had never been to film school per se, but getting thrown into production is its own kind of education. I did my first music video in 1984 for Den Roy Morgan, a Reggae artist who was well known in the UK. We shot for 26 hours straight at the International Terminal of LAX - pretty unforgettable and definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I saw the sun go down and come up again, inhabited the upstairs and downstairs of the terminal, and also used a plane out on the tarmac.

In 1987 I stumbled upon The Chanticleer Discovery Program. It was a program run by Producers Jonathan Sanger ("The Elephant Man") and Jana Sue Memel, who selected 7 finalists from an unknown number of submissions, out of whom maybe 3 would be given a respectable amount of money and resources to direct a longer film. And for these finalists, it was understood that if you were selected, the floodgates of Hollywood and all its adjoining opportunities would open for you. Each of us were given a directing task. While I became one of the initial 7 semi-finalists, I did not make it to the end, but I realize now that what I pitched was actually a dance film. A narrative love story with no dialogue whatsoever. That it even got as far as it did, still amazes me.

Then in 1991, I accepted a job as The Disney Channel's Performance Producer for the new Mickey Mouse Club (MMC). Before I knew it, I was living in Orlando, Florida for nearly half the year for the next four years. My job was to pitch and create concepts for three music numbers per week, and two music videos a month, as well as pitching and overseeing all aspects of production and costume design, casting, etc. I later learned that The Disney Channel felt – although they had not spelled this out to me at all while I was interviewing – that the previous musical numbers were becoming complacent. I remember in one of the interviews they showed me the film of a number that had been created for the song "Lean on Me" and asked for my opinion. It featured the kids singing dressed in domino suits, who, over the course of the number, ultimately leaned on each other and fell like dominoes. I remember saying that I thought it was an insult to the intelligence of an audience that was hungry for much more cutting-edge fare - not unlike some of the music videos of MTV - and that their viewers were likely a lot smarter than that number took them to be.

I don't think I fully realized the impact that dance and the media could have until after my first year on that job. I was returning home to LA over the break (where I was working creating movement pieces with transitional homeless women in a group we called MADRES). I had also accepted a short-term teaching job for a middle school's after school program. It was my first day teaching, and I had asked for a television and a tape player, because I planned to show the students some examples of dance in a variety of forms. I remember walking in carrying a stack of VHS tapes up to my neck. There were examples of my own and other people's stage work that I admired, and a couple of tapes from numbers that we had just recently created for MMC, each of which had the signature Disney mouse ears on them along with the numbers' titles. Before I even made it to the front door of the classroom the students had greeted me, and seeing the tapes with the mouse ears and reading the titles, immediately broke into the dance moves from each of

those works, moves that our amazing choreographer Myles Thoroughgood and I had created just weeks ago. It blew me away. From that moment on, my approach to the job had a new level of commitment. Above all, I saw and *really understood* the intelligence of the young people in the Disney audiences as well as the reach of the media. I committed to squeezing in more and more challenging concepts and ideas in all aspects of the numbers from the songs selected from production design to the movement itself. I understood that beyond the song and sets, if the power of the dance works we created as a whole were intelligent and pushing aesthetic boundaries, this was a good thing, especially as it involved an audience of hungry young people. Still, I thought, there could be so much more done on film. By the time I left Mickey Mouse Club four years later, I had directed a few multi-camera musical numbers and several dance music videos, helped with casting, and worked with emerging superstars like Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, Ryan Gosling and more. I had become a member of the Director's Guild of America.

Fast forward to 2013. The web was well into its third decade and artists of every discipline were sharing work across borders and time zones. Cultures, genres of dance, and ideas in general were cross pollinating at a rapid rate. I had just completed seven years of watching hundreds of dance films, and working in various capacities (e.g., Board Chair, Director of Artistic Development) with Dance Camera West, a seminal, Los Angeles-based, international Film Festival for the growing genre of screen dance. It was during that time when an old friend, Producer Adam Leipzig, pitched me an idea: to write about dance film as a genre for his new online magazine Cultural Weekly (now Cultural Daily).

When considering this opportunity, what occurred to me is that most people outside of the dance community have little knowledge of what dance can be, or what its many and varied dimensions are let alone any knowledge at all of screen dance. I realized that many people's notions of dance genres might encompass ballet, tap, hip-hop, and *maybe* jazz. But I was acutely aware that these various genres of dance were also informing one another, and that dance was becoming much broader than the confines of their names or definitions. And because I believed dance to be a universal language with incredible power, I accepted, and began the column. I called it, "ScreenDance Diaries."

To the best of my knowledge, ScreenDance Diaries is the first international column exploring the genre of dance film. I wasn't writing reviews per se, rather I was curating, sharing, and writing about dance film as a genre. For the better part of eight years, every week I would comb the web, or select a dance film that I knew from my database, and feature it online. I saw many, many more provocative films than I could write about. Most interesting of all, was that I began to recognize trends in the films in terms of locations, editing styles, ways of shooting. What occurred to me was that there was a kind of international zeitgeist going on. A not always conscious, yet urgent dialogue happening in the world about dance genres, and the craft of Screen Dance. It felt to me like an enormous cultural cross pollination and I found this incredibly exciting.

Because Cultural Weekly and the ScreenDance Diaries were online, it was international. I would receive a fair share of comments and engagements which clearly illustrated interest, and a hunger for more. In addition to this, little by little, people began to write to me, sending me their own films, or dance films done by friends, asking me to review them on the column or to respond

directly to them with my thoughts via email. I realized that I had an audience and a platform, and that I could do much more to spread the art of Screen Dance.

With the help of Cultural Weekly, Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival (D2D) was born as an online dance film festival. On September 30, 2015, ScreenDance Diaries and Cultural Weekly put out our first call.

> Have you ever walked down a city street and happened upon random and seemingly unplanned movement that is, or looks like dance? It could be accidental, it might be intentional, but whatever it is, it has the look and feel of dance? Perhaps it's a street corner preacher dragging one foot and pointing as he follows a potential recruit… Maybe it's a group of choreographed performers – collection hat out – testing some moves… It could just be a joyful person dancing as if the star of her own private movie, or an old man simply dancing to the divine. In any case, planned, random, or accidental, Cultural Weekly and ScreenDance Diaries invites you to be there, create it, capture it on camera, and submit it to our first upcoming International Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival.

In the beginning I invited submissions of films five-minutes and under. Because I wanted the process to be democratic, I assembled our first panel of judges that included Valerie Faris (director w/ Jonathan Dayton, "Little Miss Sunshine"), d. Sabela Grimes (choreographer, Rockefeller Fellow, Bessie Award Winner, composer & educator), Julie McDonald (dance agent & Co-Founder McDonald Selznick Associates), Tony Testa (choreographer for Janet Jackson, Kylie Minogue, Ariana Grande, Britney Spears and others) and myself. We announced that films would be judged in three categories. Best Interface of Dance and Camera, Best Original Choreography and Best Use of Location. In addition to having their films featured and written about in Cultural Weekly, cash prizes would be announced and distributed to the winning films. We received almost 70 submissions from all over the world that first year.

It became clear that we were promoting creativity, and that people were going out and making films just for D2D. Suddenly, we had gone from being a film festival to a call to action.

Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival was founded on the concept of democratizing dance, in part by identifying it as a universal language that all human beings with functional body parts had access to, each in their own unique and singular way. Unlike indigenous and tribal cultures, it always struck me that Americans were afraid of dance, and afraid to look silly. It occurred to me that the US had no national holiday or ritual that included dance. In fact, most people in the US don't seem to dance at all until they're a few drinks in at a wedding. As Twyla Tharp famously said: *"*Dance is simply the refinement of human movement -walking, running, and jumping. We are all experts. There should be no art form more accessible than dance, yet no art form is more mystifying in the public imagination."

Seminal for me in the founding of D2D was promoting what I saw as the absolute importance of leveling the playing field for dance, the importance of taking dance outside of the studio, off the stage, and into the public realm. I was interested in seeing people dance, seeing people confronted by dance, and also having people consider what might or might not be considered *as dance.* I was also interested in how it could be transformed through its relationship to the camera, and within all the available tools of filmmaking.

Dance is often only viewable in niche venues. As such, only a certain cross section of the population may have knowledge of or access to it. This is in part because of cultural predisposition, ethnic backgrounds, and/or socio-economic factors including their locations in a city in relation to a venue and for many, their predisposition to know that a dance event is even happening in the first place.

I know, from my own site-specific works, that when dance is taken into non-traditional spaces, it has the opportunity to reach and engage whole new audiences. When dance is presented to an unsuspecting public, you are giving people the opportunity to discover something they may never have seen before. When dance is performed in unexpected public places, it is tacitly inviting the viewer to consider, "why dance shouldn't happen anywhere at any time?" When created with vision, dance can transform quotidian spaces and moments from the mundane into the magical. It can engage and invite the public in, simply by the fact that, as fellow human beings, they can see, speak, understand and *feel* the same language.

At the height of their popularity, music videos, commercials, television, and films were featuring dance that originated on the streets and in communities – powerful dance that transcended traditional platforms and wasn't being taught in schools or studios but developed on its own terms. David La Chappelle's short documentary film KRUMP for example, which came out in the very early 2000's, followed the creation of a whole new form of dance of the same name that grew from the streets of Los Angeles. "Krumping" as a dance form was created by underserved LA communities of color that became a powerful dance movement and community. Krump was a specific form that referenced African Dance, clowning, and the concept of using dance as a means of self-expression for "the more negative emotions and experiences of life, as a positive way for people to express their feelings without judgement or harsh consequences." The film KRUMP gave way to RIZE, a feature-length endeavor on the same topic and following the same group of young people.

In starting Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival I envisioned a different kind of Screen Dance festival that was founded on access and considered all these things that were happening both in the world and in dance. As dance has historically been integrated into forms of protest against racism, inequality, and other social injustices, this was something else I wanted to welcome into the world and consciousness of D2D.

As such, we developed these tenets: 1) D2D would include films that challenged both filmmakers and viewers to explore the relationship between site, camera, editing, dance, and more; 2) D2D would consider and include budgeted and shot listed films, as well as low and no budget films that were shot from the hip; 3) D2D welcomed films that engaged public spaces and audiences, and, perhaps most importantly; 4) D2D would transcend the perceived boundaries of culture, country, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, etc. to explore what we have in.

Within a relatively short time we began receiving films from all over the world. In the beginning we received many films of people dancing in remote beaches at sunset, or safe, quiet, rural areas where no one else saw them. Some of these were beautiful, but the films of dance happening in metros, train stations, supermarkets, parking lots, promenades and other public places. Films where the public were – sometimes unwittingly – forced to engage with both the dance and

camera, those were what excited us. By their very existence, those films made a statement beyond location, dancers, choreography, and camera. By their very nature those films were saying, “dance can live here.” One thing was abundantly clear, much of the work we received was created in direct response to our tenets. Filmmakers were writing us to say as much. D2D was inspiring dancers, choreographers and filmmakers to create new work. What we quickly realized was that the name Dare to Dance in Public was, for many, an invitation. People just *got it.* And what’s even better, *they responded.*

In 2020 when the Pandemic hit, it was clear that we were in completely new and unpredictable territory. With films coming from countries all over the world - many with differing and/or rapidly changing curfews and/or rules around the Pandemic - and with people navigating a tremendous loss of loved ones, income, mental health issues, and freedoms, we, like the rest of the world were dealing with a completely altered landscape. It was no longer feasible to require people to film outside when the restrictions for each country were so different. And at the same time, people wanted, and *needed,* to make something creative, to have a sense of community, and to be connecting and expressing themselves through movement. Simultaneously, as people responded to the upheaval in the United States over the senseless murders of Black men and women by taking to the streets in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, dance was incredibly important as part of the protest**.** It became very clear that between all of these realities, D2D had to embrace the constraints of the moment as an opportunity. In response, we created Pandemania, a made-up word which we defined as follows:

> ***pan.da.may.ni.uh*** *(noun), a state of abnormally elevated arousal, affect, and energy due to isolation, frustration, anger, and various strong emotions brought about as a direct result of the Coronavirus, as well as issues/world events e.g. systemic racism, immigration & displacement, the environment, LBGTQX & women’s rights, and other pandemics in our collective history. Pandemania frequently ensues in a heightened need for self-expression through movement.*

Also in response to the moment, we created a new initiative called Six Foot Distance Dances, directly inviting dance filmmakers to make short, approximately one-minute films that pondered what they were facing as questions of the moment, such as: How do we dance in isolation? How do we connect? How do we create relevance dancing in the privacy of our own homes? What do we feel while being physically limited by an invisible enemy?

The Six Foot Distance Dances initiative brought about another batch of wildly creative short shorts from all over. Some were accompanied by texts that either reached out into the void, or offered creative context. I’ll never forget two texts from a young woman who read about our initiative and created two beautiful and simple films. She wrote: “*Hi! I was folding clothes the other day in the laundry room of our apartment building and since I was alone...well, I just went at it. I tried to be quick before anyone else barged in (social distancing!) and since I had just my phone and myself, there's no moving camera unfortunately, a lot of moving emotions though. I felt so liberated by this experience that I went home, changed into another dress, and filmed another piece with my husband's shirt. I was never caught but I kind of wish I was. Anyway, thank you so much for this great challenge! It really brightened up the day for a lonely girl all the way in Finland*.”

As a choreographer - especially when dealing with site-specific works, I have always loved what I call “the ghost imprint” of a performance. Especially with site-work, what I have experienced is that when a performance uses a specific site well, it can cause audience members to see that site or place with new eyes, and always with the lingering memory of the work they witnessed there and how it made them feel. Dance is inherently ephemeral. There is a beauty to live performance and the irretrievable once-ness of each moment as it passes before your eyes. With live work, to a certain extent you as an audience member are the director and editor of your own experience. You can choose where to look, or whether to look at all. But dance on film allows one to inhabit the specifically manipulated point of view and world of the director and choreographer, and to be able review it again and again. If the creators’ vision is powerful and moving, that can be an incredible experience, and leave an indelible mark.

Live or filmed, one form of dance is not better than the other. But what I hope is ultimately understood, is that Screen Dance, with the innumerable options presented by the tools of film, the extent of its reach, and its power to move people beyond preconceived borders, continues as a unique experience and a singular testimony to what it is to be alive and human in the world today.

About Constructing Curatorial Practices as a Collage

By Mauro Cacciatore (ARG)

Abstract

Merce Cunningham Centennial: The Elemental, The Unpredictable, The Unexpected is a curatorial collaborative project realized between the Merce Cunningham Trust and REDIV (Screendance Ibero-American Network) at the occasion of the centennial of this important choreographer in the history of dance and a key figure in the history of screendance. The world-wide celebration happened all through the year 2019 with all kinds of activities, including this project which circulated through some 20 member festivals of REDIV. It was proposed as a curatorial practice, a term which, according to Marcelo Pacheco (2001), "defines from its very meaning and etymology an action, exercise and method, and it as the surgical implication of any exhibition management." The curatorial concepts were built as a collage, where a porous exchange between the members of the international curatorial committee took place, which was woven in a transatlantic way with the aim of taking to Ibero-American countries the hybrid choreographic work of Merce Cunningham to a broad circulation.

Cunningham built his choreographies as collages, with fragments of movement that had heterogeneous and diverse origins and yet they acquire a nexus in his own discourse. How to achieve the same in our curatorial discourse? As a result of this collaborative process, a curatorial program reveals itself as a manner of kaleidoscopic windows, through which the diverse facets and perspectives of Merce Cunnigham's expanded choreography are shown. This paper will be an attempt to reconstruct this collaborative experience by putting it in relation to some conceptual aspects developed by this great dance artist.

Key Words: collage, curatorial practices, centennial

Introduction

Merce Cunningham is known for several aesthetic innovations that have expanded the boundaries of dance and contemporary visual and performing arts during the second half of the 20th century. Together with his close collaborator and life partner, John Cage, he adopted a creative process by which he sought to withdraw his personal inclinations in decision making through the use of chance operations based on the *I Ching*, the Chinese book of changes. This represented a revolutionary way of making choreographic decisions (like musical ones in Cage's case) used to determine the number of dances, their choreographic continuity as well as the rhythm and use of space among other aspects. Its use led to new discoveries, which constantly present situations that challenge the imagination.

His tireless passion for exploration and innovation made him a leader in the application of new technologies to dance. His film work in 1970 represents a key turning point in enabling an exploration for both aesthetic and creative purposes: taking advantage of the potentialities of camera mobility, the ability to edit and thus alter size and rhythm, and the possibility of focusing on specific parts of the body that would otherwise be less obvious given the viewer's distance from the scene. In his seventies, Cunningham continued to experiment, using the computer software *DanceForms* to explore movement possibilities before presenting them to dancers. Over time, he continued to find different and varied ways to integrate technology and dance, such as using motion capture technology to create *Hand Drawn Spaces* (1998), *BIPED* (1999), *Loops* (2000), and *Fluid Canvas* (2002). This interest in new media also led to the creation of *Mondays with Merce*, a webcast series that shows behind-the-scenes footage of both classes and rehearsals of Cunningham and his company.

In 2000 the Merce Cunningham Trust (MCT) was founded, initially with Merce as sole trustee. This was created as a posthumous repository of his artistic creation. In 2008 the controversial and revolutionary *Legacy Plan* was announced, the purpose of which was to honor Cunningham's profound artistic achievements, secure the future of his choreographic legacy, and recognize those who helped realize his vision. Its central elements were a final two-year world tour of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC), extensive preservation of his work, the closing of the MCDC and the Cunningham Dance Foundation (CDF) along with financial assistance to the dancers and other CDF staff to ease their transition to new employment, and an extensive fundraising campaign to finance the plan. Cunningham passes away a year later, aged ninety. In MCT's own words included in Carlson, T. & Tavachnik, K. (Ed) (2019) it is noted that:

> Like his comments during his lifetime about his work, his wishes about its fate were guarded, though obvious. In essence, his wishes and guidance can be described in simple terms: that his company would embark on a two-year world tour ending with a performance in New York City and that his work could continue to be staged for other companies as long as audiences maintained an interest in seeing it. Before his death, Cunningham named four successors to the Trust and then a fifth was added. All of them were close people during his lifetime. The trustees charted a new path without Cunningham and his creative force. (p. 14)

On the Road to the Centennial

On April 16, 2018, the day Cunningham would have turned 99, the Trust announced a global celebration to provide a wide audience with an opportunity to learn about his work and artistic process. Beginning in North America in the fall of 2018 and continuing throughout 2019, the

Merce Cunningham Centennial unites people, cities, and arts and educational institutions in a large-scale representation of this vibrant legacy. The celebrations take as their starting point the foundations of the *Legacy Plan,* with which the Trust seeks to extend aspects of his work into the future. The *Centennial* was announced by Ken Tabachnick, executive director of the Trust, and Trevor Carlson, executive director of the MCDC during its final seasons.

In its entirety, the celebration included performances, film screenings, discussions, educational initiatives, new works by other artists in conversation with Cunningham's work, and new productions in cities both in the United States and around the world involving more than 60 organizations and dance companies. Importantly, many of the works were re-performed after more than 30 years and the films include many discovered in archives around the world since Cunningham's death in 2009. The highlight of the *Centennial* was *Night of 100 solos: a Centennial Event*, a proposal that was held on Cunningham's centennial night (April 16, 2019) where one hundred dancers performed an Event of solos of his authorship made between 1950 and 2009 in three different locations: Brooklyn Academy of Music (New York), Barbican Centre (London), and Center for the Art of Performance - UCLA (Los Angeles).

The Trust's work embraces a wide range of strategies to bring the public closer to Cunningham's legacy, not only by managing the restaging rights to his works, but also by offering daily technique classes, promoting workshops that introduce his work to a new generation of dancers and audiences, providing support and training to teachers of technique so that they can develop in a variety of settings, and preserving a growing and widely accessible archive of his work. The *Centennial* is undoubtedly one of the largest projects they have undertaken, signifying a great effort to reach and make Cunningham's work available to the widest possible audience, whether or not they had previous knowledge of his work, which has led, among other actions, to its association with institutions such as REDIV, the Network of Ibero-American Screendance Festivals, whose main focus is videodance; its antecedents are the Circuito Videodanza Mercosur (2005-2007) and the Foro Latinoamericano de Videodanza (2007-2016).

This network works transversally through various projects and actions of spreading, training, management, production, and research of screendance, which are carried out cooperatively among peer festivals that share common objectives and needs beyond borders and aesthetics. It is currently made up of twenty-four festivals (among active members, adherent members, collaborating members and allied projects). The REDIV is designed and updated on a permanent basis through face-to-face and virtual meetings. Its interest is directed to discuss and debate the exercises of horizontality, non-hierarchy, and porosity among members. Through networking, it activates practices and tests within an Ibero-American laboratory space, as a process of experimentation of collaborative work forms. From a meeting of Eduardo Bonito (Brazil), Samuel Retortillo (Spain), and Leonel Brum (Brazil) with Trevor Carlson (member of the MCT) in the framework of FIVER 2018, the proposal arises to articulate an action of the MCT with the REDIV in which the rights of their filmic works will be released, making them extensible to the members of the REDIV. From this union arises *Merce Cunningham Centennial: the elemental, the unpredictable, the unexpected,* a collaborative curatorial project within the framework of the *Merce Cunningham Centennial.*

Implementation

On September 12, 2018, a first meeting was held with the participation of Eduardo Bonito (Brazil), Samuel Retortillo (Spain), Silvina Szperling (Argentina), and Mauro Cacciatore (Argentina) together with Trevor Carlson (United States). It was decided that the curatorial committee would be formed by Silvina Szperling assisted by Mauro Cacciatore, Alejandra Diaz

(Paraguay), and Paulina Ruiz Carballido (Mexico), joined by Paulo Caldas (Brazil), and Martha Hincapié (Colombia). Trevor Carlson proposed as a starting point to organize the materials into three capsules that would group Cunningham's work in the categories of video-art, filmdance and documentaries, and educational videos for which the Trust could assume the cost of subtitles. In this way it was sought to propose a package that could be presented at REDIV member festivals that would include the curatorial proposal together with a series of satellite activities based on the management possibilities of each festival.

The following week, the curatorial committee meets with Trevor Carlson and Daria Porokhovoi (his assistant) to jointly analyze the available materials and expand the information about them, in order to diagram possible relationship beams within the corpus. In this meeting, Carlson shares additional information and stories of the creation processes of the film works sent. Initially, a list of 28 works representing Cunningham's exhaustive choreographic and filmic research was made available to the committee, and the possibility of receiving some extra videos that were not included in this first corpus was left open. From that moment on and with a deadline for the month of November, the curatorial team embarked on the laborious task of visualizing the works, analyzing them, and putting them in relation with all the information received, which was also put in dialogue with the collective research carried out by the team, which meant a great task and responsibility but crossed by the joy left by Trevor's comment: "This is a gift from Merce to you." Simultaneous to the development of the curatorial research, another important task was the preparation of the logistics necessary to make these materials available to REDIV, which involved the preparation of guidelines, the organization of the dates of each Festival in order to diagram a possible itinerant calendar of the project during 2019, the coordination of Trevor's availability for his tour in Latin America, among other management and production actions.

The Project

Merce Cunningham Centennial: The Elemental, the Unpredictable, the Unexpected was designed as a curatorial program to focus on various aspects of Merce Cunningham's expanded choreographic oeuvre. For the development of this project, the committee had free access to the screen works of this great artist in order to make them extensible to REDIV member countries. In Carlson, T. & Tabachnick, K. (Ed) (2019) it can be seen in the curatorial committee's own words how the project took shape and magnitude as the research developed:

> The project grew by leaps and bounds from the strength and collective work that mobilized in us the possibility of carrying out an action that involves giving continuity to the artistic legacy of one of the great exponents of the development of dance as an art in relation to other disciplines. *Merce Cunningham Centennial: the elemental, the unpredictable, the unexpected* emerges as a curatorial program in the form of kaleidoscopic windows with multiple entrances and exits through which the various facets and perspectives of Merce Cunningham's expanded choreographic work are shown. As thematic diagonals, we present video-choreographic works, documentaries, filmic experiments, and complementary activities. (p. 22)

This curatorial program is accompanied by an extensive expanded catalog that brings together and puts into dialogue texts that explore some of the multiple aspects of the research that Cunningham developed throughout his life. It was conceived not only to give an account of the exhibition (as a catalog) but also with the certainty of the importance it could have in educational contexts to study the premises and Cunningham's artistic contributions to the

history of dance in interrelation with other arts, being the first text in Spanish dedicated to this aspect. The contributions of Trevor Carlson's first-person accounts were adding to the committee's common heritage while opening the doors to a set of information that transcends the rigor of the theoretical and analytical, to account for subjective and symbolic aspects. These operated as an important guide to carry out a precise reading at the conceptual level, while at the same time being crossed by the emotional experience.

From this rich exchange arises a curatorial proposal that puts in dialogue nineteen works that, as a camera positioned from a particular point, allow to draw attention to particular aspects of each proposal, while accounting for the broad universe that meant Cunningham's exhaustive choreographic and filmic research. This process of more than a year of work was mobilized by the desire to generate an accessible bridge to this archive for new generations.

Curatorial Concepts

Merce Cunningham Centennial: the elemental, the unpredictable, the unexpected is proposed as a curatorial practice, a term that according to Marcelo Pacheco (2001 cited in Carlson, T. & Tabachnick, K., 2019) "defines from its very meanings and etymology, the character of action, exercise, and method, and the surgical implication of all exhibition management." In Carlson, T. & Tabachnick, K. (Ed) (Ibid.) the curatorial committee explains the resonance between Cunningham's conceptual proposal and the development of the project:

> Our curatorial concepts were constructed as a collage, in a permeable exchange between the members of the curatorial committee. This was woven transatlantically in order to bring Merce Cunningham's choreographic and hybrid work to Ibero-American countries for its circulation. As a committee, we went through an extremely enriching process that involved the systematization of a mode of operation according to the material received. This material was analyzed in depth and we tested possible categories that would allow us to draw attention to particular features of the work, establishing bridges between these possible frameworks of reading and the works themselves. This meant entering a field of multiple and transdisciplinary experiences, with the absolute certainty that, rather than closing meanings, we were managing to open possible fields of relationship, allowing interpretations to circulate freely through multiple rails (p. 24).

The access to the pharaonic corpus of information received implied a drift through an incessant plot, constantly enriched, densified, and problematized, in which an enormous amount of features of Cunningham's video-choreographic work were revealed, which resonated with the objectives of the Network, in particular, the articulation of actions of dissemination, training, production, and research in video-dance crossed by the axis of the collaborative and the rhizomatic. The curatorial committee had privileged access to Cunningham's vast artistic production, in their own words:

> As curators, we had the honor and privilege of accessing a large part of the universe that contains Merce Cunningham's vast artistic production in order to organize a set of common aspects, giving them a certain direction, knowing that they in turn are implicitly crossed by other multiple readings and directions. In this process, we saw how in each case a number of intermediate diagonals were opening up, which, in addition to widening and making the map more complex, allowed us to mark possible routes and paths of access to this set of relevant aspects. (Ibid.)

Cunningham built his choreographies as collages, with fragments of movement whose origin was heterogeneous and diverse, and yet managed to establish a nexus in his own discourse. The curatorial proposal was guided by the concern of how to emulate these aspects within the curatorial discourse:

> How to generate a permeable, transversal, diagonal curatorship? Just as in his work there coexist at the same time a series of divergent movements executed by the same person and different phrases of movement in the same time and space, we sought that the works within our proposal could be articulated and function in the same way. (p. 25).

In each thematic diagonal (the name given to the different nuclei that make up the project), coexist proposals that correspond to different historical moments, to different objectives and interests in their search, but at the same time they demonstrate the broad experimentation and crossing of choreographic work and audiovisual tasks. The project contemplates a curatorial program enriched by a wide group of complementary activities that, like satellites, orbit around the central axis. In this way, they offer the possibility of accessing information and experiences that tend to generate a deepening of content in specific and at the same time complementary directions. The exhibition includes five thematic diagonals that, as a whole, operate as a brief retrospective:

Diagonal 1. Screen-dancing the View: the choreographer behind the camera (2:36 hrs).

The first diagonal brings together works in which Cunningham explores the camera-body relationship, which also allows us to approach the screen-dance relationship. In this crossing of languages, Merce was interested in keeping the indeterminacy in creation. The juxtaposition of the time and rhythm of the camera with the time and rhythm of the dancers led him to approach new possibilities that were unrealizable on stage, such as changing the focus of the viewer's gaze or shifting it to different planes. The dialogue between languages implies their transformation: the eye of the choreographer becomes the eye of the camera and the dance is designed for this new scenario. In the artist's own words (quoted in Bloedé & Suquet, 2013:32):

> The scene, the space of the scene as you, as an audience, watch it is an empty and restricted space, that is with no depth. Seen through the camera, it is exactly the inverse which, for me, changes absolutely everything, both movement and time.

The works included in diagonal 1 are *Westbeth* (Atlas & Cunningham - 1974), *Fractions* (Atlas & Cunningham - 1978), *Locale* (Atlas & Cunningham - 1979), *Channels/Inserts* (Atlas & Cunningham - 1981), and *Beach Birds for Camera* (Caplan & Cunningham - 1992). The texts *Electrifying Perception* by Annie Suquet, *The Choreography for the Camera of Merce Cunningham* by David Vaughan, and *Locale: Dancing Framing and Corporealities in Resonance* by Paulina Ruiz Carballido are put in dialogue with these works.

Diagonal 2. Merce Cunningham Dance Company Documentaries (3:00 hrs).

This diagonal brings together two historical documentaries that illustrate different aspects of the individual and collective life of the artistic work of the first cast of the MCDC and the collaboration between John Cage and Merce Cunningham: *498 3rd Avenue* (Wildenhahn & Cunningham - 1967) and *Cage/Cunningham* (Caplan & Cunningham - 1991). It is remarkable to note that both works included for the first time subtitles in Spanish and Portuguese. The text in dialogue with these works is *The way of Merce* by Nancy Dalva, who was appointed MCT's

Fellow-in-Residence in 2012 and has produced and written the *Mondays with Merce* webseries and produced the *Mondays with Merce* Film Library videos, all of which are available on the Trust's YouTube channel.

Diagonal 3: Screendance Event: extract, assemble, and perform randomly (1:43 hrs).

An Event is an uninterrupted sequence of different fragments of Cunningham's repertoire, assembled and performed in a random order and distribution. Each event is unique and conceived for the space where it is presented. This process of exploration and creation reveals the perception of architectural space in resonance, opposition, abstraction, and displacement. The program includes two proposals that at the choreographic level were created as events: *Assemblage* (Moore & Cunningham - 1968), the first work created as an event for the screen that amalgamates two ideas, a film about a particular space (Ghirardelli Square) and a film about the MCDC. The multiplicity of screens and the use of collage generate mixed choreographies, simultaneously juxtaposed with everyday gestures. In this work, the perception of space changes, offering another way of experiencing and perceiving the dancing body in filmic temporality. On the other hand, it also includes the *Park Avenue Armory Event* (Cunningham Dance Foundation - 2012) that meant the farewell of the MCDC. This video is the filmic record of the stage proposal. This time only, dancers were able to choose what they wanted to dance within an event. This performance provided a retrospective of fifty years of Cunningham's creation, from *Rune* (1959) to *Nearly 90* (2009). The texts that dialogue with this corpus are *Cunningham, collage, and the computer* (Roger Copeland), and *About a missing link: the (re)appearance of Assemblage (Merce Cunningham, Richard Moore, 1968)* by Gabriel Villota Toyos.

Diagonal 4. LifeForms: Like straight lines in curved universes (2:31 hrs).

In his book *Changes: Notes on Choreography* (1968), Cunningham describes a computer notation system that could be used for choreographic creation. Twenty years later, the Computer Graphic Research Lab at Simon Fraser University developed *LifeForms,* a software that allows the drawing of movement ideas in space and time, generating an assistance in the composition process. Cunningham argued that *LifeForms* functions as a tool for the artist but that the results always depend on the curiosity and resources of the creator. In particular, Cunningham combined its use with the employment of chance methodologies. In addition to a new way of working for the dancers, for him it implied a great enrichment in his creative work and the opening to new possibilities. The works that compose this diagonal are *Biped* (Atlas & Cunningham - 2005), *Pond Way* (Atlas & Cunningham - 2005), *Split Sides 45* (Atlas & Cunningham - 2006), *Melange* (Atlas & Cunningham - 2000), and *Views on Video* (Atlas & Cunningham - 2005). The text that dialogues with these works is *Expanded creativity in the work of Merce Cunningham* by Mauro Cacciatore, a text that explores the modifications generated by the incorporation of this tool in his language of movement.

Diagonal 5. Video archives of historical collaborations (2:54 hrs).

This diagonal brings together works with an experimental historical audiovisual archival perspective of Cunningham's interdisciplinary collaborations with artists such as John Cage, Nam June Paik, Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, Shigeko Kubota, Leo Castelli, Rusell Connor, Andy Warhol, Leacock, Pennebaker, David Tudor, Jasper Johns, Gordon Mumma, Stan VanDerBeek, Beverly Emmons, Arne Arnbom, David Behrman. The presence of these artists coexists and is put in dialogue with the members of the MCDC of the time: Merce Cunningham, Carolyn Brown, Viola Faber, Barbara Lloyd, Sandra Neels, Albert Reid, Peter Saul, Gus

Solomons. It is shaped as a historical dialogue between music, dance, poetry, and theater that relates the following works: *Merce by Merce by Paik* (Nam June Paik & Cunningham - 1978), *RainForest* (Pennebaker & Cunningham - 1968), *Variations V* (Arnborn & Cunningham - 1965), *Walkaround Time* (Atlas & Cunningham - 1968), and the documentary fragment of *The Collaborators* (Atlas & Cunningham - 1983). The text that dialogues with these works is *Cunningham, vector of singular events* by Gilsamara Moura.

The expanded catalog that accompanied the exhibition allowed not only to contextualize the exhibition during the extensive tour of the *Merce Cunningham Centennial* (throughout 2019), but also to go beyond it by becoming a consultative material for university, educational, and artistic contexts. It represents a contribution to new generations to access texts of references that are not translated into Spanish in order to understand more fully the Cunningham universe and its relevance in the development of contemporary dance. The texts included are articulated by the five axes that make up the exhibition. They carry the signature and relevance of some of the central referents of the Cunningham Universe, translated for the first time into Spanish: David Vaughan, Roger Copeland, Nancy Dalva and Merce himself, whose voice and image jump from the paper to the reader thanks to the careful and daring design of Paraguayan Paolo Herrera, who was in tune with the spirit of the curatorial committee from the very first sketch.

Other contributions translated into Spanish are those of Annie Suquet (from French) and Gilsamara Moura (from Portuguese), both of whom contribute their vision as a scholar on the topic, the first one, and as a dancer who participated in the experience with the great choreographer, the second one. Written or adapted especially for this catalog are the texts by Gabriel Villota Toyos (ES), Raúl Parra Gaitán (CO), and those of curatorial committee members Paulina Ruiz Carballido (MX-FR), and Mauro Cacciatore (AR). Thus, in addition to the synopses of the works included in the audiovisual show (whose exhibition format could be adapted to screenings in movie theaters or as an installation, according to the criteria of each of the festivals through which it circulated), these background texts were added to expand it and give it another volume and a certain three-dimensionality.

Another detail to highlight is the international character of this first REDIV publication, since its curatorial committee includes members from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Paraguay, while the original contact that led to the agreement with the Trust was made in Spain. Translations and corrections were made in Argentina, Paraguay, and France, and finally its design, printing, and worldwide launch was in Asuncion, Paraguay in August 2019. It can be read in Cacciatore, M., Ruiz Carballido, P. and Szperling, S. (2020) the words of the curatorial committee that relate the following:

> We are sure that these spatial and temporal diagonals that have woven this publication from the beginning of the process had a significant impact on the result, undoubtedly enriching those who participated in it, and we sincerely hope that the revolutionary spirit of Merce seeps into every micron of this book-catalog unfolding from these pages to the reader. (p. 2).

Satellite Actions

In order to generate a space for training and networking, *DanceForms* and *Cunningham Technique* workshops taught by Trevor Carlson (USA) and Mauro Cacciatore (AR) were included in the project. In the *DanceForms* workshops, participants used many of the *Four Events that led to Large Discoveries* (1994) described by Merce Cunningham as central to his life's work. However, the focus was on the ways in which he used *DanceForms* software from

the early 1990s until his death in 2009. Participants had the opportunity to create their own dances with other participants, playing the role of choreographers and dancers. On the other hand, there was a space dedicated to the *Cunningham Technique*, considered one of the most effective training techniques, which evolved over the course of Cunningham's 70 year career. This meant that the exercises mutated to adapt to changes in choreography and differences in body building over many generations. The classes were taught by Mauro Cacciatore (AR), who was trained by Marina Giancaspro at San Martín Theater Contemporary Dance School and later specialized with former Cunningham dancers such as Robert Swinston, Jennifer Goggans, Andrea Weber, Jean Freebury, and Susan Quinn, among others.

As a scenic proposal, the presentation of *Not A Moment Too Soon*, a multidisciplinary scenic work that integrates dance, text, music, and video and traces the life experience between Merce Cunningham and his executive director, Trevor Carlson, narrated in first person from the perspective of the latter, in the form of a solo. This relationship takes the form of a multidisciplinary dance-theater piece about a shared journey: the final stages of Cunningham's life, the struggle to continue working, and the delicacy with which Trevor Carlson accompanies him in this process. An act of introspection in a memory shared by both men that wants to propose, through the voice and image of Cunningham, in his own unpublished videos, and the narrations and actions of Carlson himself, an intimate look at the last days of a master.

A live streaming broadcast of *Night of 100 solos: a Centennial Event*, a major simultaneous event in three cities, streamed worldwide, was also made available on April 16. *Night of 100 solos* was the largest Event ever created, with 100 dancers performing a unique collection of 100 solos for 75 minutes simultaneously in New York, Los Angeles, and London. These screenings served as a preview of the activities planned for the second half of 2019. This event was a sample of the multiplicity and diversity of Cunningham's work, which opened the doors to contemplation, to delight in bursts of movement and to confirm that his legacy is still alive and kicking. That same evening, both the Merce Cunningham Trust and the John Cage Trust supported former friends and collaborators in hosting dinners recalling evenings with Cunningham and his life partner, composer John Cage. The dinners featured menus built around some of Cage's favorite macrobiotic recipes.

Seen from a distance, we can appreciate how the project fulfilled its objective of bringing heterogeneous series into contact by connecting similar points but, at the same time, by differentiating a multiplicity of features and details that make them unique. The conceptual resonance with Cunningham's work can be observed in the project by carrying out a collective curatorship, crossed and enriched by multiple points of view, the result of which is a curatorial process as a creative instance of meeting, from which networks of knowledge and interdisciplinary practices emerged in relation to video dance and its sensitive resonance with other arts.

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BIO

Mauro Cacciatore has a degree in Arts Curatorship (UNA). He is a member of the Semiotics of the Performing Body study group (IIEAC), and the Dance and Technology Research Group (Dir. Silvina Szperling - Susana Temperley). Graduated from the Professional Training Program at San Martín Theater Contemporary Dance School with special mention in recognition of his study process. Since 2012 he has received repeated invitations to participate as a scholarship holder in the workshops of the Merce Cunningham Trust (NYC) achieving in 2022 the official certification to teach Cunningham Technique, also participating in a pilot program for the training of repositories of the work of Merce Cunningham. He has started in 2024 the Master degree in Research through artistic practice (UNVM - Córdoba). He teaches at the PTP at San Martín Theater Contemporary Dance School and is a teacher and general coordinator at EME training program (Dir. Juan Jesús Guiraldi). He was guest teacher of the Compañía Nacional de Danza Contemporánea, UNSAM, and Compañía Una Constante. Since 2016, he is part of the curatorial team as well as participating in the production of the Festival Constante (Dir. Juan Jesús Guiraldi) and since 2019 he is part of the Festival Internacional VideoDanzaBA (Dir. Silvina Szperling). He is part of the curatorial committee of the exhibition *Merce Cunningham: lo elemental, lo imprecindible, lo inesperado*, a collaboration between REDIV and the Merce Cunningham Trust in the framework of the *Merce Cunningham Centennial*. He writes for *LOIE - Magazine of dance, performance and new media*. His projects have received support from FNA, Mecenazgo - GCBA, Prodanza, Fundación Williams and Fundación Amigos del Teatro San Martín.

Dance Behind the Screen in the Social Media Era: Saying NO to the BOX with the kNOwBOX dance Film Festival

By: Azaria Hogans, YeaJean Choi, Reyna Mondragon, Martheya Nygaard

Abstract:

kNOwBOX dance is a female founded digital dance company co-created in 2018. Later, the kNOwBOX Film Festival (NBFF) was founded in 2019. NBFF screens national and international dance films that challenge the possibilities of what dance can look like in video form. These films are curated by the kNOwBOX dance team and an international jury of award-winning filmmakers. NBFF presents multi-country live premier events followed by a screening tour. Screening venues have included Quadrivia Cholula in Puebla, México, Arts Mission Oak Cliff in Dallas, Texas, USA, Emu Artspace in Seoul, South Korea, Tin Star Theater in Dallas, Texas, USA, among other spaces both on and offline. kNOwBOX dance and the kNOwBOX Film Festival say "NO to the BOX" and seek to make, share, and connect dance-related resources and people. This chapter traces the creation and development of a dance film festival in the social media era, the impacts of a worldwide pandemic on the 2020 kNOwBOX Film Festival, digital space and trans geographical connections, women and BIPOC voices, support for artists, and audience participation. This chapter looks behind the screen of the kNOwBOX dance Film Festival and invites readers to consider the value of fostering relationships and opportunities for artists, their works, and audiences both on and offline.

WHO IS kNOwBOX DANCE - @knowboxdance

kNOwBOX dance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit arts service organization that creates, collaborates, and discusses art with artists and the public. Through its programs, kNOwBOX dance seeks to present and engage dance-related art. As capitalized in their name - kNOwBOX dance seeks to say NO to the BOX. NB believes "that by going outside of any four cornered box they can empower dancers and creators across the globe" ("About", 2021). kNOwBOX dance unites and empowers artists at any stage of their craft by highlighting voices from diverse backgrounds, providing educational resources, and offering opportunities for art-making and sharing.

Programming includes *Dance Behind the Screen Podcast* (DBS), *kNOwBOX dance Film Festiva*l (NBFF), *mixtamotus* interdisciplinary live performances and workshops, and other presentations/collaborations. kNOwBOX dance is a female-founded digital dance organization co-created in 2018 by Martheya Nygaard and YeaJean Choi. YeaJean, originally from Seoul, South Korea and Martheya, from Dallas, Texas, USA met at Texas Woman's University while earning their Master of Fine Arts in Dance. This is where their interest in the intersection of using technology – specifically the digital space as a unique way to generate new possibilities for art making and sharing – began. Nygaard and Choi, in creating kNOwBOX dance, sought to answer the question: How can artists have access to stay connected, make new work, and share work globally? The answer to their question was centering technology and uniting and empowering dancers and creators across the digital space.

The team later expanded and fellow TWU Dance alumni Azaria Hogans and Reyna Mondragon joined as *Dance Behind the Screen* podcast co-hosts as well as the Board of Directors. Having all attended graduate school together, they later found themselves spread across the globe and took it as an opportunity to optimize their differences in geographical locations by finding guests from across the country and the world for the podcast and hosting the kNOwBOX dance Film Festival in different countries simultaneously. Underpinning all kNOwBOX dance programming is the value of fostering relationships and opportunities for artists, their works, and audiences both on and offline.

NB presents *Dance Behind the Screen* (DBS), a podcast that supports global connections and conversations related to dance in the audio space. This dance-focused show offers a unique counterpart to the film festival as it provides a platform for NBFF awarded filmmakers to share more about their film and creative practices with an expanded audience. The DBS podcast explores collaboration and curiosity to uplift the voices of dancers and creators from different backgrounds, cultures, and languages. DBS provides a never-before-heard gathering of prominent thought-leaders and creators in the dance world, all in one place, to help the listener think outside of the box. NB describes their podcast as "a conversation series with people who have dance-related careers questioning the influence of social media in dance process, production, and publicity in order to make dance education accessible to people everywhere" ("About", 2021). DBS was launched in March of 2018 and shares new episodes regularly. The podcast has featured interviews with award-winning filmmakers and dance makers such as: Roxana Barba, Andrew Chapman, Emma Cianchi, Kelly Hargraves, Jacob Jonas, Antoine Panier, and André M. Zachery to name a few. NB programming also includes our blog archive, *mixtamotus* – a Dallas-based human-digital interface art exploration– live performances and workshops, and other presentations/collaborations.

The *kNOwBOX dance Film Festival* (NBFF) is an independent, international film festival. The mission for the NBFF is to curate dance films that explore an innovative approach to challenging the possibilities of what dance can look like in video form. The festival is a multilingual (English, Spanish, Korean) festival that is held simultaneously in Mexico, South Korea, The United States of America, and online, along with Pop-Up touring events. The *kNOwBOX dance Film Festival* was founded in 2019. From its inception, kNOwBOX dance has created enriching digitally-focused opportunities for celebrating arts and culture at the local, national, and international scale. Prior to the independent *kNOwBOX dance Film Festival*, the co-creators curated and served as creative collaborators for founding the Dallas Dance Film Festival in partnership with the Dance Council of North Texas in 2018. The Dallas Dance Film Festival and NB team recognized the need for more digital dance exposure and support for emerging and professional dance filmmakers in Dallas, Texas, USA. *Dance! North Texas* magazine wrote, "kNOwBOX serves as an exciting example of the collaborative processes that are being seen more and more in content creation, while leveraging the internet as a way to form connections" (2018, 5). The next year, in 2019, kNOwBOX dance decided to strike out on their own and develop their own dance film festival in order to serve a larger community. In creating their own independent film festival, NB focused on how to further develop best practices that center the filmmaker, such as paying honorariums to the artists. The NB team believes experiencing art – and more specifically experiencing art via dance and film – creates opportunities for understanding other perspectives.

The NBFF criteria for jury selection considers key elements including advanced knowledge in dance and filmmaking, the ability to offer unique perspectives based on individual creative practices, and inclusive representation of a wide range of abilities, cultural backgrounds, dance forms, genders, geographic locations, identities, and/or races. It is imperative to address the topic of equality in dance in the digital space as it is both a relevant and pressing issue in the current social and political climate (e.g. #BlackLivesMatter, #StopAAPIHate #Pride, etc.). From the inception of the camera, underrepresented groups have been ever-present though not always afforded the privilege to be in the forefront of these digital movements. Often overlooked, underrepresented, or uncredited, these groups have traversed the screen as directors, editors, choreographers, and performers. In the process of examining and curating, NB finds it important to acknowledge concepts of access, inclusion, power, and race in order to not reinforce some of the same structures of oppression (i.e., ableism, objectification of womxn/womyn, primitivism of people of color, the male gaze, etc.); thus, writing a more equitable future history. In order to facilitate this vision, the NB team recognized it would require diverse voices rooted in multifaceted experiences and emphasized the importance of selecting a guest jury panel in conjunction with the NB team jury. The films received are often reflective of experiences of people from all walks of life.

In addition to selecting jurors based on their contributions to the field, NBFF invites the "Visionary Award" recipient (the previous NBFF awardee) to be on the jury for the festival the following year. NBFF contributes to the development of the art world by presenting dance-related films in many ways including the following:

1. NBFF centers the filmmaker throughout all levels of producing the festival. The festival offers affordable and accessible ways for filmmakers to submit in various categories via FilmFreeway. NBFF provides social media and website features that highlight the official selection across online platforms with extended reach. Awards are then delivered to selected

filmmakers. These awards include monetary stipends, laurels, multilingual transcriptions, and interviews on the Dance Behind the Screen podcast. The festival provides encouraging feedback (upon request) to filmmakers whose works were not selected.

2. NBFF facilitates opportunities for interested artists to be involved in the festival as guest curators by serving as a compensated jury panelist, hosting the NBFF Pop-Up tours (as a location host), or participating in festival receptions.

3. NBFF highlights and encourages audiences to connect with the filmmakers by including their social media handles in the program, hosting #MEETTHEMAKERS (a free behind the screen conversation with the filmmakers), and the NBFF Pop-Up tours which brings the festival to various communities all over the world.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Social media platforms such as Facebook (2004), Vimeo (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), Pinterest (2010), and blog sites have been social networking and community gathering spaces since public access in the early two-thousands, and more recently platforms such as Instagram (2010), WeChat (2011), and TikTok (2020), have increased users' dependency on social networking for human connection. Similarly, organizations and event marketing strategies rely heavily on social media to reach artists and audiences. In 2020, the influx of dance offerings shifted to predominantly online programming for peak community engagement during the pandemic. As an experiment for connection and hope during COVID-19, kNOwBOX dance created the *kNOwBOX dance Summer Short Series* (NBSSS). This mini online festival was created in order to engage audiences at home through the social media channels of Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube in spite of people being confined to their homes. The parameters for the *kNOwBOX dance Summer Short Series* were to invite artists to submit sixty-second dance films. These films were optimal for sharing on social media due to the ease in uploading short-form videos and meeting platform specifications. The conceptual theme for NBSSS was "Connection." Connection included interpretations of finding relationships between sight, sound, and movement as well as bringing together people who were feeling discouraged because of the influx of bad news and the virus circulating globally.

NB wanted to expand the jury outside of the NB team and reinforce their value of diverse voices and expertise for dance in the digital space for NBSSS. NB invited Joy-Marie Thompson, a self-described "dancer, movement practitioner, and certified ANIMAL FLOW© instructor based in Osage Land, otherwise known as Pittsburgh, PA" ("Home", n.p.), to the NBSSS jury. She founded @issadancelook, an Instagram account with nearly five-thousand followers and has created many award-winning dance films. Thompson's combined social media savvy and filmmaking expertise supported the online festival and the filmmakers. NBSSS featured her co-created film "LINKt," "a dance short film about the relationship between a Black woman and a white woman" ("About", 2021) as the finale to the free online social media screening.

NBSSS received submissions from thirty different countries and the jury selected eight dance films of both national and international filmmakers from Iceland, Mexico, South Africa, and the United States. These films were a representation of the worldwide events of 2020. In a similar vein to the NBFF #MEETTHEMAKERS, NB facilitated a Q&A on Instagram Live with the selected filmmakers

and jury panelist Joy-Marie Thompson. Proceeds made from film submissions were donated to the Artist Relief Tree in an effort to financially support artists who were affected by cancellations due to COVID-19.

Image 1: Scan the QR code for access to the promotional video, artist profiles, and learn more about the jury panel

NBSSS Juror Joy-Marie Thompson states in correspondence with kNOwBOX dance: “kNOwBOX dance provided me a space to share work when I thought all options went out the window due to COVID-19. They managed to build a supportive platform for dance artists during an emergent time and it's inspiring to witness.”

The impacts of COVID-19 have been complicated and far-reaching especially for those in the performing arts. After deep consideration and caution with regard to the worldwide pandemic, kNOwBOX dance felt the need to continue with live screenings of the *kNOwBOX dance Film Festival* in 2020. They imagined a safe way to come together and enjoy the creative works and voices of national and international artists. To bring this idea to life, the *kNOwBOX dance Film Festival* offered a drive-in screening at the Tin Star Theater in Dallas, Texas, USA and a socially distanced intimate screening at emuARTSPACE in Seoul, South Korea. As an additional benefit in producing the festival, kNOwBOX dance provided jobs for local musicians, photographers, and technicians, many of which experienced loss of work because of the pandemic.

In hosting a live event during the pandemic, safety for all was a priority. In Dallas, Texas, USA, the drive-in Tin Star Theater was an ideal site for the festival in order to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s recommendations. The Tin Star Theater team, under the direction of Nolan DeMarco McGahan, offered experience and expertise for executing this event at the drive-in theater. In this format, audiences could stay socially distant from the comfort of their cars, enjoy the nostalgia of a drive-in experience, and synchronously connect with the community by attending a live event. Audiences not only tuned into the radio for the sound of the films, but also had the opportunity to enjoy live music from a local musician.

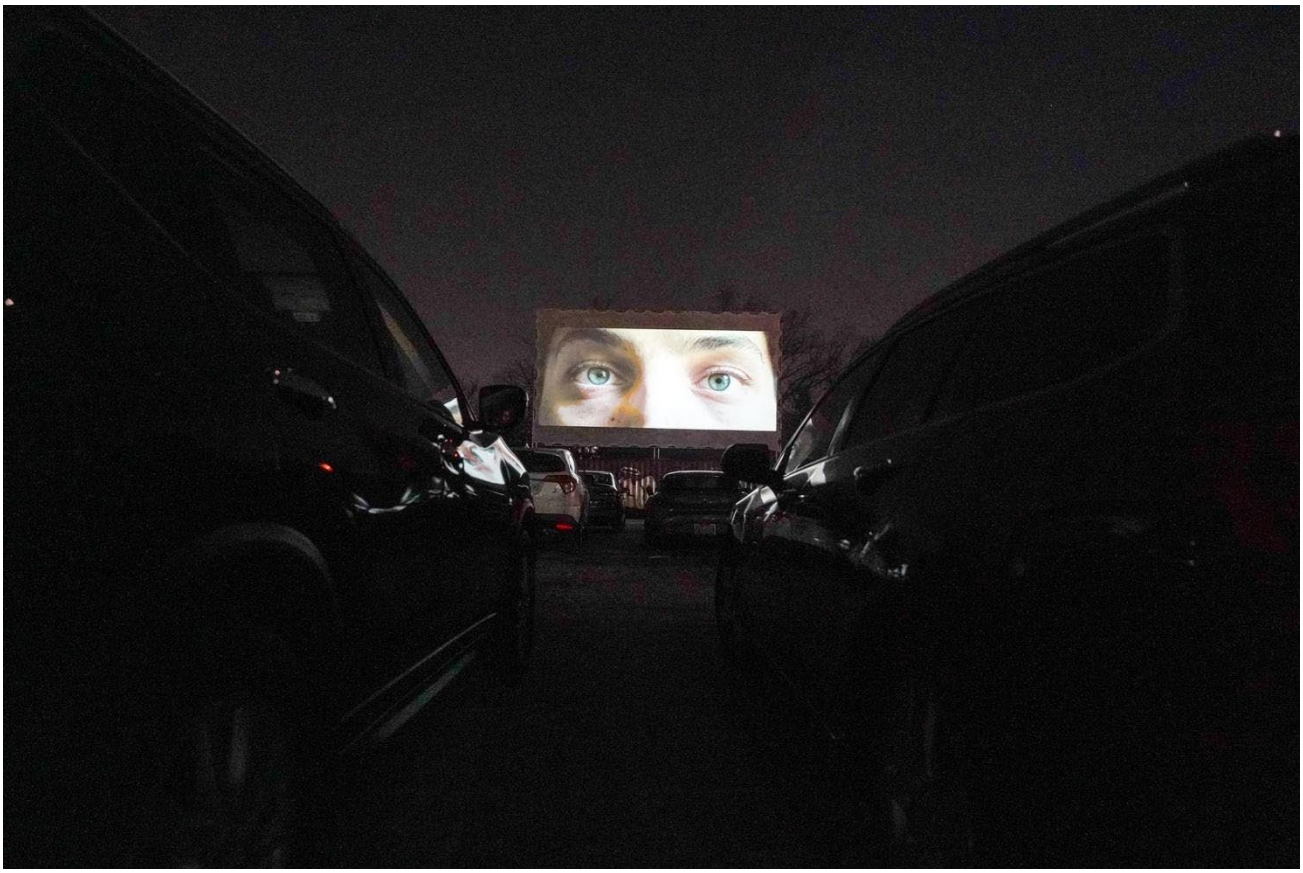

Image 2: kNOwBOX dance Film Festival 2020 Drive-In Screening, Credit: Corey Haynes

On the other side of the world, the *kNOwBOX dance Film Festival* had a South Korea premiere at emuARTSPACE. emuARTSPACE is an arts and culture complex that includes an art gallery, performance hall, book cafe, cinemas, and a roof garden. Located in the center of Seoul, this venue was conducive for NBFF 2020 for many reasons such as the cinema being well versed in safety protocols for audience members and offering large spaces to maneuver safely before and after the screening. This intimate cinema offered a suitable place to invite a small socially distanced audience to gather in person while following COVID-19 social distancing regulations in South Korea.

emuARTSPACE is recognized as a supportive cultural center for audiences and creators where they share mainstream and art movie screenings. While emuARTSPACE has screened movies such as Academy Award Best Picture Film, Parasite (2019), this was the first time dance films were screened in this cinema. Sang-min Kim the CEO of emuARTSPACE said, "It was a precious time to watch international dance films which is not an opportunity that is easily available in Seoul. It was impressive how kNOwBOX dance prepared for this festival and I am looking forward to the next step of this company." The screening of NBFF was relevant to both emuARTSPACE and the Seoul community due to the discourse of topics explored in the films. NBFF Co-Creator and location host, YeaJean Choi expressed, "the issue of racial discrimination through dance film is a topic not often seen or discussed in South Korea."

Image 3: kNOwBOX dance Film Festival 2020 emuARTSPACE Screening, Credit: Jung Yoon Choi

Audience member HyunSang Chang states to kNOwBOX dance: "성지순례 [which means Pilgrimage in English] was a very memorable dance film which shows the journey of day to night through dance with singing. The director's intention was delivered very well through body, costumes, scenery and sound, and it gave me time to think about the way to create the beautiful story beyond texts.

The NBFF 2020 received over one hundred and forty-five submissions from thirty different countries, and the official selection featured twenty international dance films from Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Romania, Scotland, South Korea, The Netherlands, and The United States. NBFF 2020 films responded to the call for submissions in creative and powerful ways amidst the uncertainty related to COVID-19 by evoking hope for humanity, arts, dance and film, and the future. These films were poignant and presented an engaging experience for viewers familiar and new to dance film.

Image 4: kNOwBOX dance Film Festival Logo

NEXT STEPS FOR EXPANDING POSSIBILITIES OF NBFF

With the onset of a global pandemic in 2020, most of the dance world was forced to flock to the digital space in order to maintain connection and keep creating. With the fast-paced and evolving nature of research on technology and the digital landscape, the ability to connect trans-geographically continues to climb. Rapid innovations in technology and the World Wide Web have influenced dependency on digital tools as a primary form of human function, productivity, and connection. Digital dance can be framed as a category where dance is generated, stored, or processed via screens or the World Wide Web regardless of geographical boundaries.

The digital space is charged with a multitude of positive and negative forces including collaboration, cultural appropriation, matters of accessibility, media prowess, misinformation, misrepresentation, networking, political and monetary power, racism, sexism, and platforms for artistic creation. The art of dance on film provides artists, curators, and audiences opportunities to engage with various representations of dance in relation to a multiplicity of topical discourses. Dance film festivals can provide opportunities and cultural exchange between creators, venues, and audiences, while also supporting the growth of a cultural ecosystem. The kNOwBOX dance organization is dedicated to creating a more equitable and inclusive dance field for all by fostering trans-geographical networking, highlighting diverse and underrepresented voices (e.g., Black, indigenous, people of color, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, and women), creating opportunities for artists, and engaging audiences both on and offline via their programming.

As kNOwBOX dance looks towards the future, the festival plans to continue to hold simultaneous festivals in many countries and show dance films in diverse and experimental venues in order to expand the flexibility and creativity of curating an international dance film festival. kNOwBOX dance and the *kNOwBOX dance Film Festival* were able to overcome and acknowledge the hurdles around community gathering even in the face of a pandemic. The pandemic simply exposed the quintessential importance of community organizing and bringing people together both in person and online. This community engagement allows the maintenance of long lasting and meaningful connections for not only dance on and behind the screen, but also basic human survival and wellbeing. While the pandemic was not ideal, it enabled many dance organizations to consider optimizing social and digital media practices to further engage with artists and audiences in the social media era. The dance community also had to grapple with the loss of live performances and events, which was devastating for all involved. However, moving forward, dance organizations can choose to explore social media practices, interactive experiences, and other multimedia and interdisciplinary formats to create new possibilities for dance. The next step for NBFF is refining the interconnectedness of these two modes – digital and face-to-face–to be able to reach people where they are and keep the appreciation of dance alive. By saying “NO” to the boxes of limitations, boundaries, and confines that limit connection, they enable themselves to say “YES” to fostering innovative possibilities, facilitating trans-geographical connections, supporting artists and audiences, and highlighting underrepresented and diverse voices.

End Note: This paper was originally written in 2020. Since then, kNOwBOX dance has undergone significant growth and transformation. Our mission, vision, and programming have evolved to further center dance artists, embrace technology, and expand our global reach. Through our continued work in film festivals, podcasts, and international collaborations, we remain dedicated to pushing the boundaries of dance and fostering a more inclusive and innovative future for the art form.

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Opine Dance Film Festival: The Little Festival That Could

By Britt Whitmoyer Fishel

Abstract

Opine Dance Film Festival (ODFF) was founded in Atlanta in 2015, bringing screendance to a community just beginning to experience the practice in a more developed way. After four seasons of presenting professionally adjudicated and student programming, *ODFF* had planned on changing formats. After relocating the festival to Philadelphia, *ODFF* planned its 5th season to be screened in gallery format, looping three ambitious programs over the course of three days on the campus of Bryn Mawr College. On March 11, 2020, Bryn Mawr College announced that it would close its doors and move remote for the remainder of the semester, due to Covid-19. With only one week before the festival was to launch and with the world changing by the minute, *ODFF* quickly decided to put the 35 films online and stream them as curated, during the original festival dates. In doing so, the online reach far surpassed the exposure of our in-person event. As the pandemic continued, *ODFF* realized its festival plans for 2021 and 2022 would have to continue online. As the festival prepared for the changes needed to sustain, it watched closely as practitioners everywhere were now dabbling with the camera. Dancers and dance makers were turning to digital practices to carry them through the pandemic. The team established a new category to accommodate professional artists who were newer to the medium or experimenting with the camera for the first time. This category, called "The Newbie Filmmaker," has become a staple for *ODFF* and the 2023 festival was the third time screening the program. Now culminating in its 10th season, *ODFF* was fortunate to partner with the well-established Bryn Mawr Film Institute, but entering a "post-Covid" world with a small festival has been daunting. What is the best screening model for the small, but mighty festival? Stepping into the unknown has taught everyone: Adaptability is key.

Opine Dance Film Festival: The Little Festival That Could

Opine Dance Film festival (ODFF) was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 2015, as a way to provide a much-needed screendance offering to the community. The festival, in its inception, was hosted and produced by *Atlanta Dance Collective*, a non-profit contemporary dance company, run by Co-Artistic Directors, Britt Whitmoyer Fishel and Sarah Stokes. Small, but mighty, the program itself ran in conjunction with the company's annual season of performances, as a way to introduce those less familiar with the artistic practice, to the world of screendance and dance film.

The mission of *ODFF* has always been to celebrate dance filmmakers locally, nationally, and internationally who are creating work with meaning. *ODFF* seeks films that speak to wider themes of identity, defying conventions, crossing borders, and pushing boundaries. The program prioritizes both inclusion and diversity through the marriage of dance and film, while also emphasizing the democratization of socioeconomic, political, and identity-driven conversations across cultures, contexts and locations.[1] It has also always been a mission to provide screendance to communities at no, or low-cost, maximizing accessibility in the field.

For the first four years of programming, the *ODFF* followed a traditional format with annual, theatrical film screenings. During that time, the festival received an average of 150-200 submissions per year, split between Professional and Student categories. The curatorial team was comprised of the Artistic Directors and Company Dancers of *Atlanta Dance Collective* and the festival was screened each season at Synchronicity Theatre in Midtown Atlanta. At the end of year four, Fishel relocated to the Philadelphia suburbs and brought the festival north for the fifth season.

March 2020 would have kicked off the fifth annual *ODFF*. In a sea of many changes, not only was the festival moved from Atlanta, Georgia to the suburbs of Philadelphia, but it was set to be changing formats from traditional screenings to a gallery exhibition. Bryn Mawr College was housing the festival in their Rhys Carpenter Library, open to students and the public at no cost. The curatorial team expanded to professional dance and screendance artists in the region, and of the 210 submissions received that season, thirty-five were selected across two professional programs and one student program.

Then, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic.[2] As the reality and seriousness set in, Universities and Colleges across the country closed their campuses and moved to remote and online platforms of learning. Bryn Mawr College made the decision on that same day, in an effort to disrupt the spread of COVID-19, to close its doors and move to a remote format. Unfortunately for *ODFF,* that meant the event had been canceled only nine days before its intended opening. The films had been programmed, the promotional materials purchased, and the team had invested time and labor into getting the small festival ready for a new season. Artists are often taught the art of pivoting, the principle of changing strategy or direction in the face of adversity. At that moment, *ODFF*'s Artistic Director, Britt Whitmoyer Fishel had to act fast. On that same day, Fishel took steps to move the festival online, releasing a statement to the filmmakers and the public:

> "As you know, *Opine Dance Film Festival* was set for March 20-21 at Bryn Mawr College, outside of Philadelphia. The Bryn Mawr College community is currently without confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19. However, Bryn Mawr College has made the decision to prioritize the wellbeing of the campus community and beyond, while following public health recommendations and contributing to the global effort to disrupt the spread of COVID-19.
>
> **That being said, Bryn Mawr College is moving to a remote format for students and faculty, and thus will not be able to continue with our event on campus.**
>
> We are disappointed, but understand the gravity and importance of the health and safety of our community and beyond. As there is uncertainty moving forward, with the evolving situation, rescheduling is not a possibility.
>
> **Therefore, we have decided to produce *Opine Dance Film Festival* online for this season.** The festival will run on its predetermined dates, March 20-21, and will be available in its original programming (Professional Program A, Professional Program B, Student Program).

> Online audience members will still get to vote for the Festival Favorite (from the adjudicated Professional Programs), which will be awarded with laurels at the end of the festival.
>
> We are a small festival and are disappointed with the waste of resources dedicated towards the gallery technology and print materials, but are focused on thinking beyond ourselves, while caring for each other and the larger world.
>
> We thank you for your understanding and continued support, and will be in touch soon with more information regarding the online viewing galleries."

While most of the response was understanding and supportive, moving the programming online did change the dynamic and outcomes of the festival. After reaching out to each filmmaker, the festival lost one of the planned thirty-five films. The filmmaker was not interested in an online world premiere, which was understandable. Knowing that the audience itself would change by moving the films online, the festival as people knew it changed completely. Several screendance festivals host their screenings in the month of March, so *ODFF* was not alone in the scramble, but as a smaller festival with less support, and the tight timeline, the pressure set in.

In the span of a week, the films in their original programming were uploaded onto a Vimeo Channel. As the programming was originally free of cost to audiences, no paywall was established, and on March 20th, the festival launched online for the world to watch and enjoy. Over the course of the weekend, the programming reached a scope of audiences that would never have been possible in an in-person format. By the end of the festival, the viewership was well over 1,100 unique viewers. In a moment of so much global uncertainty, the festival provided artistic connection across borders, creating a hopeful prospect during that time. In an interview with *Thinking Dance* about the festival occurring during the pandemic, Fishel stated:

> I'm noticing a resurgence, an awakening of people paying attention to screendance now, which I'm grateful for. I'm happy that there is attention drawn to finding new ways of using digital space. There really is a silver lining in this precarious time of uncertainty.[3]

To that end, over the next several months, as the world continued to stay under lockdown, it became clear that choreographers and dancers were going to have to find alternative ways to sustain their practice. As written in Fishel's first chapter of *The Screendance Practitioner's Workbook*:

> People who had pushed back against using video as a medium in their dance practice were now suddenly trying to navigate the digital landscape alongside screendance makers who had been in practice for 30+ years. Both professional and educational institutions were figuring out ways to move forward technologically, when the ephemeral nature of live performance had come to a halt. High school and college dance programs were presenting dance film concerts online, as were professional companies. Dance film festivals also moved online, creating a saturated market of digital dance content, ranging from novice to expert. While some groups collaborated safely with professional filmmakers, I often watched independent dance artists and students dabbling with their phones to capture their choreography.[4]

From a curatorial perspective, *ODFF* was interested in expanding the programming to fit the changing landscape during this time period. In the planning process, two new programs were established: “In The Time of Covid” and “The Newbie Filmmaker.” Films submitted to “In The Time of Covid" were conceptualized, created, and executed between March 2020 and December 2020. The films were either related to experiences in isolation or quarantine through the subject and theme of the work, or through the structure of making the film. This could be seen visually though solo-making, social distancing, masks, or limited use of equipment. Films submitted to “The Newbie Filmmaker” were specifically meant for professional dance artists who have transitioned their practice to film, but were experimenting with the medium for the first time, either through collaboration or by themselves. This has since expanded to include professional filmmakers who are new to collaborating or working with dance.

ODFF’s call for films traditionally opens in the summertime, and it was clear early on that we would still be online for the 2021 season. Knowing that ahead of time, the festival was able to include that programming change into FilmFreeway, while easily expanding the programs offered to include “In The Time of Covid” and “The Newbie Filmmaker," without much financial issue. The festival received 250 submissions for its sixth season and, of that total, over half were submitted for the new programs. This confirmed that changing the programming to fit the evolving field was the right decision. Forty-four films across the four screening categories were programmed and uploaded into a Vimeo Showcase. Using a Showcase platform, instead of a Channel on Vimeo, allowed for better protection of the films online. Users can manage the privacy and customization, for a better audience experience. The sixth season of ODFF culminated March 25th through 28th, 2021.

After two years of online programming, the festival (and the world) was itching to get back to doing things in person. In June 2021, new reported Covid-19 cases-by-day hit an all-time low in the US.[5] In optimism, *ODFF* secured a small, in-person venue in Philadelphia for the seventh season. *ODFF* announced the call in July, keeping the festival’s original Professional category, and the newly successful “The Newbie Filmmaker” category, as its two main screenings. Unfortunately, in fall 2021, the Omicron variant started to spread and by January 2022, it was reaching peak levels, changing the trajectory of the pandemic.[6] Once again, *ODFF* found themselves at a crossroads of canceling another in-person event for the safety of the community. At the same time, other in-person events were happening with strategies of testing and masking, using ventilation precautions, or requiring vaccination for entry. The location of *ODFF*’s event was small and ventilation was going to be an issue. In addition to limiting the audience size for each screening, there would need to be designated time in between screenings for ventilation, which was impractical.

Once again, to prioritize the health and safety of the community and to provide a better outcome for the festival and filmmakers, *ODFF* moved back online for the third season in a row. The reception from the filmmakers was positive and understanding. At this point, the pandemic had lasted two years, still with great uncertainty moving forward. Programs and events were in a constant state of change, which required flexibility at any moment from artists and producers. For the seventh season, ODFF received 175 submissions and programmed 19 films between the two categories. The festival ran on its predetermined dates, March 26-27, 2022 on Vimeo Showcase. With each year, the quality of the online programming increased, understanding the fluidity of the platform and user ability.

In the spring of 2022, Fishel established a relationship with Bryn Mawr Film Institute, only a short distance away from Bryn Mawr College, where Fishel is on the Dance Faculty. From their website:

> Bryn Mawr Film Institute (BMFI) is a non-profit movie theater and film education center outside of Philadelphia in Bryn Mawr, PA. BMFI is dedicated to promoting shared experiences that entertain, engage, and educate audiences through a diverse range of independent-minded films, a full curriculum of courses, and an extensive program of special events.[7]

BMFI invited Fishel and students to participate in an event, pairing a screening of the 2019 San Francisco Dance Film Festival, with additional student dance films from Fishel's screendance class that semester. The event was in April, only a week after *ODFF*'s seventh season, which took place online. Covid-19 cases were again on the decline[8], so with proof of vaccination and masking, this event was held in person. Leaving that theater on a high and with optimism once more, Fishel approached them to partner for *ODFF*'s eighth season, to which they happily agreed.

As the festival was moving back into in-person screenings, questions arose: Would there still be an audience? Is this still the best way to share screendance programming? Are we diving headfirst back to familiarity, without considering the lessons of the last three seasons?

The one thing that drove the festival back to an in-person, traditional screening again was the human aspect of it all; the community. In the three years of online screenings, the festival reached people and communities farther than *ODFF*'s small festival could ever reach in person. However, being in a room together, the kinesthetic empathy of listening to a fellow filmmaker's experiences and processes, the visceral feeling while watching a film on a larger-than-life screen in a dark theater, these were important ideas and values. After three seasons without that connection, the choice to return seemed clear.

One change that stayed with the festival was the programming of "The Newbie Filmmaker" category, which BMFI eventually renamed to "Emerging." It has been clear that since 2020, more choreographers and dancers are interested in pursuing technology in their practice and are continuing to experiment with dance on camera. While the boundaries of this category have expanded to include anyone new to working with the medium, filmmakers included, creating and maintaining an inclusive space for these artists has become a priority for *ODFF* and its mission.

In March of 2023, after three seasons of online screenings, *ODFF* held its first in-person event since 2019. The 8th Annual Opine Dance Film Festival took place at BMFI with two programs: "Professional" and "Emerging." The audiences were intimate, as expected. On one hand, communities were itching for interaction and engagement outside of their homes. On the other, it had been three years of major change with a predisposition of staying home and attending less. One major positive from the event was offering an in-person talk back from the directors and filmmakers who were present. Artist talkbacks can contribute to the cultural enrichment of a community by exposing residents to different art forms and diverse perspectives. This exposure can lead to a greater appreciation for cultural diversity and artistic expression and was one benefit that was missing from *ODFF*'s online screenings.

A major point of interest, as the festival moved through its 9th season, was to recognize growth perspectives. Would the *ODFF* audience slowly start to grow and return, or would it experience something similar as the year prior? Unfortunately, the answer to that was not what the festival coordinators had hoped. Not only did the festival experience a decline in video submissions from the year prior, but as the festival culminated in April 2024, it encountered similar attendance levels to the year prior. A surprising note in the analysis was that in both seasons after the return to in-person screenings, ticket sales were higher for the "Emerging" programming, over the "Professional." Could this speak directly to the current screendance landscape, the demographic of audience members interested in screendance in the Philadelphia region, all of the above, or none of the above? This will be interesting to track as the festival proceeds.

With anything, meaningful and sustainable progress often requires patience. The pandemic changed the way artists and producers work and make. In reflection for *ODFF*, the shifts sustained over the three years of Covid-19 have been mostly positive. We released what no longer served the program, and have remained open to adjustments where needed. A smaller festival in the screendance community, *ODFF* persevered by embracing change, exploring new possibilities, and staying open to growth. In the future, the festival may include mixed models for viewing, as it explores continued accessibility, connecting dance films to as many audience members as possible. The festival found a wonderful home and partnership with BMFI, which shares many of the same values and missions, but as the practice and our audience continues to evolve and change, an online platform does resonate with our values. As the festival celebrates its 10th season, the lens as always, is on the dance filmmaker. For year ten, we made the decision to screen the festival online, this time by choice, with goals of democratizing access to dance cinema, nurturing both artistic voices and audience appreciation in a powerful, boundary-breaking way. We hope to foster opportunities for increased visibility and recognition through the flexibility of streaming our programming. *ODFF* will continue to celebrate and promote the intersection of dance and film, serving as a nexus for creativity, collaboration, and appreciation within the screendance communities, advancing the art of dance on screen.

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Pivoting Through the Lens: Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema's Journey in a (Post) Pandemic World

By Michelle Bernier and Rosely Conz

Abstract:

This article explores how Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema responded to the challenges and possibilities of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these adaptations shaped our plans for a "post-pandemic" world. In 2020, while shifting to virtual formats, the festival launched its first-ever Community Dance Film Project, *This Breath Together*, exploring the theme of resilience through diverse artistic voices. Amid logistical hurdles and safety constraints, the project maintained a strong collaborative spirit. Sans Souci also continued the international reach of its screenings with a fully online Brazilian edition, produced in partnership with Dançaberta Dance Group. Through inclusive screenings, live-translated lectures, and interactive artist panels, Sans Souci Brazil connected artists from all over the world, highlighting the work of Brazilian filmmakers. Locally, the festival embraced hybrid programming, from drive-in screenings in Boulder to academic collaborations and virtual Q&As that brought global perspectives to niche audiences. New film categories and platforms emerged, embracing experimental formats, youth creators, and VR/360 content. As the organization adapted and embraced new modes of producing and distributing screendance, Sans Souci used dance film as a tool for education, connection, and healing, something that continues to drive our efforts five years later. Beyond presenting dance cinema, we strive to serve as a community builder for artists, educators, and audiences worldwide.

Note on authorship

This article was authored by Michelle Bernier and Rosely Conz, with contributions by Heike Salzer and Ana Baer. Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema is a non-profit organization that has been curating and producing screendance events nationally and internationally for the past 21 years. As a highly collaborative organization, we want to acknowledge the additional contributions of our advisory board, board of directors, volunteers, and interns in creating the content of our 2020 season and collecting and organizing the data that informed our writing. We also want to acknowledge the work of Dr. Julia Ziviani Vitiello and her group, Dançaberta Dance Group, in the three editions of Sans Souci Brazil.

Opening

As we sit to write this article in 2024, separated geographically by four different time zones, we look back at the accomplishments and challenges Sans Souci faced in 2020. Amidst a global pandemic, we faced losses – professional and personal ones. Still, we recognize our privilege in being able to continue screening the works of many filmmakers who were (and still are) subjected to the financial, social, and emotional hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. With live performances canceled and dance education moving online, screendance assumed a new place in the dance world. Many dance companies, artists, and higher education dance programs suddenly turned to the medium of screendance to continue sharing their productions.

This essay will look at the changes that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to Sans Souci financially, logistically, and artistically in 2020. We share stories to reflect on the importance of engaging in collaborations and strategies that enhance the diversity of our programming, while also recognizing some of our limitations. We hope that this essay creates space for festivals and artists to ponder about the future of screendance, demonstrating the incredible adaptability of this art form. At the same time, we acknowledge issues of equity, access, inclusivity, and representation in curating, programming, and producing the festival.

History & Curatorial Vision

With an expansive definition of dance and an appreciation for highly experimental and interdisciplinary forms, our festival exposes diverse audiences to a variety of film, video, and performance possibilities. Sans Souci (French for "without concern" or, as we affectionately nicknamed it, “no worries”) was conceived in 2003 when Michelle Ellsworth and Brandi Mathis sat on the porch of a 1967 Marlette Mobile home in the Sans Souci Trailer Park in Boulder, Colorado, musing about the pleasures of viewing and creating dances for the screen. Quickly, the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art and the University of Colorado at Boulder Department of Theatre & Dance, as well as artists Ana Baer Carrillo and David Leserman (under the nom de plume Hamel Bloom), added their support to transform mere musing into a full-fledged festival of dance cinema.

From the beginning, Sans Souci was directed by folks of different ages, abilities, ethnicities, and backgrounds, who were coming to dance cinema at different times in their lives for different reasons. Ana Baer Carrillo, an immigrant from Mexico. David Leserman, a Polio survivor who navigated the world in a wheelchair, going back to school after retiring early due to his disability to pursue a second bachelor’s degree in dance. This diverse group of artists made Sans Souci a festival that has always kept an extra eye out for films that represent dancers of varying races, genders, and ability levels. Films that teach about being a dancer with a disability, privileging inclusivity and access for viewers with disabilities. That said, what that meant early on was simply booking venues that David could access physically, meaning others could, too. Our efforts have graduated over the years, and now we ask all artists for captioned and audio-described versions of their films, whenever available. We also teach all-abilities dance classes as part of our creative aging program, Dance is Like a Fine Wine.

Hence, what was first imagined as an informal gathering of local dance video artists screening their works on the white wall of a trailer is now an international festival with submissions from and screenings worldwide. As the Boulder Daily Camera’s Kalene McCort wrote about us, “Since 2003, the Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema has engaged audiences with imaginative films that delight the eye and often border on the surreal... The longstanding event has expanded by spotlighting innovative films from around the globe.” (McCort, 2022)

Our revised mission, influenced by our foundation, curators, and collaborators over the years, as well as the events of 2020, aims to provide a space for communities to share an experience of dance cinema, and to elevate the ever-changing nature, culture, and field of dance cinema. We believe that this can be accomplished through enacting policies that move toward a more racially just and socially equitable landscape for dance cinema, and holding ourselves accountable to those standards, to making dance cinema accessible to more audiences, to educate, to entertain, to provoke, to inspire, and to develop appreciation and appetite for the work. We want to give

exposure to artists from all walks of life who are making work within this field, instigating transnational connections between artists and between artists and audiences.

In the past ten years, we've grown in the number of events hosted, submissions received, and films screened. Equally important, we are intentional about the representation of diverse bodies on and off screen, including our board members, curators, and volunteers, as well as in the dance styles represented. We've expanded our programming to include pedagogical initiatives, including workshops and discussions, as well as sharing our work not only in theaters and cinemas, but also in schools, libraries, galleries, museums, drive-ins, and state and national conferences. Overall, we believe in fostering a forum for the evolving conversation between dance and cinema – celebrating both and their potential to cross-pollinate, while providing a quality, professional presentation setting, and taking meticulous care in exhibiting our artists' work. Our latest efforts involve actively programming and promoting diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, age, geography, economic status, experience level, dance forms, film styles, and more – among our audiences, artists, and boards, and among the films we screen.

These efforts are evident in our curatorial guidelines and team. In 2024, we had 8 curators from 4 countries with various interests and expertise, all of whom hold advanced degrees in dance and/or filmmaking, and all of whom make dance films ourselves. Moreover, they all embrace our mission. We respect and value the fact that other festivals have an aesthetic, a particular interest in certain research areas, or an affinity for a certain filmic type or genre of dance. We do not. In fact, our priority has always been to keep the rules loose, intentionally, to let a fantastic new film spark our curiosity and affect the way we program the season. So, what *are* we looking for? We're looking to be moved. We're looking to be intrigued, to be surprised. We're absolute dance cinema fanatics, so among our curatorial team, we have quite a diverse set of interests to pique. From our website's "curatorial criteria" listing:

- "The integration of dance and cinematography is the heart of our work... Cinematic elements must be an integral part of every entry."
    - We say this because we are not, for the most part, looking for simple documentations of good choreography, nor are we looking for a well-made film where the dancing does not contribute meaningfully to the identity of the film. We are constantly asking, "Why does it have to be a film? Why does it have to have the dancing it has to be *this* film it's trying to be?" If we don't find an answer to both of those questions, it does not meet this criterion.
- "When choosing works for exhibition and installation, we consider thoughtful forms and themes, investigative/innovative/experimental approaches, production values, audience appeal, choreographic creativity, virtuosic performance, and program fit. None of these criteria is a must; none is more important than the others; excellence in any one or two areas may be sufficient for acceptance."
    - We do not want to limit or exclude a film that might, for example, have an innovative approach to choreography and simple but effective cinematography, but which also happens to have very low production values. That probably describes a lot of the films we make ourselves. We also want to be inclusive of the films that have a very high production value, and maybe don't concern themselves with virtuosic dancing, but instead prize community dancers of various ages and levels of experience. It's not important to us that each film checks every box; each film must do what it *wants to do* very well. This allows

the films to teach us, and a film that can tell us what it is and teach us something about dance or filmmaking, or life is a film we want to show.

- We encourage submissions from all artists regardless of credentials and affiliations.
    - We know that many artists feel like their one-person crew might not be significant, or perhaps not 'enough' for a festival acceptance. In reality, we show one-person-productions every single year. There are so many opportunities in the art world that are limited to folks who have already 'made it,' or seen quantifiable success in particular ways. We are interested in everyone, including helping those yet to 'get there.'

International collaborations have been part of Sans Souci, increasing access to the art of screendance and our access to diverse communities and their work. We are privileged to have as part of our team people who keep international artistic exchanges at the heart of what they do. As a small budget festival, we do not often have the funds to fly in artists from overseas to be present at events, but we do what we can when we can, and after 2020, using mostly online resources, that we learned about during the pandemic, such as artist networking events or lecture presentations on Zoom.

Speaking of budget, Sans Souci is fortunate to have a team of engaged and dedicated volunteers, but our growth in the number of events and initiatives does not necessarily mirror our budget. We have only received a handful of general operating support grants over the years, and some of those no longer exist. We never charged for tickets in the first 10 years or so, fearing it would shrink our audience, but also to keep the financial side of the festival simple. In fact, when the current Executive Director, Michelle Bernier, began volunteering with the festival, it was still not technically even an incorporated organization. It was David Leserman DBA ("doing business as") Sans Souci Festival, meaning that it was not a registered organization with the state and that it did not have its own bank account. This was all legal and appropriate at the time, but as the festival grew, changes were in order. We briefly became a for-profit corporation, and then a non-profit corporation, to better match the mission, vision, guiding principles, and programmatic work we'd been doing all along. Even after all our growth, though, we are still well under the $100,000 per year budget benchmark, and we only have one part-time employee, a handful of contractors, and survive mostly on volunteers donating their time, like many nonprofits. When we do receive funding, it's almost always project-based, meaning that the funds must be spent entirely on one project, leaving us with little capacity to build savings over the years. For those projects, we pay artists and contributors market rates, but we can only produce those kinds of projects when funding is available.

We have worked diligently to multiply and widen our income streams, especially to increase earned income, which includes submission fees, workshop income, ticket sales, screening fees, residency fees, and even changing bank account types to earn more interest on our savings. We believe the arts are a critical asset to society, and we're grateful that our nonprofit status allows us to continue driving how the arts make their impact on our local community and the broader screendance community. We see a need for both earning our funding and ensuring that our critical presence means the community feels compelled to support the work we do. For us, that has always meant straddling the line between charging enough for submissions that we can pay our bills, but not so much that we make it unaffordable for artists. It has meant relying on community support through grants and donations, and sponsorships, but not so much that we are

overly dependent on them, or too beholden to their influence to stay focused on our mission. We earn our place in the local arts landscape, proudly and wholeheartedly. All this means that we are small and mighty, we stretch every dollar as far as we can, and we try to view that as something that keeps us nimble and able to pivot quickly when the need arises.

And it did in 2020, when the pandemic hit, and we noticed that a significant pillar of our festival is friendship. We honestly wouldn't be here if we weren't a bunch of friends who enjoy doing this together, and who want to support each other in making, collecting, and sharing the work of dance cinema. When Michelle Bernier took over Executive Directorship of the festival from David Leserman, at first, she made as few changes as possible, respecting the legacy David left. At one point, she began signing off on the newsletters, "With Love, Michelle & the SSF Team." In 2018, after he handed over the reins and shortly before he passed away, David brought this up to Michelle, and she was concerned he might say it was too unprofessional, too informal, or just not the right feeling for Sans Souci. Instead, he told Michelle that's how he knew he'd made the right decision. He told her running the festival had always been an act of love, and he knew that he had found a person to keep caring for it, keep taking meticulous care of other people's artwork, and to keep doing this as long as it was fun and something to love. The way we care for each other and for the work was about to become more vital than we ever imagined when the pandemic of 2020 rolled around.

How We Navigated the COVID Pandemic/Programming Study

United States

Prior to our 17th Annual Festival Season in 2020, we typically presented 8-12 screening events in and around Boulder, Colorado, with our screening partners at 2-5 universities and colleges around the United States, and one or two tours internationally, depending on what opportunities were available in a given year. All screenings were live, and all events were in-person -- we had never done an online event until March 2020.

Our call for entries opens in early spring and closes in late spring, allowing us to curate and plan events through the summer for a fall premiere, and then a few additional screenings of the new season's official selections. When we do screenings before the fall premiere, which has been increasing in number for the last few years, we screen films from our archive. For example, if we are offered a screening partnership with a university in the spring semester, we tend to show staff or audience favorites from the previous fall season. This way, many films get a second chance to be in front of an audience, and we can increase the number of screenings and partnerships, without overtaxing our fall season with too many events. This also helps us keep a living archive, rather than simply letting it collect dust. An additional bonus is that we can program films along a theme from various seasons; our first ever Black History Month screening took place in February 2020, featuring films from several prior seasons that celebrated and/or examined the Black experience, and it launched a yearly tradition we have continued and expanded upon with Women's History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month.

The Earliest Days of the Pandemic

As the pandemic began to shut down buildings and programs in early March 2020, it became clear that we should protect our staff and audiences, eliminating in-person events. At the time, we had just completed our first Black History Month Screening in person at Boulder Public

Library and were planning to follow that up with a Women's History Month Screening at the same venue. We were recognizing the underrepresentation of Black creators in the dance film community, and although women as dancers do not struggle with underrepresentation, in roles behind the camera, they do. We recognized that the festival was a platform, and the archive an arsenal, with which we could combat the invisibilizing nature of these disparities.

With enthusiasm, we pivoted the screening to a Facebook Watch Party. This meant writing to each artist for permission to take the work online instead, which inevitably led to a slight shift in the programming and moving forward, despite the drawback that audiences needed to have a Facebook account to watch. While we learned some lessons about the feasibility of that platform and its limits, such as glitches in playback, the attendance at 57 logged-in users was better than expected, and the following Q&A was also well-attended by attentive audience members and filmmakers. Shortly thereafter, we were slated to produce screening partner events with both the Texas State University Department of Theater & Dance, and Metropolitan State University of Denver's Department of Theater & Dance. With a little ingenuity and a lot of eager helpers, we combined these events online, included another Q&A with many artists participating, and converted the intended accompanying lecture called "Why Representation Matters: Diversity and Inclusion in Dance Film" into a prerecorded introduction video for the screening. One major early takeaway from these off-season screenings where we screened past-season films was that our filmmakers and their collaborators were as hungry for these events as our audience, and we were able to accommodate many more artists in these 'virtual face-to-face' activities than we ever would have been able to pre-Covid, due to the costs of travel, lodging, etc. The other major takeaway is that students' ability to connect with artists in Zoom meetings provided a new level of inspiration and connection to their own personal artistic practices.

Around this time, we also started to become concerned that our number of new submissions would be lower than usual. We imagined (based on our own experiences) that artists' financial worries about paying submission fees now would leave them hard-pressed later, not to mention the fact that many artists were immediately let go from their jobs - either as performers or sometimes from their "day-jobs" as well. An unfortunate reality of running a dance film festival is that our artists' submission fees are what keep us alive – we would love to, in a dream world, allow everyone to submit for free and pay screening fees to artists, but it's simply not a fiscal possibility. Even with the support of grants, donations, and ticket sales – all of which were affected by the pandemic – submission fees remain one of our main revenue sources. In the 3 years before the pandemic, submission fees made up anywhere from 25-45% of our total annual revenue. In 2020, we were able to receive some COVID-19 relief grants for arts organizations that lost ticket sales and submission fees. That year, our percentage was closer to 10%, because that's specifically what those grants were designed to supplement. Nowadays, about 15%-20% of our budget comes from submission fees. But the fact is that artists were having a hard time paying submission fees, and reasonably, we would be strapped for the rest of the season if we couldn't make up the difference.

Considering this, we initiated an additional call, adding a category of submission for films that were created in quarantine or while staying 'safer at home,' and charged only $5 USD for a submission of a film that should be shorter than 2 minutes. Similarly, we offered to accept films that were edited recently, but used older footage from a previous project, simply to encourage artists to utilize the time artistically, and to have hope for a newly created project to indeed see a screening in 2020. The response was overwhelming.. Not only did we find the new crop of films

incredibly diverse and interesting, but we also heard from several artists that the call had worked: many created their piece just for this call, and a few used footage from a prior project. One artist, Sebastian de Buyl, director of *Spectre* (2020, United States and Belgium), commented "I am very grateful for your initiative that gave me strength to go through with this and put a lot of time into recent footage that could have taken dust for years that now suddenly arose from your invitation to make films in such troubled times. It really helped me, and I wanted to thank you for this."

As we mentioned, the funds collected via submission fees are our annual budget's basis. That said, we are adamant that the submission fee should not create a financial barrier to an artist's entry, and we, as Sans Souci, want to do anything we can to help. As a result, beginning in 2021, we began to offer a limited number of submission fee waivers and discounts to those with financial hardship, particularly prioritizing artists from marginalized backgrounds. Rather than setting our own standards or regulations about what might qualify as financial hardship or marginalization, we ask artists to self-identify and share as much or as little as they would like about how this applies to them. We have had artists explain their hardship or marginalization in relation to race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, economic status, and political situation (including many artists from countries where international sanctions prevent them from sending any money to an American organization like us, literally prohibiting them from submitting without a waiver). We review these applications in a process with a diverse panel made up of volunteers from our advisory board, and we guarantee that even those who are not granted a waiver get at least a discount that equates to paying the early deadline fee (the lowest possible), since we are only able to send the results of the fee application process after the early deadline. In the past five years, we have awarded dozens of full waivers and many more significant discounts on entry fees, and we have heard from many artists that this is the only reason they are able to submit to our festival. Many of these films make it into screenings every year, and several artists request and receive submission support year after year.

Our historical approach as a festival left us asking, if we wouldn't be representative of the changes we wanted to see, who would? The fact that the pandemic disproportionately affected BIPOC artists and arts administrators made us commit to our heritage month screenings (Black History Month, etc.) as annual traditions, rather than one-off instances. We allowed these times to challenge us and to bolster our investment in equitable representation in everything we do.

The Community Dance Film Project

As we emerged into summer, it became clearer that nearly all our programming for the year would have to go virtual. In addition, we were finally wrapping up with pre-production and getting ready to move into the shooting phase of our first-ever grant-funded filmmaking endeavor as a festival, a community dance film project. This funding from the Boulder Arts Commission was granted in early 2020, but the planning process for the film began in 2019. Adjusting to the requirements of the pandemic, we adopted guidelines for safety:

- Instead of shooting groups and companies as planned, we took the project down to solos, and duets that could maintain a physical distance of 6 feet between performers.
- Any indoor shooting locations were replaced with outdoor locations.
- All crew would be required to always wear a mask.
- Dancers were invited to wear a mask if they desired, but were not required. The crew kept a 6-foot distance from the dancers. Masks were provided on-site.

- We reshaped pre-production in May and began shooting in June. The film's theme had already begun formulating itself around the idea of "the first fresh breath in a while," but in the wake of first the pandemic and then the murder of George Floyd and the protests that followed, the weight of those words took on new meaning. Each dancer was invited to create movement responses to "breathing" - the right to it and the urgency of it enlightened and informed the making process. In matching our values, we employed dancers from many backgrounds: people who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQ, dancers with disabilities, and dancers of various ages, and this diversity of perspectives brought depth and volume to the piece.
- Shooting each dancer (or distanced duet) in their own location seemed simple, but of course, the challenges appeared one after another. Permits and insurance were new and large hurdles for us, especially with City and County offices, which were also shifting their policies and procedures with each new round of pandemic restrictions. Shooting was always tenuous. Many dancers were very comfortable being unmasked for performance, although this was not required, but we were always hoping that this wouldn't be the day someone started showing symptoms, not aware yet that they had contracted the virus. Any time we did need to get close to a dancer between shots to show footage or discuss something, they put the mask back on and then took it off again to shoot. Keeping dancers' masks available, clean, and untouched was like a side show act in the process.
- Collaboration with composers, a poet, and a voice actor was done almost entirely, eliminating those moments where you can watch and hear it come together with another person and see and feel their reactions. It was a lonelier process than we had envisioned, full of lots of individuals having tiny reactions in tiny rooms, separated by miles and time zones. While it was convenient that the process could continue asynchronously, it was disheartening at times to continue to take up the mantle alone.
- In surveying the artists about their participation afterwards, we learned that many appreciated having the footage for their own reels, but that several did not get the networking and connection opportunities they had hoped for when signing on. This was heartbreaking, and not as easy as we thought to just chalk it up to a result of the times. We still wish we had been able to do it better.

"This Breath Together" in production, courtesy Sans Souci.

The finalized screendance, "This Breath Together," represents the work of so many artists (please, check the Appendix for credits), and the passion and spirit that brought our community through the pandemic. As the city of Boulder rallied to come together and find community through artistic experiences despite the isolation and loneliness that Covid-19 forced upon us, so, too, did Sans Souci. We debuted the film to an eager and appreciative audience at our eighteenth annual festival premiere. It has since screened at Wicklow ScreenDance Laboratory (Wicklow, Ireland) April 12, 2022; Red Rock ScreenDance Film Festival (St George, Utah, USA) June 1, 2022; Boulder County Filmmakers Showcase (Longmont, Colorado, USA) August 20, 2022; and Downtown Boulder Short Film Festival (Boulder, Colorado, USA) July 13, 2023.

Because the trepidation of planning an in-person event in September 2021 was still very real, we sought an outdoor venue for our premiere and found a dedicated partner in the Museum of Boulder. Their rooftop terrace, with a gorgeous view of the Flatirons (foothills of the Rocky Mountains), made for an astounding setting for viewing dance films, and the fresh air allowed more guests to feel comfortable attending a large event. In retrospect, this new collaboration was one lucky occurrence amidst many frightening and terrible ones during the pandemic, and we find ourselves enjoying this partnership ever since.

"This Breath Together" in production, courtesy Sans Souci.

Sans Souci Brazil in 2020

In 2020, we were scheduled to produce our second full-fledged edition of the Sans Souci Festival in Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, as a follow-up to our 2019 edition. Due to the pandemic, we needed to reimagine it. The Brazilian Sans Souci editions – 2019 and 2020 (and later in 2022) - were funded by PROAC, a grant program from the São Paulo State government. Dr. Júlia Ziviani Vitiello was the proponent of the grant both times, and with the essential support of her group, Dançaberta, the 2019 edition was a success. We did not want to let go of the 2020 opportunity, so Júlia, Dançaberta, and the US Sans Souci team devised ways to produce a fully online event, as accessible as our budget allowed.

The result was a two-week festival in August with four screenings, all consisting of films that had some relationship with Brazil, amongst which we had one screening for children and one dedicated to films related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to the support of PROAC, applications for the 2020 Sans Souci Brazilian edition were free, as were the online events. The films were made available online for two weeks, free to the public worldwide. Equally significant, we paired the screenings with virtual discussions and lectures, some of which were in Portuguese or English with live translations, and some of which were in Portuguese only. Most of these events were simulcast to YouTube, and the recordings are still available on this link:

- Screening K: "K is for Kids!" Facebook watch party screening for children, with the films interspersed with 'workshop' videos created by Rosely Conz, asking young viewers to actively dance while watching, using movement and concepts from the films for an embodied viewing.
- Mini-course: "The Jump from Stage to Screen: the Basics of Getting Good Dance Footage" with Ana Baer Carrillo and Michelle Bernier

- Keynote Address: “Representation in Screendance” with Cara Hagan
- Lecture “Screendance: Possible Readings" with Leonel Brum
- Roundtable “Approaches to Screendance from Creation to Submission” with Ana Baer, Heike Salzer and Rodrigo Rocha-Campos
- Q&A: “Artists of the Season - Screening A” with Beatrice Martins, Cícero Fraga, Diogo Angeli, Daniel Santos, Welket Bungué, and Felipe Teixeira
- Roundtable: “Body Writings in Screendance” with Andrea Maciel & Beatriz Cerbino
- Lecture: "The body at the service of subjectivity - Let's Talk About Black Dance(s)" with Rui Moreira
- Q&A: “Artists of the Season – Screening B” with Bárbara Cunha, Mary Gatis, Loretta Pelosi, Pedro Krull, and Tainá Pompêo
- Closing Roundtable: "Kinesthesia and Videodance" with Karina Almeida & Lilian Graça

Films for Sans Souci Brazil were produced both before and during the pandemic. In "Every Point in a Curve (Todos os Pontos da Curva),” directed by Francisco Miguez and choreographed by Bibi Dória, a handful of dancers make contact and explore each other’s negative space, while the carefully choreographed camera gets up close and personal with them, no masks in sight, reminding us of all of pre-pandemic freedoms. "Dancing the limitation (Dança em tempos de limitação)" by Ayumi Hanada, features a dozen dancers in their apartments dancing in 6-foot squares taped out on the floor.

Dr. Júlia Ziviani and group Dançaberta worked tirelessly to make this possible, facing regional challenges, such as the need for dedicated internet due to the conditions of this service in Brazil, or having to go through enormous amounts of bureaucracy to adjust the budget to accommodate live translations (English –Portuguese), a service that is expensive and not easily accessible in Brazil. All their work paid off, though. The event was well attended and provocative, a truly collaborative endeavor. It was exciting having folx connecting on Zoom from all over the world, contributing with meaningful questions and thoughts, sharing an array of experiences that would not be possible otherwise - because of the shift to online programing, we were able to gather guests and screendance enthusiasts from many countries, including but not limited to USA, Brazil, Canada, etc. Since we would probably need another page or two to mention all of them here, we encourage you to peruse the website with full credits using this link.

Back Home

Like many festivals, we fought hard to maintain a sense of normalcy in 2020, while adapting as best we could, still hosting our premiere screening in collaboration with the University of Colorado Boulder (albeit as an online screening), while adding the new category, the Covid-19/Quarantine Challenge Category, to address our community’s changing needs. These Quarantine Challenge films ranged from solos in the wilderness to tiny dances shot in the dancers’ own kitchens. Desi Jevon’s "Pasion de Manos" shows only a set of hands dancing and could have been filmed in a shoebox. “Morning Coffee*”* directed by Deny Ardianto, for example, reveals dancer/choreographer Dwi Windarti in her home in Indonesia going through her morning routine, as it had been affected by the pandemic. The description states, “Covid-19 depresses everyone. Space becomes limited, houses run out of food, boredom and tension cannot be escaped. But everyone seeks to stay sane, in their own way.” As a collection, this virtual screening turned out to be a true testament to living as an artist through these times.

To increase engagement in both the Premiere and Quarantine Challenge screenings and add value to the programming, we hosted a series of four Artist Chats, each on a subject related to dance filmmaking at that moment:

- Staying Creative in Trying Times (September 28, 2020) hosted by Keith Haynes, with directors Deny Tri Ardianto, Charli Brissey, Talia Shea Levin and Maritza Navarro
- Intersectionality and Identity in Screendance (September 30, 2020) hosted by Cara Hagan, with directors Antoine Panier, Harold George, Welket Bungué, and Daniel Santos
- Bodies in Spaces - where site specificity meets the screen (October 1, 2020) hosted by Heike Salzer, with directors Abby Warrilow, Lewis Gourlay, Fu Le, Thomas Delord, Sheil Garcia and Inés Valderas
- New Possibilities for Screendance (October 2, 2020) with Sans Souci curators Ana Baer Carrillo, Michelle Bernier, Rosely Conz, and Heike Salzer.

For each of the first three chats, we invited a handful of contributing artists for the new season whose work specifically correlated with these topics, as well as a moderator (chosen from among Sans Souci contributors from past seasons and collaborations with special expertise in their subject). For the fourth chat, we had a conversation among Sans Souci curators regarding the state of the dance cinema and what it can offer as a pedagogical tool in the dance classroom. While we needed to charge a ticket price to watch the premiere screening, we were able to make both the Covid screening and this round of Artist Chats free to the public, increasing accessibility to dance cinema, as is always our aim.

Our partners of many seasons, the Dairy Arts Center in Boulder, Colorado, turned their parking lot into a Drive-In for their summer film series, and we were delighted to be invited to jump on that bandwagon! As our only in-person event since the pandemic began, our first drive-in series sold out for two nights, August 30 and 31, 2020, and our second round back on October 4 and 5, 2020, was almost as full. We didn't have to search hard for a reason - folks were so hungry for in-person events, so thrilled to be out of their homes and enjoying art, and just plain ecstatic to be doing that safely in the presence of others. It felt amazing to be able to provide a space for gathering around the arts, when, for good reason, that would have been nearly impossible to do in any other way that year.

Drive-In at Dairy Arts Center, Boulder. Courtesy Sans Souci.

Another learning outcome from the pandemic was the importance of collaboration. Besides our partnership with Brazil, we doubled down with our long-time screening partner, Ursinus College, producing a private virtual screening in September and Q&A with director Amy O'Neal and performer Michael O'Neal Jr of "How it Feels." The pandemic did not slow down our momentum in gaining new partners, as we were able to team up with the Colorado Chautauqua Association to screen the documentary "Tour de Force" directed by Brad Stabio and featuring Colorado Ballet, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, and Wonderbound, the three most historically notable dance companies in our home state of Colorado. The virtual screening ran from November 6 through December 31, 2020, and we hosted the directors for a virtual Q&A on November 20, 2020. This event allowed us to truly focus on our priority of promoting and supporting local artists. We also teamed up with Martha's Vineyard Film Society (a group that typically screens only non-dance films) for another online screening from October 23 through November 6, 2020, and this time pre-recorded a Q&A as 'bonus materials' for ticket holders with the director Francesca N. Penzani and performers Kyreeana Alexander and Nedra Wheeler of "Double Up." We were thrilled to be carrying the flag of dance cinema into a venue that has screened many kinds of films for many years, but had never screened dance films before. These online screenings also provided the chance to hear about the films directly from their creators and imbued the viewing experience with a personal, intimate perspective, taking their understanding of the films'

cultural contributions to a different level. Truly, it reminded us of the crucial nature of our work -- not just screening the work, but building audiences to build community, and building community to support the artists in making the work.

"Tour de Force" director and subjects in a virtual Q&A, courtesy Sans Souci.

Having been accepted to present a panel titled *Empathy through the Screen: Implications for Creating, Curating, and Screening Dance Cinema* at the National Dance Educators Conference (NDEO) in October, three of our curators, Rosely Conz, Michelle Bernier, and Bailey Anderson, adapted their presentation for the online format without hesitation. As an arts organization with education as a part of our mission, it was important to us to take every opportunity this year to connect with educators about the value of dance film in the classroom, tools for utilizing it, and resources for understanding and accessing work in the genre. We continue to develop this research on how empathy is created through watching dance film, and the power and responsibility that comes with that ethically, socially, and developmentally.

Platforms, Access, and Interconnection

We hosted 2020 events on many online platforms to increase accessibility and to experiment with this new phase of festival production. Films in the Covid-19/Quarantine Challenge were screened both on our website (free) for a week, and released for 48 hours on Facebook, Vimeo, and Instagram's video feature, IGTV. Not only did this reach viewers who had never attended a dance film screening, but it also challenged the paradigm of trick-filled spectacles as the only way to experience dance videos on Instagram. Our 2020 Brazil events were simulcast to YouTube, and are still available for viewing; likewise, our Artist Chat series was recorded,

edited, and uploaded to Vimeo and our website, where they are also still available for viewing as of this publishing. Several screening partner events used Eventive as a platform, and all our Q&As and Artist Chats happened over Zoom. We found that the multiplicity of methods of transmission increased our reach, broadening our audience, reaching many folx who had never attended a dance film screening before. Particularly in sharing through social media, we created a sense of interconnection among audiences and artists and provided more economically equitable access to the programming.

We also found that our interconnectedness helped us manage during these times. We who run the festival together found it a great excuse to stay connected to friends. We wanted to be there for friends who were experiencing grief in their families and networks due to the virus, and support those who had lost work or even their sense of where their careers were going. In the years following, we wanted to witness each other's lives, celebrate the births of their children, congratulate them on new jobs, stand up with them when their unions went on strike, and be with them during their heartbreaks and losses. It is our friendship that has kept Sans Souci together, and Sans Souci that has kept our friendships together, and for that we are extremely grateful.

Togetherness and laughter in virtual space, courtesy Sans Souci.

An archive of all films screened during the pandemic is available under Past Events on our website, sanssoucifest.org.

2021 and beyond

The effects of the pandemic continue to influence our work with Sans Souci. Artists continue to struggle, and the end of Covid-19 emergency and relief grants is a source of anxiety and instability for many. We can now confidently say that Sans Souci experienced a boom in submissions in the pandemic years 2020 through 2022, and that our submissions for 2023 and 2024 seem to be leveling out, albeit at a still higher level than before the pandemic. We have pondered various explanations for this. Perhaps our efforts to keep the dance and film communities connected during the pandemic paid off, and more dance filmmakers have heard of us, or dance film festivals in general?

We did make significant efforts to continue to expand our definitions of dance and dance film in 2021, adding categories for music videos, documentaries, micro-shorts, and hybrid performance/documentations, as well as films by youth, students, and first-time filmmakers. In 2022, we added categories for jazz dance films (thanks to a collaboration with Rhythmically Speaking, Twin Cities Film Festival, and Boulder Jazz Dance Workshop) and VR/360 films. Do more categories attract more submitters? Or encourage past submitters to make more or different kinds of work? Finally, could it be that dance cinema just seems like a more accessible option to artists now, since their technical know-how and expressive range increased during the pandemic? Is dance cinema seeing an increase in size and scope, since so many dancers took their work online out of necessity?

As curators, we see more and more professional directors working with their students to create films – in fact, we added a category for that, "directors working with students," – as well as video essays in 2024. We see more collaborations where choreographers are the directors, and the cinematography is hired out. As we have since our inception, we continue to welcome films that experiment with the medium itself, imagining new possibilities that cross between existing and forming genres.

In 2022, we collaborated with the "Gastro Think Tank" Festival in Bogotá, Colombia, for a month-long installation of archive films, plus two in-person screenings and a workshop. In 2023, we celebrated our 20th anniversary with a new iteration of the Community Dance Film Project (more on that below), a sold-out premiere, and more virtual and in-person screenings than ever. We collaborated on two more long-term installations: a 20th anniversary retrospective throughout the summer at the Museum of Boulder, and a 3-week live performance and film project with Fimudanza in Morelia, Mexico, in August. We have refreshed our relationships with old screening partners and built new ones. Our creative aging program, Dance is Like a Fine Wine, has soared to new heights in the last 5 years, with partnerships in 8 local and 2 out-of-state older adult residential and recreational facilities.

In an effort to keep cross-pollinating and encouraging new possibilities, and because of how well-loved the Artist Chat series was, we teamed up with San Francisco Dance Film Festival and the International Screendance Calendar to produce a series of Screendance Coffee Chats. Beginning in the summer of 2023 and still ongoing, these open community Zoom calls encourage artists, producers, curators, and festival administrators in the international community to come together in the most informal way possible. We have experimented with different times of the day and week to accommodate artists in different time zones, but we have also learned that several artists make the commitment to show up even if it's the middle of the night where they are. The chats are only structured by introductions at the beginning, and an open request for topics or questions from anyone in attendance. Discussions have touched upon everything from funding a film to embodied practices for shooting to curatorial practices and preferences from various festivals. We have found these discussions enlightening as programmers and artists and hope to continue them indefinitely.

We also had the third edition of Sans Souci Brazil in November 2022, again, thanks to the work of Dr. Julia Ziviani and Dançaberta, who secured the PROAC grant. Using what we learned during the pandemic, we had in-person, hybrid, and online events, streamed on YouTube. Moreover, we had Brazilian Sign Language translation and audio description for panels and lectures, as well as translators for the international guests who only spoke English and Spanish.

All the marketing material posted on social media followed accessibility guidelines (image description, universal design), aligning with the requirements of the PROAC grant, as well as our efforts to continue promoting diversity and inclusion.

In the continuing evolution of the Community Dance Film Project, we've focused our efforts on expanding opportunities for directors. A 2023-4 iteration of this project was multifold: we offered two experienced choreographers, Megan Roney and Keith Haynes, a chance to direct their first-ever dance films, and created youth workshops that put young dancers in the driver's seat of their first films. Plans are in the works for a 2025-6 adaptation, where we ourselves will visit a new medium. We hope to create our first dance film in Virtual Reality, pending grant funding and a successful collaboration with a local VR production company. We hope to have a long-running installation of the work at a Boulder venue that is open to the public, to allow those who cannot make it to a festival event the chance to experience dance cinema on a VR headset, individualizing an embodied cinematic experience in the virtual company of local dance artists.

These exciting adventures have led us to a new future, where we think of the role of a dance film festival as much broader than before. Not only can we produce screenings, discussions, and workshops, but also ongoing educational programming, public art installations, and film projects of our own. This kind of expansion is not for every festival. There always will be and should be a place for festivals to just screen the work and celebrate the artists. For Sans Souci, however, we see opportunities to help cultivate the future of the field as more equitable, accessible, innovative, and collaborative, and we just can't help ourselves. We've got to dig in.

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Appendix

"This Breath Together"
Director & Editor: Michelle Bernier
Producer: Tom Wingerd
Director of Photography: Jesse Rarick
Choreographers/Dancers: Cindy Brandle, Luciana Da Silva, Danielle K. Garrison, Briana Georjae, Sarah Harrison, Keith Haynes, Bridget Heddens, Vivian Kim, Gina Medina, Emma Michaux, Alex Milewski, Peg Volpe Posnick, Jessica Riggs, Gwen Ritchie, Marla A. Schulz, Alfred Smith, Nancy E. Smith, and Miah Yager
Composers/Musicians: Sean Connolly, Kristen Demaree, and Dudu Fuentes
Poet: Brooke McNamara
Voice Actor: Alfred Smith
Production Assistants: Sean Connolly, Katy Gallagher, Holly Schlotterback, and Tom Wingerd

Photo Captions and Credits

BernierConz-1 - The team running Sans Souci Brazil - clockwise from upper left, including Bruno Harlyson, Ana Baer Carrillo, Michelle Bernier, Rosely Conz, and Julia Ziviani Vitello - worked hard and laughed harder over many long video calls.

Credit: n/a

BernierConz-2 - Cinematographer Jesse Rarick of Sparta Media and Director Michelle Bernier stayed socially distanced from dancer Peg Volpe Posnick while shooting our Community Dance Film Project in 2020.
Credit: Thomas Wingerd

BernierConz-3 - Outside the Boulder Public Library's playground, Boulder Ballet dancer Emma Michaux performed her own choreography *en pointe*, framed by Cinematographer Jesse Rarick of Sparta Media and Director Michelle Bernier.
Credit: Thomas Wingerd

BernierConz-4 - Director Zoee Marsh's film "4040 HOME" (2020, Australia) screened at Dairy Arts Center's makeshift drive-in cinema, taking over their parking lot and screening films on the side of the building in August of 2020.
Credit: n/a

BernierConz-5 - Our Zoom Q&A for the virtual screening of "Tour de Force" created space for a discussion between film director Brad Stabio, Colorado Ballet Artistic Director Gil Bogs, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble Artistic Director Cleo Parker Robinson, and Wonderbound Artistic Director Garrett Ammon, for the first time since the live performance collaboration that is documented by the film.
Credit: n/a

grounded: A Lens on COVID through Screendance

By Claudia Kappenberg and Fiontán Moran

Abstract

In this article, Claudia Kappenberg (University of Brighton, UK) and Fiontán Moran (Tate Modern, UK) reflect on the curation of a one-off online Screendance festival which they co-devised in summer 2020. Kappenberg had secured financial support from a Covid Recovery Fund set up by the University of Brighton with the aim of initiating regional recovery projects from any academic discipline or field of research. Due to a nationwide lockdown all art institutions along the East Sussex Coast had been closed, which caused an eery absence in the region of creative critical discourses. Kappenberg invited Fiontán Moran, a visual arts curator with an interest in the body on screen but new to the canon of Screendance, to collaborate with her on the festival. The festival consisted of five programmes, each available online for 24hrs and it concluded with an online conversation. This article takes the form of a dialogue between the two curators. They reflect on the festival's title *'grounded'* and the use of Screendance as a lens with which to explore films from diverse groups of artists and epochs, and propose thinking about movement as a political act.

Introduction

Like much of the United Kingdom, arts communities in the Southeast of the UK were largely paralysed during the lockdown in spring 2020 through the temporary closure of venues in Brighton, Eastbourne, Bexhill, Hastings as well as numerous smaller arts, music and theatre venues along the coast. Many gallery staff were on furlough and online content tended to be provided by larger institutions elsewhere, apart from grassroots activities such as Hasting's Isolation Station broadcast on Facebook. Regional cultural platforms and their conversations were largely absent at a time of intense turmoil, which created a particularly eerie state of things reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's suggestion that art could be an early warning system.[1] McLuhan borrowed the term from an actual distant early warning line or DEW line, a series of American radar stations that were built across the Arctic region and Alaska in 1957 during the Cold War, and which remained active until 1993. The closure of arts institutions all along the East Sussex Coast and the absence of their habitual signalling felt like an inverse phenomenon and uneasy foreboding. *grounded*[2] was devised in response to the regional silence as an online film festival that used Screendance as a lens with which to explore relevant films from diverse groups of artists and epochs. The curators, Claudia Kappenberg and Fiontán Moran reflected on the project initially for a special issue of MIRAJ, the London-based Moving

[1] McLuhan, Marshall (2013) *Understanding media: the extensions of man*, New York: Gingko Press, p12.

[2] Kappenberg, Claudia and Moran, Fiontán (2020) 'grounded, A Season of Screendance', 28 July – 9 August, http://coastalcurrents.org.uk/grounded/. Accessed 28 July 2020.

Image Review & Art Journal[3], which was compiled in response to the extraordinary circumstances of the Pandemic. The article is reprinted here with minor amendments.

Claudia Kappenberg: In May 2020, the University of Brighton set up a COVID-19 Research Urgency Fund, inviting proposals for projects designed to support the efforts of local and regional communities and local capacities, be they economic, environmental or else. I saw this as an opportunity to curate an online season of moving image works that would respond to the issues raised by the pandemic, bringing together films of predominantly regional artists and using the funds to pay the artists for the screening. As a crisis that affected our embodied selves, our mobility and relations in unprecedented ways, this was also an opportunity to test and expand the parameters of the field of Screendance. As an art form that bridges the gap between our embodied lives and digital technologies, Screendance appeared to be ideally placed to engage with individual and collective experience during lockdown.

Historically, Screendance has been disseminated above all through dedicated festivals and screened to dedicated audiences, more often than not to audiences interested in dance, expecting to see work about dance. While this audience is in itself a varied and global constituency, there is potentially a wider relevance for the practice given the current interest in the relation between physical and digital space, physical and digital bodies and physical and virtual experience. In order to explore this wider remit I was interested in co-curating the season with someone from a different field of curatorial practice, and I invited Fiontán Moran, curator at Tate Modern in London and on furlough at the time, to work with me. *Coastal Currents*, a cultural organization in Hastings which normally focuses its activities on an annual arts festival in the autumn, agreed to host the project on its website.

Reflecting on both the condition of confinement and the unavoidable immersion of oneself in one's locality, the season was entitled *grounded* and proposed a way of thinking about movement as a political act, using an expanded notion of Screendance both as a practice and as a lens with which to revisit other moving image work. The season considered the variety of ways artists use movement in video and film to explore the relationship of the body to society, of confinement to imagination, and health to politics.

Fiontán Moran: As many have remarked, the pandemic and resulting lockdown provided much-needed space and time to reflect on the role of art in times of crisis and drew attention to the limits and possibilities of showing work online. Claudia's invitation provided me with an opportunity to explore my longstanding interest in the relationship of dance to film and video, and to foreground the work of London-based artists whose work I have found useful in thinking through these concerns. I was interested in how the

[3] Reynolds, Lucy and Mazière, Michael, *Moving Image Review & Art Journal*, Intellect LTD, Volume (9): Issue (2). < https://www.intellectbooks.com/miraj-the-moving-image-review-art-journal> https://doi.org/10.1386/miraj_00031_2

genre of Screendance might function at a time of stasis, and how essential movement is to both the body and to building a sense of community.

As most of my professional experience has involved the creation of temporary exhibitions within gallery environments, *grounded* was an opportunity to think more concretely about curated screenings of time-based media work and the possibilities and limitations of the online environment.

An important part of this investigation involved me thinking through Claudia's decision to title the programme *grounded* and what possibilities might emerge from that word, which led me to Grounded Theory. As a form of qualitative analysis most commonly used in the social sciences, Grounded Theory prioritizes a mode of research that does not begin with a set aim or thesis but is grounded in observation and analysis and allows thematics to organically emerge, which seemed to reflect the process Claudia and I followed. Working in collaboration, we selected artists by compiling and sharing lists of works and then finding affinities between works to form the screenings. However, it was also important that there be crossovers between screenings so as to resist any defined curatorial statement, which stood in contrast to what many curated projects aim to do. Rather than attempt to make sense of the current moment by constructing grand narratives with defined conclusions we sought to create a space where different affinities could be found between the artists' works.

CK: From this position Fiontán and I set out to devise five screening programmes, which would be streamed on the *Coastal Currents* website over two weeks. Each screening would be accessible online for 24 hours so as to retain the feeling of an event, whilst allowing for some flexibility and access across time zones. The main parameters for the selection of artists and projects were the pandemic, the sense that this crisis highlighted the vulnerabilities of individuals and communities, that it put into question much of our assumed ways of being, and also that the suspension of normality might just provide a chance for profound change. Related concerns became more significant in light of the mass protests in the wake of the death of George Floyd and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement. Subsequently, a number of works that explored the representation of Black bodies in history and the media took on renewed relevance.

FM: *grounded* provided an opportunity to return to works that we have seen over the past few years, and in some cases further back, that seemed to reflect many of the experiences created by the lockdown. Developing the screenings at a time of ecological, biological, political and social crises, we hoped that the season could ask how a new social fabric can be developed at this time, how we traverse boundaries and dissolve conventions, how we nurture newness and mourn what we have lost, how we remember and how we forget, how we explore what it means to be human.

One of our concerns was the way in which boundaries or physical space is constructed, how bodies move within and traverse them, and the intimacies that are played out in public. These ideas formed the basis of our launch screening 'interior worlds/exterior lives'. In Harriet Middleton Baker's video *The War Room: An Opera!* (2018) corporate

aesthetics served as a way to think around the performance of power at a time when institutions and governments were being called to account.

In contrast, other works presented an expanded experience of subjectivity that used formal concerns of the split screen, abstraction and animation to disrupt traditional modes of seeing. Ursula Mayer permitted us to show her 16-mm film double projection *CINESEXUAL* (2014) as a split-screen video presentation for the first time that created a new relationship between the content of the work and the space of the digital screen. In Adham Faramawy's *Skin Flick* (2019) they play on the performances for camera that are associated with vlog confessionals, makeup tutorials, and advertising imagery, to present a personal and fantastical exploration of how our skins relate to ecology, pharmaceuticals and the screen. Jordan Baseman's *gendersick* (2019) uses abstract visuals to illustrate a monologue that explores what it means to be in-bodied, and the expectations that come with essentialized notions of gender identity.

This programme closed with Paul Maheke's beautiful silent video *Tropicalité, l'île et l'exote* (2014) where he adopts imagery of the artificial island of Vassivière, alongside brief moments of his dancing, to form an analogy between the body and land as sites of colonization but also resistance.

CK: The season's concern with the interplay between subjectivity and the wider social fabric was signalled also by the very first film of the programme, Ben Rivers' *The Coming Race* (2006), an ominous scrambling of people up a mountain side, shot in black and white 16mm film. The film is almost abstract in its visual and sonic elements, but visceral at the same time, with the pedestrian activity of scrambling functioning as a metaphor that echoes the current sense of crisis and uncertainty. The second programme 'socialised' further explored the notion of the individual in context and focused specifically on the conscious and unconscious movements that affect how we shape and form our place within society.

FM: It was important that our second screening, titled 'socialised', include references to modes of address that are associated with institutions. This was perfectly conveyed through Rosa-Johan Uddoh's *Performing Whitness* (2019), where she takes on the role of a newsreader, accompanied by back-up singers, to impart poetic reflections on the state of UK politics and the culture sector with comedic effect. Performed in various parts of Tate Modern and produced by the collective East London Cable, the three videos uncannily reflected upon how information is communicated through carefully stage-managed institutions and organizations to convey an air of authority.

Forms of reportage or transmission served as the basis for a number of works, all of which foregrounded certain conventions of behaviour and movement that form meaning when enacted collectively. In Gray Wielebinski's *Honey Doesn't Go Bad On Its Own* (2018) they compiled countless clips depicting intimate and emotional moments between baseball players on-and-off the field that are contrasted with countless scenes of the tradition of throwing buckets of ice-cold water over team members. While Onyeka Igwe's *Sitting On A Man* (2018) and Evan Ifekoya's *She Was A Full Bodied Speaker*

(2016) each reanimated different types of archives in order to reflect upon and form new histories.

CK: At a Frieze roundtable discussion entitled *Dance during the Pandemic*, intimacy came up as a topic and Aruna D'Souza noted that culturally we barely differentiate between touch and intimacy.[4] One might argue that this is changing rapidly with the recent requirements for physical social distancing on the one hand and increasing virtual interactions on the other. In the absence of physical touch, we rely more on the screen's capacity to provide multisensorial, embodied viewing experiences, a kind of haptic visuality[5] that can engage with intimacy in many ways, and various strands in *grounded* explored this territory.

A number of works in the programme 'taking/care' placed the viewer into an intimate proximity to pain and loss. The programme started with Yvonne Rainer's *Hand Movie* (1966), one of the films in the season that signals a longer history of relevant cinematic approaches. *Hand Movie* was shot on 16mm by dancer William Davis while Rainer was in the hospital recovering from a big operation, showing the small, mundane movements of one of Rainer's hands against a grey background in a meditative, quietly defiant and intimate dance.

In Florence Peake's *The Keeners* (2015), viewers witness in close-up a group of mourning women in a public park who enact the Irish and Celtic tradition of keening – ritualized crying performed by professional mourners. The sound in this video is deliberately withheld, but the implied sound appears to resonate even more forcefully. *The Keeners* is followed by a persistent close-up on Phoebe Collings-James' shaking head and open mouth in *Mother Tongue, Mother Master* (2018), which is accompanied by an incessant ringing of bells that are strapped to her head. A slow and solitary dancing in Fenia Kotsopoulou's *This Dance Has No End* (2018)[6] shows a hybrid male and female figure immersed in dark space and silence, accompanied only by sparse sounds that seem to emanate from the filming camera and which add to the sense of proximity, of something analogue and real.

FM: Developing out of works of mourning such as Florence Peake's *The Keeners* (2015), water became an important motif as a metaphor for renewal and transformation. In Zoë Marden's *little lo ting* (2017) she contrasts underwater footage with brief glimpses of the cityscape of Hong Kong and her own body to narrate the story of the ancient myth of the Lo Ting, a mer-creature of the indigenous inhabitants of Hong Kong, and who stands as a symbol of dissolving boundaries.

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[4] Aruna D'Souza (2020), 'Dance during the pandemic: A roundtable conversation', *Frieze*, 213, 4 September, https://www.frieze.com/article/dance-during-pandemic-roundtable-conversation. Accessed 16 December 2020.
[5] Laura U. Marks (2000), *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham: Duke University Press.
[6] Fenia Kotsopoulou (dir., chor.) (2018), '*This Dance Has No End*', Accessed 19 December 2020 < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOY6uyRZ0fw>

While in *water bb* (2019) by HRH and Gray Wielebinski, a static camera with minimal editing showed a group of participants in outfits also designed by HRH performing a series of mysterious movements in a swimming pool. Showcasing the relationship between teacher and student, questions of trust and care, *water bb* sought to find a way to think about the therapeutic possibilities of movement in times of crisis.

Intimacy was also an important element of the other screenings. In Holly Blakey's *Some Greater Class* (2015), which was shown as part of the 'interior worlds/exterior lives' programme, she depicts dancers performing the kinds of routines common in popular music videos or in nightclubs but pushes them to a place that foregrounds the vulnerability and exhaustion of the body. As a choreographer and filmmaker who has made a number of music videos, Blakey's work reframed how we view conventions of dance at a time when it was gaining increased visibility in the art world.

More sensual forms of intimacy were foregrounded in *Fantasy Series EP01* (2018–19) by Florence Peake and Eve Stainton, which was shown as part of 'socialised'. Originally live-streamed by the East London Cable collective in a domestic interior, the video used green screen technology to transform the floor with a close-up of slug-like creatures. As they rolled around and placed their bodies in erotic poses, often in extreme close-up, Stainton and Peake formed an analogy between the space of the screen and the intimate space created between bodies, which was emphasized by the series of sexual fantasies that they whispered to each other in an ASMR style. At a time when the screen has become a locus of intimacy, *Fantasy Series* was a reminder of the need for sensory experience to form meaningful connections.

CK: The fourth programme began with *Play (*1970) by Sally Potter, also a film that is part of choreographic traditions in cinema. *Play* is a double screen film of six children – three sets of twins – playing on the street, filmed from above and through two adjacent cameras. The key device here is the doubling of elements, children and screens, with each screen offering slightly different versions of the same scene in a way that troubles and confuses the audience's vision, thereby challenging the notion that vision gives us access to truth. The two frames almost correspond, but not quite. Filmmaker Maya Deren wrote, in *Divine Horsemen*, that in Haitian Vodou the understanding of the relation between segments is different to ours, that it avoids competitive, dualist constructions. In Vodou, Deren noted, one and one add up to three, taking into account the 'and' as a further constitutive and meaningful element.[7] This concept tallied with the films in the fourth programme and inspired the title '1+ 1 = 3 / narratives', which considered more closely the ways in which our bodies try to make sense of stories and experience.

Two films in this programme were made during lockdown: Andrew Köttings's *Because the Rest is Silence* (2020) and David Blandy's *How To Fly* (2020). Based in Hastings, Kötting turned to his own archive and films of local and coastal landscapes to devise a deeply subjective, and in Köttings' lexicon, hauntological account inflected by his lockdown experience. Based in Brighton, Blandy's *How to Fly,* by contrast, used the

[7] Maya Deren (1983), *Divine Horsemen*: *The Living Gods of Haiti*, New York: McPherson & Company.

format of a YouTube tutorial and appropriated the tools of a games engine to fly a cormorant across digital landscapes in a meditation on life as essentially mobility, adaptability and presence. These latter approaches are also indicative of a sense of resilience that emerged from the films of this programme, including Oona Doherty *Concrete Song* (2017) and Becky Edmund's *Stand In* (2009). In the latter, a single man merely stands in the frame as a still figure but asserts the inevitability of the relation between us and the world. *Concrete Song* meanwhile played out in urban Belfast and portrayed a combination of energy, passion and determination that shouted out to artists everywhere in lockdown.

FM: Harold Offeh's *Smile* (2001) offered an important way to think about Screendance and storytelling through a video work that included no editing and only featured the artist's face in extreme close-up. The narrative was conveyed solely through Nat King Cole's rendition of the song *Smile*, during which Offeh attempts to keep his face muscles in the said position. While the original video lasts for over thirty minutes, in the 3min edit that we presented you can already see the difficulty Offeh has in holding the pose. It transforms a song that proposes smiling as a way to deal with upset as a deeply labour intensive experience that does not suggest any outcome of happiness but instead places the figure in an ambivalent position. As a former University of Brighton student, Offeh's work also formed a connection to the origins of the programme.

CK: Evan Ifekoya's film *Contoured Thoughts* (2019) seemed to encapsulate what many artists in this programme share, a need for language in a quest for meaning and possibility. A figure is submerged in water and surrounded by hills, drawing attention to both the materiality of body and site, as well as to the image, facilitating a process of quiet contemplation.

The season concluded with a fifth, meditative programme and the premiere of Graeme Miller's *Wild Car* (2020), which was shot on a camera-phone, that entity that has dictated so much of life over the past few months. Mounted on an improvised rail vehicle and steadily moving forward, the film follows the narrow-gauge tracks of Europe. Created in response to Brexit and edited in lockdown in rural East Sussex, the film travelled across distances and landscapes in a way that underscored the current confinement and mourned the Brexit yet to come.

Overall, the season mirrored difficult circumstances. The open curatorial premise allowed us however to respond to the moment, and to discover connections without concern for categorizations of artistic practices or differences in aesthetic modes. It allowed us to repurpose older films and to bring them into dialogue with contemporary projects and current concerns, building programmes which themselves repurpose movements and images of the everyday to investigate both communality and specificity of experience during the pandemic. What emerges is perhaps a heightened attention to the values we embody as people and as a society, such as care and attention, difference and solidarity.

FM: Reflecting on the programme as a whole, *grounded* seems to have proposed alternate ways through which to view Screendance, and to think through the importance of community. With a number of the works being co-authored, or produced by the same

collective, or featuring the contributions of their friends and colleagues, I was reminded of the way artists have self-organized over the last few months to create new platforms for sharing work and have formed closer bonds with their peers. The variety of artists and types of work in the programme also drew attention to the necessity of thinking about the ground we each inhabit and the way that movement, either choreographically or cinematically, can help to form new modes of connection and communication.

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Lone Mountain College's San Francisco Dance Film Festival 1976-1978

By Clare Schweitzer

Abstract:

This paper tracks the history and development of the history of dance and film practice and collaboration in the San Francisco Bay Area from the early 1900s to the mid-1980s. It focuses on dance and film collaboration that emerged during the Art in Cinema Series presented by SFMOMa in the mid-1940s and how these collaborations informed the work created in the San Francisco Bay Area in the decades that followed.

It highlights Lone Mountain College's San Francisco Dance Film Festival, a series of multi-day curated dance film screenings and events that took place between 1976-1978 in San Francisco. It situates the festival within the context of the histories of the San Francisco dance community, the West Coast Experimental Film movement and interdisciplinary collaborations between the two. It examines the festival's distinct curatorial approaches to both film screenings and accompanying events, as well as its significance in the world of dance film practice at the time. It also examines how the festival's legacy was lost to history and surveys additional measures of preserving and spotlighting curatorial work in order to present a further expanded history of screendance practice and exhibition.

Experimental Art in the San Francisco Bay Area Post-WWII

San Francisco Bay Area[1] film history begins the moment when Eadward Muybridge was commissioned to take pictures of a horse belonging to former California governor Leland Stanford, resulting in the debut of his Zoopraxiscope simulating a horse in a constant gallop in May 1880. Film production continued in the San Francisco Bay Area in the silent era, most notably in Niles Canyon which served as a production site for many silent films including Charlie Chaplin's *The Tramp* in 1914. Fast forward to 1927 when Philo T Farnsworth's image dissection camera tube transmitted its first image to a receiver in another room in his Green street laboratory in San Francisco, the catalyst of what would become commercially available television (Anker 2013 12-13). While film tends to be more synonymous with Los Angeles due to the scale of industrial production and distribution of the form, the San Francisco Bay Area has historically been a testing ground for its genesis and a lab for its expressive and transmissional possibilities.

With the San Francisco Bay Area already established as a testing ground for the development of moving image technologies, the period following World War II would see the creative exploration of these technologies' potential. In 1946, independent filmmaker Frank Stauffacher launched the Art in Cinema series and over the course of eight years presented regular screenings of experimental and avant-garde cinema in the Bay Area (Anker 2010, 30). On Friday nights, film enthusiasts, filmmakers, and artists gathered at the San Francisco Museum of Art

(SFMOMA) to experience programs of films. The series' program notes convey a sense of the evolution of Art in Cinema; the programs progressively expanded from charting and sharing a history of alternative film into providing a space where American film artists could present their own work. These screenings were often accompanied by creators of the work and short notes and handouts for each film, offering an audience access to those creating the work. It was through this program that Maya Deren's work was screened, beginning with a presentation of *A Ritual in Transfigured Time* on November 1st, 1946 (ten days after the world premiere of the film in New York). Screenings of her films in San Francisco were accompanied by handouts of her writing. The choreographic approaches and philosophies that appeared in her writing and film work were significant influences on local filmmakers (Broughton "Screening Room").

The Art in Cinema series laid the groundwork for interdisciplinary collaboration in an area where such experimentation was beginning to formulate across other art forms. After the conclusion of the Second World War, Anna Halprin and her husband Lawrence settled in the Bay Area following her time at the University of Wisconsin, where she began to depart from codified modern dance techniques in favor of task-based improvisational movement that reproduced the art of everyday life (Auther 2011, 24). Over the course of their relationship, Anna and Lawrence gained insight into each other's forms as they engaged with their own practice, a cross-disciplinary dialogue that would open to other forms including writing, music and film.

As Anna continued her research into movement improvisation, she began to explore environments away from stage and studio spaces. She famously conducted workshops and rehearsals on a wood deck constructed by Lawrence in the redwoods of Marin County with the expanse of the natural environment offering possibilities for movement not bound by proscenium constraints. She sought out additional environments for movement research and became interested in the construction site of an airport hangar at San Francisco International Airport. William R. Heick, a neighbor of the Halprin's, filmed three hours of dancers improvising through the site using a wide range of angles that departed from straightforward documentation of the event. The film was edited into a seven-minute short film entitled *Hangar*, which itself contrasts open environments where dancers have free reign to a carefully composed image of dancers moving on suspended I-beams and navigating the precarity of the body and an unstable environment (Ross 2009. 130-131).

Another filmmaker Halprin closely collaborated with was poet & filmmaker James Broughton, who also presented work in the Art in Cinema series. Broughton's film *Four in the Afternoon*, is a film in four parts based on poems found in Broughton's book *Musical Chairs*. The film represents scenarios scored by the poems aiming to blend music, dance and spoken verse into a whole. In the film, Anna is depicted as a medieval princess, who's corseted costuming is at odds with loose gestural movement. Her performance references hallmarks of ballet technique, which are soon deconstructed into energetically punctuated jumps, conveying a feeling of excitement, barely contained. Also featured in the film is Welland Lathrop playing an elderly man alternating

between repetitive, exaggerated rocking movements in a chair followed by a sequence of small jumps, conveying a sense of futility while featuring the dissolving image of a sylph-like ballerina (Broughton 1951).

Lathrop was a former dancer for Martha Graham whose collaborations with artists in other forms showed a willingness to break form and try experimental approaches. In the film *Triptych*, adapted from one of Lathrop's stage pieces of the same name, Lathrop performs three solos playing a different character in each. Rather than recording a reproduction of the stage work on film, Lathrop aimed "to create a dance film using photographed dance movement in such a way that the emotional quality of the original dance would be conveyed to screen" (Lathrop 1960 50). This can be seen most clearly in the first section of the film, which depicts him performing a series of poses with jump cuts eliminating any transitional material between them. Additionally, the filmic approach adds to the characterization of each section, with the first two sections shot form a low angle emphasizing the power of the character and the last section removing the power with the use of a high angled lens. The film also departs from traditional locations where dance is performed. While the first section prominently features a wooden floor, the performer is surrounded by a dark, undefined space. As the film progresses, close ups are utilized more often with the floor out of frame, preserving the trajectory of Lathrop's movement, but creating the illusion that he is transitioning to a space void of gravity and a solid floor.

While these collaborative works are notable explorations of the melding of dance and film languages, the creative team of Marian Van Tuyl and Sidney Peterson would expand on its capacity both in practice and writing. Van Tuyl was a dancer and choreographer who was a founding professor of the Mills College dance department in 1939. The formation of the department began when the likes of Martha Graham, Hanya Holm and Doris Humphrey would instruct students in modern technique classes during summer sessions held at the school's Oakland Hill's campus (Fries, "Dancing with Destiny). In addition to these courses, students also received education in music, choreography and stage design, establishing elements of interdisciplinary collaboration. Dance luminaries such as Merce Cunningham and Alwin Nikolais attended these sessions and John Cage served as an accompanist for Van Tuyl's courses. Van Tuyl eventually combined dance into a fine arts course, inviting lecturers in other fields to her class. This focus on collaboration impressed the president of Mills and the dance course was moved out of the Physical Education department and became an independent program in 1941, one of the first of its kind in the United States (Fries, "Dancing with Destiny).

With an openness to interdisciplinary creation, Van Tuyl collaborated with filmmaker Peterson, the founder of one of the United States' first experimental filmmaking courses at the California School of Fine Arts, which was later renamed the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) (Anker 2010, p.40). The collaboration yielded two films that were shot at Mills College and featured dancers from the department. The film *Clinic of Stumble*, features three female dancers in an abstracted interior of a beauty salon performing actions that alternate among sitting under hair

dryers, riding scooters, and moving with dynamics and qualities distinct to each character. Per Van Tuyl, the costumes informed the film's characters as "the woman in red, the voluptuous quality; the one in the greenish taffeta exhibits a primness and rigidity; and the third one in the little blue-and-white striped flouncy dress has a pert energy expressed in multiple jumps" (Van Tuyl, "Clinic of Stumble").

The film was created using double exposure techniques, where Peterson captured the dancers in a wide frame in one reel, wound it back, and captured them again in close up. This allowed the creative team to juxtapose images of the dancers' solo moments on top of each other, creating combinations of color and dynamic that re-contextualize each performer's movement. The film also utilized captures of the movement in different frame rates, allowing for the dancers' performance to be slowed down on film. The qualitative and temporal manipulation of the images of Van Tuyl's choreographed movement generates a visual choreography, creating a logic of space, time and dynamic that is wholly unique to the film space.

The film *Horror Dream*, also by Van Tuyl and Peterson, took a different approach. The work depicts a woman portrayed by Van Tuyl navigating through a surrealistic environment. Rather than follow the protagonist's point of view through the film, the camera's gaze drifts toward scenes of white dressed-figures with faces obscured by decorative sun hats, performing ritualistic movements in an abstract home environment. The linear progression of the main character's journey is interrupted by close ups of the dancer's repetitive moment in addition to moments where the protagonist's movement is slowed to half speed. The decentering of the protagonist's perspective in addition to the breaks in linear space & time changes the viewer's sense of control, evoking a feeling of sleep paralysis. This feeling is further amplified by an atonal staccato score from John Cage, punctuated by electronic instrumentation reminiscent of a siren[2]. While the dance movement in the film was recognizably created for a proscenium environment based on the orientation of the dancers in space, the camera's temporal reorientation of it makes it choreographically specific to the filmic medium and experience.

Both *Horror Dream* and *Clinic of Stumble* would screen in the Art in Cinema series and Peterson and Van Tuyl would continue to elaborate on their practice in writing. In 1949, Van Tuyl established the periodical Impulse, one of the first journals dedicated to exploring the relationship of dance and other fields featuring articles that synthesized "scholarship, journalism, and documentation for dance in twentieth century American culture." (Impulse Dance Annuals, online). In 1952, the pair collaborated on an article in *Impulse* magazine entitled, "The Slowing Down of the Subject: A Medium for Choreographers" that outlines the challenges of creating work that spans between dance and film. While their creative collaboration effectively ended with the two films, Van Tuyl continued to explore cross-disciplinary collaboration through *Impulse*, even editing another edition devoted to the intersection of dance and film in 1960 (Van Tuyl, Impulse 1960).

Collectives & Creative Efforts: 1950s-1970s

Frank Stauffacher passed away in 1954, effectively ending the Art in Cinema series, though multiple film screenings and creation initiatives emerged to fill the void. In 1958, The Camera Obscura Film Society emerged as a membership film series (Anker 2010, 88-89). The society operated under the auspices of the Contemporary Dancer's Foundation, which was headed by choreographer J Marks (Anker 2010, 89). The Foundation hosted experimental film screenings, including a screening entitled "Experimental Films on the Dance." Marks and Camera Obscura chairman Roger Ferragallo would eventually become close collaborators, exploring the possibilities of capturing stage work on film leading to early renderings of expanded archival work. For instance, the film *DESIRE* choreographed by Marks and filmed by Ferragallo features an expanded studio capture of a stage work that not only incorporates a multi camera approach with filmic composition, but also features overlays of moving images ranging from depictions of suburban life to flames overtaking the screen (DESIRE, 1961). Marks and Ferragallo use filmic techniques to expand on the themes and dynamics in the original stage work expanding its formal potential beyond its function as a record of a live work.

The audience for experimental film in the Bay Area would continue to expand with the founding of Canyon Cinema in 1961 by Bruce Baillie. The purpose of the organization was to broaden the opportunities for experimental filmmakers and serve as a distribution platform for artists to rent out their work and receive compensation for it. Canyon Cinema was housed at the San Francisco Tape Center, which was also the home of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and eventually, Anna Halprin's Dance Company. The housing of many disciplines under one roof catalyzed additional collaborations with films featuring dance like Baillie's *Tung* as well as expanded studio performance captures like Arne Arnebornson's *Parades and Changes* emerging during this time.

In the 1960's, film & video collectives dedicated to the sharing of equipment, education and ideas began to emerge. The prominence of counter cultural movements in San Francisco directly influenced local institutions into offering support of the development, potential and understanding of the video medium. In 1968, the television station KQED set up the National Center for Experimental Media and invited artists to experiment with the creative potential of television technologies, resulting in collaborations such as Graham Tape Delay which features the image of a dancing form (performed by frequent Halprin collaborator John Graham) manipulated by solarization and tape delayed image layering techniques (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Image from *Graham Tape Delay* (1968) (dir. Richard Felciano) (screenshot from Internet Archive)

In the late 1960's, the video collective Video Free America (VFA) became a center of video activity in San Francisco, hosting workshops and live events (Anker 2010 150). Housed in a lofted space and led by the creative team of video artist Skip Sweeney and dance artist Joanne Kelly, A key facet of VFA's curation was to challenge the expectations of broadcast television which video technology was used in service of. While VFA did show tapes of documentaries and live performances, they also showed multi-channel installation work as well as live video performances. One such work featured performer Livia Blankman interacting with a projection of a pre-recorded video while the projector itself was manipulated by another performer. Another performance by Sharon Grace featured a live video transmission among six artists in different US cities, each sharing different imagery specific to their geographical region (Kelly 1978).

Further curatorial initiatives began to emerge with artists melding curated screenings with other types of live events. In 1973, the Society for Patakinetics led by Millicent Hodson and Pat "VeVe" Clark staged an interdisciplinary event entitled *Battery Plumb*. The event featured a live performance as well as the start of a film series entitled *Kinesis: Images of Dance on Film*. The series presented a variety of approaches to dance on film aimed to "stimulate new ideas in theory and choreography and to encourage a sense of historical identity among dancers." The breadth of

the programming of *Kinesis* paired with detailed reflections on the films demonstrated a desire to share a history of practice with the hopes of further generating it and also to ground the audience in the history of the form.

Lone Mountain College's Dance Film Festival

As the fields of dance and video practice and presentation began to shift, Major Bay Area Institutions continued to take notice and adjust their curriculum accordingly. Lone Mountain College was founded in 1898 and was first known as the San Francisco College for Women. The school moved to a former cemetery lot across Golden Gate Avenue to the north of St. Ignatius College, which would later become the University of San Francisco (Marquez, "Exploring Hidden Gems"). The school became coed in 1969 at which time it assumed the name of Lone Mountain College, replacing its liberal arts focus with a less traditional "New Age" curriculum (Bronson, "Deal of a Lifetime"). These shifts would eventually extend to the Dance Program, which was founded in 1975 and offered courses in classical ballet and modern technique in addition to contemporary forms including contact improvisation. By 1978, 25% of the Lone Mountain students were taking courses in the Dance Program and had built a national reputation as a solid program (Goodman 1978. 14).

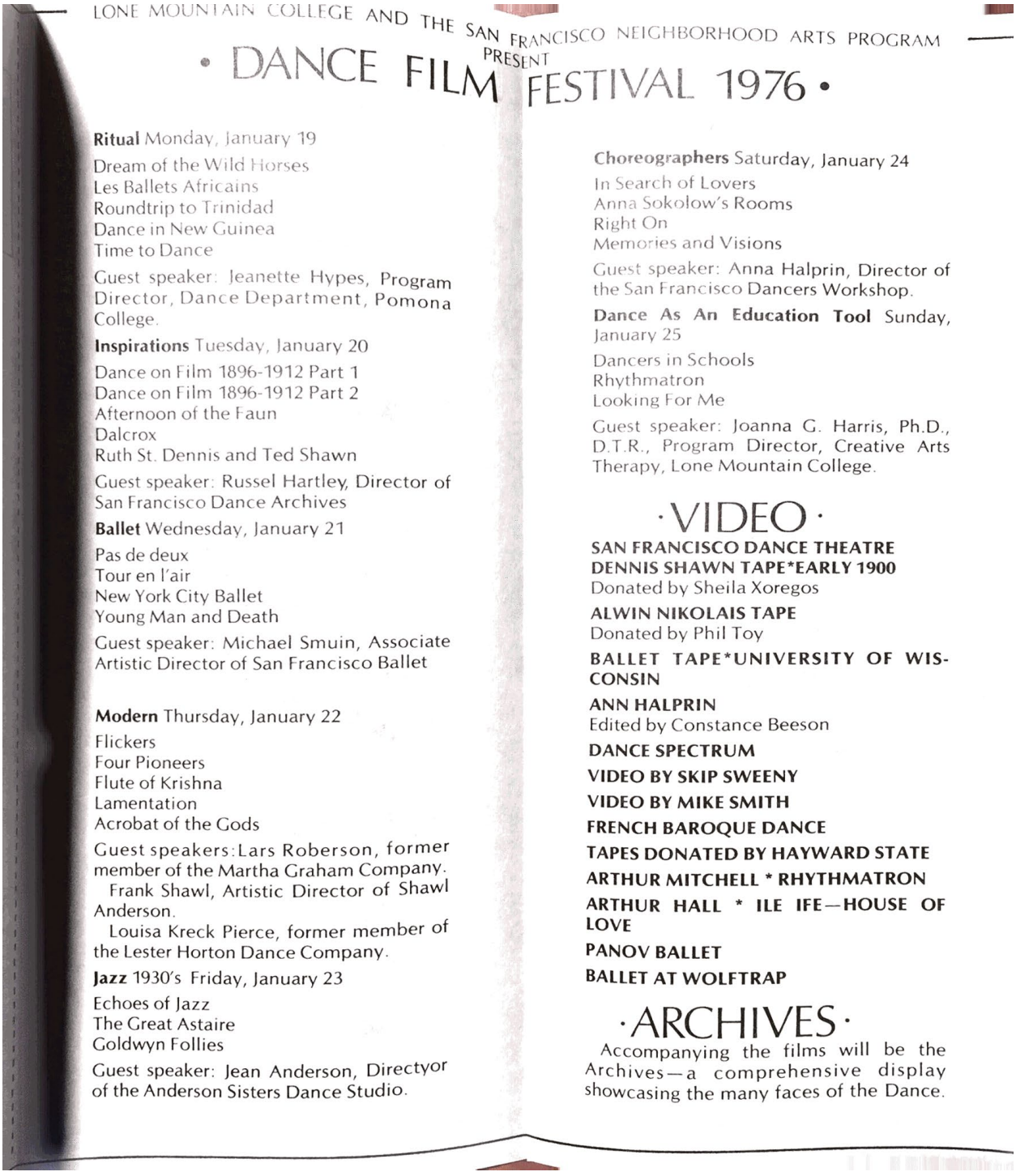
While the department itself was building on its dance curriculum, its students often double majored and collaborated with other departments[3]. In 1976, student Deborah Mangum collaborated with Lone Mountain's Videography Department on a live videodance event presented at the Serramonte Shopping Mall in Daly City, CA. The performance featured five dancers, surrounded by monitors screening video taken by a moving camera operator, manipulating six movement phrases. The audience was allowed to move freely through the dance and at times, the camera person would leave her camera and assume the position of a dancer. The ten-minute edited tape, *Six Phrases in Real Time,* is described by Mangum as "both another interpretation of the event and an independent visual and aural experience with its own integrity" (Kelly 1978).

Lenwood Sloan grew up in Pennsylvania and studied with the Pennsylvania Ballet, which led to performance opportunities with companies such as the Martha Graham Company, Alvin Ailey and Mary Wigman, with whom he was part of her last ensemble (Sloan, April 7, 2022). It was through Wigman's works that he was exposed to the work of Alvin Nikolais which contributed to his understanding of the use of light and motion on film. Sloan eventually took a role with the Joffrey Ballet as an assistant to the company's co-founder Gerald Arpino and followed the company where it toured. He traveled with the company to Berkeley where a car accident and an extended stay in San Francisco medical facilities turned into a longer stay where he based himself in the Bay Area (Sloan, April 7, 2022).

FIGURE 2: Still from *Six Phrases in Real Time (1976*) (dir/chor. Deborah Mangum**)** (screenshot from Internet Archive)

Unable to perform, Sloan focused his efforts on education and was eventually employed as the dance coordinator for the San Francisco Arts Commission, a neighborhood arts program that offered free education and support services in the arts both for working artists and for communities with limited familiarity. As Sloan was no longer able to physically teach, he utilized films of dances as instructional materials (Sloan, April 7, 2022). Sloan developed a significant collection of films from which he could curate a specialized educational experience, sourcing the films from the Dance Films Association catalog and the Jacob's Pillow archives as well as personal connections from his work dancing for New York-based companies.

Sloan was then hired by Lone Mountain College as an instructor for the dance history course. He brought his film collection with him and per the 1976 Dance Film Festival program (Figure 3), a "nucleus of energy" emerged from the exchange of ideas, research and communication. This began to attract interest from local filmmakers, photographers and administrators. Thus, the idea for a seven-day dance film festival event emerged showcasing the art form as an educational tool, a performance and a ritual.



LONE MOUNTAIN COLLEGE AND THE SAN FRANCISCO NEIGHBORHOOD ARTS PROGRAM PRESENT

· DANCE FILM FESTIVAL 1976 ·

Ritual Monday, January 19

Dream of the Wild Horses
Les Ballets Africains
Roundtrip to Trinidad
Dance in New Guinea
Time to Dance

Guest speaker: Jeanette Hypes, Program Director, Dance Department, Pomona College.

Inspirations Tuesday, January 20

Dance on Film 1896-1912 Part 1
Dance on Film 1896-1912 Part 2
Afternoon of the Faun
Dalcrox
Ruth St. Dennis and Ted Shawn

Guest speaker: Russel Hartley, Director of San Francisco Dance Archives

Ballet Wednesday, January 21

Pas de deux
Tour en l'air
New York City Ballet
Young Man and Death

Guest speaker: Michael Smuin, Associate Artistic Director of San Francisco Ballet

Modern Thursday, January 22

Flickers
Four Pioneers
Flute of Krishna
Lamentation
Acrobat of the Gods

Guest speakers: Lars Roberson, former member of the Martha Graham Company.
Frank Shawl, Artistic Director of Shawl Anderson.
Louisa Kreck Pierce, former member of the Lester Horton Dance Company.

Jazz 1930's Friday, January 23

Echoes of Jazz
The Great Astaire
Goldwyn Follies

Guest speaker: Jean Anderson, Directyor of the Anderson Sisters Dance Studio.

Choreographers Saturday, January 24

In Search of Lovers
Anna Sokolow's Rooms
Right On
Memories and Visions

Guest speaker: Anna Halprin, Director of the San Francisco Dancers Workshop.

Dance As An Education Tool Sunday, January 25

Dancers in Schools
Rhythmatron
Looking For Me

Guest speaker: Joanna G. Harris, Ph.D., D.T.R., Program Director, Creative Arts Therapy, Lone Mountain College.

· VIDEO ·

SAN FRANCISCO DANCE THEATRE
DENNIS SHAWN TAPE*EARLY 1900
Donated by Sheila Xoregos

ALWIN NIKOLAIS TAPE
Donated by Phil Toy

BALLET TAPE*UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

ANN HALPRIN
Edited by Constance Beeson

DANCE SPECTRUM

VIDEO BY SKIP SWEENY

VIDEO BY MIKE SMITH

FRENCH BAROQUE DANCE

TAPES DONATED BY HAYWARD STATE

ARTHUR MITCHELL * RHYTHMATRON

ARTHUR HALL * ILE IFE—HOUSE OF LOVE

PANOV BALLET

BALLET AT WOLFTRAP

· ARCHIVES ·

Accompanying the films will be the Archives—a comprehensive display showcasing the many faces of the Dance.

Figure 3: Image of 1976 Dance Film Festival Program from the Museum of Performance + Design

Sloan initially approached the presentation of the festival as a dance history course, charting the development of dance through the screenings of film. However, although the Lone Mountain Faculty selected the films in the program, the students themselves crafted the screenings, shifting the focus from a chronological presentation of material to one delineated by techniques

represented on screen (Sloan, April 7 2022). The films themselves were mostly recordings of live performances, with the full dancing body shown in either single takes or continuous ones. Notable exceptions include films shown in the Ritual program, particularly *Dance of Wild Horses*, which features horses moving in slow motion.

> We showed crowds running across a field to talk about kinesphere so we would try to introduce these shorts to introduce ideas of: the choreographer is working with effort shape, the choreographer is working with kinesphere, this piece is about music visualization. (Sloan)

Additionally, the festival was used to teach the student groups skills in arts administration. Festival events were used to teach students about marketing, production, rehearsal, company management, and hospitality in addition to the curation of festival events. The students were compensated for their work as a part of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, a federal program through the San Francisco Arts Commission aimed at employing artists in public positions. While the opportunity to work in a festival environment likely proved enriching for the students, Sloan was thinking of the application of the work to the broader operation of dance.

> We were trying to create entry level [work]. I have always been concerned about the management of dance companies, particularly sole source founder companies so I felt we needed to be training people. (Sloan, April 7, 2022).

Figure 4: L to R: (Lars Roberson, Russell Hartley, Lenwood Sloan) at 1976 Festival event. Image by Gary Sinick from the Museum of Performance + Design.

Upon the success of the first festival, the event was repeated for a second edition in 1977, featuring a tribute to four notable artists that Sloan considered personally influential: Alvin Ailey, Katherine Dunham, Robert Joffrey and Alvin Nikolais. While the first screening was

curated by the students according to dance techniques presented on screen, the approach to the second festival reflects a method of curating a personal history and shows that the festival was willing to break form from its previous year in terms of the way films were showcased.

Each of the 1977 festival evenings featured either pre-recorded interviews with the artists themselves, or artists who worked closely with them and were accompanied by an evening of films or recordings of live performances of the artists' work. Like the first festival edition, each program had an artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area who had previously worked with one of the artist honorees. Sloan elaborates here on his reasoning behind inviting guest speakers to the festivals:

> There was always an introduction of a dancer in San Francisco who had been with one of the companies and was teaching that technique. And I was trying to say 'we don't have to look to New York to learn these techniques. There's a rich body of dancers who were developing schools, companies, and schools of thought about this movement, but using it as nouns and verbs and an alphabet to reconstruct their own expressions of those dances (Sloan, April 7, 2022).

While the students were once again tasked with programming and operating the second iteration of the festival, Sloan also brought on noted curator and archivist Russell Hartley. A dancer and designer for SF Ballet's formative years, Hartley was an avid collector of dance materials including programs, stage designs and newspaper clippings. He established the San Francisco Dance Archives, which was housed in his home, and routinely curated exhibitions on the Bay Area's dance history that were featured in libraries, school and museums. Sloan notes Hartley's influence on his program, noting that "Russell was the one who taught me about [saving] everything, every program" (Sloan. April 7, 2022). As with other events in the San Francisco Bay Area, Hartley took detailed notes and pictures of the events of the festival and amassed a significant collection of newspaper clippings related to the festival event[3].

The third festival was a significant departure from the first two. Before the second festival took place, Sloan had a deal in place with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) to host the third iteration of the event onsite. Sloan worked closely with SFMOMA director Henry Hopkins and experimental filmmaker Ed Emschwiler, who advised him to curate a program focusing on dance on film as an art in and of itself (Sloan, April 7, 2022). While the program proved a step forward in terms of the breadth of work presented and the number of participants, Sloan mentions the collaboration with SFMOMA was a challenging one for both him and his students. Prior to the 1978 festival, the Federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program that had compensated students for their work at the festival was dissolved and while students received course credit for the work they did, they were not paid. Additionally, the shift in venues from a school auditorium to a union building meant that professional hierarchies were enforced. Sloan mentions that " The students felt that they lost their place. They felt really that

they owned the festival at Lone Mountain and they were crew at the museum" (Sloan, 2022), suggesting students were treated less as collaborators and co-creators of an event and more of a means to an end to making it run.

Although the work in producing the festival proved challenging for Sloan and team, the resulting program proved to be one of the first comprehensive surveys of Bay Area dance film and intermedia collaboration. The event opened with a screening of Van Tuyl's work, including the aforementioned *Horror Dream* and *Clinic of Stumble,* accompanied by a live interview with Van Tuyl following the screenings. The evening continued with early modern dance film work from 1894-1926 accompanied by an interview with former Denishawn dancer Klarna Pinska. Another screening in the program was promoted as a sampler of modern dance on film and screened the aforementioned Triptych by Welland Lathrop and Arne Arneborn's capture of Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes.*

The standout evening of programming, however, was titled "A Meta-Kinesis Preserve and We Went Dancing in the Electronic Mirror" presented by the video collective "Demystavision" with the term Videodance signifying "a new frontier for the choreographer and technician." The program departed from cinematic projection and created a sculptural environment of light and image. Video Free America is listed as a participant in the event, presenting works from Steve Beck and Richard Lowenberg that had previously been shown at their curated programs. The audience was also encouraged to participate in the "Videola" from Don Hallock, an optical video and mirror machine which had first been exhibited in 1973 at SFMOMA. While the practices seen in the program had already been established, the presentation of the program under the term videodance suggests an alternate relationship between the viewer and the work and expanded the possibilities of dance and video collaboration.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1978

8 pm: A META-KINESIS PRESERVE: AND WE WENT DANCING IN THE ELECTRONIC MIRROR

A video program by Demystavision.

VIDEO: Pertaining to or used in the transmission or reception of instant images.
INSTANT: Immediate, an infinitesimal portion of time.
VIDEODANCE: A new frontier for the choreographer and technician.
This program departs from the traditional relationship between the viewer and the projected image to create a total environment of "motion, light and images." Demystavision presents a multimedia evening exhibiting a "kaleidoscope" of live and recorded dances in a unique and ever changing formula. The audience is invited to participate in the "Videola," Don Hallock and Stephen Beck's video and mirror machine which was exhibited in 1973 at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

The video works include:
Dancers' Workshop
Rainbow the Mime
"Anima" with Katie McGuire
"Shiva" with Noel Parenti
Thermography by Richard Lowenberg

Participants include:
Donald Day, California College of Arts and Crafts
Eleanor Dickinson
Dan Dugan
Dance Spectrum
Patty Ann Farrell
Kat Kleinhenz
The Polaroid Corporation
Skip Sweeny, Video Free America

Special thanks to General Electronics Systems, Inc., Berkeley; Advent Corporation, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Video International, San Francisco.

Demystavision, a video-collective, has participated in the 1976 and 1977 San Francisco Summer Dance Festival. Two types of dance video tapes were provided: pre-performance and rehearsal tapes for the education and critiquing of the dancers; and performance tapes for documentation. This year, most performance tapes were made with a two camera system designed by Donald Day, of the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland. Tapes were made available to the dance companies for a very low price. Demystavision has brought two video innovations to the dance community: the newvicon tube which replaces the ordinary vidicon and gives a picture in very low light levels; and the Advent videoprojector, on which tapes appear near life size. They have for two years provided the only documentation of the Ballet Trockadero de Monte Carlo's repertory. They have taped with over twenty dance groups in the Bay Area. Their most recent work was the gala performance of the California Association of Dance Companies with a low light mini-cam donated by General Electronics Systems, Inc., Berkeley. They have just begun a "tape club" with Dance Spectrum; this is the first known use of the new home videocassette media by any dance company in the nation. Demystavision is Bill Bathurst, Ron Blanchette and Jed Handler.

10

Figure 5: Page from SFDFF 1978 Festival Program, image from the Museum of Performance + Design

The Disappearance of an Event

The final page of the third program hints at the development of a fourth program which would present "five evenings of films, video and photography which will explore the duet between camera and choreographer" (1978 Dance Film Festival). Per Sloan, this was to be a program facilitated by the burgeoning National Performance Network established by David White, the Artistic director of Dance Theater Workshop in New York City. In this program, 26 organizations that were funded by the network would create and present new works in dance and interdisciplinary art, not only highlighting new experiments in dance and film but also featuring

the network as a place for new work to incubate. The presentation structure also proposed a first showing in a company's home site and second at the festival in San Francisco, placing San Francisco dance specifically in a national performance network.

However, following the third festival, Sloan put the organization on hiatus and stepped away noting that his job was done. His goal to bring dancers together and share work had created a stronger dance community and local companies and choreographers, such as the Oberlin Dance Collection (ODC), Margaret Jenkins and Carlos Carvajal had opened their own studio spaces. Following the festival, Sloan toured his own choreographic stage work worldwide and became involved with Dance/USA's philanthropy initiatives. He was eventually hired by the NEA to direct the interdisciplinary art program and served for a decade. He then moved into cultural civic work, serving as the director of the New Arts Tourism Partnership in New Orleans and the Director of Cultural and Heritage Tourism in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where he currently resides as of February 2025.

Although Sloan left the Dance Film Festival Project feeling it had successfully achieved its original goals, the legacy of Sloan's work was threatened by a series of events. In February of 1978, less than one month after the third festival's conclusion, Lone Mountain College closed due to financial difficulties and was later acquired by the University of San Francisco (Arredando 2022). The Lone Mountain Dance Department and its facilities were merged into the University of San Francisco Athletics Program. According to Sloan, the Jesuit Catholic institution was not wholly approving of the activities of the dance department and thus did little to preserve the records of its activity. Indeed, an assisted search through University of San Francisco archives yielded limited information about the dance department and Sloan's involvement in it. With only a few administrative shifts in the institution that housed it, Sloan's festival ceased to exist and its record was left in a precarious state.

Soon afterward the San Francisco Arts Community would face the devastating consequences of the AIDS virus which would claim many luminaries in the San Francisco Dance Scene, including Russell Hartley in 1983. Upon his passing, the city had lost a dedicated archivist of its performing arts history and it was up to the artists themselves to maintain archives of their work. Hartley's extensive archive was eventually housed in a dedicated research building now known as the Museum of Performance + Design.

The emergence of technological industries in the 1990s in the Bay Area and the subsequent rise of housing prices posed further challenges to an art scene that was still trying to rebuild itself after the AIDS crisis. Many artists sought more affordable options outside of the San Francisco Bay Area and those who remained, while carrying a valuable lived experience of what San Francisco's art scene once was, represented a small sampling of those who experienced the decades of creativity that flourished following World War Two. Additionally, based on personal observation, many dance artists tend to use their years in the San Francisco Bay Area as a

springboard before finding a base elsewhere. This creates a culture of transience that can preclude the solidification of a dedicated record of practice and presentation.

This loss is compounded by the instability of preservation initiatives in the area. In 2021, Mills College was acquired by Northeastern University, and its pioneering Dance Department eliminated. Additionally, the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) which hosted some of the first experimental filmmaking programs that emerged from the art in cinema series closed in 2022. While a non-profit was formed to care for the institution's archives, there is an ongoing dispute from one of the school's buyers regarding the ownership of the materials. These events are reminiscent of those that ended Sloan's festival and enshrouded its existence. While there are presently additional means of preservation in the form of digitized archives and powerful servers that can store them, they are not invulnerable and there are still barriers to their access.

Creation and curation of dance film in the San Francisco Bay Area certainly did not cease, as festivals and screening programs like Dance/Screen presented through SF Performances and curated by Charlotte Shoemaker and the current San Francisco Dance Film Festival (SFDFF) founded by Greta Schoenberg can attest to. In addition to this, commissioning initiatives like KQED's Alive from Off Center in 1989 and SFDFF's Co-Laboratory Program (2013-present) have offered San Francisco Bay Area-based choreographers and directors to collaborate on the creation of films featuring dance.

However, the concern echoed in Cara Hagan *Screendance From Film to Festival* that Lenwood Sloan's absence in the retelling of dance film history is conspicuous given the artistic and curatorial approaches he utilized during his Dance Film Festival's run deserves to be interrogated (Hagan 2022. 52). Indeed, Sloan's Dance Film Festival impresses in terms of the breadth of the work shown and manner of presentation, curating not just films but experiences. The design of the program gives new audiences a rigorous but accessible entry point to the form and experienced audiences a deeper understanding of dance and its interdisciplinary potential. It is also a case study in how such an undertaking can be lost to history and highlights the instability of institutions meant to preserve it.

Sloan's absence also raises the importance of work for which there is no record and the value systems that deemed it unworthy of preservation in the first place. Thus, the continued exploration and sharing of information is essential in order to create a more expanded history of the practice of the form and understanding the invisible biases and forces that have shaped it to this point. Hagan's aforementioned book is extremely valuable in this area in addition to an increase of screenings from SFDFF, San Francisco Cinematheque & the Chicago-based Tone Glow[5]. A necessary step forward would be the establishment of an accessible open-source archive, strands of which are already in the works[6].

Ultimately, the stories of the figures who shaped screendance need to be disseminated more widely to not only highlight the breadth of the field but also to understand the forces that

contribute to the constant cycles of the burial of its history. As these cycles begin the process of repeating themselves, the connection of the worldwide screendance community gives it a greater ability to organize and mobilize to highlight the practice of not only the creation of the work, but labor of its care and sharing. Through this, more histories can be excavated and the understanding of the practice and presentation of screendance can further expand.

1-The San Francisco Bay Area refers to the land delineated by nine counties that border the estuaries of San Francisco Bay- Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma, and San Francisco. The majority of work described in this paper was created within San Francisco city limits unless described elsewhere, though artists have often found bases outside of the city limits.

2 - Cage's Imaginary Landscape #1 was used to score the film. Per Van Tuyl, "I did this dance during a summer session for a production at Mills, as I said, in 1941, and we used it in concerts after that time, but with the onset of war, we had to drop this dance because the accompanyment (sic) was so reminiscent of sirens that it had a kind of air-raid warning and could not be played in the theatre" (Van Tuyl Horror Dream).

3 -The student biographies on the final page of the 1977 and 1978 programs, mention either a combination of dance and another major or a specially designed major created across multiple departments. Of note is student Clint Shelby, who noted his major as "video dance"

4- These materials can be found in the "San Francisco Dance Film Festival Collection" at the Museum of Performance + Design in Bayview.

5-Screenings referred to include the following:

-"Colordance" presented by Tone Glow at The Film-Makers Cooperative on May 26, 2023. (https://toneglow.substack.com/p/film-screening-tone-glow-presents)

-"Maya Deren: Choreographed for Camera" presented by SF Cinematheque at Gray Area on June 18, 2023. (https://www.sfcinematheque.org/screenings/maya-deren-choreographed-for-camera/)

-"The Vault: Bay Area Legends" presented by San Francisco Dance Film Festival at the Delancey Theater on June 6, 2024. (https://sfdancefilmfest.org/shorts-program/alive-from-off-center/).

6- Per personal conversation, Both Regina Lissowska (Director of Short Waves Poznań in Poland) and Gábor Pintér (Director of SZERPENTIN Dance Film Festival) are in the process of establishing accessible archives of Polish & Hungarian dance films respectively.

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A Democratization of Screendance Curation: The Value of Curating as a Group Versus an Autonomous Curatorial Approach

By Jo Cork, Luisa Lazzaro, and Gitta Wigro

Abstract

This essay offers reflective insights into the creation and presentation of a student-led screendance festival, developed within the unique context of the world's only MA in Screendance. Written by alumni Jo Cork and Luisa Lazzaro, with an introduction by module leader Gitta Wigro, the piece explores the collaborative process that underpinned both the festival and the writing itself. Jo Cork is a screendance maker and unit leader for the MA Screendance at London Contemporary Dance School and Luisa Lazzaro is a screendance maker, intimacy coordinator and board member of The International Journal of Screendance. Gitta Wigro is an internationally renowned screendance programmer and has been speaker and jury member at numerous festivals. Initially focusing on programming and curating respectively, Cork and Lazzaro refined the structure of the essay through shared authorship and continuous dialogue with Wigro. The narrative became a collective one, echoing the festival's ethos of group-led creative production. Drawing on conversations with fellow cohort members, the authors reconstruct the festival's evolution, offering a layered reflection on practice-based learning, memory, and community within a postgraduate arts education context.

Perspectives on presenting a student-led screendance festival in the context of the only MA screendance course in the world, presented by two of the alumni of the course.

Reflections on the complexities encountered in defining and refining curatorial aims within different autonomous voices, and the active co-construction of a collaborative leadership approach.

Introduction: the festival and its context

Frame Rush 2019 program

Frame Rush 2019 took place in the Founder's Studio at The Place, London, on 13 and 14 March 2019. The program comprised five screenings: three international programs drawn from an international open call, and two curated programs, one focusing on urban dance on screen and one on historical dance films.[1] The festival opened with a talk by Dr. Claudia Kappenberg, and each screening was accompanied by a Q&A with participating filmmakers. In total, Frame Rush 2019 presented 37 films.

Context

Frame Rush is an annual event, created by the students of the MA Screendance[2] as part of their coursework. This article discusses its first ever edition, presented in 2019.

The MA is run by London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS), a conservatoire for dance. LCDS is part of The Place in central London, which also houses a 300-seat theater with a year-round dance program, public classes and other events and activities. The MA Screendance, while not the *first* postgraduate course in dance film,[3] is currently the only one.

The course focuses on developing the students' filmmaking practice. As such, the purpose of this module (with the rather prosaic name "Presenting Screendance Work" or PSW) is not to create programmers or curators; it is on broadening the students' perspectives and critical reflection of the field(s) they will work in on graduation, as well as a space to develop skills and take creative risks in a supportive environment. Seeking out, viewing and selecting work by other artists invites students to reflect critically on their practices and preferences, and encounter some of the dynamics present in the sector.

Stepping into the role of festival organizer, the students encounter a number of emergent questions to confront and resolve for themselves: Why do events and festivals tend to operate in certain ways? How do we use the resources available to us? How does that reflect our values and intentions? What is my/our relationship to being a gatekeeper? What alternative methods do we want to explore, and what do they produce? What relationships does the event have with artists, its venue, audience and the field? How does the nature of festivals shape the field? And, of course, how does this inform my own practice as a screendance maker?

These questions and others are addressed in weekly seminars as well as in the students' own work and discussions.

Concurrently, the students work on two other modules, one on screendance making, and one delving into current debates and histories relating to screendance; these three areas interweave as the students apply material across these areas of creative practice.

The assignment / the givens

The module has two assessments: (1) to contribute to the production of a dance film festival, and (2) to reflect on their contribution and the event after the festival is completed.[4]. They are not assessed on the 'success' of the event as such: rather on the way that they approach the project and their subsequent self-assessment of their learning. This is to maintain a learning environment that is focused on exploration and experimentation.

There are certain givens that the students have to navigate as they devise their edition of Frame Rush: the event takes place in one of the spaces at The Place (or through its digital platform), a space recognised internationally as a *live* dance venue; the date is determined by the school; tickets are sold via The Place's box office, and it is advertised via its channels (as well as the festivals own channels, run by the students).

The assignment requires the students to formulate an open call and select one program of films from this open call. Subsequent editions have also been asked to present a selection of work from the previous MA Screendance cohort, though of course that did not apply to the first year. Otherwise the students are free to design the event content and schedule according to their interests.

Brief description of the process

The 2018-19 cohort consisted of 9 students: Corinna Abela, Emily Romain, Jo Cork, Luisa Lazzaro, Omari Carter, Vilma Tihilä, Eloise Mavronicholas, Kitty Voget, and Maria Kapala.

The group was asked to decide on the content of the festival collectively (unless they chose to cede or delegate decisions to particular members) - effectively creating a festival with nine artistic co-directors. Each also led on a specific area, such as artist liaison, technical production, finance, marketing, and stepped in across areas to support each other and explore other areas of

interest. They were supported by the module leader and a producer who offered guidance, knowledge and provocations. They receive between £1,800 - £2,000 to cover direct costs, and ca. £8,000 worth of in-kind technical, marketing and production support from LCDS/The Place.

The students met in September 2018, and began to define their common interests and aims for the festival. They devised a call for submissions which ran from 5 November 2018 to 7 January 2019 and received 833 eligible submissions.[5]The students watched the films, with each seen by at least three people, over the course of two months.

The joint programming process took place over several days in January, and yielded three international programs. Luisa Lazzaro and Omari Carter also curated a themed screening each.

Wider context

The wider context to acknowledge includes Brexit, a significant and ongoing rupture, which created significant political strain in the UK on personal, regional and national levels. The covid-19 pandemic hadn't begun yet. While the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, triggered by the killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, were still in the future, the student cohort brought experience and understanding of structural inequalities and lack of global majority and disability representation into its process from the beginning.

On a local and artform level, this year of Frame Rush also coincided with the inaugural edition of the London International Screen Dance Festival, created by choreographer Charles Linehan at Trinity Laban[6] in south London, in September 2019, six months after Frame Rush. To avoid unintentional overlap, the two events liaised during the selection process.

A Democratic Environment

The context of the MA is important in that not only was it a peer environment, bringing together a group of people with different intentions and backgrounds (a product perhaps, of the recruitment remit for a Master of the Arts course with a small intake). The situation engendered, and even demanded, a working etiquette of openness, listening, mutual respect and equal power. This environment was welcomed and carried wholly by all on the course - again - likely due to the context of the MA and a group whose personal agendas sought opportunities to learn, broaden one's view, and adopt an exploratory approach in efforts to optimize educational gain from the course.

Collaborative Practice

The openness and listening of the group, as we will discuss, reflects some of the thinking behind The Weave,"a methodology of interauthorship ",[7] developed by interactive design collective, body>data>space in the 1980s and 90s. "The Weave enables the participants to envision the process and progression of a project… forming a plait that retains the visible identity of each contributor".[8] The ideas of body>data>space were present in the development of the whole festival, as well as within the programming and curating processes; each of the nine voices manifested not only in our contributions to selecting films, but also in small but meaningful details, like local business flyers in goody bags, the wording of signage, the content of pre-screening talks, the focus of Q&As, as well as the larger structural details like screening timings, the screen size for hiring and so much more. There was coordination and weaving in of all the different inputs, each intent tended to in some way. Perhaps imperfectly, in an ideal sense, to the

individual whose intent was being answered - but nonetheless, each individual retained a voice of decision making in what the festival as a whole became.

The Group Programming Process

The Intentions of the Programming Team and The Wider Impact on the Artform

As a preface to this section and in recognition of the experience from the perspective of the cohort, the essay moves from objective analysis to direct, first-person reflection necessary to better articulate the nuances of the project's development.

In order to make decisions, one needs a purpose, or at least parameters on which to base choices. In programming Frame Rush 2019, the team felt bound to two commitments. 1) The commitment to meet the needs and interests of the group as a whole. As a group of students on an MA program, each member of the team had the same right and expectation to learn and follow their curiosity. 2) The obligation - or artistic duty - to listen to new propositions and radical ideas from the team and the wider field, and to advocate for progressive work. The team's process had to serve both commitments - the internal (i.e. the programmer's) intentions, and the impact on the artform.

The first commitment manifests the voices working on the festival. The second - the artform focus or impact - is more broadly about progression within the arts to further the medium, or how it can be presented to audiences; the desire to delve ever more deeply into our practices and works in order to understand what it is we have done, why we may have done it that way, and what that opens doors to - or closes doors on. It's about remaining open to new ideas and reflective of older ones in pursuit of furthering the field.

A common team structure of festivals has a director, or lead creative. Others working on the event, though contributing deeply, are likely to have less decision making power in the overall identity of the festival. In those cases, the internal focus is likely to be seeded in the established values of the organizations, funders or independent artists who facilitate the realization of the event. It may be to do with work from marginalized artists, local artists, or young artists, for example; or to do with work tackling political issues, regional needs, ideas about the body, or any number of thematic markers. Of course it is likely to be several overlapping and interacting ideals that any team will navigate. For Frame Rush 2019, the internal intentions had yet to be formed, and would be formed in its particular context. Most of us didn't know each other, having met less than a week before planning got underway. We came together as students and peers; no hierarchy, each with our own goals, aspirations and interests, all of which were respected by our fellow students, even when their own differed.

In our initial conversations and research, we discussed the identity of the festival. As a group of largely liberal artists, the creation of safe space for audiences felt important, where people in all their diversities could safely enjoy the events and feel welcome and indeed integral in the community created. Drawing on Cara Hagan's vast data collection on submissions to the Movies by Movers festival and her findings,[9] we discussed ideas about representation of filmmakers, performers on screen and audiences, and established them as an important consideration.[10] The group also shared a deep care for accessibility and inclusivity alongside a concern for diversity of genre, and for presenting female voices. The implementation of said values was deliberately left to our will as part of the educational structure. Without a single decision-making voice, our internal agenda was necessarily broad and was, in function, democratic.

From the open call, the team created three international shorts programs for Frame Rush 2019. The selection focussed on goals and enquiries one might also see at other screendance festivals - goals on which nine disparate students yet to become familiar with one another could confidently align. These were: the raising of screendance's profile; the progression of the artform; and artists' bold use of the art form to express radical ideas or ask provocative questions. We all shared the desire to engage with the wider field, and create something that was impactful in the screendance community. We wanted to showcase screendance's potential for new audiences to fall in love with, and to manifest before us a coherent moment which embodied our collective understanding of the field we were studying. The team focussed on the proposition: What is screendance? What is not screendance?[11] This enquiry alongside all other aspects of our internal agenda became our impetus from which to build the festival.

The Team's Approach to Programming

The difference between curating screenings and programming might be seen as the difference between seeking out works versus selecting works from a pool of submissions. In *Inscribing the Ephemeral Image*, Douglas Rosenberg unpacks the difference between programming and curation. He describes curation as 'not simply about choosing… "The curator assumes responsibility for the gestalt of the exhibition that itself further iterates a particular point of view by using works of art as texts, which by implication or inference create collective meanings."[12] The indication here might be that less compositional thinking might take place in a programming process - that 'simple choices' are made. Cara Hagan describes her experiences of developing the first Movies by Movers screendance festival in 2010 in her book, *Screendance From Film to Festival* (2022) and suggests on reflection of having screened a, "Handful of movies brought together by happenstance,"[13] that "Curation, programming, and producing are separate but inextricable activities that each require their own attention, while simultaneously maintaining awareness of all facets to create the scaffolding necessary to craft a successful event."[14] Hagan draws attention to the "felt experience of a festival, informed most saliently by the works included in any specific event"[15] and acknowledges that through these frameworks, "Many of the field's most recognized actors articulate for us their respective philosophies… and their intrinsic morals and values."[16] A curator will have a defined motivation in seeking works, but as we have discussed, so too does a programmer in selecting works - both processes may answer and work to an agenda, or set of agendas.

Rosenberg does not regard that a well-programmed showcase can also provoke discussion and excavation of genres, just as curated screenings might, however, putting a program together thoughtfully is much less about picking the nicest films that come in, and much more about listening to the submitting artists' voices and creating space, and a structure through which those meaningful voices can be heard. This does, as Rosenberg suggests, create a "kind of showcase",[17] however not one lacking in coherence. A programmed screening can draw out meanings and connections between its films, and create a dialogue between the individual works and the form as a whole. Films are chosen precisely because of their impact amidst or next to other films - the intertextuality and interdisciplinary that Rosenberg refers to in relation to curation may also be tended to within a programming process.

While it is to some extent true that programming "follows an entertainment model and therefore has an agenda that is colored by audience expectations" (p.129. 2012.), what is not accounted for is the programmers' prerogative and empowerment to subvert, question and reshape audience expectations through thoughtful programming, or as Hagan remarks in relation to selecting work

from 50 submissions for the third edition of Movies by Movers in 2012, through selection processes we can "shape the experience of the work intentionally."[18] In this way, programming, just as curation, can rely "on a set of strategies that are intended to speak back to the form very directly, and in many cases… attempts to move the form in a particular direction."[19] Rather than seeking out, programming is about listening in to the films before you, hearing the voices and agendas of submitting artists and responding to them, allowing the films themselves to inform and generate ideas of relation between them.

Implementing a Democratic Process in Programming

Facilitation of Open Debate

The team watched 833 films in total, each film viewed by a minimum of three people. After voting for favored films in a shared document, the team split into two groups, which met on consecutive days. Each individual came to their meeting with detailed notes for discussion. Vilma Tihilä facilitated both sessions and nurtured the same rigorous and open discussion about the films and programs in both meetings. Vilma brought the discussions from the first meeting into the second, distinguishing between expressing her own views and relaying discussions of the first group. After this accumulation of perspectives, Vilma and a representative from each meeting met and developed a final line up to take back to the group.

The in-depth programming discussions included the following considerations:

- Films that we all agreed on versus what sparked debate
- Different definitions of screendance within the team
- Representation of diverse bodies on and off screen
- Accommodating and challenging audiences' expectations
- The established and potential new audiences we could draw in
- Aspects of care - the deftness and level of informedness of filmmakers in tackling highly sensitive or potentially triggering material
- The curated programs, and how the international screenings would relate to them - both chronologically in a single day of the festival, and broadly over the whole event
- The possibility of educating new audiences about the form
- The relevance of films in relation to current political and cultural events.

Using post-its and a large table, each group sifted through the recommended films, compiling them in somewhat fluid categories: clear favorites for inclusion, and those that some felt very strongly about but whose place in the festival was contingent on their context within a screening.

Early on, Omari Carter articulated the pull between 'popular' films and those that provoked discussion: "Are the [films] that are most voted for the ones that need to be given priority?… The ones that we're arguing about ... will spark up an interesting discourse" .[20] Luisa Lazzaro pointed out that the voting process showed that even within the group itself there were "different views as to What is Screendance?"[21] Emily Romain and Vilma Tihilä discussed how to offer work that might not be conventionally understood as screendance (e.g. a film not featuring dancing bodies, or one creating choreography in the edit) to an audience; taking into account the festival location: The Place is a well-known dance venue. [22]

Conversations were not a linear process of proposition, analysis, judgment and conclusion, but rather rebounded around all corners of the room numerous times - with many up in the air at any one moment. Facilitated by Vilma, we interrogated each other's thinking from multiple perspectives - each of us genuinely open to being persuaded away from our initial views. This rigorous questioning was a vehicle for progressive discussion and meant that an individual's perspective was never delegitimized or dismissed by another's retort. Rather, we gave alternative views and excavated individual perspectives; a process through which voices were accounted for and accumulated into the end product. Gradually, each rebounding proposition settled into a conclusion that lay in relation to all other evolving decisions. The countless conversations, critical response and reflections about the films evolved and honed the festival identity. The conclusions and considerations, much more than the number of votes, became the deciding factor for choosing or rejecting films.

Relationships drawn between the films gave rise to intertextual observations: 'We have two animations there'; 'these three are all very other-worldly', 'Nothing else we have is doing something like that'. We acknowledged that the most 'popular' films weren't shoo-ins: creating meaning through selection and placement asked different questions of us and the films. We tested and debated hypothetical running orders, and gradually, each group arrived at two draft screenings: two vertical lines of post-it notes, surrounded by a cloud of other floating films.

While we had considered a screening focusing on work about queer culture or made by artists identifying as queer; having sifted through all of the submissions, the team decided not to theme the third screening. Corinna Abela, Luisa and Vilma met to re-consider the drafts and their surrounding clouds of possibilities . Drawing on all the considerations from the initial selection meetings, the three reconfigured the two draft screenings, re-shaping them into three well-balanced programs. Vilma's presence, mediating and acting as an advocate for both groups alongside a representative from each group, was crucial in maintaining the democratic structure. We shared a trust in the three's dedication to representing the entire group's views.

The joint programming process of decision-making took place intensively over 3-4 days, and while consuming, the immersion in the process allowed for visibility, accumulation, configuration and interweaving of the many perspectives of the entire team. Our approach allowed us to arrive at a consensus without narrowing the content to a single perspective, nor diluting it to bland, inoffensive consensus. We engaged in an intellectual rigor that allowed us, on an individual level, to concede: 'I don't like that film, but I can see what it is doing, why you feel it is doing that thing well and why we should include it in the festival'.

Democratic structures of conversation and a conscious practice of listening to one another's views gave validity to individual assertions, while also filtering out personalized responses in favor of rigorous, and intellectually meaningful statements for consideration. We were able to be thinking artists together, with care for both content and composition of the festival we were creating.

The international programs

The team programmed three international screenings. Program 1 was shown on the first day following the historical screening, and on the second day Program 2 and 3 were presented after the *Urban Dance on Screen* program.

The three programs included diverse films and offered different emotional and visual journeys, but all responded to the screendance denominator that as a team we discussed in depth. The programs also predominantly shared progressive themes and were in line with curatorial concerns of representation such as female identity, experimental space, minority ethnic representation, LGBTQ+ representation, representation of disability and age diversity. It is important to note that the team's curatorial concerns in the context of this article refer to how the festival would be perceived and experienced as a whole, therefore relating to the international screenings together with the curated screenings.

Program 1

> This screening consisted of nine visually striking films that explored in-between spaces and borders, and boundaries between self and other. An element that we wanted to actively support while selecting and programming was a substantial inclusion of female directors and choreographers

Program 2

> A selection of films which spanned vast locations and intimate spaces, from outer space to the earth, and from the formal to the interpersonal. Minority ethnic representation, representation of disability, LGBTQ+ representation underlined our choices

Program 3

> In this selection of international films, private moments sit next to social constructs and formal dance meets individual expression. This program prioritized and aimed to epitomize cross-cultural viewpoints, a choice that was further enhanced by the political climate experienced at the time and its unwelcome outcome about the UK exiting the European Union (Brexit) and its unsuccessful attempts to withdraw the agreement to leave.

Curatorial concerns

The curatorial concerns consisted of an overall view of all five screenings of the festival. Once the international and curated programs had been defined, the team met to discuss ideas for a main narrative around the two-day festival, fusing the screenings, talks and their inter-relations.

Ensuring the collection of the group's pre-existing concerns or desires about Frame Rush

We were aware of the following wishes: a response to a specific political climate (representation of production from different European and non-European countries); a consideration of screendance as established notions of choreography on screen as well as an experimental space for the two; representation of minority ethnic and LGBTQ+ makers; representation of disability; feminist issues; age diversity on screen; historical context; gender concerns; urban dance focus. These comprised a substantial collection and at times it felt challenging to search for specificity within this realm of desired inclusive possibilities. We were inclined and preoccupied in finding a link among these considerations. When the curatorial team met the first time to discuss potential links the idea of time was suggested as a connecting thread. It seemed a bit cliché initially and simplistically connected to the historical screening. However, when the idea was communicated to the team, Omari responded with "the future is urban" - this invited a connection of active collaborative endeavor, triggering a way to visualize the different

screenings, which felt like curatorial work. The past embodied within the historical screening, the international programs representing the present and the urban screening epitomizing the future. Omari's response provided scope for further exchange of ideas. There followed a dialogue that focused on ethnicity and the lack of diversity within the institution. The realization that this was true impacted on the need to subvert or at least address this imbalance. Roya Rastegar speaks of emotional triggers in relation to watching films as a programmer or as a member of a selection committee. She describes how the condition of watching without an audience contributes to accessing the emotional where one finds what matters.[23] This personal mechanism described by Rastegar reverberated among us and the act of listening among our team members in the initial stages including the programming process provided us with curatorial opportunities.

Therefore, the discussions and dialogue among all members was significant in anchoring the motivations behind the two curated screenings as well as the programmed ones, and what emerged from these is that the more we discussed what screendance was or discussed the relevance of including specific issues the more this helped to visualize an arc of the festival with its multiple concerns under the overall principle of being inclusive curators.

Working closely with programming and interpreting programming with an understanding of potential connections

Curating and programming processes were similar, and decisions in each informed each other, the processes intersected.

It was initially suggested that the historical screening be presented as an installation with iPads or tablets on which audience members could select several films from the past. The idea was interesting from the point of view of offering audiences the experience of moving fluidly within the areas of the festival, however as we were hiring a large projection screen it seemed pertinent to use it for the historical films as well. The historical screening opened the festival, which further validated the initiative to present the films on a big screen.

Most of the audience present at the *Once Upon A Light* had also booked for the International Screening 1, which took place the same evening. From a curatorial point of view the first immediate connection between the two screenings was the strands of what as a team we considered screendance, or the ways in which we valued the hybrid nature of screendance. Female filmmakers were another element of connection between the two screenings. Maya Deren's *At Land,* other than using innovative editing techniques, is also an act of advocacy for female filmmaking, which was present in our programming concerns and that was reflected in Program 1 through a number of films made by female directors and female choreographers.[24]

In *Once Upon a Light* the referencing of works that included presence of the body in and out of the screen connected to our concern about makers and crews, and their bodies being significant to a wider understanding of themes and politics within the programmed films.[25]

The international program 2 and 3 showcased films that included various curatorial concerns such as female identity, experimental space, minority ethnic representation, LGBTQ+ representation, representation of disability and age diversity. Omari's curation was a valuable addition to minority ethnic representation and LGBTQ+ concerns within the festival, and the films *Polishing*, *Fear* and *Dyanamite* that were in the *Urban Dance on Screen* curation came from the open call, which further indicates how the curatorial and programming concerns related and informed each other.

With reference to working with programming the curatorial team was preoccupied with searching for an overall connection among the curated screenings and the international programmed screenings. Once the three international programs had been decided, final decisions about these programs mainly revolved around establishing a balance of the diversity within each program.

In the final stages of the selection, it became evident that thanks to the diversity of the group in terms of age differences, identity, ethnicity, and artistic visions, interpreting programming by the group was naturally more representative of themes and concerns that as individuals alone programming, we would have not encompassed in their entirety.

Curated Screenings

Finding a common definition of screendance and motivations for curations

In the very early stages of the process the MA group found itself discussing at length what screen dance was to us. The more we tried to find a common definition the more we wanted to add and refine that definition. This highlighted the gaps present in setting or securing a definition that felt representative of different perspectives. In *Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* Douglas Rosenberg in his chapter *Curating the Practice/The Practice of Curatin*g, presents two ideologies of screendance curation. He posits two approaches: one that supports an experimental space between dance and screen, and another that supports more established ideas of choreography transferred to screen.[26] In consideration of these two strands, what resulted from the team's discussions was an identity of the group that included both ideologies. This allowed for the nine organizers to be open in programming and curating screenings that approached the relationship between dance and film in both notions described by Rosenberg.

Frame Rush 2019 included two curated screenings (beyond the requirement for the course), born out of individual initiatives presented and discussed among the group in the early stages of the course module.

Urban Dance on Screen showcased works that used innovative concepts, thought-provoking narratives and urbanity in a range of contexts. The films were drawn partly from the open call, and some were invited directly.

Once Upon a Light, presented a range of short films from the past that shared the idea of play between light and dark, and included an introduction by Dr Claudia Kappenberg, principal lecturer at the University of Brighton, artist and co-founder-editor of the International Journal of Screendance and lecturer at LCDS.

Once Upon a Light presented examples of origins and developments of the two notions Rosenberg defined. Though all four historical films were innovative in experimenting with dance and screen at the time of their making, *Le Lys* is representative of choreography directly transferred on screen, and *At Land* is representative of how editing could further transform movement sequences in ways that still influence choreography on screen today. The other films, *Black, White, Gray,* (1930) by László Moholy-Nagy and *Free Radicals* (1979) by Len Lye, exemplified the concept of a more experimental space between choreography and film. This provided a basis of how two different approaches to the form have a history and still held relevance to present day approaches.

In addition, *Once Upon a Light* intended to contextualize dance on screen as a multidisciplinary art form. The historical legacy of the study of dance and choreography places the body as the central focus, and screendance offers possibilities to re-contextualise the body.[27] The body can be present on screen or off screen, the dance can expand beyond the visible, and the choreography can interact with footage. These thoughts around the body, dance and choreography were the starting points for selecting the historical films.

Urban Dance on Screen presented a contemporary and diverse exhibit of films directing attention to the evolution of styles within a nuanced perspective of the artform.

Omari envisioned a screening of films that included urbanity in a range of contexts. His wish was to dismantle a generalized and fixed understanding of urban dance too often associated with a singular hip-hop dance form, black culture, or a specific city. *Urban Dance on Screen* consisted of seven films covering a variety of dance styles (contemporary, freestyle, ballet, hip hop, physical theater, gestural and puppet theater), filmed in cities in the U.S.A, Cameroon, UK, and Tibet. The films integrated choreography with urban themes within the film. Via his curation, Omari reminded us that urban dance is always evolving as cultures respond to the times in which they live.

Main challenges encountered

As with most endeavors the curated screenings also had their challenges.

In the case of the historical curation, finding where some films were archived, obtaining the rights and negotiating prices to stay within the budget were the most prominent challenges. For the urban dance on screen curation, Omari found it challenging to negotiate with some artists because they distributed their works in different ways, ranging from self-distribution, commercial distribution companies, to licensing.

Another challenge shared by both curations was how to reach desired audiences. There was concern among the cohort that students (a demographic the team had identified as a desired target audience) would not be enticed and drawn to historical screendance. According to survey and box office data, a mixture of different age groups attended *Once Upon a Light* that included students from London Contemporary Dance School, but we did not fill all the seats on the day. With hindsight, it would have been helpful to consider advertising/marketing to dance history and dance culture tutors at the schools and universities in the area to reach more students.

For *Urban Dance on Screen*, the team was hoping to reach crossover audiences attending a live event on the main stage of The Place, Avant Garde Dance's *Show and Prove*, a competition of various dance styles including Hip Hop, Experimental, Afro Beats and House. *Urban Dance on Screen* was scheduled to allow audiences to attend the screening and then join the Avant Garde show and a discount was available when booking for both events. Unfortunately, dancers and competitors who had registered for the theater event were not as easily drawn to our screening space as we had hoped. This was possibly due to the building's layout not facilitating a physical meeting point between the two events. It raised a question about our marketing strategy and how we could have reached that sector of the audience that did attend the theater event but was unaware of the screening.

In a recent conversation with Omari he spoke of a gap he noticed on the day of the festival with reference to reached audiences. This further emphasized how at the time The Place did not necessarily offer professional training to people who were not already trained in

established/traditional classical and contemporary techniques and as a result people who generally book events and performances at The Place will be dancers from the mentioned professional sector. This realization intensified the value and purpose for his curation. Despite not having achieved the desired outcome in relation to broader audience attendance, the work inspired Omari to make a video essay[28] about the imbalance within the world of contemporary dance styles and make light on this issue within the academic world of dance education. So, in Omari's words "the curation took a different form to bridge the gap in academia" (Carter, personal communication with Lazzaro, 18 February 2021).

Curated screenings Q&A sessions

During the *Urban Dance on Screen* Q&A session a member of the audience noted that he appreciated the political nature of the festival as a whole and asked how this was perceived by the organizers. Omari's response was that in his case it stemmed from realizing that urban is a lot more than just hip hop, a lot more than just relating to an *urbe*, and that it encompasses multiple stories.[29] Leaning into Omari's thought, the whole group concurred that programming and curating Frame Rush was so much more than our single stories, and that our single stories, if anything, were a reflection of a wider pool of stories. One could say that as nine programmers and curators we acted as an audience sample, an idea that Loist mentioned as being identified by Zielinsky in the 1980s when "[s]election committees typically represent a diverse range of community members and serve as sounding boards for a variety of tastes and identity issues." [30] With an awareness of community and the current political climate in the country we were inclined to promote representation of diverse voices and the intersection of boundaries.

Urban Dance On Screen sparked an animated post screening discussion around race. The director Cléophée Moser who presented *Fauves* (2018) was asked a question about being a white French female director shooting in Cameroon, a colony of France. This sparked questions from the director herself challenging the accuracy of the facts stated in the question: 'Cameroon was no longer a French colony', and 'how do you define white?' The director carried on specifying her ethnicity to be Ladino, originating from Turkish nomads. Despite having been born and raised in France, Moser expressed her indignation with the French colonial past. The film celebrates and attempts to empower the film's female protagonist in an environment that would condemn her dancing in public. Moser also described her creative approach as collaborative. What became clearer from the exchange was the existing privilege of the director potentially 'passing as white' which confers privilege, having a French passport, and having no issue coming to the festival as a French national while her colleagues from Cameroon were not granted a visa for traveling into the UK.[31]

It also became clear from this exchange how recognizing the power and privilege imbalance between western crews and local casts in non-western countries as a result of past occidental colonization could further inform individual and collective curatorial responsibilities toward contributing to a fairer balance.

Learning from the Process

Conclusions about the ongoing potential of Frame Rush

The framework of Frame Rush as a festival proposes some interesting outcomes:

As the team changes every year, with each cohort given the autonomy to re-shape the festival according to their interests, Frame Rush is, in a way, protected from its own institutionalization. Every year, the contributing voices and their interaction with wider concerns of the artform shifts - with no cohort obliged to honor the choices of those in the years before them. This creates a vital artistic space which is poised to confront the wider concerns of the artform and impact upon it, with fresh and current perspective. In the very notion of their studentship, team members are permitted and encouraged to destabilize, question, and confront new propositions boldly, with perhaps fewer restrictions around satisfying funders, partner organizations or established audiences than other festivals.

The freedom of students to experiment and indeed both fail and succeed in their ideas creates a unique space in which experimental or unconventional methods of producing and programming can be explored - a luxury of inquisition rarely afforded to organizations or individuals who must attempt to guarantee some minimum outcome or face losing their funding. Each new cohort also changes the institution: informed by their ideas and ideals, they challenge the course, its staff and systems to engage with and support their vision for the event.

The democratic structure between the students acts as an annually renewed web in which the vitality of screendance in that moment can be voiced, questioned, articulated, translated and harnessed, to speak back to the form in a voice which is profoundly of the present, and freer from institutional obligations.

Conclusions about Frame Rush 2019 and how our working processes impacted the outcome

Few cultural workers have the luxury of time to reflect. Some form of evaluation takes place in most settings, but it is pertinent to note how the educational structure of Frame Rush allowed the team the privilege to reflect deeply with one another and individually. Even as we have written this chapter, new reflections and conversations have emerged regularly as we recall the process.

Our submission criteria specified an open call that welcomed all genres of dance and film that adhered to the mutual interconnectivity of screen and dance, that supported artists who are changing narratives, that encouraged work driven by female, minority ethnic and LGBTQ+ artists, and that welcomed professional and student works that were meaningful, thought-provoking, experimental, and that cultivated dialogues across culture, contexts and locations. As a team we favored a collective voice that avoided separatist programming, categorizing films in one program or another based on theme, we intentionally grouped diverse films indicating our distinct inclusive politics. As suggested by Skadi Loist, “one strategy for avoiding separatist programming along gender/sexual identity or racial/ethnic backgrounds is the obvious move to mixed programs”.[32]

We sought to deliver a festival which, across its breadth, felt vital and relevant. We extended this care in both the programming and curation processes, all five screenings serving our intentions. The value of the programming as a thoughtful and rigorous process, along with the two curations and all the intermediary negotiations between each screening, afforded the rich gestalt of the entire event.

Our strategy was to present a mixture of films that focused on various themes and current issues including gender and ethnicity issues. From a curatorial point of view perhaps this strategy provided too few constraints, but Frame Rush in its first ever edition and in conjunction with the

MA being a new course with the largest cohort since its inception, demanded a wide spectrum of focus, which was further shaped by the stupefaction at the UK's exit from Europe. The breadth of our collective enquiry led us to create a festival that felt substantial in its content and meaning, and we were able to recognise this, gratefully, in the feedback received from audience members and invited sector professionals. We shared a sense of having successfully developed an event which answered both the intents of the group - and all the individuals in it - whilst also adding a meaningful contribution to the wider discourse across the field of screendance.

This was indeed, to many of us, a shock; having come together so abruptly, it was almost a marvel that at the end of the process, each of the team - all nine - felt satisfied and proud of what we had created - and more than this, felt satisfied that their individual practices, values, ideas, and artistic enquiries, had been embedded and present in the festival.

It would be true to say that the extent to which democratic mechanics were present in the day-to-day activity of developing Frame Rush 2019 were, in the moment, less obvious to us. The simple act of checking with the group before doing, generated a process of filtering through which allowed all to become included in every decision.

Curator Lisa Rosendhal talks about autonomous authorship versus a poly-vocal process in a presentation entitled 'Where is the body of the curator?'. Reflections on her experience of her then recent curation (the 2021 edition of the biennial The Ghost Ship & The Sea Change) eloquently theorized the validity of a poly-vocal process in curation:

> I think it's a mistake to think of curatorial work along the lines of the conventions of individual authorship and ownership, it limits our understanding of the potential of the curatorial. Curatorial practice is relational and contingent at root. A curator is never autonomous in the sense of an autonomous artist producing an artwork alone in the studio. On the contrary a curator always produces with others in one form or another. This relationality seems to me to correspond to an understanding of the world as made up of relations and interdependencies, something that ideological construction of individual authorship with all its divisions of power, labor and agency underpinned by modernist ideas of autonomy and authenticity tends to make invisible. But my rejection of the idea of individual authorship and ownership does not mean that I reject the possibility of voice or agency. I'd rather think we should use the relational nature of curatorial practice to explore poly vocal ways of telling about the world, conceived from the point of view of an agency that includes us but does not belong to us.[33]

The term poly-vocal rings true both as conveying a group led-decision-making system as well as reflecting the experience that occurred during our making of Frame Rush. The Frame Rush 2019 team with its nine programmers and curators favored the relational nature of the endeavor and understood the value of shared curatorial authorship among different autonomous voices.

Reflecting on the process of developing Frame Rush 2019, it was clear among the group that we largely attributed the success of the festival in producing a substantial and impactful program of events to the interauthorship and collaborative practice we had so fully committed to. The process of legitimizing and hearing the views of others was what allowed us to arrive at a consensus which was not diluted to the inoffensive or selling out to the easy audience. We crafted a breadth of work and within its structure, we carved a space for dissenting opinions and choices, placing each piece thoughtfully to shape discourse and provoke a residual response to

the festival that bubbled for some time after - indeed, for the team at least - it still bubbles today, 3 years later.

Endnotes

1. See appendix for full festival program
2. Please note that all descriptions in this article relate to the version of the course running from 2018-2021, validated by the University of Kent. A revised version of the course was validated in 2021 by the University of the Arts London.
3. The first MA courses with strong dance film focus were 2006-2009 Masters in Media Art at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, a 12 month postgraduate course developed by Simon Fildes and Katrina McPherson, and taught by them and other faculty from the School of Media Arts, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee.
The MA Contemporary Dance (Dance for the Screen pathway) at London Contemporary Dance School (David Hinton/Alex Reuben) ran from 2002-2007.
Currently running is also the Graduate Certificate in Screendance at the University of Utah, USA founded by Ellen Bromberg 2010, developed further by Katrina McPherson.
4. This is the wording of the 2018/19 contribution assignment:
Assignment 1: Contribute to the organization of a public festival (50% of final mark)
5. There was no submission fee, and the call also received 1,345 ineligible submissions.
6. Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance is a music and dance conservatoire based in south London. – thus a similar institution and venue to Frame Rush.
7. The Weave- a shinkansen and body>data>space interdisciplinary co-creation methodology, co-created 1992–1996, p.1
8. The Weave - a shinkansen and body>data>space interdisciplinary co-creation methodology, co-created 1992–1996, p.2
9. Hagan, Visual Politics in American Dance Film: Representation and Disparity.
10. The cohort set targets for themselves in relation to representation, and tracked the following statistics:
Gender of makers: 60% Female makers; 40% Male makers
Country of origin of films: Europe 50%; America 30%; Other 20%
Representing ethnic and age diversity and minority groups on screen: 50%
First time film-makers (student productions): 30%
Filmmakers attending Festival (films represented at festival): 20%
11. Due to the hybrid nature of screen dance, the first task of the module was to define and describe what it entailed.
12. Rosenberg, Inscribing the Ephemeral Image. p.129
13. Hagan, Screendance from Film to Festival: Celebration and Curatorial Practice, p.87
14. Ibid
15. Ibid, p.85
16. Ibid
17. Rosenberg, Inscribing the Ephemeral Image. p.129
18. Hagan, Screendance from Film to Festival. p.90
19. Rosenberg, Inscribing the Ephemeral Image, p.129
20. Frame Rush Selection Meetings were recorded for reflection. Meeting dated 5 Feb 2019: 0:01:31
21. Ibid, Meeting dated 17 Jan 2019: 0:01:57.
22. Ibid, Meeting dated 17 Jan 2019: 0:04:31.

23. Rastegar, p.191
24. See Appendix for festival Program 1
25. The concept of selecting work with the presence of the body in and out of the artwork (visible and invisible) was very much influenced by Claudia Kappenberg's chapter 'The Politics of Discourse in Hybrid Art Forms' in Boulègue, F. and Hayes, M.C. (eds.). Art in Motion. Current Research in Screendance/ Recherches actuelles en ciné-danse.
26. Rosenberg, Inscribing the Ephemeral Image, p.126
27. Kappenberg,The Politics of Discourse, p.27
28. https://uwprod-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/otcarter_wisc_edu/Em_xosdcKkNBjG46KXyrX7wBhKkTZ_sRpgYF22bGXRooQ?e=KE0p0P
29. Urban Dance on Screen Q&A recording, minutes 1:59—2:40, 22:38-24:32. For access to the TED talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie mentioned by Omari, 'The danger of a single story'. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare
30. Loist, A Complicated Queerness, p.163
31. Urban Dance on Screen Q&A recording, minutes 25:01- 30:21
32. Loist, A Complicated Queerness, p.165
33. Rosendahl, Online lecture, minutes 10:30-12:12

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Appendices

- Frame Rush Festival program
- Frame Rush 2019 film programs (list of films)
    - International screening 1
    - International screening 2
    - International screening 3
    - Once Upon a Light
    - Urban Dance on Screen
- Q&A participants list
- Submission and program demographics?

Screendance Africa (Pty) Ltd: *African Screendance made by Africans*

By Jeannette Ginslov

Abstract

Screendance Africa (Pty) Ltd (SDA), is a Screendance company founded by South African co-directors and co-curators, Jeannette Ginslov and Dominique Jossie, in Cape Town, South Africa, 2012. SDA's mission is to advance and encourage the making of Screendance in Africa, made by Africans. This may be thought of to challenge, reshape and tackle ideas about racial diversity in Screendance in South Africa, its representation and its curation at local and international Screendance Festivals. Before discussing how SDA does this, this chapter provides a short background on the history of filmmaking in South Africa and questions why Screendance never developed a strong voice alongside the growth of film and Contemporary Dance in South Africa. It then discusses how SDA attempted to promote Screendance in South Africa, using the method of PAR - practice as research or 'learning by doing', running workshops, online discussions and curating locally made Screendance for local and international Screendance audiences. Finally, it reveals issues around international collaborations and how the COVID19 Pandemic Lockdown and the phenomenon of Zoom has ironically accelerated and inspired a new generation of Screendance makers in South Africa, which reveal African voices and African bodies in front of African lenses.

A background

Screendance Africa (SDA) was founded by co-directors and co-curators, Jeannette Ginslov and filmmaker Dominique Jossie on 15 November 2012, in Cape Town South Africa (1). Both Ginslov and Jossie are native to South Africa. Ginslov has Danish heritage and is White, whereas Jossie is mixed race. Ginslov worked extensively with Black, White and mixed-race artists in South Africa during the time of apartheid (1948-1994), grappling with issues such as gender inequality, identity and race in her dance theater productions and later in her MA Choreography studies at Rhodes University in 1999 and her MSc Screendance studies at Dundee University in 2009. Jossie studied a BA degree majoring in Film, Drama and Media at the University of Cape Town (UCT) continuing to graduate with honours in Drama in 2009. She designed videography for live dance performances with Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre and coordinated the internationally acclaimed *Winnie: The Opera***,** a multimedia opera about the life of Winnie Mandela. In January 2012 Dominique interned at the 40th Annual Dance on Camera Festival in New York.

The springboard for the creation of Screendance Africa, for both Jossie and GInslov, stems from a desire to work across different media and their lived experience of apartheid and its effect on artists and the arts. The apartheid era in South Africa, was a time of legally enforced racial segregation under the all-white Nationalist Government. Non-white South Africans, the majority of the population, were required to live separately and use segregated public facilities, minimizing or eliminating contact between racial groups. This division extended to the arts, where artists of different races worked in isolation. The situation was further exacerbated by the global Cultural and Academic Boycott of South Africa from 1963 to the early 1990s, which left the country isolated and hindered its ability to progress alongside the rest of the world—particularly in technological advancements in the arts, such as dance on video or Screendance. However, from the late 1980's onward, local artists across the colour divide began to collaborate, form multiracial

committees and political alliances to rectify the inequalities in the arts. Ginslov was the elected Co-Founder and Dance Rep of the Dance Alliance South Africa & Performing Artists Workers Equity: Interim Committee, for example and helped re-write the White Paper for the Arts, for the newly elected African National Congress (ANC) in 1994. The election of the ANC spelled the end of apartheid and the beginning of Democracy and the visual arts, photography, multimedia installations, film, dance and the performing arts began to carve out uniquely multiracial South African voices and identities, such as the ones founded at the Dance Factory, the Market Theater in Johannesburg and exported abroad by artists such as William Kentridge and Robyn Orlin. The heinous stranglehold of apartheid on South Africa people, the Arts and Dance in South Africa was finally over. However, Screendance or Dance Film was not part of that trajectory and only began to take shape in 2007-2009 when Ginslov and Gerard Bester formed Montage Video Dance Festival, to be discussed in more detail below. However, in 2012 when Ginslov and Jossie first met in Cape Town, where Ginslov was teaching a Screendance workshop at UCT, they decided to join forces and create Screendance Africa to reflect and identify the need to find a unique voice for South African Screendance.

Since its inception SDA has had one mission: to encourage the making of Screendance in Africa, made by Africans. SDA is dedicated to the development, production, screening, and distribution of Screendance made in Africa, locally and internationally. SDA endeavors to push the boundaries of dance on screen giving audiences visual and visceral experiences of life through dance on the African continent. Its vision is to elevate the standard and quality of Screendance made in Africa by providing a platform for the crossover of dance and digital media, which explores all forms of dance and filmmaking, on screen and online distribution. It curates and presents Screendance festivals in South Africa, the African continent and around the globe, and conducts workshops, labs, lectures, outdoor screening events and residencies. SDA aims to be the link between international and African Screendance production and talent. Our vision is to become part of a global network of Screendance festivals, organizations, and online platforms.

Since its inception it has produced two fashion dance films, and using the method of PAR (2) conducted Screendance and augmented reality (AR) workshops, discussions online, curated and screened African Screendance for local and international audiences, providing differing views of African dance and ways of identity making, storytelling and representation through the medium.

However, first a very short background history of film in South Africa further provides a context for the emergence of Screendance in South Africa and SDA.

South African Film History

On 11 May 1896, the Empire Palace of Varieties, a cinema in Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, began screening international films to segregated audiences. (3) The local film industry flourished in the early 20th Century and locally produced films appeared from 1911. (4) In 1987, director Oliver Schmitz directed the film *Mapantsula*, (5) the first anti-apartheid feature film for and about Black South Africans, when South Africa was in a state of emergency. By 1997, South Africa, particularly Cape Town, became increasingly recognized as a popular destination for foreign and commercial film production, as the weather and locations are good, and crews are available at affordable rates. Since then, the South African film industry has produced award winning

mainstream feature films as well as experimental films and documentaries, (6) that are screened around the globe, securing an African voice for the medium of film.

South African Dance Film History

Paradoxically, with the successful development of cinema, dance on film never flourished in Africa, as it did in the United States and Europe. This is curious, as African culture and live performance is strongly associated with the expression of embodied experiences of being African, through dance and theater. Contemporary Dance in South Africa and other African countries have successfully and purposefully addressed issues of African identity, race, and culture since the 1980's. This begs the question why the making of Screendance in Africa has not developed alongside its dance and film industry, as it did internationally and why to date, there is no single annual festival dedicated to Screendance in South Africa nor in any other country in Africa?

The first local full-length ballet Dance Film to be made in South Africa was *Raka* (1967). Directed by South African Frank Staff, and distributed internationally by 20th Century Fox, this three-act ballet film is based on an epic poem in Afrikaans by South African N.P. van Wyk Louw. Since then, there have been no other locally produced full-length feature Dance Films featuring mainstream dance such as Ballet, unless it has been produced for social media purposes. However, the Dance Film *Hear Me Move* (2015) was reported as being the first South African Dance Film, to feature *Sbujwa*, a Johannesburg street dance style that uses house music, taunting, shouting matches and "'a dance that requires every muscle in your body to work in order to complete moves,' plus lots of creativity." (Bukola 2012) Directed by Scottnes L. Smith, produced by Fidel Namisi and Wandile Molebatsi, with production taking place in Johannesburg by Coal Stove Pictures, it won best editing from the Africa Film Academy in 2016. Released at Ster-Kinekor Cinemas nationwide in South Africa, it also had international screenings via the Afrostream network in different countries including the United States. Soon after Jonathan Hofmeyr directed *Pop Lock 'n Roll* (2017), a hip-hop Dance Film, which the Indigenous Film Distribution company distributed locally and internationally and nominated by the Africa Film Academy for best editing in 2018. The inspiration one can assume came from the flood of Dance Films featuring street dance styles that Hollywood produced during this time, such as *Stomp the Yard* (2007) and *Step Up* (2006 to 2014). Currently the dance company Darkroom Contemporary, founded in 2010, by Louise Coetzer and Oscar O'Ryan are leading the field in Screendance production and Jomba! Contemporary Dance Festival in Durban often screen works during their festival but it is not a platform dedicated to Screendance, but live performance.

However, the growth of Dance Video or Video Dance never flourished in the local South African Contemporary Dance community as it did internationally. One could assume that it was due to a lack of resources, or a local suspicion that the medium would replace live performance as expressed above. The use of video technology was, however, explored by Contemporary Dance practitioners in live performance from the 1990's onwards. Here Robyn Orlin and Author used video technology experimentally in live or interactive works. These were not Screendance works per se but provided visual digital backgrounds to enhance live performances and dance theater works. However, it may be safe to say that Ginslov conceived, choreographed and performed one of South Africa's first Video Dances, *Sandstone* (1988) (Image 1), directed by Byron Griffin.

Image 1**:** Ginslov in *Sandstone* (1989) jpeg, – Credit: Bob Martin 1990

Griffin entered *Sandstone* into the international Tokyo Film Festival competition that year but was not accepted. The dance video slid into obscurity only to surface again on Ginslov's YouTube Channel in 2010. However, in the 2000s, having discovered Screendance on the Internet whilst based in Johannesburg, Ginslov attended a self-funded Screendance Masterclass with Katrina McPherson at the Place, London in 2006. Inspired, upon her return, she created the *Montage Video Dance Festival* (2007-9), assisted by Gerard Bester in association with her dance theater company *Walking Gusto Productions* (2003-8), that received a three-year funding grant from the National Arts Council (NAC), South Africa. With this funding and collaborative support from *FNB Dance Umbrella*, Bester and Ginslov curated a roll of Screendance works from local and international Screendance makers for *Montage*. The works were screened alongside the *FNB Dance Umbrella* in Johannesburg (2007-9), at the *National Arts Festival* South Africa (2008 & 2009) and for *Jomba! Dance Festival* in Durban (2009). Disappointingly the auditoriums sometimes stood

empty, despite free entrance. Interested audiences were small but occasionally not appreciative of the medium. From a dance perspective, audiences who still pandered to European culture as the golden standard, sometimes reported that they could not relate to a digital version of live performance, arguing that Screendance should never replace live performance, or that the medium prevented a viewing of the whole body in motion, as the framing cut the body into different parts.

Disappointingly, funding for *Walking Gusto Productions* and the *FNB Dance Umbrella* evaporated*, Montage* was shut down and Ginslov began an MSc Screendance degree at the Duncan and Jordanstone College of Art and Design at the University of Dundee, Scotland (2008-9). This was headed up by Simon Fildes and Katrina McPherson. During her studies in 2009 Ginslov curated *Montage in Africa,* which was screened at the *moves09 – International Festival of Movement on Screen,* in Manchester, UK to great acclaim. This included the student works of Ginslov: *sanctum I* and s*anctum II*, that explore the sensitive issue of female genital mutilation occurring in Africa and elsewhere. Since then both films have been screened at over twenty different international Screendance festivals.

During this time, Screendance in South Africa became dormant and was still somewhat viewed suspiciously by local dance makers. However, after having taught Screendance in the Dansehallerne in Copenhagen, Oslo Art on Wires, Stockholm University, University of Wisconsin, Hong Kong Dance Festival, Dundee University and Kigali Art Centre (2010-11), Ginslov returned to South Africa in 2012, to teach Screendance at the University of Cape Town and to take up a Senior Dance and Screendance Lecturing post at the University of Grahamstown, for MA students. Acknowledging the dearth of Screendance makers in South Africa, Ginslov was motivated and determined to re-activate the production of a Screendance festival but needed a partner. Fortunately, Jossie and Ginslov first met at the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA) Dance and Film Colloquium, that Jossie and Professor Jay Pather Director of GIPCA, Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre and associate professor for the Centre for Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Cape Town (UCT), established. They invited Ginslov to present alongside other Screendance practitioners as well as local dancers and filmmakers. After a brief meeting in Cape Town Jossie and GInslov identified the need for a local Screendance Festival that could promote the production of Screendance through screenings, lectures, and workshops, after which they founded *Screendance Africa (Pty) Ltd,* that was then and currently still is in operation without financial support, headed up by Jossie.

Back to the present

One of SDA's main aims from 2012 was to foster the creation of Screendance made in Africa, by Africans, thereby attempting to *decolonize* the practice. SDA takes the wider meaning of *decolonizing,* as the freeing of minds, culture and practice from colonial ideology and identity, by "addressing the ingrained idea that to be colonized [is] to be inferior". (7) SDA believes that *decolonization* is a performative act as "[p]erformativity is the power of language to effect change in the world: language does not simply describe the world but may instead (or also) function as a form of social action… Performativity, then, is the process of subject formation, which creates that which it purports to describe and occurs through linguistic means, as well as via other social practices". (8) It is understood as a process, in which we must rethink, reframe, and reconstruct our art practices through PAR, that unites the experiences and actions in the place it is derived. In this case it is Screendance, that internationally and locally we think, sometimes preserves, and operates

from a pre-eminent Eurocentric, colonial and cultural lens. Subsequently there are too many white bodies dancing in front of white lenses.

For SDA, *decolonizing* Screendance needs to take place through local Screendance practitioners actively engaging in interdisciplinary research, questioning their methods and processes by interrogating African or Other bodies and their representation on screen, alongside issues of identity, and diversity. Other ways to dismantle 'colonial eyes' is by viewing all forms of Screendance critically, either in a studio or online, or by attending workshops, collaborations, and discussions. Finally, it is by curating and screening locally produced works, in Africa and internationally, changing the ways that international festivals curate and control the viewing of Other bodies and their representation.

Learning by viewing and doing

Growing and learning about a *decolonized* form of Screendance on the African continent and screening it abroad, is not easy or affordable. Apart from a few examples, there are no paradigmatic African Screendance works to guide the form nor to learn from, so one starts from the bottom, and this is fortuitous. Screendance makers in South Africa have had to learn about the craft by attending a few workshops or by watching Screendance online, due to the lack of local Screendance Festivals. In addition, there are only a few Screendance workshops at university or college dance courses and with only a few Screendance Workshops conducted by SDA in the past, the aspiring Screendance maker in Africa needs to resort to other means to learn about the form – "learning by doing."

For Jossie, international and local Screendance works screened at a few SDA festivals in South Africa (see below), may have inspired potential Screendance makers in South Africa, making them more aware of the form and what is expected in the production of Screendance for local and international screening events. They may also have been inspired by online Screendance works that are freely available. However, whatever is freely shared online, is often not current, nor are the most significant works available, as they are exclusively reserved and curated for real-time major Screendance festival attendees, usually in the United States and Europe. This stymies Screendance making in South Africa, and no doubt the rest of Africa, as there are no funds available to apply for to attend these festivals, nor is there any funding in local or national government level, for researching the creation of African Screendance. In other words, lack of exposure to excellent work and the confidence and finances to make good work, to experiment or reveal embodied stories through an African Screendance lens is underdeveloped. In addition, if mainstream works are screened in South Africa, for example *Nora* (2008) or *Pina* (3D) (2011), the African Screendance maker is, either overwhelmed by its sophistication or inspired to recreate it, but by not having the skills to do so, their Screendance outcomes are of low production value and content. Screendance from Africa therefore, if shown online or at international festivals is not respected abroad and is sometimes viewed as being crude, simplistic, without sophistication, intention, and meaningful subject matter.

Ironically, it is sometimes, but not always, that the negative attributes described above, draws an international Screendance audience's attention. The more unsophisticated the capturing of the moving body is, the more haptic it is, and as a result the more empathic responses it draws from the viewer (9). The haptic is about tactility, texture, proximity, contact, and touch. They are felt

viscerally, and associated with motion, action, extreme close-ups that lose all identification of place or character, and/or disturbs the mastery of the reading of the image. Haptic images are therefore indirect and give rise to resonances and intimacy – ways of looking and experiencing through the caressing gaze rather than a voyeuristic control or mastery. Media theoretician Laura U Marks (2000) claims that the viewer engages with the haptic, rather than the narrative or character as it captures life forces as a politics of representation. Take for example the student films derived from SDA's Screendance workshops *uValo* (2012) (Image 2) and *Vulnerability* (2012), that were created intuitively and do not pander to the expectations of international Screendance festival curators. The Screendance makers here lean towards creating a new style with limited resources.

Image 2. Perf. Mpilo Khumalo in *uValo* (2012)
jpeg, - Credit: Jeannette Ginslov 2012

These works were screened and received positively at several international Screendance Festivals. Despite this, Jossie and Ginslov often found it was difficult to persuade aspiring Screendance makers in South Africa that these types of Screendance works, unsophisticated as they are, is where one starts, and often these beginnings are the most intuitive, remarkable, and memorable.

SDA Workshops

So far workshops by SDA have been conducted by the Author (Image 3) in South Africa, Europe and Hong Kong.

Image 3. SDA (2012) Ginslov teaching a workshop for Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre Company Durban jpeg, – Credit: Dominique Jossie 2012

SDA's workshop timeline:

2016
Africa in Motion at Dance Base, Edinburgh 01/11.
Screendance Africa roll of African Dance films and 90mins Screendance workshop
Tanzrauschen Dance Film Festival Screendance & AR Workshop, Wuppertal, Germany for the *Tanzrauschen Dance Film Festival*, Die Börse Kommunikationszentrum in Wuppertal Germany 28-31/01
Screendance Africa in the Loop Room*:*
2014
Vo'Arte InShadow 2014, Lisbon International Festival of Video, performance and technology. Masterclass 60secondsdance.dk and Screendance & AR Workshop
iDance Festival Hong Kong: Screendance Workshops 22-29 Nov
2012
University of Cape Town Dance Department: Screendance course for the Post

Graduate Choreography students throughout the year.
Durban University of Technology & Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre: Screendance Workshop Nov 22-28 Durban, South Africa
Rhodes University Screendance Residency: 06-11/08
Art on Wires Oslo Screendance Workshop*:* 30/07-04/08
GIPCA Cape Town Screendance Workshop: 18-22/07
Ishyo Arts Centre, Rwanda Kigali 15-22/04

SDA curation for local and International Screendance festivals

Ginslov, together with Jossie, guest curated a selection of films for each of the African and international Screendance festivals listed below. While some festivals made specific selections from our submissions, others screened the entire curated program, offering a range of perspectives on African dance and representations of the body. The works featured included Screendance pieces created in South Africa by South African artists, as well as through international collaborations. Below is the list of Screendance festivals that Screendance Africa contributed to, between 2013 and 2020:

2020: *Ruch Oporu* (Movement of Resistance), for *Kino Tańca* Online program
2020: *Screendance: Diversity & Representation Matters*: Online Conference Vrystaat Arts Festival, Bloemfontein, South Africa
2018: *Moving Image Festival* hosted by the Dance Department at Barnard College of Columbia University, *Moving BROWN body - Moving image Festival*. New York, USA.
2018: *Cinedans*, Amsterdam, Netherlands
2018: *Moovy Tanzfilmfestival*, Cologne, Germany
2017: *Choreoscope*: Screendance Festival in Barcelona, Spain
2017: *Bodily Undoing*: Somatic Activism and Performance Cultures as Practices of Critique. Bath Spa University, United Kingdom
2017: *Afrikanska kulturdagar*: African Screendance Works for Afrikultur, Stockholm, Sweden
2017: *African Film Day* at Skarpnäcks Kulturhus, Stockholm, Sweden
2017: *Africa Day* and African Christmas Market in Bagarmossens Folkets Hus and Bagarmossens Library, Stockholm, Sweden
2016: *Tanzrauschen International Dance Festival* and Screendance Africa screening in the Loop Room, Wuppertal, Germany
2016: *Dança em Foco*, International Festival of Video and Dance, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
2016: *Interdisciplinary Conference in Dance-Cognition-Technology*, Teatro Martins Gonçalvez, Bahia, Brazil
2016: *Africa in Motion,* Dance Base, Edinburgh, Scotland
2014: *Chennai Women's International Film Festival*, Cape Town, South Africa
2014: *iDance Hong Kong Festival,* Hong Kong
2013: *JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Festival*, Durban, South Africa
2013: *Detours* - University of Witwatersrand: Re –Visioning Dance Festival. Johannesburg, South Africa
2013: *Transmissions Dance Festival*, Uganda

2013: *African Creative Economy Conference*, Cape Town, South Africa
2013: *National Arts Festival*, Grahamstown, South Africa
2013: *Durban International Film Festival*, Durban, South Africa

Online workshops and festivals

New ways of learning about Screendance making via online workshops and viewing Screendance festivals online, curated by international Screendance Festivals, have also made the form more accessible to aspiring African Screendance makers. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020-21), new ways of "learning by doing" and attending Screendance discussions and Festivals during Lockdown occurred via the Zoom phenomenon. Online workshops for the final year UCT Theatre and Performance Studies students, facilitated by Pather and Ginslov, in collaboration with other staff members, produced some remarkable Screendance works. Made with mobile phones using rudimentary editing techniques, in Lockdown and isolation, these students produced what *Screendance Africa's* mission set out to do: produce African Screendance made by Africans.

The time in Lockdown and isolation gave these African student Screendance makers a chance to examine and reveal the more experiential African aspects of themselves. By experiencing things in isolation, the students were requested, by Pather and Ginslov, to *look inwardly* at their own experiences, their own South African histories and identities, or ways of being a South African, and in this way come one step closer to creating South African Screendance not seen before. These Screendance works were later screened online, on UCT's YouTube Channel in 2021.

SDA hopes that this will inspire potential Screendance makers in South Africa to address issues of the *colonial lens* and why it is important to create Screendance through an African eye. It is questionable however that many aspiring filmmakers have the money to pay for online screening events and workshops, let alone have the bandwidth to do so, as the economic landscape of South Africa is dire, with many living in poverty. Artists struggle to make ends meet, and as there is a lack of financial support for the medium across the board, a DIY or "punk aesthetic" in Screendance has started to surface. Perhaps it is here that a unique South African Screendance voice will rise. This also seems to be an inherent feature of Screendance for most makers, at least at some point or at the beginning of their journey. Specific examples of what this kind of representation looks like on screen besides is difficult to find, due to the reasons above. It does not mean simply having the presence of South African dancers in the dance film but what PAR in relation to a decolonial attitude inspires. One example is *Lipstick* (2014) a Rhodes University Student Screendance workshop outcome. This collaborative Screendance work tackles the issue of being "other": a homosexual Black male growing up in a misogynistic patriarchal Black Township and his desire to express his otherness and identity through dance. The film is haptic and autobiographical, dealing with the dancer's lived experiences of current and remnants of the past. However, Ginslov, having experienced teaching at AFDA, the South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance (2003-8), came across film students who no longer cared for, nor examined their parent's apartheid past in relation to their current film projects. It seems like a generation wanting to rid itself of a heinous past but not really assured of its current position. Having not been back in South Africa since 2014, the Author wonders if this has changed and if this will inspire a new generation of filmmakers and Screendance makers in the future?

International collaborations

The exposure and production of African dance on screen has also in the past been instigated by international Screendance makers, often European, collaborating with African dancers and dance companies. Through funds provided by their own foreign governments, they have created African Screendance through their own foreign perspectives and often for their own foreign audiences. These projects may have also been funded with the possibility of fulfilling EU government funding criteria, that may have insisted on the enabling and inclusion of Black dancing bodies. However, Wilson stated that "(o)ne can only speculate about funding criteria for EU Screendance makers as Black dancers in EU dance companies are currently experiencing feeling marginalized and their contracts fulfilling funding criteria". (10)

Whilst this provides much needed international exchange and experience for African Screendance makers, authentic voices of African experience, of which there are many, are perhaps discounted in the pressure to produce inclusivity and diversity. Besides, how can an outsider speak for a local?

Too often the African screen dancing body is fetishized and the experience of being African, which is a multitudinous plethora of different perspectives, experiences, languages, dances, and identities, is sometimes stereotyped through colonial lenses. In other words, these dance videos expose audiences to a specific kind of streamlined African cultural identity and made to feel and see things about being African based on colonial, outsider or European eyes. This upholds a simplistic vision of African identity, one that is either in constant struggle, poor, broken and underdeveloped, or one that is idyllic, friendly, and exuberant, given the sun and outdoor lifestyle. Or sometimes mixed. For example, *Recycled Movement* (2015) (Image 4).

Image 4. Lee, B. (2015) *Recycled Movement* jpeg, Credit - Bob Lee 2015

Tagline: Shall we recall our forgotten memory? Shall we reuse our abandoned movement? And finally, our reused movement, embrace the abandoned world.
Cast and Crew:
Director: Bo Lee (Korea/Germany)
Country: Kenya
Producer: Bo Lee
Camera: Patrick Nyangena
Edit: Aline Juárez Contreras
Choreography: Bo Lee
Performers: Collins Matindi, Steve Ongeri, Mercy Kamoni
Sound design: Wonji Lee

Paradoxically, a few African Screendance makers aspire to these forms of Screendance, by recreating foreign visions of African identity to be accepted internationally. By doing so African Screendance makers relinquish control of their own identity and representation, foregoing a methodology that could reframe and reshape their own experience through their own lenses – PAR, a much harder route. These foreign-local productions, which may be collaborations, should be investigations and explorations through inquiries into diversity, identity, representation, and points of view, from an African perspective. To do so would grow the vision of making African Screendance through an embodied African experiential lens. This, however, requires re-education through workshops, experimentation and exploration which requires funding, time, and patience, none of which are currently available on the continent of Africa.

SDA online discussions

Other ways to *decolonize* Screendance, to reshape and tackle ideas about racial diversity in Screendance, its representation and curation at local, and international Screendance festivals, is to openly discuss these issues directly with makers and curators. To do so Ginslov, representing SDA, headed up an online Zoom discussion for the Vrystaat Kunstefees July 2020, called *Screendance: Representation and Diversity Matters*, inspired by the *Black Lives Matter* demonstrations after the death of George Floyd at the hands of a white US policeman. Presented on Zoom, it was open for free public online viewing. Invited artists presented their work, and after a panel discussion, with Jossie in attendance, a Q&A was opened to the public. The questions and issues raised now need to be rechanneled and worked through the medium of the African body, and an embodied African lens.

Vrystaat Kunstefees Discussion:

Screendance: Diversity & Representation Matters, presents and discusses the art form, Screendance. Screendance artists from diverse backgrounds have been asked to present their work, revealing what Screendance is, how they create it, and why it matters. It is also a panel discussion about the form of Screendance, the representation of bodies on screen, cultural diversity and the body's representation at International Screendance festivals.

Given the current socio-political climate we can no longer skirt around the issues of bodies, race, diversity, and their representation on screen. To date, this topic has never been discussed on a South African Screendance panel. Being highly contentious, these issues are often difficult to talk about and overlooked in favor of other discussions on funding and networking, for example. These are also important issues, but the representation of dancing bodies cannot and should not be a discussion held by academics behind closed doors. Yes, it may be uncomfortable to talk about race and representation, but this discomfort needs to be discussed as we cannot get away from bodies, their representation and context. They are the very medium of Screendance, entangled with the medium of cinema. So how do we overcome something that we cannot and should not ignore? How do we ask these questions in and with our work and how is this represented on screens internationally? There may be no answers, but at least let us try to talk about these issues. We have work to do.

Hosts

Author: Screendance, Embodied Technologies Practitioner & PhD Candidate London South Bank University: UK
Georgina Thomson: Dance Programme Coordinator: *Vrystaat Arts Festival* South Africa

Presenters

Omari Carter: Associate Lecturer and Screendance Practitioner: UK
Gabri Christa: Dance filmmaker, Associate Professor of Professional Dance Practice Barnard College and Curator-Director of *Moving Body-Moving Image Festival*: NYC, United States
Simon Fildes: Screendance practitioner, producer, curator and teacher: Scotland
Robin Gee: Screendance practitioner, Associate Professor of Dance, University of North Carolina, Greensboro: United States
Smangaliso Siphesihle Ngwenya: Screendance practitioner, writer, choreographer and performer: South Africa

Conclusion

In conclusion, SDA, through the work of Ginslov and Jossie, has attempted to establish the medium and art of Screendance in Africa and to *decolonize* Screendance. There is no way of finding out if this has been successful as the issue has never been fully addressed. Questions such as: How does one *decolonize* Screendance? How does one elicit feedback from others in countries around the world about *decolonizing* Screendance? How does one engage in dismantling something that is invisible to many? These and other questions may never be answered. SDA, however, believes that it is only through performative actions such as PAR, curating, workshopping, discussion, dialogue, international exchange and residencies and the production of chapters such as this one, that these issues can be brought to light. It is our hope that it will do so.

Unfortunately, SDA has been dormant for a while as work and studies have pulled Author and Jossie in other directions. Since 2014 Jossie, always interested in incorporating dance narratives into her work, has gone on to producing and directing film and documentaries for e.TV and the narrative series DaNZ for Gambit Films, most notably *Rooilug* (2019) and *Rumba in the Jungle: The Return*. GInslov started her PhD studies 2017 at London South Bank University, Arts & Creative Industries Film and Media Departments, and completed in 2021. Perhaps others may take over the work that SDA began, by working in online production and on platforms such TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram, thereby expanding notions Screendance beyond local and international institutional/festival perspectives. It begs the question, however, does this online community not have another set of rules to follow, one that is steeped and driven by a globalized homogenizing aesthetic? So how can a unique South African Screendance voice be rendered and be revealed on these platforms? What innovative young makers are there in this space that we can identify as being African? We shall have to wait and see as the medium continues to grow and the makers find their own voices and true identities through Screendance.

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(1) Screendance: Rosenberg and Azrak & Bahhi, 1. Screendance is the umbrella term for three types of dance on screen each with their own set of different criteria: Dance Film (focuses on narrative and character arc in the dance film), Dance Video (where movement and the choreography are the most important elements and are created to be filmed) and Video Dance (the most experimental form of Screendance).
(2) Practice as Research: a methodology that encourages the practitioner/artist to construct knowledge whilst *doing* their practice, that is learning by doing. Nelson (2013) advocates researching between three types of learning, three different modes of knowledge making processes: "'*know-how; know-what and know-that*'", a multi-modal epistemological process. Combined and interrelated, they inform and form a *praxis* where practice and knowledge merge and work together.
(3) Gutsche 1946, 511.
(4) South African History Online, 1.
(5) *Mapantsula*: meaning petty gangster and refers to a South African dance style from the Black Township, Soweto.

(6) *My Octopus Teacher,* a South African documentary directed by James Reed and Pippa Ehrlich, took home an Oscar for Best Documentary at the 93rd Academy Awards 2021.
(7) University of Warwick Education Studies,1.
(8) Cavanaugh, Intro.
(9) Paasonen, S.
(10) Wilson, n.p.

Tracing the Disappeared Videodance Festivals of Italy

by Ariadne Mikou

Abstract

The focus of this short paper is on Italy's first videodance festivals that emerged in the beginning of the 1990s and contributed to the flourishing of screendance, known in Italian as *videodanza* (videodance). Pioneers of this kind of audiovisual curation have been the Naples-based festival known as *Il Coreografo Elettronico* (1990); the *Danza & Video* festival (1991) -- later transformed into an open archive known as *Cro.me.* -- and the recently "resurrected" festival *Teatro Televisione Video TTVV* (1985) in the region of Riccione in the Adriatic part of Italy. Employing web research in combination with bibliographic material and oral testimonies, this research looks at the reasons that instigated the emergence of these festivals, their modes of survival and resistance in time prior to their disappearance or evolution and the practice of curation before the rise of web and digital facilities. In this way, this preliminary inquiry hopes to inform the current ways of screendance curation, dissemination and appreciation across Italy and abroad.

keywords: videodanza, festivalisation, audiovisual curation, audiovisual archive

Introduction

According to recent research (Payri, 2018), Italy is one of the European countries with the most numerous and in some cases long-existing videodance festivals. With a curatorial activity that officially began in the 1990s, videodance festivals have enabled the relationship between dance as an ephemeral act and its capture initially in analogue audiovisual media to gradually flourish into the hybrid art form known in Italian as *videodanza*[1] (videodance). Considering that festivals usually inspire artistic experimentation and as social events may incite collaborations and promote creative exchanges, we may assume that videodance festivals played a crucial role in the growth of dance on screen in Italy.

Festivals usually offer support to artists, if not economical at least symbolic, by augmenting their visibility and recognition that in turn may generate for them possibilities for funding. Festivals are also a gate to artistic and cultural production and may offer a lens to navigate a specific field and help to create a community of supporters of an artform. The circulation of capital, bodies and ideas enabled by 'festivalisation' (Cudny 2016; Taylor and Bennett 2016) and the subsequent increase of local tourism contribute to the social and economic growth of a region. Despite their cultural and economic values, festivals are living organisms and as such, they get born and die. The festivals and projects dedicated to dance on screen that I am trying to outline in this paper have disappeared; thus, they have ceased to operate as festivals. Nevertheless, they have left invaluable archives to trace the evolution of the artform as well as the undertaken curatorial activities or they have shifted their focus to other forms of supporting the field of dance on screen.

[1] The *videodanza* is a wide term that is not only translated into videodance but is probably closer to the concept of screendance as it embraces dance documentation, dance (on) film and dance animation, thus experimentations of dance with cinema and digital technologies.

Within the Italian borders, pioneers[2] in the curatorial endeavour of *videodanza* have been the Naples-based festival known as *Il Coreografo Elettronico* (1990–2017); *Premio TTVV* held in the city of Riccione in the Adriatic part of Italy and the Milan-based *Danza & Video* festival *(*1992–1996*)* -- later transformed into an open archive known as *Cro.me.* that is currently operating in collaboration with different partners for the curation of a variety of programmes and events for dance on screen. The screendance festival activity in Italy has also been supported by plenty of usually enthusiastic cultural associations[3]. Artist scholar Blas Payri (2018: 28) has identified the following 'discontinued' short-lived festivals that co-existed along with ongoing initiatives: VideoDanza Film Fest (Catania, 2005), MILANO DOC FESTIVAL - VIDEODANCE SECTION (Milan, 2007), Movingwalls - Urban Videodance Festival (Ferrara, 2010–2013), and Wallpaper Dance (Trieste, 2010–2012). In this list, it should also be added *Video Dance Italy – Moving Virtual Bodies* (2006–2014), an international dance film project curated by Roberto Casarotto and Gitta Wigro that was supported by the Italian dance network Anticorpi XL. As the focus of this paper is not exhaustive[4], the following analysis concentrates on the disappeared screendance festivals with the longest life span enabling us to observe better their evolution and survival strategies. Therefore, the chronological frame that this paper examines begins approximately in the 90s with the establishment of the first initiatives of screenance dissemination in the format of competitions and exhibitions.

Employing web research in combination with bibliographic material and oral testimonies, this research focuses on the reasons that instigated the appearance of the three festival structures that emerged in the 1990s (*Premio TTVV Riccione, Il Coreografo Elettronico*, *Danza & Video*). The paper also examines their modes of survival and resistance in time, the practice of curation that coincided with the period before the rise of web and digital facilities and finally the impact of these festivals' activities on the recent ways of screendance production and dissemination. How did these festivals help to scaffold the field during their lifespan and how did they inform the present festivalisation through their disappearance or transformation? Looking at the reasons for their longevity may help to build better and sustainable supporting frames for curatorial and artistic practices, which is one of the reasons that motivates this research.

My perspective is informed by my work that straddles artistic practice, writing and curatorship. As part of the collective futuremellon/NOT YET ART I had the chance to curate together with

[2] As part of the book *Festivaliana. Festival, culture e politiche di danza al tempo del 'miracolo italiano'* (2020), Italian scholar Giulia Taddeo explores the cultural politics of Italian dance festivals in the middle of twentieth century and reveals information about the Festival Internazionale del Balletto di Nervi that curated dance film programmes between 1957–1969. The programme presented a high-quality of experimental dance films and dance documentations originating from Europe, USA, the former USSR and Africa.

[3] In the co-authored paper "Screendance Narratives from around the Mediterranean Sea" published at the *International Journal of Screendance* (2020, Vol. 11), I have attempted to map the active screendance festivals across the European Mediterranean during 2020. For Italy, these are: La Danza in 1 minuto (Torino, active since 2010), Breaking 8 International Dance Film Festival (Cagliari since 2013), Fuori Formato Festival Internazionale di danza contemporanea, performance e videodanza / Stories We Dance (Genova since 2016), Cinematica (Ancona since 2017), Cinema è Danza (Arezzo and Perugia since 2014), Cinedanza (Modena since 2019), ZED Festival Internazionale Videodanza (Bologna since 2019).

[4] Screendance scholar Xiao Huang also lists the majority of the Italian screendance festivals and initiatives that emerged from 1985 to the present in her chapter *I festival di videodanza. Una panoramica della situazione italiana* (Cervellati and Garzarella 2024). Some of them include T*Danse – Festival internazionale della Nuova Danza (Aosta since 2016); Premio Roma Danza – International Choreography and Dance-Video Competition (Rome since 2018); Videobox – Festival di videodanza (Pesaro since 2021).

VeNe cultural association *[SET.mefree] Dance and Movement on Screen*, a short-lived platform for the curation, education and mentoring on screendance. In *[SET.mefree] Dance and Movement on Screen,* we adapted a mixed curatorial approach based on inviting artists to show their films through open calls and creating allies with other screendance festivals, notably Dance on Film Festival in Austria, Festival International de Vidéodanse de Bourgogne in France and Lago Film Festival in Italy, by asking them to curate short programmes as part of our events. Occasionally we were also invited to curate guest programmes for their festivals as well. A major event along our path has been *Screendance Landscapes. Due Giorni su Danza e Schermo* which was supported by IUAV University of Venice and aimed to bridge theory with practice by connecting artists, curators, producers and scholars.

After two years of non-stop and non-paid, yet enthusiastic, nomadic work mainly in Italy, our latest event took place in September 2019 on the occasion of the first and what seems for now the last edition of D*ance and Performing Arts Festival for Urban Regeneration* (Mestre, Italy). Although the pandemic brought the suspension of our curatorial practice, my close collaborator Elisa Frasson and I contributed to the visibility of screendance in Europe by writing two short papers published in the International Journal of Screendance. One of them[5], the most relevant to the current research, was based on one-to-one interviews with curators of the major screendance festivals from the European Mediterranean and it examined the pre-pandemic infrastructures for enabling the production of screendance and the tools for audience development in Italy, France, Greece and Spain; it also offered speculations on the evolution of the form. This publication under the title "Screendance Narratives from around the Mediterranean Sea" (Mikou 2020) that looked at the active screendance festivals in the European Mediterranean may serve as an introduction to the current research. Considering that our curatorial activities have been suspended, I became motivated on a personal level to explore what happened at other screendance festivals in Italy and question how they managed to survive through time or why they stopped their activities.

1. Parallel & Interlaced Histories

Although the history of dance on screen is interlaced with the histories of cinema, video art and documentation, digital technologies, and the industries of music, advertising and broadcasting, the *videodanza* in Italy gradually gained popularity mostly through the Italian state television and the home videos available at local newsstands, such as the video collections *I Grandi Protagonisti Della Danza* and *I Grandi Balletti* (Guzzo Vaccarino 1996: 108). The Italian dance critic Elisa Guzzo Vaccarino in her book *La Musa dello Schermo Freddo* (hence, The Muse of the Cold Screen) mentions Rai (especially Rai Uno, Due, Tre), Fininvest, Videomusic, Telemontecarlo, and Tele+ as the Italian TV channels that in the 1980s and 1990s included in their programmes, initially sporadically but with an augmented frequency, documentations of dance performances or remakes recasted for the screen predominantly from abroad, thematic broadcasts or episodes dedicated to acclaimed choreographers (video portraits) and rarely international experimental dance works made for the screen. *Maratona d'Estate* (Summer Marathon) with the Italian dance critic Vittoria Ottolenghi in Rai Uno succeeded in reaching the record number of 18 summer editions (with the first edition in 1978 and the last one in 1995) and transmitted predominantly classical, neo-classical and modern dance repertory, and selected videodance works in collaboration with the festival *Il Coreografo Elettronico*.

[5] The second contribution co-authored with Elisa Frasson, Marisa C. Hayes, Marco Longo and Katja Vaghi aimed to question the shift of the spectatorship of screendance and the educational and creation processes during the first lockdown in Europe by articulating a series of rhetoric yet urgent questions.

According to Vaccarino the production of videodanza in Italy received little support from the Italian TV in comparison, for instance, to France and Great Britain where the videodance boom stimulated diverse collaborations between TV channels and production companies (such as Dancelines-BBC channel for the UK) for the creation of original dance creations for the screen. Another element to keep in mind is that broadcasting of full-length dance performances, thus video documentations, is a very important aspect of the history of videodance in Italy, and not only, and it has been one of the routes from which videodance emerged. The motivation behind video documentation did not only respond to archival necessities but most importantly to the possibility that it gave for promoting and disseminating to large audiences choreographic works conceived for the stage. The observation of the role of video documentation in the growth of screendance and the development of its audience reveals the oxymoron of this research: exploring the disappearance of festival structures that were created as a response to support an art form (screendance) that initially emerged from the necessity to capture an art form (dance) that disappears as soon as it is performed, or to be more precise, that remains differently.

Videodance creation in Italy – dance works created to be seen only on screen – began independently around the end of 1980s, for instance *Dolcemente* (1989) by Enzo Cosimi and Italo Pesce Delfino; *Tuffo nell'acqua e tonfi del cuore* (1989) by Cinzia Romiti and Laura Balis Giambrocono, winner of the first edition of *Il Coreografo Elettronico*. Although the Italian dance scene has been enjoying a dance boom since the late 1970s (Poesio 2000), the videodance creations were few and the first videodance festivals initially presented works originating from abroad.

1.1 Premio Riccione TTVV and Coreografo Elettronico

Premio Riccione TTVV (Teatro TeleVisione Video), established in 1947 and today simplified as TTV, first dedicated space to videoteatro (videotheatre) in 1985 under the initiative of Franco Quadri. Since the second year of this initiative, the general category of videoteatro that used to embrace works of 'theatre' on screen and ranged from performance documentations to experimental video works, included video creations by acclaimed choreographers such as Pina Bausch (*Blaubart*), Jean-Claude Gallotta and Raul Ruiz (*Mammame*) who also won the Sole d'Oro award in the 1986 edition. In 1994, the first official videodance programme was presented as part of *Panorama Videodanza* and made a clear distinction between videoteatro and videodanza (hence videotheatre and videodance). The catalogue of the audiovisual archive of *Premio Riccione TTVV* is available online thanks to the project *ACT! Archivi del Teatro Contemporaneo* and contains the titles of more than 4000 audio-visual works (theatre, opera, dance, performance on screen) that were presented at the festival. The festival as an interdisciplinary event combining theatre, video and experimental practices continues to run until today and it concluded its 27th edition in autumn 2024. Although it is a very rich case to examine further – especially due to its longevity – it deserves a separate investigation that goes beyond the purposes of this research.

Il Coreografo Elettronico, one of the most well-known videodance festivals and competitions in Italy, was found by Marilena Riccio (Associazione Napolidanza), a former dancer of Teatro di San Carlo. The festival was active from 1990 until 2015 under her artistic direction that was passed to Laura Valente, who served as director until 2017, the year that the festival ceased its activities. During its lifespan, *Il Coreografo Elettronico* played an important role in the promotion and dissemination of screendance practice and culture in Italy and beyond[6] (Massari

[6] "La manifestazione divenne, fin da subito, uno strumento per monitorare le realtà produttive esistenti, la circuitazione delle nuove opere, la creazione di una rete di collegamento tra operatori di diversi paesi e confronto di esperienze diverse" (Massari 2020: 288).

2020: 288) and it served as a venue to present to the Italian audience works from Italy and most predominantly from across the globe – for instance, Canada, USA and Europe among other places. *Il Coreografo Elettronico* has screened dance documentations or dance adaptations for the screen, promotional videos of dance performances, dance (on) films, videodance works and dance documentaries. Indicatively, some of the winners of the competition have been Sasha Waltz with *Allee der Kosmonauten* (2000), Wim Vandekeybus with *Here After* (2007) and *Nora* (2008) directed by Alla Kovgan and David Hinton and choreographed by Nora Chipaumire. Italian pioneers such as N+N Corsino, Ariella Vidach and Claudio Prati found a welcoming space to develop and present their own distinct artistic language[7] (Riccio 2018). As Riccio recalls, the festival's international partners among others included the international videodance festival DanceScreen in Vienna curated by International Music+Media Centre, Channel 4 from BBC and Spanish video director and dance on screen curator Nuria Font. At a national level, *Premio TTVV Riccione* and *Romaeuropa Festival*, especially the programme *Mondi Riflessi* (1991–1992) by Colette Veaute and Carlo Infante, often meta-programmed several of the works that were first presented as part of *Il Coreografo Elettronico* (Massari: 2020) indicating that there was a tendency to create a network at a national and international level among the active cultural associations and institutions of the time.

The audio-visual archive of the festival that gathers approximately 2000 works (Monda 2020) has been donated at Donnaregina Foundation of Contemporary Arts / Museo Madre in Naples in 2019. Although the festival no longer operates as a venue for presenting contemporary screendance practice, its long survival along with its high standard quality that contributed to its visibility beyond the Italian borders attracted the interest of many scholars. Indeed, there is a growing bibliography (Massari: 2020; Monda: 2020) and research activity focusing exclusively on *Il Coreografo Elettronico* such as an initiative from Sapienza University of Rome to set its archive in motion. Dance History Professor Vito Di Bernardi has been the principal curator of *Il Coreografo Elettronico Archive* with the support of Letizia Gioia Monda among others. Sapienza's two-year research project (2017–2018) aimed to explore the development of choreographic thinking and interdisciplinary collaboration through the years with the hope of expanding "the understanding of dance history, by designing renovated interdisciplinary constellations that can have an important impact on teaching and research programs, as much as in the development of exhibition itineraries" (Monda 2020: 325). *Il Coreografo Elettronico* is a festival turned into an archive that resists its disappearance through a process based on the future construction of an open-source digital archive and "an interactive conceptual map" (Monda 2020: 327) that will allow the user to re-arrange its contents (and metadata) according to diverse parameters and aspects[8].

1.2 Danza & Video and Cronaca e Memoria dello Spettacolo (Cro.me.)

Danza & Video was curated in 1992 by dance critic Sergio Trombetta and Paola Calvetti, an Italian writer and back then a dance journalist for the Italian journal La Republica and whose brainchilds among others include the TV video portraits *Danza un Personaggio, una Città,* and

[7] For instance, the 1991 competition included works by Elsa Piperno, Enzo Cosimi, Michele Abbondanza, Antonella Bertoni, Sosta Palmizi, Virgilio Sieni, Italo Pesce Delfino, Roberto Castello and gruppo Corte Sconta, the winners of the first edition that shaped the Italian videodance (Massari 2020: 292–295).

[8] For the study of the *Coreografo Elettronico Archive*, Monda suggests the following keywords that could be applicable but also expanded for the study of other archives: creator, country of origin, themes, periods, experimentation types, digital technologies applied, relation with other artistic disciplines such as music and theatre (2020: 325).

the home video collection *I Grandi Protagonisti Della Danza*[9]. The first edition of *Danza & Video* was presented as part of MILANoLTRE, a currently active performing arts festival in Milan that was born in 1986. The next editions were supported by the Municipality of Milano and were organised in collaboration with Enrico Coffetti, the actual president of the cultural association Cro.me. (CROnaca e MEmoria dello Spettacolo), and the initiative ceased to operate in 1996 after five monthly-long exhibitions in Milan and several nomadic events across Italy.

It is important to clarify that the initiative of *Danza & Video* did not appear as a festival but rather as an exhibition or showcase of dance works mediated through the screen that gradually created a community around the artform and a pole of attraction of a new audience[10], curious for what was at that time in Italy a revolutionary artform, yet imported from France and the USA and promising to open dance to new possibilities. During the exhibition month, a video wall (maxi schermo) and giant promotional dance images could be seen on the front of Palazzo dell'Arengario, currently the Museo del Novecento, in Piazza del Duomo in Milan, that used to build the curiosity of citizens and tourists. Eighteen exhibition screening stations equipped with monitors, VHS players and headphones were installed at the principal venue of the exhibition at Palazzo dell'Arengario and could be visited during flexible exhibition times such as from lunchtime until late at night. The exhibition included special screenings, guest programmes curated by partners such as La Cinémathèque de la Danse in Paris, discussions with dance artists working with new technologies, such as Ariella Vidach, and press conferences of dance artists from La Scala di Milano Foundation or dance companies that were passing from the city to perform in other venues during the specific month. These opportunities contributed to building a mutual supporting ecosystem between artists and 'archivists'/videographers.

Through its involvement in *Danza & Video*, Cro.me. gradually discovered its *raison d'être* as a living archive – a 'historical memory' – for dance works on screen. *Cro.me.* was established in 1994 firstly to organise *Danza & Video* and gradually its mission was directed "to collect, preserve, restore, disseminate and promote the history of dance" through its mediation on screen (Giardino ZED online). It received its first financial support from the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities in 1999, two years after a significant change in the Italian system[11] of public funding. Cro.me's archive that has been almost entirely digitised includes around 2000 files in the form of: documentations of all styles and genres of dance performances for the stage and the studio (not only contemporary, but also ballet, folkloric and butoh, that

[9] In 1988, *Danza un Personaggio, una Città* was co-produced by Rai Due, the second state channel in Italy, and was designed to create video portraits of great dance artists in the cities where they were based, for instance Alvin Ailey in New York, Roland Petit in Paris and Carolyn Carlson in Venice. This material later served for the home video collection (composed of twenty VHS tapes) *I Grandi Protagonisti Della Danza* that was dedicated to 20th century ballet and contemporary choreographers and was available for purchase on the newsstands of the Italian cities of that time; the collection produced around 20.000 copies (Guzzo Vaccarino 1996).

[10] In the writings of this era (e.g. Vaccarino 1996: 8), there is very vivid the angst of contemporaneity and the fear of the death of performing arts due to the advent of video technologies. This fact shares parallels with some of the fears expressed during the lockdown regarding the relationship of the screen with the performing arts. Although during the pandemic the web-connected screen has literally given increased visibility to the performing arts through a variety of classes and performances available online, fears about the death of dance as live art and its live audience were among the several voices expressed.

[11] "In 1997, the appointment of a committee of dance experts in charge of the distribution of government funds to dance companies was hailed as the first step towards a new political and administrative regulation of Italian theatre dance" (Poesio, 2000: 100).

were presented in Milan through the years), documentaries, animations and most importantly original works made for the screen. This archive was also a 'nomadic archive' (Giardino ZED online) carrying tapes, video players and monitors inside a van to create in situ exhibitions across Italy (*Video Dance Moving*). It still maintains its 'living' character by allowing it to be accessed through various thematic programmes curated upon request or re-arranged and re-associated through video-editing of extracts for different occasions.

As a cultural organisation, Cro.me. has collaborated with festivals for special and often thematic screenings and supported academic training and educational events through additional dance on screen programmes such as Le Storie della Danza (The Stories of Dance) and Danzare la Performance, both curated by Anna Lea Antolini. Coffetti (Cro.me.) together with Fabio Bruschi (*Premio Riccione TTVV*), associazione NapoliDanza (*Il Coreografo Elettronico*) and IBACN (Istituto dei beni artistici, culturali e naturali della Regione Emilia-Romagna) participated in the European project *Terpsychore: European Network for the Preservation of the Audiovisual Dance Heritage* (1999–2002)[12] that aimed to map and disseminate to a general public the European archives for the memory of dance. According to Riccio[13], the project was about "the systematic integration and cataloguing of European video dance collections, the creation of a common method for the restoration and preservation of audiovisual material, and the search for an appropriate communication and promotion strategy" (Riccio 2018: 172). As part of this project, Coffetti proposed a multimedia archive with two screens next to each other suitable for a museum visitor: one with the performance documented on screen and the other including clickable screen buttons with information for instance about the choreographer, the performers, the director of photography and reviews by critics. This installation was a sort of an analogue configuration of today's multimedia web pages that the fast evolution of the internet rendered obsolete. Cro.me. also initiated the digital project *M.house - Multimedia Archive of Dance and Performing arts* (1997–1999) and currently curates the downloadable Danza Dove App in order to inform users about the dance events across Italy.

Cro.me. is currently operating in collaboration with different partners for the curation of a variety of programmes for dance on screen. It is a founding member of the project RiSiCo (Rete Interative per Sistemi Coreografici, hence Interactive Network for Choreographic Systems) – that is supported by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities. RiSiCo's partners include the Turin-based cultural association COORPI and Perypezye Urbane, a cultural organisation in Milan that was founded in 2005 and conducts research and educational activities between digital culture and performing arts, with particular emphasis on dance production. Cro.me.'s mission of archiving and its dissemination through innovative practices has met COORPI's three axes of activities outlined as cross-media production, promotion / distribution and programming/curation, enabling in this way a complementary relationship between them since 2015. This alliance has been further reinforced through a collaboration with the Compagnia della Quarta, the curators of the Bologna-based ZED Festival Internazionale Videodanza, which is a festival established in 2019 that presents videodance works along with projects of virtual and augmented reality.

[12] The rest of the European partners were Deutsches Tanzfilminsitut (Germany), Vlaams Theater Instituut, Carina Ari Stiftelsen (Sweden), Maguar Tancmuvescek Szovetsege (Hungary), Polski Osrodek Miedzyarodowego Instytutu Teatralnego (Poland), Video Place (Great Britain).

[13] 'Il progetto riguardava la sistematica integrazione e catalogazione delle collezioni europee di videodanza, la creazione di un metodo comune per il restauro e la conservazione del materiale audiovisivo, la ricerca di una appropriata strategia di comunicazione e promozione' (Riccio 2018: 172).

COORPI (COORdinamento Danza PIemonte) was established in 2002 by Cristiana Candellero and Lucia De Rienzo in the region of Piemonte with the aim to promote and distribute creative story-telling through the body (and the moving image); in other words, to support locally the contemporary dance production, distribute it and at the same time build a local audience for dance on screen. In a format similar to the Amsterdam-based *One Minute Dance Film Contest, La Danza in 1 minuto* (ongoing since 2011 and addressed also to international artists since 2018) is COORPI's longest project in the form of an online competition enabled through mobile devices. *La Danza in 1 minuto* gathers through an open call short works of dance on screen, maximum 60 seconds long, that may narrate creatively the urgencies of our contemporary world. One of the most acclaimed and award-winning productions by COORPI in collaboration with Scenario Pubblico – recognised since 2022 by the Italian Ministry of Culture as Crid (Centro di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale nell'Ambito della Danza –, has been Alain el Sakhawi's *Nouns n'attendros plus les barbares* (2016), which was purchased and subsequently screened at the prestigious European channel ARTE from July to October 2018 (Giardino ZED online). COORPI's activities expand into the support of videodance and multimedia residencies (Campo Largo 2015–2017) and the production of (dance) films in 4D, such as *Ben* (2019) by Teresa Sala, Ilaria Vergani Bassi, Mattia Parisotto, and Gabriel Beddoes. They have recently oriented their efforts towards the production of transmedia and immersive projects such as re-FLOW and Zona Martiska, a project uniting dance performance, architecture and interactive digital technologies. In cooperation with other European partners, COORPI co-led *Migrating Artists Project* (mAPs, 2020–2022), a Creative Europe project aiming to recognise dance film as a legitimate genre and hoping to leave a strong imprint in the film industry.

Observations and Future Steps

Looking at the festival structures described in this paper (*Premio TTVV Riccione, Il Coreografo Elettronico, Danza & Video)* we can observe that their life span depends on co-dependence between funding availability, curatorial commitment, networking and adaptability to the fast-changing conditions that shape our digitally oriented world. Openness to collaboration across different associations, festivals and institutions and an interest in working together in order to obtain more are cultural signs of a changing mentality that is often trapped in isolation. Payri has observed that "festivals in Italy are scattered around different cities and seem to ignore each other" and this can be partially proven true when looking at short-lived initiatives that did not manage to build strong networks. The longer-lived festivals have survived thanks to exchanges with other like-minded entities and structures and often the issue turns out to be about how to access them.

This research has also revealed that the disappeared festivals have been transformed into invaluable archives that if studied together may help to expand our awareness of the past and grasp the evolution of dance in relation to the screen in a specific country, in this case Italy, or a broader region such as the (European) Mediterranean. As a subsequent step in this research, studying these archives all together is crucial due to the fact that selection and evaluation criteria (curation and appreciation) on behalf of a jury or a festival organisation shape inclusions and exclusions of artistic practices – creating differentiation between 'good'/ 'worth seeing' and 'bad'/'not worth seeing' works. For this reason, it is important to look at a plurality of festivals and their archives in order to comprehend more holistically the evolution of an artform during a specific era and a geographical region. To this end, Enrico Coffetti (Cro.me.) suggests inviting different experts or even curious minds to curate navigation paths within these archives by offering diverse entrance points to the study of the past of dance on screen, for instance, thematic, aesthetic or historical.

By looking at the moving body through dance and the working modes and conditions manifested through choreographic, cross- and interdisciplinary making, we may comprehend which are the social views and political and economic parameters that shape an era, in this case from the 1990s and after. The mediation of the body through the screen also allows for examining its visual representation and therefore screendance may offer a combined lens between performance and the screen to examine the past and the present. Through this lens, how is the body and its relation to other bodies and the environment depicted or represented on screen? Are there any recurrent themes, obsessions or aesthetics across the archived works? What can the technology used tell us about the modes of production and funding? These are questions among others that can be answered only through in situ visits and meticulous study and exploration of these archives which may constitute a future development of this research.

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The Impetus

By Dawn R. Schultz, PhD

Abstract

The Impetus traces a deeply personal and transformative journey from a classroom dance educator to a passionate screendance artist and festival director. What began as a desire to preserve the fleeting beauty of student performances evolved into a vibrant, interdisciplinary practice blending dance, film, visual art, and community engagement. Set against the backdrop of New Jersey's parks and public spaces, the narrative follows the author's early experimentation with smartphone videography, her evolution through graduate studies, and the pivotal role of mentorship and collaboration in developing her artistic voice.

Through a blend of intuitive practice and formal education, the author examines the technical and emotional aspects of capturing movement on camera. The essay reflects on projects influenced by spontaneity, natural landscapes, and social issues—including addiction and climate change—and culminates in the establishment of the *mignolo international screendance festival*. Throughout the piece, a compelling metaphor is woven in: the carousel—symbolizing structure, unpredictability, and the cyclical nature of creation.

Ultimately, *The Impetus* reveals how screendance became a vessel for preserving ephemeral moments, fostering artistic community, and amplifying diverse stories through the convergence of motion and media. It celebrates the resilience of both students and educators, the magic of collaboration, and the enduring power of dance as it evolves beyond the stage and into the cinematic realm.

The Impetus

The impermanence of dance is captured in snapshots of the memory, fleeting, an art to be lived and escaped in time and space. This thought haunted me as I dwelled on it during my morning drive to work in the early months of my sixteenth year of teaching. I spent years working with students to craft dances to be performed on stage at the end of the school year. How could I seize the choreography and hand it to them in a container to take with them once they finished my class? I wanted the experience to last more than a brief moment; I wanted it to last a lifetime.

In September 2015, I embarked on a new teaching journey as one of the Ocean Township High School dance instructors in Monmouth County, New Jersey. My route took me down a stretch of W. Park Avenue in Oakhurst each morning. The drive, while routine, became a moment of reflection and inspiration as I approached Weltz Park. Bathed in the soft, golden hues of the early morning sun, the park transformed into an enchanting realm. The trees whispered tales of old, and the shimmering dew on the grass seemed to dance to its own rhythm. It was a daily tableau that left me spellbound. Just as I was deeply committed to nurturing the passion for dance in my students, I found myself equally drawn to immortalize the emotions that welled within me during these fleeting moments of looking down the park's trail. The juxtaposition of

my love for dance and the natural allure of Weltz Park at dawn became a potent reminder of the beauty that surrounds us, waiting to be appreciated and expressed.

My experience with filming had always been limited and straightforward, merely a tool to capture dance movements for future reference. Whenever my dancers experimented with improv or needed to review combinations, I would record them, focusing only on the choreography, with no regard for the intricacies of filmmaking. The world of screendance, a genre where dance collides with the cinematic canvas, was alien to me. Concepts like optimal camera angles, scouting picturesque locations, or even the nuanced craft of film editing, were areas I had never ventured into. Yet, this undeniable pull, a magnetic force, drew me in. Every morning, as nature painted its masterpiece with dawn's first light, I felt a yearning to bring the two worlds I loved together. I envisioned dancers moving fluidly amidst nature's backdrop. I saw more than dancing, I saw stillness, walking, holding hands, climbing trees, and capturing it all on film. I might have been inexperienced in filmmaking, but my passion for blending movement with nature's ethereal beauty drove me to reach beyond my boundaries.

Bringing this concept to life was not just about a grand idea; it demanded meticulousness, persuasion, and an unwavering commitment. First and foremost, I knew the enthusiasm and willingness of the students was paramount. I shared my vision and excitement with them, ensuring they understood the novelty and beauty of the project. Their energy was palpable, which boosted my confidence further. Navigating the administrative aspects of such an endeavor was the next hurdle. My initial chat with my supervisor gave me hope. Her nod of approval was a stepping stone, but the school principal's endorsement would seal the deal. After a detailed discussion highlighting the project's values and potential impact on the student's learning experience, I was ecstatic to receive the principal's support. With the school's authorities behind me, the next layer of consent involved the parents. I drafted detailed permission slips, ensuring all safety concerns were addressed.

With the logistics behind me, my artistic mind began to wander into unexplored territories. Until now, the traditional stage, set with its controlled environment, dictated my choices in costuming. But a park, alive with the elements, changing hues, and unpredictable moods offered a different canvas. The rustling leaves, the spotted sunlight filtering through the trees, and the very essence of nature demanded a fresh perspective. I imagined costumes that would seamlessly blend with the surroundings but stand out, echoing the movements of the dancers with the rhythm of nature. Textures, colors, and fabrics began to flood my mind, painting a vivid image of the spectacle I was about to create. The journey from conceptualization to realization was truly underway, and I was brimming with anticipation.

The task of capturing the dance performance in the park presented a technical dilemma. I knew that the success of this endeavor hinged not only on the choreography and the dancers' talent but also on how it would be immortalized on film. Hopeful, I turned to the TV production teacher at my school, who was well-versed in the intricacies of filming. From prior experiences, I had utilized a camcorder stationed on a tripod to record performances, but the dynamic nature of the park setting demanded a more hands-on approach. When I approached him about using the school's camcorder, I was met with unexpected resistance. His reluctance to allow me access, rooted in worries about potential damage to the school's equipment, felt like a setback. While I understood his concerns, the disappointment was real. His alternative solution was for me to use

my iPhone. I was initially met with skepticism. With the advancements in smartphone technology, I was aware that iPhones had commendable camera capabilities, but I was always a step behind in the tech game. And the phone in my pocket was an iPhone 4. A relic, really, lagging about three models behind the latest. Yet, the idea of relying solely on it for such a crucial project left me feeling apprehensive. While I was familiar with the casual snapshots and videos my phone could produce, I wasn't sure it would meet the standards for my envisioned dance film.

Questions swirled in my mind: Would the video quality suffice? How would I ensure stability? And what about editing? Could I truly bring my artistic vision to life with just the device in my pocket? Despite these uncertainties, I had a choice, to abandon the idea or adapt. Recognizing the importance of flexibility in the arts, I started to research smartphone videography techniques, determined to make the best of the situation. The park awaited, and with it, a dance that was eager to find its perfect frame.

In hindsight, I should have visited Weltz Park alone to familiarize myself with the area before taking the students. However, I decided to bring the students along for the first exploration. At the time, everything just felt aligned. While fully engaged in the experience, we had a great time filming various parts of the dance in different locations around the park. I felt as if I was a student and the park was my classroom. I had no prior experience in shooting a screendance, but I was fueled by inspiration. The combination of the landscape and the choreography intuitively directed my artistic choices. This spontaneous and intuitive approach is emblematic of my work today. From this first experience, I have carried this method through all my projects. I often let the present moment, combined with the surroundings, guide and inspire the shots I capture.

iMovie was suggested as the ideal software for editing videos taken on my phone since I did not have any experience with other editing software, so I decided to test it out. I was pleasantly surprised by its capabilities and quickly became deeply involved in editing. The following spring, I broadened the filming locations to include Palaia Park, just a short walk from the school. I led a dance class to both parks every school year to produce a screendance. This experience was a mutual learning journey for both the students and me. I called these dance films our "Parks Projects," a tradition I upheld with each class until in-person teaching was interrupted by the Covid pandemic.

—Let's take a moment to go back in time, roughly two years before the onset of Covid and three years after I started playing in the park with my dancers. I embarked on an MFA in Choreography at Jacksonville University. During my first summer semester, I was enrolled in an intermedia course, where I was introduced to creating soundscapes and experimenting with editing short films using Premier Pro. By then, I had grown quite comfortable with iMovie and was somewhat reluctant to transition to another tool. However, despite my experience with iMovie, all of which I'd done on my phone, I saw Premier Pro's advantages. The most notable skill I acquired from this new program and brought home with me that summer was creating rolling credits. After completing the summer residency, I continued to film with my iPhone, ensuring I always had the latest model. As I upgraded, I didn't discard my older devices. Instead, I mounted them on tripods, utilizing them to capture diverse perspectives in my shoots.

During my second summer semester, I enrolled in another intermedia course under the tutelage of the accomplished filmmaker Tiffany Santeiro. Not only was she a seasoned professional behind the camera, but she was also pivotal in establishing the Jacksonville Dance-Film Festival. Tiffany didn't just impart technical filmmaking skills, but she enriched us with a broader perspective, enabling us to view our creations through the eyes of an audience. She educated us on the intricacies of camera angles, the power of juxtaposition, the crafting of compelling narratives, and a pivotal realization that a dance film doesn't necessarily require the constant presence of a moving body.

The curriculum was challenging and pushed our boundaries. Armed with new techniques and insights, we were trained to control and influence the viewer's experience artfully. Our course culminated in a special moment of a screening for our creations to be viewed in a theater. Witnessing our work on the big screen was nothing short of transformative. The films looked professional, and there was a unanimous sense of accomplishment. We left that room feeling like authentic screendance creators.

This deep dive into the world of screendance only intensified my passion for the medium. I eagerly anticipated returning home, ready to harness my newfound knowledge and continue crafting films alongside my students.

That fall, I undertook a project addressing the social stigma associated with addiction. Rather than relying solely on the emotive power of music, this endeavor required in-depth research. I engaged with individuals from a 12-step recovery program, conducting interviews to deepen my understanding of their experiences as well as drawing from my own experience as having loved ones who struggled with addiction. This insight transformed my approach to choreography, pushing me beyond the spontaneous inspiration I often derived from music or a picturesque park setting. Instead of the familiar park surroundings, we chose a stunning historic art center as the backdrop for our screendance, with atmospheric architecture amplifying the weighted theme of the piece.

As I approached the culmination of my MFA journey, my focus shifted predominantly to my final thesis performance. The majority of the choreography was rehearsed and filmed within the confines of a black box theater. This setting provided a unique opportunity to utilize multiple cameras and capture the performances from various angles, including a vantage point from the overhead catwalk. There was a distinct pleasure in editing all the footage that was shot within this singular location of the black box, and the experience honed my skills. As I prepared for my MFA performance slated for early April 2020, my group of 10 dancers and I diligently rehearsed and filmed numerous sessions in the black box. Then, unexpectedly, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Fortunately, due to our proactive approach, all dance sequences had already been captured on film, allowing me to submit a comprehensive final performance piece.

In the upcoming school year, I was dealt a unique challenge, I would be teaching a new dance class for middle school students in a hybrid environment. While half of my students would physically attend the class, the other half participated virtually from their homes. Recognizing this, I spent my summer meticulously designing the curriculum. This curriculum includes a new learning standard mandated by the state, which emphasizes the topic of climate change. To creatively integrate this topic, I proposed an innovative idea: the students' final project would be

to produce their own films. This screendance project would serve as their culminating dance final, allowing them to interpret and express their understanding of the pressing issue of climate change through movement and media.

The results of the screendance projects exceeded all my expectations. Despite the inherent challenges the hybrid learning environment posed, students showcased remarkable creativity and commitment in their work. Those who attended physically collaborated with their peers, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose, while students working independently at home took pride in their work. The films displayed diverse interpretations, from moving narratives about the earth's fragility to abstract expressions of climate turmoil. Not only did they blend dance and cinematography, but they also displayed a profound understanding of the complexities surrounding climate change. The screendance initiative not only met the state-mandated standards but also became a testament to the resilience and adaptability of my young students in the face of challenges.

During my time in the MFA program, I was exposed to a fresh perspective on dance films and also discovered the captivating world of arts-based research, a discipline in which I quickly developed a passion. The onset of COVID-19, however, reshaped my creative practices, particularly those involving direct human-to-human contact. Despite these challenges, I remained determined to advance my practice and research. Seeking a platform to deepen my understanding and exploration, I applied to a Ph.D. program. I was ecstatic to be accepted into Transart Institute, which partners with Liverpool John Moores University. As I continued my studies, I found myself captivated by the potential of combining different mediums to explore new avenues for choreography.

In April 2021, my ethics approval was granted, and at this time, the restrictions on working with dancers in enclosed spaces, provided everyone wore masks, were lifted. The primary aim of each group of dancers I worked with during my research was to merge visual art and choreography. The dancers would create fluid acrylic pour paintings and, given improvisational movement tasks, explore new movement possibilities. The movement would then be collaboratively composed, and the final piece would be captured in a screendance. When selecting a location for the first film, the dancers and I brainstormed ideas. Filming outside was convenient due to the mask-free environment, and one dancer suggested filming on the beach during sunrise. This idea resonated with all of us, especially since our rehearsal studio was just a short distance from the beach, and we had often been fascinated by the colors of the sky at different times of the day. Moreover, our choreography was designed from vibrant hues found within the paintings the dancers created.

CANVAS came alive against the backdrop of the rising sun, reminiscent of a painting transitioning from canvas to a motion picture. Thus, our collective vision transformed into a breathtaking reality, fusing art, environment, and movement into a singular, evocative experience.

In pursuing further research, I contacted local colleges and dance companies to collaborate. My seventh project introduced me to the notable mignolo dance company in Metuchen, New Jersey. This company was founded by two talented sisters, Charly and Eriel Santagado. Before embarking on our collaboration, I presented one of my films to the Santagado sisters and their

CEO, Tobi Santagado. Coincidentally, they expressed their aspiration to initiate a screendance festival. Furthermore, Tobi implied the possibility of featuring the film we would co-create at this prospective event. This potential opportunity promised a blending of our artistic visions on a larger platform.

Collaborating with the dancers, they devised choreography drawing from the interdisciplinary techniques I formulated during my Ph.D. studies. These methods combined visual arts and choreography. At our initial rehearsal, dancers painted 2 x 4 feet canvases, adding swipes and splashes of color to the white clothing I provided for costumes. As subsequent rehearsals unfolded, we contemplated the ideal filming location for our piece. I introduced an image of a vintage carousel in Asbury Park to the group. Charly nostalgically mentioned her dream of dancing there. The entire group felt it was the perfect backdrop. While I attempted to gain access to the carousel's interior, my efforts were unsuccessful. Consequently, we captured our performance outside, leading me to title our film *Carousel*. The title of the screendance was inspired by more than just its filming location near an old carousel. It goes deeper into the meaning of the carousel and its parallels with the process of designing the choreography and filming dance for the camera.

A carousel is a universally recognizable object. Its distinct shape and whimsical nature transport riders to a different world. Each carousel, though similar in form, boasts a variety of creatures designed for amusement. An integral part of the carousel experience is the unpredictability. You never know when the ride will end, which direction you'll face when it stops, or the view you'll be met with once you disembark. This is often different from the scene you first saw upon getting on.

This carousel analogy resonates deeply with the dance projects I've undertaken. Each involves participants with bodies that, like carousels, may look similar but carry their own unique stories and interpretations. When these participants create a painting, they are often amazed by the resulting blend of colors. Just as every painting serves as a guide for the dance, every carousel creature offers a unique ride. For every project, I provide a structured framework or formula, allowing participants the space to have their own unique experiences. Rather than dictating every move, I let them interpret the guidance of the painting and make their own choreographic choices. It's their decision how the dance takes shape.

Every time I undertake a new project, there's a sense of mystery and unpredictability. Just as one doesn't know which carousel creature they'll ride or the view they'll have when the ride ends, I enter each project unsure of its outcome. I cannot predict which ‘creature’ or style a participant will choose or the final visual result of the dance, whether in person or on film.

But therein lies the beauty. The process of presenting participants with mediums, canvases, and movement prompts and watching them craft a dance is reminiscent of a carousel. It’s cyclical and unpredictable, yet it offers a structure and a familiar form. So, the experience of choreographing and creating a screendance is akin to riding a carousel, as it provides a blend of structure and spontaneity, familiarity, and surprise.

After completing the filming for *Carousel*, I became immersed in my Ph.D. research, writing, and preparation for a summer residency in Europe. Charly offered to edit the film, and I was

intrigued to see her unique take on our material. How would her vision and style contrast with what I had in mind? The anticipation of seeing the film through her lens filled me with genuine excitement.

Tobi approached me with the idea of spearheading a film festival for 'mignolo.' I was thrilled by the opportunity to contribute to the dance company's growth and have a hand in shaping this new event. Admittedly, I was venturing into unfamiliar territory. To grasp the task, I studied existing dance film festivals, examining their websites, mission statements, award categories, and festival guidelines. Using this research, I outlined a blueprint tailored for mignolo and shared this information with the group for feedback and alterations. After brainstorming some names with Charly and Eriel, we collectively chose "mignolo international screendance festival."

In addition to handling the details of organization and planning, I recognized our immediate need for a distinctive logo. The perfect candidate for this task sprang to mind: Ky Park, a former student. Ky had previously crafted an impressive motion logo for me and was on the cusp of attending the prestigious Ringling College of Art and Design. After collaborating with Ky through several iterations, I presented a couple of his drafts to Charly for feedback. Ultimately, Ky delivered a logo that flawlessly captured our collective vision.

With the film festival's preparations in full swing, the logo was the next step in establishing our FilmFreeway account and launching our social media presence. Once set up, it was an electrifying experience to witness film submissions pouring in from all corners of the world. The quality of work was astounding, and the sheer talent evident in each submission left me in awe. The excitement was palpable, and I was eager to showcase and share each exceptional piece with our audience.

Situated in New Jersey, a stone's throw from New York's vibrant dance scene, we received numerous local submissions from the two states. The Mignolo girls' connections to work in the city, Rutgers University, and local dance circles led them to dancers in renowned local companies. Given our roots, I felt strongly responsible for uplifting and supporting these local artists. However, this sense of community didn't overshadow the submitted incredible international films.

Our inaugural festival spanned three days, featuring over two hours of dance films nightly. My enthusiasm got the better of me that first year. From the 98 submissions spanning 23 countries, I passionately advocated for half the films to be showcased over the course of those three days. The range and diversity of the submissions were breathtaking, each presenting a unique perspective on screendance, pushing the boundaries of creative expression. A vibrant tapestry of global and local films inspired me to support many of them.

These screenings were also available online, making them accessible to a broader audience and allowing enthusiasts worldwide to participate in our celebration. The virtual format also provided filmmakers an opportunity to connect with audiences they might not have reached otherwise.

International filmmaker Li Chen, mesmerized us with his cinematic vision and touched our spirits. His film, *Our Planet Destiny*, was highlighted as the "Best of the Fest." He received a

$250 award, and his film was screened all three evenings. The distinction it gathered was evident in person and from the buzz it generated online.

In addition to the top award, we highlighted exceptional submissions each evening by awarding a new film with an "Honorable Mention" every night. It was our way of acknowledging the extraordinary talent that might not have won a cash prize but deserved recognition. And perhaps one of the most exciting aspects for the filmmakers was the "Viewer's Choice" award at each in-person screening. This allowed our live audience to have a voice, and their reactions and choices provided invaluable feedback for all the participating artists.

After closing the second season's deadline, we moved into the planning stages for the 2023 festival. I remained committed to advocating for the inclusion of local artists and showcasing their work in person, as it provides a platform to be seen and appreciated by their peers and community. While we may not be able to present every film recommended by the jury in person, I am fortunate to be working alongside Charly, Eriel, and Tobi, who bring their open-mindedness, creativity, and collaborative spirit to the table. We all value each other's input and ideas. At the 2023 festival, we added a virtual screening of selected films the evening before our in-person festival.

Our in-person festival began in the afternoon and featured six engaging sessions. As our festival gained momentum and recognition, we increased our prize offerings. The "Best of the Fest" award cash prize doubled to $500 and was awarded to “The Lines In Between” by Georgia Usborne. Karen Pearlman’s “Impossible Image” received an "Honorable Mention" and a $100 prize. The "Local Favorite" film award also offers the winners 4 hours of studio time at Mignolo Arts Center. These awards were given to Megan Chu for “Those Last Few Weeks” and Jody Oberfelder and Eric Siegel for “Dance of the Neurones.”

The day following the festival, we scheduled a special virtual gathering. All filmmakers and guests were invited to attend a Zoom meeting, designed to connect artists from both the virtual evening and the in-person festival. Here, they had a platform to discuss their films, share their experiences, and dive into the inspirations behind their work. More than just a post-festival discussion, this virtual gathering was geared towards fostering collaboration. It provided an invaluable opportunity for networking and building potential future partnerships, creating a community that thrives on mutual support and shared passion for screendance.

For our 2024 screendance festival, we will continue to hold both an in-person and virtual festival. This year, mignolo arts center will be hosting an Art Week from October 5 to 13. The screendance festival will close out the events for the week with a free screening of all finalists and prize winners. We have added one more prize to the festival, as we noticed how many new filmmakers were submitting films. The category is titled “My First Screendance Fest.” This allows new dance filmmakers the opportunity to be recognized and awarded prizes alongside seasoned creators.

The opportunity to develop and direct a screendance festival presented itself at a time of rapid growth in this art form. It has allowed me to connect with dancers and filmmakers worldwide as I participate in a shifting landscape that celebrates the unique vantage point of dance on camera. Capturing dance on film is a complex endeavor that blurs the lines between art and

documentation. It is an act of preserving ephemeral moments of human expression while simultaneously creating a new art form in its own right.

The impetus that once lured me to film dance in a park to heading a screendance festival is a journey I never envisioned just a few years prior. Through this medium, those I have met have woven a mosaic of cultures, traditions, and narratives that transcend borders, languages, and biases. Each interaction, whether with an emerging dancer or an acclaimed filmmaker, has enriched my understanding of this medium's vast potential. It reinforced the belief that dance, when merged with the cinematic lens, can tell intimately personal and universally resonant stories.

As I look ahead, I am filled with anticipation for what the next chapter holds. With a strong foundation and a supportive community, screendance is soaring to remarkable heights, reshaping perceptions and inspiring future generations. As a part of this ever-evolving narrative, I am humbled, honored, and excited to dance alongside it.

The Third Coast Dance Film Festival and COVID-19 Adaptive Programing in 2021

by Rosie Trump

Abstract

The Third Coast Dance Film Festival celebrates the intersection of contemporary dance and the moving image with a screening series of short dance films. The festival programs films that reflect diversity in genre, form, and representation. Low budget/high impact and female driven work are of high interest to the festival curators.

The Third Coast Dance Film Festival was founded in 2010 in Houston TX and is now based in Reno, NV. The chapter discusses the festival's curation process, economy, driving values, and audience demographics. Starting in February 2020, the impact of and navigation of COVID-19 are detailed at various steps of the festival from initial planning to curation to and to screening events.

The essay concludes with questions for the future regarding social formats, economy, purpose, and values of the Third Coast Dance Film Festival and screendance festivals.

In a companion piece, 2021 curators Ellen Duffy, Eve Allen Garza, and Laura Gutierrez are featured in conversation with festival founder and chief curator Rosie Trump. Specifically, they discuss the curation process and how COVID-19 influenced the process of choosing a screening program.

Introduction

In the first part of this essay, I trace the origins of the Third Coast Dance Film Festival with discussion of the personal, geographical, and logistical issues that shaped the festival in the early years and what continues to inform the festival now. This is motivated by a desire to contribute to and recognize how and why dance film festivals have proliferated, especially in the last fifteen years.

In the second part, I present the case study of adaptive programing the Third Coast Dance Film Festival employed during the COVID-19 pandemic by approaching the effects on makers, presenters, curators, and audiences. Ultimately, these reflections offer ways to analyze and understand the pandemic era and prompts questions for the future concerning issues of economy, value, purposes, and social media.

A discussion with the 2021 curators Eve Allen-Garza, Ellen Duffy, and Laura Gutierrez in interview format is included as a companion to this essay in the Interviews section of this issue.

Festival History

In 2010, I began a new job as the Director of Dance at Rice University in Houston, TX. One of my preliminary goals going into this job was to leverage the resources of my new institutional

affiliation to begin a dance film festival. I was a transplant to Texas, having lived the previous five years in Southern California. My founding intentions for the Third Coast Dance Film Festival were twofold: 1.) to support the Houston dance community with a local dance film festival and 2.) to create a platform for dance filmmakers like myself, specifically female-identifying with DIY approaches to making.

I come to the dance film festival world as a dance filmmaker and choreographer. My first exposure to the possibilities of dance and digital media was at Slippery Rock University as an undergraduate dance student. I took in a course called Dance and Technology taught by Jennifer Keller in 2002. In this class, we worked with DanceForms software, choreographed and edited video dances, and created digital portfolios. There was a novelty to animating virtual dancers and an allure to the portability of a portfolio on a CD, however I became enamored with making screendance and hybridizing live performance with projected video. The following year, I had the opportunity to work with Troika Ranch in a guest artist residency at Slippery Rock University. They introduced students to Isadora software and creating interactive video dances by combining projection and performance.

I worked as a Videography and Archives intern at the American Dance Festival (ADF) in 2002 where I attended the Dancing for the Camera Festival: International Festival of Film and Video Dance. While I had seen screendance on the small screen in educational settings, this was my first time attending an actual festival. The crafted curation, the excitement of premieres, and the impact of the large screen captivated my imagination. My experiences at ADF inspired me tremendously to commit to the creative work of translating movement to screen—I knew I wanted to make work like what I had seen in the Dancing for the Camera festival.

While pursuing a Masters of Fine Arts degree in experimental dance choreography, I worked with video artist Hilja Keading and filmmakers Erika Suderberg and Bridget Murane at the University of California, Riverside. Their mentorship further shaped my value system in the form: centering concept and appreciating low-fi, experimental methodologies. I was encouraged to contextualize screendance beyond the field of dance performance. I was asked to think beyond the cinema and movement techniques and to connect the body on screen to ideas in media, cultural, and women's studies. Over time, my interest in multimedia performance waned, but my fascination with screendance grew larger.

While living in Southern California, I regularly attended Los Angeles's screendance festival Dance Camera West in the mid 2000's. I saw an amazing array of screendance programming at Dance Camera West, especially shorts programs. Though, I also saw a programming bias towards male directors, male choreographers, and works with large budgets made possible by established funding in Europe and Canada. Even in Los Angeles, the movie capital of the world, few local artists were programmed into Dance Camera West's main events, at the time.

As an emerging screendance artist I asked: Where were the venues for artists that were making work without access to big budgets? Where were the screening opportunities for artists making experimental work without the high production values? When I looked at peer dance filmmakers, I saw women making films with a strong engagement with DIY approaches and aesthetics. I saw work that resulted in high impact because of movement invention and cinematic point of view.

How could a film festival buoy the do-it-yourself and multi-hyphenate makers? How could gender representation be more balanced in festivals?

These questions guided the formation of the Third Coast Dance Film Festival. The platform I wanted to build would attempt to amplify the work of artists who may not appeal to the bigger festivals. Figuring out how to build screening programs that value process, not just product, and challenge stylistic questions of what can be considered dance guided my interest in curation. This was and is an ongoing, imperfect, and evolving model of responsiveness that guides the Third Coast Dance Film Festival.

From the start of the Third Coast Dance Film Festival, shorts were my main interest. Uncertain of what the responses might be that first year and under the moniker Rice Dance Film Festival, I put out an open call for dance films under twelve minutes. The call resulted in a shorts program of local and national makers.

By happenstance, the Contemporary Art Museum of Houston was exhibiting Dance for Camera[1] and we collaborated on co-presenting several events. Sharon Lockhart's *Goshogaoka* (1998, 63 minutes) which was part of the Dance for Camera exhibit screened at Rice Cinema in conjunction with the inaugural Rice Dance Film Festival. The CAMH hosted me and the Houston dance community in several live dance performances at the museum during the exhibit.

With the initial year momentum taking the festival beyond Rice University's campus, the name changed to the Third Coast Dance Film Festival and became an annual event. The success of the CAMH partnership indelibly shaped the festival; partnering with visual arts venues is now woven into the fabric of the festival programing. The early years of the festival would not have been possible without building foundational relationships in Houston with the dance company Frame Dance Productions, film venue and non-profit Aurora Picture Show, and dance writer Nancy Wozny.

Currently over a decade old, The Third Coast Dance Film Festival celebrates the intersection of contemporary dance and the moving image with a screening series of short dance films. We program films that reflect diversity in genre, form, and representation. Low budget/high impact and female driven work are highlighted in our curatorial point of view. The festival is now based out of Reno, NV.

The Third Coast Dance Film Festival programming includes a premiere event with one to three shorts screenings and an ad hoc screening touring to various arts venues and universities in Pennsylvania, Alabama, Nevada, California, Nebraska, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, and Texas. I am the founder, director, and chief curator of the Third Coast Dance Film Festival. Guest curators have included Jodie Barker, Charli Brissey, Ellen Duffy, Jordan Fuchs, Lydia Hance,

[1] On view at the Contemporary Art Museum Houston from August 7, 2010 - October 17, 2010, *Dance with Camera* is an exhibition that considers artists and dancers who make choreography for the camera. The exhibition features art works in film, video, and still photography that exemplify the ways dance has compelled visual artists to record bodies moving in time and space. Featuring 26 artists and filmmakers, Dance with Camera has been organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, and is curated by Jenelle Porter, ICA Curator.

Ashley Horn, Jennifer Keller, Rosa Lina Lima, Rebecca Salzer, and Noelle Ruggieri. The 2021 festival guest curators were Eve Allen-Garza, Ellen Duffy, and Laura Gutierrez.

My own identity as a female-identifying choreographer and filmmaker paired with my academic career are undeniably enmeshed with my roles as dance film festival director and curator. These two roles impact how I've shaped the festival, built its audience, and focused the programing.

Economy and Audience Reach

The Third Coast Dance Film Festival has a modest, self-sustaining budget, by choice. While I retain the ability to shape the festival uncompromisingly, I also recognize the limitations of running a festival this way. The festival cannot afford to hire regular support staff or apply for grant funding, and programming possibilities hit a ceiling of limitation that is set by how much I can manage.

I see the potential and opportunities for expansion, however I have prioritized balance. It is small, it is regional, it is niche. A resistance to building the infrastructure to support the economics needed to sustain growth.

It has taken me ten years to be comfortable talking about this structure, owning it as a choice rather than a failure to incorporate into a non-profit, to exponentially expand, to capitalize. It is a more precarious structure, but not a less viable one.

The Third Coast Dance Film Festival's audience falls primarily into three categories: college students, dance viewers, and/or film/visual arts enthusiasts. Audiences are built from the local dance communities, venue patrons, and my academic affiliations. The touring venues combined with my professional association means the majority of the viewers are young adults/college students.

There is often a secondary impact for these viewers. The screening event may be the first-time viewers visit the venue, such as a museum. For example, our regular screening partner since 2014, the Nevada Museum of Art, which is the only accredited art museum in Nevada, is only 1.3 miles from the University of Nevada, Reno campus. Many Third Coast Dance Film Festival college student attendees express having never visited the museum prior to the screening and enthusiasm for returning.

Curatorial Process and Point of View

I serve as the chief curator and invite two or three different guest curators to review films and shape the program. The curation process for the Third Coast Dance Film Festival takes place over three rounds with each film submission being reviewed by at least two curators. A call for films short films under 12 minutes is published, circulating through social media, email, and the network of makers the festival has built over ten years of programming. In 2018, the festival began using the FilmFreeway online platform to accept submissions.

The umbrella curatorial point of view prioritizes three ideas: 1.) diversity in genre, form, and representation 2.) low budget/high impact and 3.) female driven work/ female-identifying makers are highlighted in the programing. The curators are encouraged to select films that speak to their

individual aesthetics. Works that include humor, unusual approaches to movement or cinematic method and content, and question what dance is, have been hallmarks of the festival.

Ultimately, between fifteen and thirty short films are selected for the screening program annually. The festival gives out two types of awards. The "Best of Festival Award" is granted by each curator to highlight their top pick, resulting in three to four film awards each season. One "Spirit of the Festival Award" is chosen collectively by the curators to highlight a film that exemplifies the festival's interest in female-identifying driven and low budget/high impact work.

The identity of the Third Coast Dance Film Festival is grounded in the curation. The films are selected each season with an eye towards challenging what dance on screen is and can be conceptually and technically. Specifically, this is achieved by embracing and prioritizing low-fi, DIY, and experimental approaches in selections.

Impacts and Pivoting Programing for COVID-19

COVID-19 began impacting, and subsequently shaping, our programing concretely in April 2020 and unwittingly as early as February 2020.

The Third Coast Dance Film Festival annually presents a touring screening at the Kaleidoscope Arts Festival in Slippery Rock, PA. The event coordinators contacted me in early March 2020 with notification that live events were being canceled, and the festival was ultimately going to be canceled. I responded with a proposal to offer a virtual screening of the Third Coast Dance Film Festival. This was a novel idea, at the time, though we know it now to be normal. I used the online video sharing platform Youtube to present a virtual screening for the Kaleidoscope Arts Festival. Because distribution in this way was a new concept for most, the biggest challenge was Kaleidoscope figuring out the logistics of how to get their patrons the information (link) for the digital screening.

Then college campuses began closing and instruction was moving online. As my social and professional networks filled with the expressions of worry, panic, and anxiety of the unknowns, specifically how to translate dance into the virtual world and how to generate content to fill a digital space, I saw a small need that the Third Coast Dance Film Festival could fill. Based on the successful pivot to online content with the Kaleidoscope Arts Festival, I offered a one hour screening program to my social media network of university faculty. Colleagues from the California State University, Long Beach, the University of California, Berkeley, Davidson College, the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and the University of Nevada, Reno incorporated screenings of the Third Coast Dance Film Festival in their courses. Largely, these virtual Third Coast Dance Film Festival screenings replaced the canceled live performance viewing assignments for students in Spring 2020.

I remember beginning the administrative work for the 2021 season in February 2020 and thinking to myself how COVID will never impact an event scheduled for February 2021. I even thought that by scheduling a call for films in June, we would "jump" past the pandemic period. In retrospect that thinking was so naive, but at the time, city, state, and national shut downs had yet to begin. In those early Spring 2020 days, there was a (very) misguided hope that the worst would pass by summer.

The 2021 call for films opened on May 1, 2020. My state of residence, Nevada, had stay-at-home orders in place for a month at this point. It became clear that the national landscape for the arts had been decimated with cancellations, postponements, rescheduling, resulting in wide-spread unemployment and irrevocable income loss. I waived the submission fee ($15) for the regular deadline. Since we started charging submission fees in 2015, the festival offers waivers for anyone who finds the submission fee cost prohibitive. 2020 demanded blanket economic relief, and fee waivers was the small contribution the Third Coast Dance Film Festival could offer.

The call for films closed on July 1, 2020. Ellen Duffy, Eve Allen Garza, Laura Gutierrez, and myself served as the 2020-21 curators, reviewing the films over the summer and finalizing the line up by September 2020.

The main programing for 2021 included three screening events in February:

The Virtual Screening #1 was on February 18 at 6 pm at the Nevada Arts Museum in Reno, NV. A ticketed event, though free for museum members and students. Following the one hour film screening there was a Q & A with filmmaker Marta Renzi and myself moderated by NMA director of public programs, Christian Davies.

The Virtual Screening #2 was on February 20 at 7 pm co-presented by the Holland Project in Reno, NV. This was a free, one hour screening event.

The Video Installation was available for in-person viewing Feb. 1-28 at The Holland Project Gallery at 140 Vesta Street in Reno, NV. The installation featured 25 minutes of films on a continuous loop and was available for viewing during gallery hours or by appointment.

In addition to virtual programming, there were two significant programming additions in 2021. There were an unprecedented number of student film submissions in 2020. The Third Coast Dance Film Festival has never offered a student category for film submissions, however I saw this aberration as an opportunity to support young dance filmmakers. Fresh from the energy of the added university screenings in April and May of 2020, combined with the impressive student work submissions, I reached out to middle and high school performing arts educators from my personal network. After gauging their interest in virtual content, I created a YOUTH screening program in addition to the primary shorts screenings. The YOUTH program toured to three pilot schools, two in Reno, NV and one in Baltimore, MD.

The second program addition was a month-long video installation to complement the short screening in partnership with the Holland Project in Reno, NV. This program element was in response to the surge of films we received that would work well on a mid-sized screen, some of which were COVID responsive. The video installation ran in a gallery space, intentionally intimate and framed as an in-person, socially distanced dance film experience for one or two people at a time.

In summary of the immediate impact of COVID, the Third Coast Dance Film Festival expanded its touring programing and pivoted the annual live screening to all but one virtual event resulting in programming that could be viewed across geographies.

Since the summer of 2020, I have attended more dance film festivals and viewed more dance on screen than I have ever had the opportunity to before. The level accessibility virtual screenings have given to this form is unparalleled. The Third Coast Dance Film Festival is currently located in the city of Reno in the state of Nevada-- a fairly isolated city in a state with many remote and rural communities. Access, specifically virtual access, is an issue that cannot be ignored moving forward.

Questions for the Future of Screendance Festivals

When I think of the future, I think of questions. These questions help me dream up what may yet be possible and to contemplate the reality COVID continues to indelibly shape.

1. ECONOMY

Will festivals shift towards and/or utilize corporate, third party platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo to present their content? What are the economic implications of such platforms? This trend potentially transfers resources and relationships away from local community partners, yet increases audience reach beyond locality. How does this impact issues of growth/sustainability and audience engagement/reach?

Will artists continue to be able to pay festival entry fees? What are the ethics of entry fees, specifically? How do they feed into festivals' production budgets? Can paying screening fees become a norm?

2. VALUE

In 2020/2021, the demand for the skill set of translating dance to screen and live performance to virtual presentation increased. What will the long-term impacts on the field be as more dance artists learn and use the camera to present dance? Will the value of these skills remain elevated beyond the immediacy of the pandemic? Will workshops and class offerings in the genre expand?

During the pandemic, many funding/commissioning entities included virtual performance and dance films into their parameters. Will the screendance and virtual performance continue to be considered in a foregrounded manner?

In the July 2020 New York Times article, "The Dance on Camera Festival, When Dance Is Only on Camera," choreographer Annie-B Parson remarks "We're all becoming filmmakers." I have been thinking about this quote since then. When all choreographers are screendance makers, how are these skills regarded? Is there an elevation, devaluation, or evolution that happens when we all become filmmakers?

3. PURPOSE

What are the larger goals of screendance festival curation? For many years, the Third Coast Dance Film Festival's driving goal was to showcase the sheer possibilities of dance on screen. Specifically, spectacular sites, novel techniques, and cinematics feats of time and rhythm. Now I want to be driven by what screen dance can do for the viewer. Facilitating a festival during the

COVID pandemic has prompted me to move away from crafting programming that proves the validity and showcases the capabilities of the form. Instead, I want to move towards creating programming that highlights the affective impact and responsive relevance of dance on screen.

Many screendance festivals organize screenings into thematic programming. Virtual screenings (and the absence of physical financial and logistical barriers) expanded how many screening programs and themes they offered. Will this continue as festivals transition back to primarily in-person events. What is lost/gained when programming shrinks?

4. SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2020 searching for connection, physicality, and entertainment, people consumed an inordinate amount of bite-sized screened dance through the social platforms of TikTok, Youtube, and Instagram. Social media seemed easy to dismiss as faddish and trivial over the last decade. How will screendance meet viewers where they are—on social media?

How can, or should, dance made for the social media screen be considered in screendance festivals? How could this bring new, and diverse audiences and makers to the form? What are the inherent limits to work made on commercial apps and corporate platforms? How can makers use and manipulate technological tools to define, drive, and expand the presentation of moving bodies on screen?

Conclusion

Dance film festivals responded to the pandemic in diverse and unprecedented ways, especially around access to programming. Dance artists turned to the format of dance on screen as an alternative to live performance, and the form significantly evolved and continues to evolve in turn. Audiences learned to consume virtual content through new platforms and formats, with altered attention spans, and with unparalleled capacity. In the years since 2020 many conventional practices, such as live screenings, have (delightfully) returned. However, other new, hybrid, and virtual modalities have remained and are still emerging. New questions continue to surface around commercialization, space for experimentation, and risk-taking in programming.

VideoDanzaBA Festival: Almost Three Decades of Pioneering the Field in Latin America

By Silvina Szperling, Mauro Cacciatore, Mariel Leibovich

Abstract

Created in 1995 by director Silvina Szperling, VideoDanzaBA is the first festival in Latin America dedicated to the promotion, dialogue and education in the field of screendance. Based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the Festival has shown in its 28 years of existence hundreds of works from most corners of the planet, where Latin America has grown as a specific force in the field, gaining representation on screen as a diverse multicultural scope, both artistically and as a production and circulation network, such as REDIV (Red Iberoamericana de Videodanza/Ibero American Network of Screendance). In addition to its screendance competition, VideoDanzaBA has welcomed artists from all over the world to participate in its Education Program and academic Symposium. Some of these scholars' writings were included in the book “Terpsícore en ceros y unos. Ensayos de Videodanza” (*Terpsichore in zeroes and ones. Essays on Screendance*; Szperling, Temperley comp., Guadalquivir, Buenos Aires, 2010).

Through its history, VideoDanzaBA has depicted materials that document the artistic and political production of underrepresented communities in the field (women, indigenous people, LGBT+), comprising a wide scope of dance styles (contemporary, classical, hip hop, folklore, regional dances, tango). This paper will be an attempt to reconstruct this history in connection with the genealogy of the field of dance and technology in Argentina.

Introduction

The VideoDanzaBA International Festival (VDBA), from Buenos Aires, is a pioneer in the regional screendance field. Since its beginnings in 1995, it has been an important platform for the circulation, education, discussion, and development of networks regarding artistic manifestations around the body-technology axis, in a broad sense. Throughout its history, it has become a platform for the dissemination and professionalization of the screendance field. VDBA's activities sought to promote screendance produced by local and regional artists, to provide multidisciplinary mentoring for the implementation of viable projects, to build networks, and to bring art closer to the community. With an emphasis on international exchange, the festival developed artistic residency plans with foreign organizations to promote research and artistic cooperation, in a framework that always encouraged diversity. Its educational initiative was aimed at both professional development and community outreach, and its programs included live performances, screenings, exhibitions, lectures, and special activities.

The history of VDBA is directly linked to the role of Silvina Szperling, her professional background, and the beginnings of screendance in Argentina and Latin America. Szperling, founder and director of VideoDanzaBA, has become a precursor in this genre with her first work, *Temblor* (1993), considered to be one of the first Argentine screendance pieces. This article is the result of a dialogue between the Festival's historical archive and a series of interviews and talks with Silvina, with the purpose of systematizing the information and enriching it with all that is linked to the sphere of the memory, anecdotes, and emotions that can be derived from the oral history. As a whole, both materials are intended to give an account of the historical background of VDBA, addressing its first actions, the emergence, growth, and development of each one of its areas, with the aim of understanding how the process of building its own identity took place, and also the factors that led the Festival to say goodbye in 2023, twenty-eight years after its foundation.

Context and background: the seeds of VideoDanzaBA

In order to account for the local and regional implications of the Festival, it is necessary to briefly contextualize the socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions of that time. The '90s in Argentina were marked by a brutal neoliberalism whose main policies implemented were the privatization of public companies, trade liberalization, decentralization of the State, reform of the Public Administration, a marked reduction in public spending and an increase in foreign debt, among other issues. In specific terms, this translated into a lack of support for cultural activities in general and for dance in particular. In addition to these factors, it is important to remember that we are facing an era marked by a certain isolation in technological terms: the Internet did not exist, nor did the pre-eminence of the digital world.

At that time everything was analog, therefore, the materials were video cassettes that traveled by postal mail. In some developed countries they worked in film or high definition, as in professional television, but these were technologies that were not yet available in Argentina. Even in the field of video art, which had already a longer history, artists also worked with home cameras, which were also difficult to access, not everyone had one. Both the geopolitical and social context at a national scale, and the technological status and difficulties of access to media, put the artists in a very precarious situation.

An example of this situation is the fact that in 1993 the National Secretary of Culture wanted to organize a Festival in which Jorge Coscia[1] was to be a member of the jury, but no works were submitted: the call for entries was declared void. Part of Coscia's production as a filmmaker was linked to musical movies in which dance played a leading role, among them *Cipayos* and *Canción desesperada*. Faced with this absence of screendance productions, Coscia proposed setting up a Screendance Workshop for Choreographers at the recently inaugurated National Library (Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno). The course lasted three months and was free of charge. The attendance was approximately fifty people, so two different classes were offered. Coscia's pedagogical thesis was very pragmatic: he insisted that it was easier to teach the basics of cinematographic language to choreographers and dancers than to teach dance to audiovisual producers. The workshop became a production motor, since each person had to make a final exercise. The first Argentinian screendance productions came out of this course, by Silvina Szperling, Margarita Bali, Paula de Luque and Melanie Alfie.

The four resulting pieces were supervised by Coscia, who acted as production assistant, technician, and executive producer, among other roles, as needed in each case. The following year Szperling, who was a teacher at the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Center (*Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas*, a venue dependent on the University of Buenos Aires), received a proposal to make an exhibition of the four videos produced at the end of the screendance workshop: the reception from the audience was overwhelming. The situation of dance at that time in Argentina was really critical, due to the economic crisis mentioned above, and that is why the video appeared as a simpler possibility of production and circulation (especially compared to the costs of touring a dance company).

From North to South: ADF / BA

Within the migratory movement resulting from the crisis during the '90s, it was very common for Argentinian artists who traveled abroad to remain living in the place that they arrived to, and only in exceptional cases did they return to Argentina. Since video has an independent circulation, unlike a stage work that implies the travel of a large amount of materials and people, video as support for a dance piece was used as a facilitator for artists who were established abroad to exhibit their own work in Argentina. Likewise, for artists living in Argentina, video worked as a facilitator for exhibiting their work abroad.

In 1994 Szperling was awarded with a grant from the American Dance Festival (ADF), which had a very strong level of exchange with Argentina. At that time, they had an International Choreographers' Residency (ICR) program in which choreographers from different countries lived together in the same house on Campus at Duke University, sharing common activities, as well as integrating themselves in an exchange with all participants of ADF. Margarita Bali[2] and Susana Tambutti[3] were already periodically attending ADF with their company

[1] Jorge Coscia (1952-2021) was an Argentine filmmaker and politician. He graduated from the Centro de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica (CERC), currently the Escuela Nacional de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica (ENERC), which belongs to the Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA). His career as a director includes the feature films *Luca vive* (2002), *Canción desesperada* (1997), *Comix, cuentos de amor, de video y de muerte* (1995), *El general y la fiebre* (1992), *Cipayos (la tercera invasión)* (1989), *Chorros* (1987), and *Mirta, de Liniers a Estambu*l (1987).

[2] Margarita Bali is a choreographer, teacher, and pioneer of screendance in Argentina. In 1975 she founded, together with Susana Tambutti, the company Nucleodanza from where they created multiple works. Originally trained in Biology (California), she later turned to the visual arts, incorporating video work into her dance works.

[3] Susana Tambutti is an architect, choreographer, teacher, and researcher. She co-directed Nucleodanza (1974-1996). She is currently a Consulting Professor (Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, UBA), Associate Professor in

Nucleodanza. There was a growing relationship and interest of the directors of ADF in Argentine dance production. That year, after a visit to Buenos Aires by Stephanie Reinhart (co-director of ADF), they decided to invite seven Argentine choreographers to the festival, including Mabel Dai Chi Chang, Mariano Pattin, Brenda Angiel, Laura Veiga, among others. This group was joined by Susana Szperling, who lived in NYC and got a scholarship at the Young Choreographers Program to attend, and Marcelo Isse Moyano who traveled as a Scholar.

Silvina's 6-week scholarship was a video apprenticeship, her purpose was to study screendance and to be an assistant to Douglas Rosenberg.[4] In one of the interviews conducted for this article Szperling mentions that, upon returning to Argentina after that experience, she had her first idea as a producer:

> I had managed to travel with the support of the Argentine Foreign Ministry, and I thought: "It costs the same for a country to pay a scholarship to an Argentinean to study screendance in the USA, than to pay an American professor to come and teach classes to everybody."

Following the initial impulse of the video exhibition held at the Rojas, the project to create a screendance festival began to take shape. On the recommendation of Graciela Taquini[5] – pioneer of video art and "artistic godmother" of VDBA– Szperling contacted Rodrigo Alonso[6], who at that time was a student of the Bachelor of Combined Arts at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires, and belonged to the faculty of General Theory of Dance, whose head was Susana Tambutti.

As part of the Festival's proposal, Douglas Rosenberg was invited, by means of an economic aid from the ADF, to cover his travel expenses and fees, beginning a south/north relationship that was very beneficial. This bilateral relationship also highlighted the economic inequalities between the two festivals, which impacted on the availability of technologies. Highly qualified

General History of Dance (Department of Movement Arts (UNA). Member of the Academic Council of the Doctorate in Arts (UNA). She is Director of the Specialization in Contemporary Dance Trends (UNA), of the Research Institute of the Department of Movement Arts (UNA), and of the Academic Section of the International Performance Biennial (Argentina).

[4] Rosenberg is well known for his work in screendance. He has articulated the field both through his films and his theoretical writing. He is a founding editor of the International Journal of Screendance. He is the author of Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image and editor of The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies, which was awarded the Oscar G. Brockett Book Prize for Dance Research. He is well-known for his collaborations with choreographers including Molissa Fenley, Sean Curran, Ellen Bromberg, Joe Goode, Li Chiao-Ping, Eiko and Koma and others. His film My Grandfather Dances with choreographer Anna Halprin was awarded the Director's Prize at the International Jewish Video Festival in Berkeley, California.

[5]Graciela Taquini is an Argentine artist, curator and teacher who has developed most of her artistic production in the area of single-channel experimental video. She is a referent of contemporary art and new media. She has been producing artistic work since 1988, receiving different awards, among them the Konex Platinum Award in Video Art (2012). She has been nicknamed "the aunt of Argentine video art" for her early participation and interest in that discipline. She is a full member of the National Academy of Fine Arts. Her recent endeavor is Legado.ar, a network and archive of Argentinian female audiovisual artists.

[6] Rodrigo Alonso is a professor and independent curator. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), Argentina, specializing in contemporary art and new media. Professor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), Universidad del Salvador (USal), and Universidad Nacional de las Artes (UNA), Argentina. Invited professor at important universities, congresses, and international forums in Latin America and Europe.

international professors and artists were invited to teach courses, train people, and help to produce. Szperling says:

> In the case of Douglas Rosenberg, I asked him to bring his camera and he brought ADF's professional camera, which was a giant BetaCam, which is like a backpack. We are not talking about a camcorder where the camera and the recorder were together, but the camera was one device and the recorder was another. As it turned out, he was stopped at customs and we had to take steps to get an authorization to release it. The feeling was as if we were importing technology when, in fact, we were importing knowledge.

In this way, the workshops became a way of transferring knowledge and, at the same time, a space for production: works were created there in the same way as in Jorge Coscia's first workshop, but now, in a more organized and sustained training instance, that allowed access to a growing community, and achieve greater development.

VDBA 1.0 - Outreach and Education

The emergence of the Festival is the result of the encounter between the need to produce and to promote an art form that was still new in the country. An exponential interest was generated by this language, both in local creators and consumers. The first years of VDBA were marked by the import of knowledge and the training of artists, as well as by the possibility of accessing material that could not be found anywhere else.

The Education Area of the Festival has been one of its strong and permanent features since its foundation. During the first years most of the activities were practical workshops given by important foreign guest artists such as Douglas Rosenberg, Li Chiao-Ping, Elliot Caplan (USA), Laura Taler (Canada), Becky Edmunds, Liz Aggis, Billy Cowie (UK), Pascal Magnin (Switzerland), among others.[7]

Over the years, the Education and Extension Area was divided in two: on the one hand, "Professional Training", from which the LAB VD (Screendance Project Development Laboratory, *Laboratorio de Desarrollo de Proyectos de Videodanza*) would later emerge. It was a program in which a dozen Argentinean and Latin American scholarship holders worked intensively for a week on their own projects, advised by five tutors in different specialties of screendance: Dance for the Camera, Direction and Script, Production Design, Soundtrack, and General Project Advice. At the end of the LAB, the participants presented their projects in a pitching session in front of a jury, who awarded the Production Stimulus Prizes, consisting of image and sound post-production services and electronic subtitling by professionals of the highest quality. On the other hand, the area of "Outreach to the Community" was created, within the framework of which, for example, there were activities organized in collaboration with the group Alma, a company focused on inclusive dance directed by Susana Gonzalez Gonz and with the group Danza Comunitaria (*Community Dance)* of Aurelia Chillemi, among other actions. More than 100 people participated in these activities each year, being one of the areas that attracted the most audience.

[7] The United States, Canada, Switzerland, and France provided funding, along with support from other local funds, such as the National Fund for the Arts and, above all, the Rojas Cultural Center, which made a big bet on the project. At that time, the Rojas represented a very important gravitational center of emerging culture (it is currently celebrating its 40th anniversary). It began as a very modest space of the University, which grew a lot from synergies with party and political movements of the University, becoming a place of reference.

The Festival continued its development, changing venues on several occasions, until 2001, when there was a hiatus in the historical line of the Festival. That year's edition had been held at the Recoleta Cultural Center in August, and already at that time there were signs of serious economic problems, which later led to the social, political, and economical collapse that took place in December of that year, and that culminated in the resignation of President De La Rúa. The crisis led Szperling to live in the USA for a few years, but in 2005, back in the country, she organized a new edition of VDBA, again at the Rojas. Graciela Taquini came up with the idea of celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Festival, so a "curatorship of awarded pieces" was made, where the award-winning works of that first 10 years were highlighted at a Special Screening.

VDBA 2.0 - A united Latin America and academic initiatives

By 2005 the context was very different, other winds were blowing. It was a time marked by a new Latin American geopolitical organization in which MERCOSUR[8] became more relevant and powerful, UNASUR[9] was being planned, and the local Secretary of Culture was closely connected to that of Brazil, whose Minister of Culture was the well-known musician Gilberto Gil. VideoDanzaBA, together with the festivals Dança em Foco (Brazil) and FIVU (Uruguay), which were holding their first editions, created the Mercosur Screendance Circuit (*Circuito de Videodanza Mercosur)* which resulted in the creation of two DVD compilations, and a series of trips and meetings among the members of this network. Silvina says:

> We held residencies in which, for example, three artists (one from each country) stayed for two weeks in the cities of the other festivals (Montevideo, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires). The local artist acted as host and facilitator for their colleagues. Tamara Cubas and I also traveled to teach workshops in Rio and Sao Paulo, and this networking that began to happen had to do with a cultural management that sought to expand our circuit collectively, and help each other in management. But the most important thing is that on an artistic level, on an artistic language level, we began to see ourselves in the mirror of our peers. That is: Brazil, Uruguay, and then Mexico, together with other countries that joined the Forum (Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile), had the same production problems that we did, and also many of the same aesthetic questions, which of course are diverse and always characterized by a respect for diversity.

The governments of the region were coming to an agreement; it was the time of the "No al ALCA"[10], characterized by a great economic growth in Argentina and Brazil, which meant a turn in the modes of production and circulation. This shift allowed for a different type of framework in which, although works, artists, and proposals from the northern hemisphere continued to be welcomed, a greater regional productivity began to emerge. The situation of greater production was strengthened by the growing technological accessibility, the digitalization of contents and then, gradually, by the possibility of circulation through the

[8] The Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market) is an economic bloc founded in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

[9] Unión de las Naciones Suramericanas (Union of South American Nations, UNaSur), created in 2008. South American integration organization, currently composed of six countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela.

[10] The ALCA, Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas, (Free Trade Area of the Americas) was a multilateral free trade agreement, signed in Miami during the First Summit of the Americas in 1994, which included all the countries of the American continent, with the exception of Cuba. It was scheduled to begin at the IV Summit of the Americas, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina in 2005, but the rejection of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Venezuela prevented the treaty from entering into force.

Internet. Not only was it easier to have access to certain technologies (which are now an everyday occurrence), but it was also easier to obtain local investment and support from public funds. Thus, a phase of less precariousness began.

At this time, academic initiatives began to emerge with greater depth and dedication, renewing the Festival's research axis. Although in the '90s some actions of discussion had been proposed, they had had little impact at that time; however, those spaces of round tables and conferences were continued, and eventually the "International Symposium of Screendance" emerged. By then, many of the artists who had already been participating in the Festival were also involved in their academic practices, and were in contact with the new generations, thus creating a second wave of professionals linked to screendance.

The symposium had three editions (2006, 2007, 2009) and, as a product of those experiences, the first book edited by the Festival was published: *Terpsichore en ceros y unos. Ensayos de Videodanza*, co-compiled by Susana Temperley and Silvina Szperling (Guadalquivir, Buenos Aires, 2010). The book contains essays by academics who had participated in the Symposium, such as Simon Fildes (UK), Paulo Caldas and Alexandre Veras (Brazil), Oscar Traversa and Graciela Taquini (Argentina), Douglas Rosenberg and Ellen Bromberg (USA), among others, and is the first publication on screendance in Spanish. At the same time, Dança em Foco began to publish in Brazil their first book collection about screendance in Portuguese.

The development of the academic area was strongly linked to the semiologist Susana Temperley[11], who at the time of joining the Festival chose dance and screendance as her object of study. Her expertise in academic work strongly strengthened this section of VDBA. At the same time, there was already a greater number of artists who approached screendance not only from their artistic practice, but also from critical thinking linked to academic research.

The Festival continued its development by promoting residency plans with foreign organizations such as South East Dance (UK), among others, to encourage research and artistic exchange. In 2010, on its 15th anniversary, a publication was released about the first two editions of the Symposium, the Education Area added residencies, professionalization and community outreach workshops, as well as scholarships and internships for residents in Latin America. All this activity enriched the usual exhibits: photography shows, installations, multimedia performances, as well as the open call for screendance pieces, works-in-progress, retrospectives, and special screenings.

VDBA 3.0 - Between programming, curatorships, and award ceremonies

Within the framework of the meetings of the Latin American Screendance Forum (*Foro Latinoamericano de Videodanza*), which took place in Buenos Aires (2006), Brazil (2007 and 2009), and Mexico (2011), the issue of curatorship began to be discussed -especially by Brazilian colleagues- an aspect still somewhat neglected. From these meetings onwards, the discussions on this topic were enhanced through conferences, meetings, articles, and in the production team of each festival.

[11] Susana Temperley holds a PhD in Arts (UNA), specializes in Arts Criticism and Dissemination (UNA), Analysis of Choreographic Production (UNLP), and has a degree in Social Communication (UBA). Since 2007 she teaches Semiotics and Theory of Communication and Semiotics of the Arts in the area of Arts Criticism at Universidad nacional de las Artes (UNA). For more than two decades, she has been devoted to the study of the relationship between dance and technology and its problematics around the languages of contemporary art. She has published articles on this topic in Argentine and international media.

Over the years, a growing specialization became more evident, both at the artistic level and at the festival production level, which marked clearer roles. In this regard, the VDBA team started to ask itself what distinguishes a program from a curatorship, which led to the differentiation of the work of two different juries. At first, the historical pre-selection jury developed curatorial criteria related to the grouping of works, and how to link them in relation to a containing discourse. These discussions were characterized by their interdisciplinary nature, with the participation of Rodrigo Alonso (video art and video dance researcher), Diego Trerotola (film critic), as well as an artist from the world of dance, who changed according to each edition, together with the Festival's director. On a second stage, the second group of jurors was in charge of the decision of the awarded pieces.

Then, the Festival's production team began to take charge of the curatorship in 2017, and gradually perfected the curatorial process until 2023, when a more extensive discussion began prior to the call for entries. Therefore, the curatorial process of that edition was extended for almost a year, and it became necessary to appoint a person to coordinate the team, who was Mauro Cacciatore. We will delve into this experience, and some of the aspects that went through it in the next section, dedicated to the last edition of the Festival.

Although curatorship was not originally included as an axis within the Festival's mission, it emerged in the light of the development of the discipline, taking into account the progress of this language, its evolution, and the question of how a Festival is not only a mere container of what is being produced, but also a producer of discourses. So, for example, one of the decisions taken by the initial team in 1995 had been to exhibit all the material received in the open call, as an attempt of encouraging production in an almost deserted field. It is worth mentioning that in those first editions, special screenings included pieces by Douglas Rosenberg, material from the Goethe Institut, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), among others. Those decisions were based on the desire to promote creation, and to provide artists with tools to develop a critical view (learning by watching) and, based on this knowledge, to encourage local production.

Over the years those decisions changed, and although VDBA was not a thematic festival in the strict sense of the word, from that time on it became a common practice to choose a specific motto for each edition, which sought to be transversal to all its actions. In 2013, for instance, in accordance with the 30th anniversary of Argentina's democracy, the leitmotif “Memory, Body and Image” was the axis around which the artistic proposals were aligned, as well as the academic dialogues and the intervention of the space of our main venue, the Haroldo Conti Cultural Center for Memory, at the former ESMA[12]. The relationship with the institutions that became venues is also an aspect that crosses the curatorial aspect; perhaps the most obvious case is the Conti, a place dedicated to memory, which makes it impossible for the space not to dialogue with the work of the artists in residence, as well as the people who circulated through the Festival during that week.

Expanding on the curatorial aspects, in 2015 the theme focused on the relationship with the natural and urban environment, in particular the preservation of water and other natural resources. The theme that year was “Energies in transformation”. In the 2017 edition, “Falsa Danza” emerged as a proposal by Susana Temperley, academic coordinator of the Festival.

[12] The ESMA Memory Site Museum is a National Historic Monument, a MERCOSUR Cultural Asset and part of UNESCO's World Heritage List. The building that houses it, the former Officers' Casino of the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA), is evidence of the actions of State terrorism and judicial evidence in cases of crimes against humanity in Argentina.

This curatorial initiative included a section curated by Temperley together with Valeria Martínez, Silvina Szperling and Federica Baeza, and was a project that crossed all the artistic areas and art forms present in the Festival: a photo exhibition, video screenings, stage pieces, lectures, conferences, and critical writings.

The 2019 edition was connected to *Merce Cunningham Centennial: the elemental, the unpredictable, the unexpected*, a curatorial project in collaboration with Merce Cunningham Trust and REDIV (Red Iberoamericana de Videodanza) in the occasion of the Centennial of Merce Cunningham, not only an important choreographer in the history of dance, but also a key figure in the history of screendance and dance with technology at large. The project consisted of a curatorial program in the form of kaleidoscopic windows, through which the multiple and possible facets and perspectives of the expanded choreographic work of this choreographer were shown. In the form of thematic diagonals, the works were presented in the form of choreographic films, documentaries, and filmic experiments that were made available to all REDIV[13] member countries. The exhibition was accompanied by an expanded catalog to provide context for the exhibition during the extensive tour of the Merce Cunningham Centennial (2019), as well as to serve as reference material for future reference in university, educational, and artistic contexts. In order to generate an educational and exchange space, workshops on *DanceForms* and *Cunningham Technique* were included, taught by Trevor Carlson (USA) and Mauro Cacciatore (Argentina). As a stage production, the Festivals were offered the presentation of *Not A Moment Too Soon*, a multidisciplinary stage work that integrates dance, text, music, and video that traces the life experience between the choreographer Merce Cunningham and his executive director, Trevor Carlson, who narrates it in the first person as a solo. In addition, on April 16, Cunningham's birthday, the live streaming of *Night of 100 Solos: A Centennial Event*, a large simultaneous event in three cities, broadcast via worldwide streaming, was accompanied.

This array of activities shows that VDBA has been a Festival that aimed at multidisciplinarity, the diversity of formats and to promote an approach to contemporary issues, both artistic and socio-political. On some occasions there have been sections of photographic exhibitions curated by experts such as Karin Idelson and Augusto Zanella. There have also been installations and other types of expanded screendance, but always the focus -for reasons related to the complexities and production costs of such works- has been the exhibition of single-channel audiovisual videos organized in competitive exhibitions: the Argentine competition, the International competition, and in several editions, the Videodanza Minuto competition. In turn, these programs dialogue with special screenings (retrospectives of guest artists, Argentine documentaries, etc.), university and workshop exhibitions, plus all of those grouped in the Living Arts section (multimedia works that integrate live dance with moving images and sound, either scenic, or installation), training activities (workshops, interdisciplinary artistic residencies, the LAB VD), publications, lectures, and conferences.

Regarding programming and awards, it is important to mention that for many years the Festival was not competitive, but later, it began to offer awards again. There was a change in the approach to this matter. Silvina says that:

> I thought at the time that a prize without money didn't make much sense. But later, in order to enter the film circuit as an audiovisual festival eligible for funding, you had to

[13] The Red Iberoamericana de Videodanza, REDIV, is a network of cultural managers, researchers, and artists that works transversally through various projects and actions of curatorship, dissemination, training, management, production and research on screendance.

> be a competitive festival. At a certain point I realized that, just as we were advancing in the academic field, in the intellectual authorization, or in the recognition of production, it appeared to me that, although the award was not economic, it was an important recognition in that particular world of cinema. We moved between two areas: at the beginning we were dancers with cameras who made distinctive works, then film students began to collaborate with dance students for their graduation theses. These theses, concretely, implied to gain, not only an audience from the film world, but also critics and theorists. Thus, the issue of hybridity, so typical of our language, began to be evident.

In the '90s video-dance appeared as linked to video art, but later, due to technological advances, cinema began to be digital as well. The most important film festivals started to hold round tables on digital cinema, where there were debates on whether digital cinema was cinema or not. Although screendance artists were beyond those debates, the discussion existed and was the reason why screendance was proposed as an audiovisual language and could be recognized by the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA, *Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales*), which started to support the production of screendance works and festivals through subsidies. This shows that the awards not only imply an economic retribution, but also a legitimization within the film industry, whose modes of circulation, production, and legitimization are different from those of dance and the performing arts. Also, by joining the Argentine Network of Audiovisual Festivals and Exhibitions (RAFMA, *Red Argentina de Festivales y Muestras Audiovisuales*[14]), VDBA began to link up with independent film festivals that were beyond the official circuit and added another award to the festival, the RAFMA Prize.

2023 - The last edition

Curatorship is a practice that obtains its specificity by being conceived as a field of writing. Marcelo Pacheco defines it by "its inherent capacity to remain a terrain of multiple and transdisciplinary experiences without becoming a discipline in itself, remaining a function 'in between'" (2001, p. 5). In turn, Douglas Rosenberg points to other issues that draw attention to various aspects that enrich the practice:

> Curation is not simply a selection. It is a proactive practice, which by nature contains equal parts of academic, scholarly, and teaching components. One undertakes a high degree of responsibility as a curator, not only to the work but also to the culture of that art form in general, its historical origin, its manner of proceeding and its flow of interrelated strands: interdisciplinarity and intertextuality. Curatorship is a platform for strong statements and is quite different from organizing and programming (2021, p. 96).

When analyzing the work of the curatorial team of the 2023 edition of VDBA 2023, integrated by Silvina Szperling, Mariel Leibovich, Marina Andreotti, Sofia Castro, Lola Vazquez, and Mauro Cacciatore as Chief Curator, Rosenberg's words resonate, not only for the necessary differentiation between a mere selection and the proactive practice that he describes as inherent to curatorial work, but also for the focus he places on the responsibility of this task in relation to culture and the origin of the artistic discipline. The viewing of works by the curatorial team during the selection process generally implies the consolidation of a space for questions and

[14] The Red Argentina de Festivales y Muestras Audiovisuales (Argentine Network of Audiovisual Festivals and Exhibitions) is made up of more than sixty Cultural Organizations and was created with the purpose of establishing and strengthening cooperation links between Film Festivals and Exhibitions.

dialogues that might turn into open curatorial responses. Curatorial practice modifies itself, in its own development, promoting a process in which the way of looking mutates, which generates a complex and rich truss of possible networks of sensitive relationships.

For VideoDanzaBA 2023, the aim was to create a conceptual framework through which to *sieve* the productions, taking into account the idea of *agitation* proposed by this action. The gesture of sifting is also very descriptive of the ambivalence or multiplicity of possibilities faced by this task: a proposal can be related to a program by certain aspects, but also, by inserting it into another program (and placing it in function to a discourse composed of other works), aspects that at first glance were not so noticeable can become relevant. The same work is re-signified in different curatorial contexts, both by the works with which it coexists, and by the physical and symbolic exhibition spaces that house them. Each work generates its own universe, and one of the challenges of curatorial practice is how to put them in dialogue with other pieces, so that these discourses and narratives are enhanced. In this way, curatorship leads to the generation of new relationships and new constructions of meaning.

Screendance is continuously undergoing a crisis of concepts, practices, and worlds that enable a new possibility of changing the way in which we conceive things. The curatorial team decided to make room for works in which this crisis is present in both the thematic and rhetorical dimensions. This initial approach made it possible to trace a path towards transmedia narrative, a type of story whose plot unfolds through multiple media and communication platforms, and in which the spectators assume an active role in this process of expansion. Finally, in line with the idea of disciplinary crossings and from a perspective that sheds light on the current environmental crisis, it was proposed to work on the idea of composting, inspired by this controlled biological decomposition technique where what is apparently presented as discarded material ends up becoming compost. This decision enabled the possibility of crossing and articulating three scenarios of life: art, technology, and nature.

This edition's on-site program was composed by four curatorial programs that participated in the competitive section, which brought together works from our country and from all over the world, in a creative resonance. Something very particular that happened was that, having received works created from the year 2021 onwards, most of the productions were elaborated around the theme of the pandemic and isolation. In the search to escape from literalism and in the attempt to add a layer of meaning (especially because looking back from the present, despite not being so far back in time, all that dystopian era feels quite distant), it was observed that, within the works selected for the first program, the space of seclusion and intimacy appeared as a key to go through certain processes: to connect with emotions and experiences, to open up to other realities and from there, perhaps, to return to everyday existence. What record of time and relationships does the state of confinement make possible in these works? What forces and emotions operate and are put in tension, in the face of such a situation of emptiness? It is from these questions that the program Inside Doors (*Puertas adentro*) took shape.

The following two programs can be seen as two sides of the same coin, marked by the territorial aspect. In the case of the program *Como el musguito en la piedra* (Like Moss to the Stone), the wink to the well-known phrase of Chilean singer-songwriter Violeta Parra operates as a kick to raise a certain drive for natural life in adverse contexts. In a dual gesture, the program brought together works that draw attention to issues inherent to environmental problems, and to the struggle against man's control and abuse of nature but, at the same time, works that, on the contrary, allow us to show nature in all its splendor. In relation to the latter, we wanted to point out how poetic landscapes can be constructed by presenting human beings in a harmonious bond with nature, melting into it and becoming part of it.

The third program, Territorial Radiography (*Radiografía territorial*), placed in dialogue pieces by artists who work with different social realities and with the everyday life that emerges from them. We included works that fluctuate between documentary research and artistic creation, achieving testimonies that are presented as portraits and allow us to understand the territory, not only as a portion of surface, but also as the space where certain social relations are developed, which, as such, are crossed by cultural, political and economic aspects.

In a gesture almost opposite to the initial one, more towards "the inside", towards isolation, the program closed with the Ominous Realities - *Das Unheimlich* (*Realidades ominosas* – Das Unheimlich). Here the gaze is opened and the body is proposed in a relationship towards the outside. The ominous alludes to a sensation of loss of familiarity that can appear in the core of the known, although it can also, through a specular inversion, refer to an experience of familiarity that appears in the center of the unknown. In this section we find cities devastated by the worst of modernity, by pandemics, by wars and bombings. The works included invite, on the one hand, to unbridled movement, but also to take a pause and look back to try to understand how to continue.

By organizing and generating exhibitions, not only bridges are built between the works, but also towards the spectators, so that both circulate and meet, enriching each other culturally. The curatorial practice does not only imply the programming of screenings, it is the work of giving meaning and putting in dialogue all the activities of an event from a global perspective. In the case of this edition of VDBA, the task involved a wide range of activities that fostered different types of reflection encounters. The on-site program included, in addition to the four competitive programs, the Special Screenings, in the form of anthological retrospectives, which made it possible to immerse oneself in two extremely dissimilar poetic universes: those of Li Chiao-Ping (USA) and Luiz Bizerril (Brazil).

The program was also expanded and enriched with a set of Special Activities that included, among others, the Pitching LAB VDBA 23 (an instance of presentation of the projects participating in the training area of the Festival) and the panel discussion *The body of the archive* which, with the gesture of looking backwards and forwards at the same time, put in relation two facts of great relevance: the preservation of the VideoDanzaBA archive in ARCA Video and the 30th anniversary of *Temblor* (directed by Silvina Szperling), a pioneer work of screendance in our country, awarded by the National Secretary of Culture. ARCA Video presents itself as an "Argentine experimental video archive" whose main objective is to "facilitate public, remote and free access to works and related information through its website."[15] At the end of 2021, ARCA received in custody our historical archive, so that it can be cataloged and mediated by other viewpoints, and be available to the public.

In addition to the on-site program, there was also a varied Online Program made up of eight curatorial programs, including the Student Competition and the special program Argentine Screendance Panorama, curated by the Argentine Videodance Circuit (CAV, *Circuito Argentino de Videodanza*[16]). This factor represents an important strategy to multiply voices at

[15] https://arcavideoargentino.com.ar/

[16] Circuito Argentino de Videodanza (CAV) was founded by cultural managers, researchers, and artists that make up multiple festivals and other expressions of academic and formative convergence dedicated to screendance, corporeality and technological mediation in a broad sense of our country. It arises from the motivation to strengthen the language of screendance by encouraging the circulation of works, the promotion of artists, the creation of virtual and on-site corridors and the research, analysis, and recognition of the Argentine screendance scene.

the curatorial level and for the dialogue it enables, not only among the works, but also at the program level. As a whole, all these activities and relationship games invited people to dive into the conceptual, affective and productive links generated by the work of multiple artists, collectives and networks. They also operate as a panoramic shot that allows us to understand where we come from as a screendance community, and how we transform ourselves to move forward. The Festival said goodbye as such with the certainty that everything is in motion and letting go of what is known is a way, perhaps painful, but also necessary, to be able to embrace all that is to come.

The day after tomorrow

In the introductory words to the catalog of the last edition of the Festival, the director wondered whether it might be true that all farewells are sad, and invited us to celebrate the end of this cycle with toasts, laughter and dance steps. “Why not think that the labor transforms and proposes new challenges, and that in the future we will continue to grow artistically, researching, proposing, listening, traveling and producing work, which in turn will induce others to produce their own?” asks Silvina.

If something is evidenced throughout the entire trajectory traced in this article, it is the growth and development of the Festival throughout its life as such. From the zero point of total absence of production, to the development of its own production, the generation of spaces to host those productions, the exchange propitiated, the weaving of networks, the space generated for reflection, the space of militancy generated, and much more. As it was pointed out at the beginning, it is impossible to separate the life process of the Festival from the life process of its *alma mater*. In one of the talks for this article Szperling tells the following:

> I became a cultural manager because being an artist was not enough to develop my new career. When I did my stage works I also did everything (promotion, lights, etc). Nowadays the category of *artist-manager* or *artist-et cetera* in the living arts is established, but at that time it was an act of survival, which actually had an echo. If it had been an individual thing of mine, how long would it have lasted? That initiative was projected in time because it had an echo in the community.

There is something of a mission accomplished. In its beginnings the VideoDanzaBA Festival was the first in Latin America, and today there are twenty-five festivals in Latin America, and in Argentina alone there are between eight and ten (perhaps some more, between series and other formats). The expansion of screendance as a language, even its territorial expansion (since these festivals are in provinces such as Misiones, Córdoba, Santa Fe, Buenos Aires, etc.) was driven by people who, in one way or another, were related to the history of VideoDanzaBA, both as part of the staff and/or participants, consumers, etc., and continue their own management work where VDBA's missions are still being fulfilled.

In its origins, at the time of naming it *First Screendance Festival*, the designer in charge of the graphic was asked to include the word “First” because it was very important to point out that it had a projection towards the future. In its journey, the Festival went through many periods of economic crisis: from the neoliberal context of the '90s to the 2001 crisis, the subsequent one in 2015 and recently the time of the pandemic, when many festivals closed: some remained online, others closed and reopened after the pandemic, and others closed for good. In reference to the context in which the Festival bids farewell, its director reflects:

> I feel that since there is a generational renewal in the Festival staff, along with such enormous contextual changes and, having other festivals that are channeling the production, education, among many other things, everything is fine. At another time I felt that it would been like giving up, and that the closing of the Festival was going to leave a lack of support for the work, since a screendance series within a much larger festival is not the same as a Screendance Festival, because in the latter there is one axis that is highlighted as the most important. At this moment, I feel that I am freer to relate to the rest of the screendance world without organizing a festival. I continue being a researcher and an artist, and I also recognise that my artistic work has changed, my production is migrating to other scenarios and contexts, but that does not imply that I am going to disassociate myself from screendance, since we are already one. I have an authorship and a way of working that I took to all the places where I went. Far from being absorbed by any type of institution, VideoDanzaBA Festival expanded, opened spaces, generated networks, generated knowledge, and did not turn in on itself. It has allowed space for others to do their own thing, with their own personality.

It is interesting to read this story, and the evolution of these events, as the expansive movement generated by a stone thrown into water. In the same way that the career of its director expanded and mutated, so did the Festival, adding axles year after year, and fostering a transformation that resonates and is replicated in a medium that is also expanding and constantly reformulating itself.

APPENDIX

Historical VideoDanzaBA Staff (1995-2023)

Our interest in publishing this list is to thank and mention all the people who have worked or collaborated with the VideoDanzaBA festival in its 28 years of life. The information on the different editions is what could be obtained to date. Because the reconstruction and preservation of the festival's archive is in its initial stages, in collaboration with ARCA video argentino, there could be involuntary omissions in this list, for which we apologize in advance. We are open to suggestions, modifications and new inclusions from the community of VideoDanzaBA.

First International Video-Dance Festival - 1995
Festival General Coordinator: Silvina Szperling. **Selection committee:** Jorge Coscia, Ana Kamien, Graciela Taquini. **Area Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Guest artist:** Professor Douglas Rosenberg. **Press:** Agustín Aramburu. **Graphic Design:** Geni Expósito.

Second International Video-Dance Festival - 1996
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Jury:** Jorge Coscia, Margarita Bali, Andrés Di Tella, Douglas Rosenberg. **Guest artists:** Douglas Rosemberg, Li-Chiao Ping.

Third International Video-Dance Festival - 1997
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Jury:** Oscar Araiz, Fabio Guzmán, Núria Font. **Guest artists:** Núria Font, Dziga Vertov Performance Group (Douglas Rosemberg, Li-Chiao Ping, Ted Johmsom, Patrice Napastek, Pedro Alejandro).

Fourth International Video-Dance Festival - 1998
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Jury:** Graciela Taquini, Jorge Coscia, Susana Tambutti.

Fifth International Video-Dance Festival - 1999
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Advisor:** Graciela Taquini. **Production:** Mecha Lamothe, Santiago Bontá. **Press:** Karina Barrozo, Agustín Aramburu. **Technical coordinator:** Gonzalo Córdova.

6th Buenos Aires Video Dance Festival, 2001
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Programmer and Editor of Academic Texts:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Assistant Director:** Marcelo Plorutti. **Coordinator:** Claudia Cuadrado. **Workshop Assistant:** María Eugenia Bustamante. **Production:** Mariana Fonseca, Jorge Riehl, Paulina López Meyer, Gisela Norymberg, Lara Arellano. **Media Library:** Bernardo Coloma. **Institutional and Cultural Relations:** Natalia Margiotta. **Logo photo:** Andrea López. **Honorary Advisor:** Graciela Taquini
7th Buenos Aires Video-dance Festival - 2005
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Daniel Rosenfeld and Silvina Szperling. **Guest artists:** Leonel Brum, Tamara Cubas, Becky Edmunds, Mairead Turner, Emma Gladstone, Cecilia Rosso

8th Buenos Aires Video-dance Festival - 2006
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Jury:** Daniel Böhm, Rodrigo Alonso, Silvina Szperling. **Assistant Director:** Ximena Monroy Rocha. **Text Editor:** Susana Temperley. **Production:** Betyna Bergara, Marcela Carrero, Tomás Middleton, Cecilia Pugin, Eliza Ribeiro Capal, Claudia Sánchez, Paula Zacharías.

9th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2007
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Assistant Director and CVM Residency Coordinator:** Ximena Monroy. **Institutional Relations and CVM2 DVD Coordinator:** Gabu Espina. **Education Area Coordinator:** Claudia Sanchez. **International Videodance Symposium Coordinator:** Susana Temperley. **Production Assistant:** JulieAnna Facelli. **Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Diego Trerotola.

10th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2008
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Programming and Technical coordinator:** Ximena Monroy. **Institutional Relations and DVDs:** Gabu Espina. **Education coordinator:** Claudia Sánchez. **Education assistant:** Fanny Roland. **Academic coordinator:** Susana Temperley. **Production assistant:** Selva Lecot. **Graphic Design:** María Daniela Orlando. **Press:** Jeankarla Falón Plaza. **Preselection jury:** Rodrigo Alonso and Diego Trerotola.

11th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2009
Director: Silvina Szperling. **General Coordinator:** Selva Lecot. **General Producer:** Fanny Rolland**. Education coordinator:** Claudia Sánchez. **Academic coordinator:** Susana Temperley. **Multimedia and Installations coordinator:** Verónica Santamaría. **Guest coordinator:** Carolina Carvajal. **Education assistants:** Mónica Osma Tapias and Mariel Leibovich. **Production assistant:** Mariana Di Silverio. **Editing:** Natalia de la Vega. **Blog and video library:** Carolina Marin Rubio. **Graphic design:** María Daniela Orlando. **Press:** Jeankarla Falón Plaza. **Screendance Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso and Diego Trerotola. **Photography Preselection Jury:** Augusto Zanela and Karin Idelson.

12th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2010

Director: Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Fanny Rolland**. Education Coordinator:** Claudia Sánchez. **Academic Coordinator:** Susana Temperley. **Guest Coordinator:** Carolina Carvajal. **Education Assistant:** Mariel Leibovich. **Production Assistants:** Mariana Di Silverio and Julieta Alzaga. **Editing:** Natalia de la Vega. **Blog and recordings:** Carolina Marin Rubio. **Web design:** Esteban Agosin. **Graphic design:** María Daniela Orlando. **Press:** Jeankarla Falón Plaza. **Screendance Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Diego Terotola, Silvina Szperling. **Preselection Jury Photography:** Augusto Zanela, Karin Idelson, Silvina Szperling.

13th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2011
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Fanny Roland. **Education Coordination:** Mariel Leibovich. **Education Advisor:** Claudia Sánchez. **Academics: Susana Temperley and Mariana Di Silverio. Editing:** Natalia de la Vega. **Web Design:** Esteban Agosin. **Graphic Design:** María Daniela Orlando. **Screendance Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Diego Trerotola. **Photography Preselection Jury:** Augusto Zanela, Karin Idelson.

14th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2013
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Julieta Alzaga. **Education:** Mariel Leibovich**. Academics:** Susana Temperley. **Editing:** Natalia de la Vega. **Web Design:** Esteban Agosin Otero. **Graphic Design:** Ma. Daniela Orlando. **Communication:** Macarena Blasco. **Video Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Claudia Sánchez, Diego Trerotola. **Photography Jury:** Karin Idelson, Augusto Zanela.

15th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2015
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Macarena Blasco. **Education:** Mariel Leibovich. **Academics:** Susana Temperley**. Editing:** Joan M. Soriano. **Communication:** Laura Marajofsky. **Live Shows coordination:** Cinthia Konpacki. **Graphic design:** Ma. Daniela Orlando. **Web design:** Maite Guelerman. **Video Jury:** Claudia Sánchez, Diego Trerotola, M. Fernanda Vallejos. **Photo Jury:** Karin Idelson, Augusto Zanela.

16th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2017
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Producer and Associate Curator:** Mariel Leibovich. **Academic Area and Associate Curator:** Susana Temperley. **Press and Communication:** Laura Marajofsky. **Curatorial and Editorial Writing:** María José Rubin. **Institutional Relations and Hospitality:** Manuela Quesada. **Technical Manager:** René Medina. **Live Arts:** Jimena García Blaya. **Education:** María Garona. **Local REDIV coordination:** Mayra Arenzon. **Web design:** Maite Guelerman. **Graphic design:** Primor Design.

17th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2019
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Mariel Leibovich. **Academic Area and Publications:** Susana Temperley. **Press and media:** Laura Marajofsky. **Text editing:** María José Rubín. **Management of audiovisual materials:** René Medina**. Production assistant:** Marina Andreotti. **Jury coordinator:** Jimena García Blaya. **Associate curators:** Mauro Cacciatore, Jimena García Blaya, Mariel Leibovich, Laura Marajofsky, René Medina, María José Rubín. **Spot:** Lola Vázquez.

18th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2021
Online programming - Director: Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Marina Andreotti.

Tecnodanza (in co-production with Fundación Cazadores) - Director and curator: Mariel Leibovich. **Residency tutoring and artistic advice:** Silvina Szperling. **Production assistance:** Marina Andreotti. **Photography and audiovisual:** Pablo Linietsky.

19th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2023
Director: Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Marina Andreotti. **Curator in Chief and Curatorial Texts:** Mauro Cacciatore. **Curatorial Team:** Marina Andreotti, Mauro Cacciatore, Sofía Castro, Mariel Leibovich, Silvina Szperling, Lola Vázquez. **Technical Production:** Stefano Salvatelli. **Communication:** Mariel Leibovich. **Social Media - PR:** Laura Marajofsky. **Official Competition Jury:** Carla Briasco, Leonel Brum, Susana Temperley. **Students Competition Jury:** Galo Terán, Paola Escoto, Mariana Jaroslavsky. **RAFMA Jury:** Federico Ambrosis, Romina Luz Garay, Eduardo Marún. **REDIV Jury:** Andres Abreu, Denise Matta, Sofía Orihuela. **Pitching Juries:** Leonel Brum, Carolina Fernandez, Diego Trerotola. **Web Design:** Cacique Argentina.

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Choreoscope: Anatomy of a Festival

By Loránd János

Abstract

This essay offers an intimate look at the evolution of Choreoscope, the Barcelona Dance Film Festival since its birth in 2013 through the eyes of its founder, Loránd János. It explores how personal experiences, artistic passions, and societal challenges shaped the festival's identity over its first decade. The narrative weaves together János' journey in dance and film with the growth of Choreoscope, highlighting the festival's role in promoting screendance, fostering talent, and aiming to create positive social impact through art. This opening sets the stage for the personal narrative that follows, introducing the main themes of the essay and its autobiographical nature. It also hints at the broader context of the festival's development and its aspirations.

Choreoscope: Anatomy of a Festival

I cannot talk about Choreoscope without talking about my personal journey, as the two blur together.

Dance has always been a passion of mine. I was drawn like a moth to a flame in which I was reborn like Phoenix from the ashes. Although dance has always been present in my life, it never occurred to me as a child to follow it on a professional basis.

I grew up in a small town in Transylvania, Romania, and back then in the 1990s there were no possibilities of taking dance lessons… or at least not that I knew of. I was more than happy being the Tony Manero of every (improvised) dancefloor I could hit. Growing up in a communist country (actually the communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania can be considered a dictatorship) I was exposed pretty young to cinema. Censorship was harsh, and most of the content we could watch on our small black and white TV or at the local cinema was Soviet produced (which in hindsight was quite a blessing). From time to time a blockbuster, such as *Star Wars,* made it to the movie theatre. But we also had clandestine film parties: a neighbor with a VHS player and another one with a Color TV (!!!) invited neighbors to Friday or Saturday evening marathons where clandestine VHS tapes of Western country films – basically Hollywood films –were played. The films, I remember, were dubbed (if you could call that dubbing) – spoken over by a single female voice, who was basically translating the dialogue. She was the voice of freedom. My family, and hence I as a child, were lucky enough to be invited to these film sessions, allowing me to step into the magical realm of movies. This is where I saw movies for the first time like *Dirty Dancing* and *Total Recall*.

Then came the revolution in 1989, and opening the borders allowed us to get easier access to Western culture. My first audio tape was Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. That was a life-changer. Then came our first color TV in my home in 1992, with a satellite dish and MTV. The first time I saw *Thriller*, the Michael Jackson film directed by John Landis, I was blown away. I felt an instant connection towards cinema. I knew this was the path I wanted to follow, and I surely did. Life, however, is not a straight path. I first ended up in Bucharest when I turned 18 studying directing at the Film Academy. I only did one year, year zero, as my pragmatism, my ego and inexperience made me decide that the people teaching there were not good enough for me to learn filmmaking, so I

quit. I do not regret past decisions I made in my life, as they cannot be changed. They serve a meaningful purpose, but I wonder what would have happened if I would have stayed and finished my studies there. Fun fact, my roommate in the Film Academy's student house went on to win the Berlinale with his feature film a few years ago – so it seems I was wrong regarding the teachers.

Then came the big change, me moving to Barcelona in 2001. And as I stepped into adulthood my dreams went on pause: when you have no papers, no money, you prioritize basic human needs. Survival has no place for dreams. I started working at the Hotel Paral·lel, the place that gave me stability in life, the place where I became an adult. I am to this day grateful to my two bosses, Ángel Font, the director of the hotel, and Angélica Revoredo, the housekeeping chief of staff, who took care of me as if they were my second father and mother.

Once I started reaching financial but also psychological stability (it was a hard and long process to understand and accept my cultural and sexual identity, while juggling being an immigrant and integrating into a different cultural context), the kindle of my filmmaking dreams started sparking again. I started experimenting with the cinematographic language through some poorly made but well-intentioned short films. But I also rediscovered as an adult my passion for dance, so I started taking dance lessons. I was just as bad at dancing as I was at making films, but I didn't care. I loved it.

A most crucial moment in my journey occurred when I got an injury. I needed surgical intervention and had to quit dancing. At the same time, I discovered Lloyd Newson's *The Cost of Living* and Wim Vandekeybus' *Blush* and slipped into the rabbit hole of viewing dance films. It was at that point in my life, turning 30, when I realized the urge to combine these two amazing art forms. It came organically. I started experimenting in creating short dance films.

New Avenues

My first attempt never made the final cut, its shooting turned out to be a horrible experience. It was the story of a Robinson Crusoe stranded on an island, where each day an empty bottle emitting a sound was washed to the shore. When putting all the bottles together that have arrived at the seashore, the different sounds combined into a beautiful melody, prompting the man to dance. Everything that could go wrong with the shoot, did. The location failed. The "abandoned" beach we were filming on was actually a pretty busy spot on the weekends. I never again ignored the importance of doing good location scouting. The camera lens was not cleaned properly, hence all the material had sand spots on it. I almost drowned trying to alert the boats passing, not get into our shot. The dancer got a horrible sunburn and never spoke to me again, nor did he venture into another film.

My second attempt was better, but the work was different: I was entrusted to edit pre-shot material that seemed not to make much sense into a film. It was fun, and the result was quite acceptable.

Then came my first truly finished short film. *Ego* brought another passion of mine to the creative process, horror films. It began as a collaboration with a fellow dance student of the dance academy where I was enrolled. Since then, Elisa del Pozo became a close

friend and a true inspiration in my life. The three years I spent at the dance academy doing some jazz, some ballet, and some contemporary were some of my happiest ones, but I always felt like an outsider. Most of the dancers never accepted me into their circle. Elisa was an exception. She was, and is, not only an amazing dancer, but an amazing and generous person. When finishing her studies, she decided to move back to Seville, her hometown, and founded a dance and music school for children with her husband, a pianist. Flashback to Elisa at the dance school, where one day she told me she would like to make a film with me. My answer in today's politically correct context might come as a shock, but the intention was always a creative one. I told her that she inspired in me so much kindness and goodness, that I wanted to challenge her by putting her in the most opposite place possible: to tie her to a chair, tortured and filled with blood, in order to push her creative boundaries. She laughed and accepted. We started working on *Ego* at a distance, she back in Seville, while I was still in Barcelona. A few months later the project came to life.

Ego is far from being a perfect film, but to this day I am very happy about how it all came together. The film is not about senselessly torturing another human being, but it is about facing your inner demons, your fears, traumas and scars, and trying to overcome them. The music was made by my then flat mate, Joaquín Escudero, a very talented musician, who also collaborated on my next short film, *Sueños* (Dreams), inspired by Japanese haiku and Kurosawa's *Dreams*. Both films had limited success at festivals, although *Sueños* did screen at a cinema in Barcelona.

Lynching, my next film, was a 12-minute twisted version of Snow White as an homage to David Lynch. Elisa was featured as the narcissistic princess with a truly amazing Lynchian soundtrack made by her father, Manuel Pozo. My intention was to screen it in a cinema setting as well, as I did with my previous short, but I felt that it was too short to justify renting a movie theatre. So, I thought to look for some other short dance films and put together an evening-length program. As I started doing my research it became quite obvious to me that there were so many amazing dance films out there, that showing them to the audience felt like an obligation. The program came together and in 2013, Choreoscope, my film festival, was born. The screening was a huge success and yet I was at a crossroads: should I carry on with this idea?

Íris Martín Perlata not only produced my short film, she also runs the Spanish Film Festival in Italy. One day I sat down with her to talk about the idea of transforming the Choreoscope evening into a festival, and I was explaining my plan, I could see her face changing, her eyes lit up. She was a very special partner who gave me the necessary push to take the idea and put it into practice.

Brighid Greene was the programming director of the Dance Films Association (DFA) in New York back in 2014. By then *Sueños* (Dreams) screened at the Dance on Camera festival and we established a cordial dialogue. I contacted her and explained the idea, asking for DFA's support. Brighid opened a world of endless possibilities for me and Choreoscope and I am eternally grateful for the positive impact she had on my professional goals. DFA went on to support Choreoscope at the beginning, and the festival started to develop. The funniest thing (I say funny to avoid calling it shocking) was, that while the international support for the festival has been crucial for its existence, at the beginning, Choreoscope was received in a pretty cold manner by the professional dance community in Barcelona. I'm not talking about the audience that flocked to the festival from the first moment. There were many moments during the

festival's trajectory when I had the feeling that Choreoscope was considered a menace, rather than a platform for showcasing, promoting talent, and knowledge. This has changed over the years.

What is amazing to see is that a huge percentage of the festival's audience are movie-goers, people who like good films and want to see or discover something new, something different, people who enjoy dance. Yet despite the fact that there is a huge dance community in Barcelona, many dancers do not attend the festival. It is sad, because one important objective of the festival is to provide knowledge and to inspire and show people what is being made choreographically in the world, providing content which they may have difficulty accessing otherwise.

Quantity and Quality

There is a paradigm shift happening due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When the lockdown occurred live performances were shut down too, and many dance artists shifted towards the audiovisual medium, even those who were against it. On one hand, this is a good thing, as this meant a significant increase of audiovisual dance productions, with many creators "making peace" with the audiovisual medium. This is something that could benefit us all and could mean a new "golden age" for screendance; however, the biggest problem is that many artists seem to think that they are inventing the wheel, and do not do their homework, in terms of their research of what is out there and what has been done before. The result has been an increase in the quantity of screendance productions, but not as much in quality. We see the same stories, the same filming mistakes, the same locations that have been used and done so many times before. What's lacking is the element of novelty, what an artist might consider as experimentation and doing something new or even revolutionary has in fact been done before. As a festival curator I tire of seeing works made in abandoned spaces (if you do something in an abandoned warehouse it needs to be better than the Sigur Ros/Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui *Valtari* dance/music video), or that focus only on capturing dance, but do not take advantage of the audiovisual language – unjustified camera shots/angles, beautiful but soulless/meaningless images – or stories where dance is not really integrated into the film. I always recommend filmmakers or dancers/choreographers who venture into screendance to do their research first.

The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on Choreoscope as well, as it forced the festival to reinvent itself to a certain degree. As live events got cancelled, the festival was celebrated online. What at first seemed as a survival technique turned out to be quite positive, as we were able to reach a wider audience. Choreoscope went from targeting the Barcelona audience (a reach of around 3000 people) to target Spain and Andorra, reaching over 36,000 people in 2021. With the future of live cinema being still discussed, the streaming platforms are becoming more and more powerful, changing consumer habits. I couldn't be happier providing the platform and the opportunity for the creators to reach an even wider audience, and to give access to a wide audience to these amazing films. It does make me wonder about the purpose of the festival if people will not be attending live screenings as before in favor of home viewing. The collective experience, to meet and interact with people, the possibility to discuss and exchange ideas is in my opinion the essence of a festival. That exchange of positive energy, to be inspired, uplifted, is what a festival's goal should be. If the future is online, there is an important emotional, connective part of the festival that will be lost. And it would be a great shame.

Times are changing, and Choreoscope is changing too. I believe I can talk about two types of changes: an organic change, and one that resulted as a necessity to adapt to reality.

To talk about organic change, I need to compare the festival to a human being that is born and grows bigger each year. Choreoscope was born as a small project, with one screening the first year, then two screenings the second year, each year getting bigger and bigger, from a toddler to a child to an adolescent searching for its maturity and its sense of life. The ninth edition of the festival in 2021 had 13 live screenings (in 6 days) followed by 3 weeks of online festival. The reasons for this organic growth had to do with the festival's burgeoning identity, motivated by several things, such as programing not only short films, but also feature length films, an increase in the amount of films received in the open calls (including a palpable increase of Spanish and Catalan productions), the audience's interest in the festival, and the necessity to introduce special awards for films or personalities that made outstanding contributions in the screendance field.

With each year this organic growth required adaptability: the bigger it got the bigger shoes it needed to fill.

Adaptation and Growth

This process of adaptation however, came many times in conflict with reality. You want what's best for your child, but it gets what you can afford. Two main undeniable issues were budget and the team. Unfortunately, Choreoscope's budget is still very small. Government grants are small and cover only a part of the total. The regional Catalan Cultural Department remains today one of our key financial supporters, with representatives who come each year to the festival.

Besides government funding, there is little hope to get the private sector involved. Sponsorship is pretty much non-existent in Spain, except for mass-appeal projects. Basically, marketing departments in Spain want immediate results. Sponsors would rather pile up with other logos on the billboard of a popular festival, then support a singular project. Corporate brands are hypocritical. They use dance in their advertising, because they know it connects very well with the audience, but they rarely support dance, or dancers. There are of course a few exceptions. Patronage does not truly exist in Spain either. Here I must say Choreoscope does have a patron. The festival was able to thrive thanks to the generous and unconditional support of Cynthia Odier from Flux Laboratory/Fluxum Foundation, located in Geneva, Switzerland.

External factors such as budgetary limitations have not stopped the festival from evolving and getting bigger, but they definitely make the work a lot more tedious. The impact on the team is clear. The people administering the festival do it first of all out of love and illusion, since the annual budget cannot retain them throughout the year. Further, professional growth inside the project is limited, so workers move on to financially more stable positions, slowing and limiting the growth of the festival. One cannot pay the bills with love only. It is a sad thing to lose brilliant people, as they would definitely carry the festival to even higher grounds, but at the same time it is very rewarding to see that many of the people involved in the project during these past ten years have gone on to become amazing professionals in their selected fields.

All these external and internal factors also shaped the personality and identity of the festival. If at the beginning I felt an urgent need to showcase screendance in Barcelona, to connect the audience with amazing works and artists, there was a turning point when that felt like it wasn't enough.

The Narrative Element

One of my fondest memories growing up is my grandmother, my mother and my sisters reading me bedtime stories. I could never get enough of them. They opened a world of endless possibilities for me, they made me dare to dream. These three generations of women shaped my world view, made me become the person I am today, helped me see that the world is full of amazing stories worth living and sharing. Narrative had a huge impact on me, so for Choreoscope, narrative started becoming more and more relevant. As a curator, you say, "Okay, nicely shot, brilliantly danced, but what's your story? What are you trying to tell me, to communicate to the world?" The more abstract work became secondary. Screendance became a broad realm and term, and yet for me it became about telling stories through dance, through movement, by using the language of cinema. Stories, narrative, and dance are primordial elements in human evolution. In my view, these elements form part of our genetic structure, making us who we are. Everybody enjoys a good story. Stories can make us dream; stories can also crush us. Dance goes beyond words. It is a universal language that connects people by breaking the boundaries of spoken words. The combination of these two elements, story, dance with the audiovisual generates something unique, something spectacular. While abstract projects might still find a place in our programing, Choreoscope is about telling stories.

On a subconscious level I understand why the dance films *The Cost of Living* by Lloyd Newson and *Blush* by Wim Vandekeybus had such a huge impact on me: they incorporated a strong cinematic narrative. While the fascination towards dance films has always been there (I'm thinking about blockbusters such as *Billy Elliott*, *Dirty Dancing* or *Flashdance*, and a very special mention to Bob Fosse's films, that truly marked my childhood and forged my professional path), I discovered Newson's and Vandekeybus' films quite late, around the age of 27, when I was already working in the audiovisual field, but had still not related dance and film. I can honestly say that dance films marked me twice: in my childhood (unconsciously) and in my adulthood (consciously). The latter made me realize the beauty of bringing these two art forms together. It pushed me in the right way, to (first) start making dance films and a few years later to start the festival.

Past Informs Present

I believe it is important to acknowledge both the positive impact and the traumas that forged my path towards Choreoscope. Doing some introspective work during the Covid-19 lockdown I realized that two of my adult traumas are dance-related. We tend to give a lot of importance to our childhood traumas, while maybe we do not pay as much attention to those that occur during our adulthood. Yet here I was, working in the field of dance, loving and enjoying it, while some scary experiences from the past began to surface.

The first one occurred when I was around 22. I had recently moved to Barcelona all by myself, discovering my new life and freedom. Coming from a small Transylvanian city (Csíkszereda in Hungarian, Miercurea-Ciuc in Romanian), and growing up in a

conservative and homophobic community in the 90s, made my coming out as a gay person very difficult. Like so many young gay boys, I lacked support and understanding of what was going on with me. Belonging to a sexual minority has been even more difficult to accept, as at the same time I belonged to a cultural minority, the Hungarian minority in Romania. So, my cultural identity crisis added to my sexual identity crisis. I must state at this point, that being Hungarian is not something I'm currently proud of, due the current political situation with Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán's dictatorship masked as democracy. It has been quite difficult to accept myself for who I am, and I might say that it is still a work in progress. Moving from my small city to Bucharest, the capital of Romania, where I studied and lived from 1998 to 2001, was a first step towards my self-healing process, but moving to Barcelona was the larger step I needed. As the years went by, I learned to love and accept myself for who I am. I was lucky: I was loved, supported, and guided, and I had a strong personality to overcome obstacles. Many people in other parts of the world are not so lucky.

When I moved to Barcelona I did not know many people, I did not have any friends, but that was not an obstacle for me. I felt free, I was enjoying my life, my gay life. I loved music and I loved to dance, it was not an issue for me to go out by myself and have fun. I remember one night at the disco, where I gave my all (as I usually do) on the dance floor. Once again, I danced till the music stopped and the lights turned on. I was alone, but I was happy. I had fun. Then this random guy came toward me, planted himself right in front of me, scanned me from top to bottom and then said "yes, but no". Then he turned and walked away. His words cut deep. Not because of the so-called rejection, but because my safe space and my healing activity has been desecrated. Cut to a few years later, me dancing in Space Ibiza with my friends at an amazing party. There I was again giving my all, dancing like there was no tomorrow. When another random guy approached me to insult my way of dancing, my moves. It was not about how good or bad I was dancing, but about how "faggoty" I was. Fortunately, nowadays the concepts of masculinity and femininity are more fluid. Yet these two events are still very present in me, defined the way I am and how I act, and it definitely shaped the identity of Choreoscope. The festival wants to, needs to be a safe place for everybody to feel love, acceptance, community, positivity.

It takes a lot less energy and it is so much more rewarding to make people happy, than to focus on the negative. It's true, humans tend to project their frustrations on others, finding a perverse pleasure in seeing others suffer. Our differences make us unique and uniqueness makes us richer, yet many perceive difference as a threat. This is something I can absolutely not relate to and try to avoid at all costs. While the world seems to be falling apart, a cruel place lacking empathy and good will, it made me question the festival's purpose beyond showcasing quality films and good stories. On a personal level, as well as a festival director, I feel the obligation to contribute as much as I can to make this world a better place. I believe that a festival has a responsibility toward society. It needs to thrive to be a platform for change. It needs to generate debate, to encourage constructive criticism. It needs to connect the audience with different realities and different points of view to which they might not be accustomed. It needs to motivate, to inspire, to push forward.

By defining the identity of the festival, it became also important to become a place for artists to be able to promote their work, to connect them with the audience. This was my goal from the beginning, but throughout the years it became more imperative to boost the dance and audiovisual community in Spain. We are accustomed to seeing high

quality productions from the US, Canada, France, or the Netherlands, but the audiovisual production of dance in Spain was quite limited (with some truly notable exceptions: we must not forget the important global impact of director Carlos Saura's indelible work with his cycles of dance films, or *Timecode* directed by Juanjo Giménez, Palme d'Or winner in Cannes in 2016 for best short film). When Choreoscope started back in 2013 there were barely ten audiovisual dance productions made in Spain. By 2019, the number of Spanish screendance films had increased to the degree that we had to introduce a screening category for Spanish-Catalan films. For the 2022 open call we received more than 70 films, only from Spain. We noticed an increase not only in quantity, but also in quality.

Choreoscope, the Barcelona Dance Film Festival turns 12 in 2024. And after so many adventures and pitfalls, it is maturing. It might not be a perfect grown-up (but then again, who is?), but it has found its purpose and its voice. The festival can be an instrument of change. An event that wants to leave its mark, a positive impact in the world. In the spirit of the butterfly effect, it moves its wings to influence people.

Life is but one dance.

Post Data

At this point in the writing, I thought I ended this brief chapter regarding Choreoscope, the Barcelona Dance Film Festival. But Philip (Szporer), my friend and accomplice in this writing, kindly reminded me that I did not talk about the future. I find it quite curious that at no moment while writing this essay did I think about how the journey might continue. And this is not because I cannot envision a bright(er) future for the festival, filled with success, but rather because at this turning point, celebrating twelve years of existence, the question is rather, will it be continued?

I remember when Loikka, the Helsinki-based dance film festival, announced that its 10th edition would be the last one. I was quite shocked. Loikka was one of my main references as a festival (together with Cinedans Amsterdam, San Francisco Dance Film Festival and New York's Dance on Camera Festival). Its quality programming and impeccable organization served as a role model and an inspiration. I was lucky enough to visit the festival in its last year. Artistic director, Kati Kallio, an amazing person and a great colleague, explained to me that it was time to move on to different professional challenges. Today she directs incredible dance films. Not that I could not understand her, but I did struggle with that decision, that by ending the festival, a cultural landmark, something that was imperative not only for the Finnish society, but also for our screendance community, would cease to exist.

Not that I'm comparing Choreoscope with Loikka, but as I stated before, we do have a responsibility as a festival to try to have a positive impact on society through culture. And also, towards the artists to ensure a safe space for their creations. To encourage connections, debates and constructive criticism. But organizing a festival is a very difficult task, especially when you run on a tight budget. The flame of illusion of the first years becomes but a kindle and it makes you wonder if all the effort and energy you expend is worth it. Facing the everyday obstacles in organizing wears you out, it drains you.

So, regarding the future of the festival, I will say that there is a multiverse of possibilities, of what the future can bring. On one hand, I'm still dreaming to have enough strength, financial support and people power to be able to push the qualitative boundaries of the festival even further in order to achieve the "Cannes" excellence of dance film festivals. On another hand, I'd wish to achieve an independence from the festival, to step aside from it, leave it in other hands, making sure that it will be continued. Or just let the fire burn out, to become a memory in the history of screendance festivals, as it happened to many others. Choreoscope's motion started twelve years ago. Obeying the laws of physics, it will persist until it comes to a halt, due to external, or internal forces:

No dance lasts forever.

Final thoughts

Remembering the past and reflecting about the future was a fun, but also difficult process, as at times I had to face my inner saboteur, nourished by my mistakes and traumas. In those points of the story, acknowledging the help and support of the people that accompanied me and made me the person who I am today was very important to me. It gave me balance, made me focus on the positive side. It humbled me; it gave me strength. It still does. But line constraints and story development limited my capacity to talk about many of the people that inspired, guided and accompanied me in my personal and professional evolution. These lines are dedicated to them (in no particular order), with a huge gratitude from the bottom of my heart:

First and foremost, to the Goddess that gave me life, my mother, János Irén.

Thank you Susanna Vivé, Madeleine Curro, Bea Fiteni, Esther Pedrós, Antonio Muñoz, Carme Puig, Armando Rotondi, Mirko Ettore, Gitta Wigro, Andy Wood, Laida Aldaz, Sol Picó, Lali Aiguadé, Javier Escrivà, Cynthia Odier, Paco León, Andreas Hannes, Clare Schweitzer, Marites Carino, Carme Martí, M.H., Augusto Casanovas, Lucia De Rienzo, Marlene Millar, Ágota Harmati, Susana Millet, Begoña Olabarría, Eneko Lorente, Lloyd Newson, Wim Vandekeybus, Mikel Zudaire, Arnau Más, Cara Hagan, Sandra Navarro, Susanna Sibila, Francesc Casadesus… and so many others…

Getting Emotional/Strange with filmmaker Laura Taler on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of *the village trilogy*

Interview by Kathleen Smith

This year, Laura Taler's [https://laurataler.ca/] influential screendance, *the village trilogy* turns thirty. Premiered at the Moving Pictures Festival in 1994, when Taler was just twenty-four, the film has been broadcast, screened at film events around the world, won awards and served as an ageless exemplar of seamlessly merging choreography and the camera. Today, it lives online as part of the Canadian archive Collections Regards Hybrides [https://collection.regardshybrides.com/] and is poised for several celebratory screenings throughout the year.

Laura Taler in *the village trilogy* (screenshot)

Shot on black-and-white 16 mm film by director of photography Michael Spicer and directed by Taler, the village trilogy runs twenty-four minutes and consists of three distinct yet related chapters. The first—**casa (house)**—is set in an abandoned building. Through broken panes of glass, we first glimpse Taler, clad in dark baggy clothes, a cap obscuring her hair. She yawns, puts her finger in her mouth, and beats a hand against her armpit. This solo is vintage Taler, full of quirks and charm. The second chapter—**copii (children or kids)**— is set in a forest in early winter. Two men in old-fashioned coats and caps (José Navas and Luc Ouellette) move through the woods, hiding behind trees, sometimes sleeping. They're furtive when awake and look like lifeless bodies when they slumber among the fallen leaves. This could be child's play or some grim reality—it's hard to tell. We see that they may be brothers; each wears the same ageing photo of two young boys pinned to the inside of his coat. The third chapter of the village trilogy — **famiglia (family)**— begins with a young woman (Kim Frank) tenderly kissing a white-haired man (Donald Himes) on the cheek. As the camera pulls back, we see that they are part of a group sitting around a table outside in a paddock or farmyard. The dancers mime sharing food and feeding each other. They laugh and smile as the camera starts to circle them. The movement gets bigger, faster, more theatrical, as some of the performers lean back and disappear under the table, popping back up to reach ecstatically for the sky.

Many of the themes first tackled in the village trilogy continue to reverberate in Taler's current interdisciplinary and visual arts practice. Ideas about personal history, language, gesture, migration, family – all are often expressed in Taler's site-specific or multichannel installations, in live performances with screen elements and many other hybrid modalities. And the film itself has a continuing yet evolving relevance in our volatile, migratory, and shifting contemporary world.

We chatted about this and more on February 12, 2025.

[Kathleen Smith]
The village trilogy was one of the first films you ever made. Can you talk a bit about how you became interested in filmmaking?

[Laura Taler]
It *was* the first film I made that wasn't part of a performance. But how far do you want to go back? I remember waking up early on Sunday mornings to watch musicals – *Singing in the Rain* and *An American in Paris* and all those great musicals. I also loved old silent films – Chaplin and Keaton. When I was a teenager, I acted in a television series called 9B for a couple of years. I think that gave me the bug of being on set. I love the process of making a film. I love all the people, the collaboration, the different jobs.

I would also say a big switch happened in 1992 when I was at the Canada Dance Festival in Ottawa. A bunch of dance films were just sitting in the library at the National Gallery (selected by Lisa Cochrane, I think) and you could just go and stick them into the VHS and watch – nothing formal as far as I remember. I watched all of them… and loved them. I can't remember the names of the films, but I can see them in my head. I loved the fact that these films created these different worlds, different from the one we live in, through set and costume and location and movement. That was a big inspiration.

That fall there was a big dance and camera workshop at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. At the last minute I ended up going with four other choreographers, five directors, five composers, and the company Le group de la Place Royale as dancers. I had applied as a choreographer thinking that I might want to direct eventually. When I left, all I wanted was to direct.

It was a hard three weeks. I think the only people who came out of that workshop who are still making dance films regularly are myself and Katrina McPherson. It was a very hard, intensive workshop and I was already thinking about *the village trilogy*. I had done the opening solo as a live stage piece and I had a group of dancers that I got into the forest in these funny outfits to do these weird little Laura Taler movements. And we filmed it.

Everybody hated it. There were people who were saying "you're mocking the dancers." I mean, this is my memory of it. Of course, there were other people in the room. Maybe they have a different memory of it. Anyway, many just found it all very weird and that was hard to take. But when I left I was determined to go ahead.

[Kathleen Smith]
Was it always going to be a trilogy? Did you envision that from the outset?

[Laura Taler]
It started as such a weird little solo and I wanted to bring it out to other places without losing the intimacy that it had when I first performed it live at Dances For a Small Stage. I wanted to use cinematic tools like the close up and the moving camera to maintain that kind of intimacy. But I thought, oh, I can't just make a six-minute film because where are you going to show a six-minute film? I have to make a twenty-four-minute film because that's a broadcast half-hour. That way I can get it on these television arts programs that are popping up all over the world now, right? Mid-90s, right? Stuff was happening.

[Kathleen Smith]
That was the time.

[Laura Taler]
I thought, okay, I have this solo. What would happen after a solo? Well, let's do some work with two people, make it a duet, and then a group of people, let's make it a family. So it was always going to be a trilogy. I was once called a practical hard-nosed realist.

[Kathleen Smith]
How did you get the funding together?

[Laura Taler]
I'm always saying, “ah, the 90s.”

So in the 90s, there was a program at the Canada Council, you may remember, called Explorations. And there was a program at the Ontario Arts Council called Ventures which was similar to Explorations. And these were programs to which you could apply as an artist to explore another medium or something that was outside of your wheelhouse.

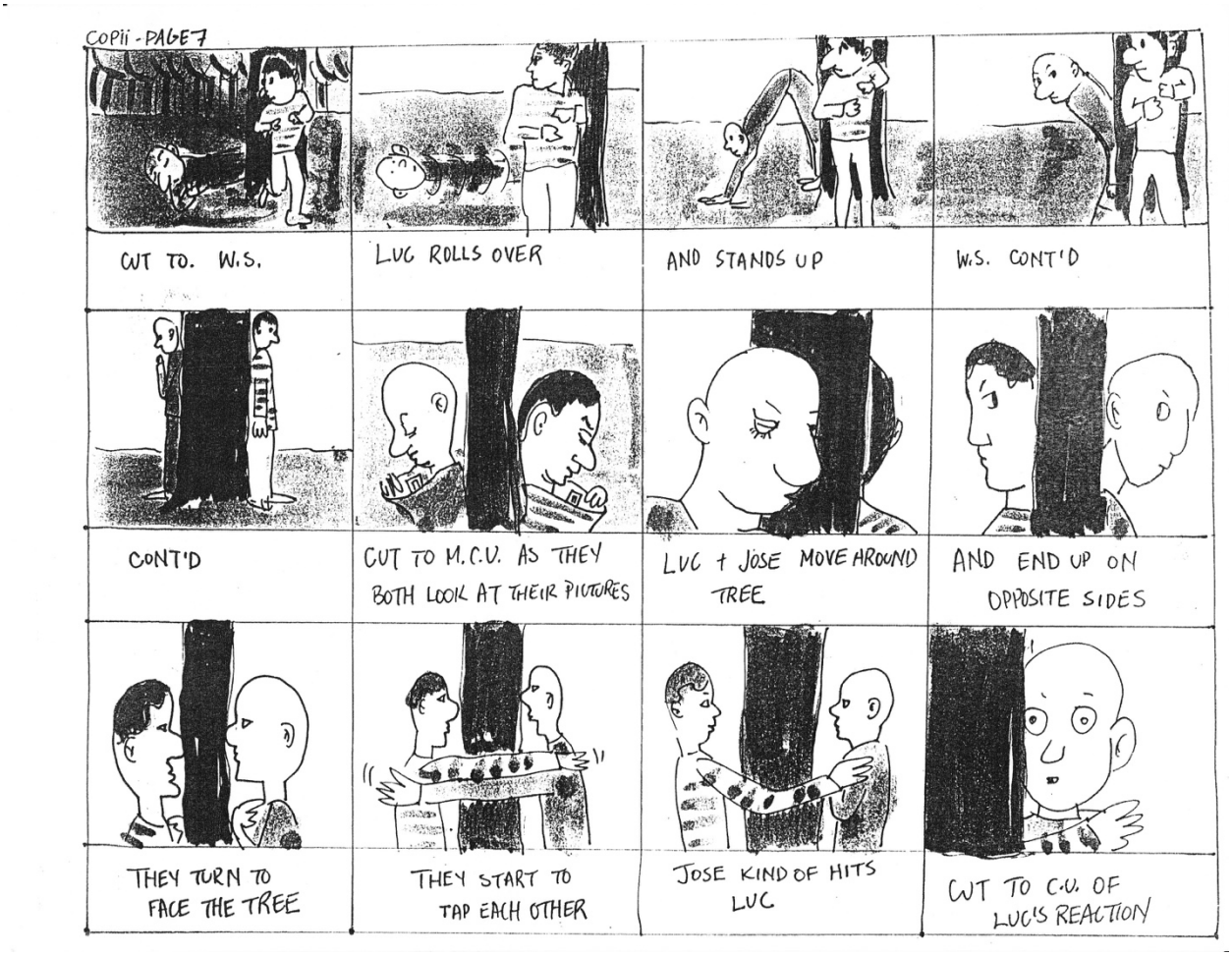
So Leuten Rojas was the officer at Explorations and I called him and I said, ‘Hi, I'm Laura and I'm a choreographer and I want to make this film’ and told him my story and he was very nice and he basically said to me: “You will not get a grant unless you have a storyboard.” And this was one of the most important things anyone's ever said to me. I would not have done a storyboard otherwise. And I think it was the storyboard that got me the grant because it showed that I have these cinematic ideas and that the choreographic material could translate cinematically, that I was already thinking cinematically in my head. So, I applied for Ventures and I applied for Explorations and I got both.

Which at the time was like a lot of money – I think it was a $40,000 budget.

[Kathleen Smith]
Yeah, that's a lot at that time.

[Laura Taler]
But I mean, to put it in perspective, the film I just made had a $65,000 budget.

[Kathleen Smith]
Oh.



Storyboard for PT II: copii P7, storyboard artist: Xenia Taler

[Laura Taler]
Yeah, anyways. The *village trilogy* budget included Ventures and Explorations, and I think there was probably some money in there from the Toronto Arts Council and the Laidlaw Foundation and probably some from the National Film Board. We started editing at the NFB because we needed a Steenbeck and they had one. Then we ended up at the Canadian Film Centre Because they also had a Steenbeck.

[Kathleen Smith]
Wow. It's wild to think that you made that film on film.

[Laura Taler]
Yeah. For 10 years I made work on film but this was filmed and edited on film.

[Kathleen Smith]
That era though, the early 90s, there was this real embrace of the idea of interdisciplinary work, there was this climate of mashing things up and exploring and experimenting and taking risks outside your discipline. That's something I sometimes think we've lost. Do you find that's true?

[Laura Taler]
It's hard for me to tell because I just keep doing what I'm doing and I mean it's always been a bit weird and off the mark and it continues to be so. I do feel there's less of an appetite for stuff like that. Maybe within the programming world, people want things to fit into boxes. But then there's also stuff that is even more strange – and I use the word strange in the best sense of the word as something that we're not familiar with and that makes us think differently: 'Oh, this is something that's strange. I need to get to know it. I need to try to find ways to open my mind to it.'

It's like people want things they can recognize. You know, as much as I watch all the streaming services and Netflix and all that jazz, it really has messed with our ability to see things differently – because it's so formulaic. We're not open to different rhythms, different cadences, a different level of comfort — we're just not open to *difference* so much anymore. We're so used to these cookie cutter formulas that work and are satisfying. It's like eating junk food, basically. It's delicious. We all love it. We all do it once in a while.

I've always tried to play with the idea of creating something cinematic with movement, not necessarily like capital C choreography, but with movement where you're not being told so much through words. Lately I've been playing with singing a little bit too and lyrics.

And then trying to figure out like, what if it's not like what you would expect or what you would want. Instead it kind of pushes you to think differently or to slow down or it makes you uncomfortable, all those things, yeah.

[Kathleen Smith]
To go back to the village trilogy then … some of these ideas you're describing and that you're pursuing now in newer works like *THREE SONGS* were in evidence in *the village trilogy* as well. Not just the movement quality or the choreography, but also the human voice that comes up, the look of it, the pace of it. And then there's the sort of personal history and those references that have consistently appeared in your work over time. Can you talk a little bit about your personal connection to the material in *the village trilogy*?

[Laura Taler]
In what way?

[Kathleen Smith]
Like in terms of your connections to your family's home, to your grandmother, to your native language.

[Laura Taler]
Well, I find it very complicated because I get so emotional.

[Kathleen Smith]
What? You're crying, Laura. Oh, my God.

[Laura Taler]
I think because we left when I was six my connection is so emotional. I've talked to people who left when they were like 12 or 13 and they have similar ideas around their relationship to living in Canada and coming from Romania. But they don't have this emotional trigger, they're more reasonable about it. I just go straight to the emotional. So I'm going to answer your question obtusely.

I'm working on a new project, which begins by going through a bunch of boxes in my archives that I have labeled "undone" or "unmade" and they're all the projects which I started and got to a pretty advanced level. The idea is to go back to these undone boxes and see like, what can I do with the past? Do I just get rid of the projects in the box or is there material in there that I can move into a future project?

All that to say, I went through these boxes and I could see in the projects, even the ones that I abandoned, how much I kept reaching back to my past, to Romania.

[Kathleen Smith]
Viewing the film you can sense a lot of these resonances and echoes and hallmarks of loss and yearning, looking for things. That's what I find most interesting about *the village trilogy* – all that stuff is recognizable even though people looking at it don't necessarily know anything about you. It's all there, it kind of comes off the screen. It's a point of interest for me, having just shown it to my students.

[Laura Taler]
The thing is I never intend to do those things. I never intend to *do* Romania. I don't want to do it. I mean, I spent most of my time, especially when I was younger, on moving away from it. I don't want to be an immigrant artist. I just want to be an artist. I don't want to be given privileges because I come from somewhere else. I want to be just who I am, whatever that is. It's complicated, but it just comes out because that's what's there.

On location filming *the village trilogy*, from L to R: Peter Irvine, José Navas, Micheal Spicer, Laura Taler, photo Stacy Clark

[Kathleen Smith]
Can you talk a bit about how your practice became more interdisciplinary? I guess the question I really want to ask is, did you consciously turn your back at any point on dance and film as standalone disciplines?

[Laura Taler]
I don't think so. When people ask me why I started to dance, I tell them that I never really felt comfortable with words. I was born in Romania where I went to German kindergarten. Then we moved to Italy where I learned Italian and Hebrew. Then we moved to Canada where I learned English and French. I didn't even know what people were saying to me half the time. When we went to Italy, I had no idea what people were saying to me. When we came to Canada, my parents sent me to sleepover camp after we were here for a week. I had like five words of English so I had to read people's gestures and facial expressions and I had to read the affect in the room. I had to read the affect to understand what was going on and so I would mimic people's faces or I would mimic what they were doing. I think I started to dance because I felt

really comfortable expressing myself in a way that didn't include words. I love moving physically but the dance I did was always a little bit not so dancey. There was always this theatrical element or character, small gestures or quirkiness. Then the film came really quickly. I was already working a little bit as an actor and as a dancer and then also in these cinematic environments.

[Laura Taler]
I don't know if you've read it, there's this great essay by Ursula K. LeGuin called The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction. It has an introduction by Donna Haraway. It's a short essay about the idea that story, our ideas of story are so particular and limited. You hear about the bone or the blunt instrument as the first tool, but LeGuin talks about the carrier bag as being the first tool. She talks about fiction more as this carrier bag or vessel that you carry. Anyways, you have to read the essay, but it's really worthwhile in terms of this idea of our obsession with plot. There are different ways to tell a story.

[Kathleen Smith]
It's great to talk about this because, you know, the thing about *the village trilogy* is it did so well that there was this sense that you were going to be a filmmaker now, like you were going to go on to make feature films. That was the trajectory. It was very clear and often when people are presented with a very clear career trajectory, they will follow that trajectory because they'll make a lot of money and be successful.

My point is you're so clearly not that kind of artist, right? You followed your own path and it's more about the integrity of your practice and what you're interested in personally and interrogating all these things from your past and current interests and different kinds of media. So much has become available to us in the last twenty years in terms of new ways of doing things and you're always right there messing around in it. So I think it's worth noting that this film was a launch pad that you did not use to launch yourself in the expected direction.

[Laura Taler]
I did try a little bit. I did get a Chalmers grant and went off to write a feature and it was torturous. I just felt like I was following this structure that was so bound.

[Kathleen Smith]
Why did you hate it so much?

[Laura Taler]
It just wasn't fun. This idea of the strange I brought up earlier… where you take something that's very close to you and push it away somehow and make it strange in order to look at it from a distance and be able to see it differently.

I always ended up back in Romania. So, this idea of making something strange is so you can learn something from what you're doing.

I worked on two features for a really long time and I tried really hard. I don't know if it's that I'm too stubborn or if I didn't learn enough about the technique of script writing – because it is a technique and it requires learning.

Maybe if I had dived right into a three-act structure Instead of just reading a couple books about it, I could have honed those skills in a different way. I'm a hard worker, I would have done that if that was the thing I wanted to do. But I tried to do it and it didn't attract me. And then the projects went in the box.

So now I'm going to go into the box and I'm going to say, okay, what of the stuff that went into the box that I worked so hard on still sparks me and makes me curious and can I take some of those elements and make something new out of it.

It's taken me a long time to figure out what I want to do and how I want to do it.

[Kathleen Smith]
Do you keep up with the screen dance community?

[Laura Taler]
It's so big now. It's not really possible to keep up with it. But there are a few people I do keep up with, colleagues I've met throughout the years. I sat on a jury at one point for the New York Dance on Camera festival and that was really helpful because I got to see a bunch of stuff. But that was a while ago. I feel more connected to the visual art community right now.

[Kathleen Smith]
When you're getting ready to show *the village trilogy* to a new audience now, how do you feel about it?

[Laura Taler]
I am always nervous before a screening. I am even getting nervous answering this question (as I imagine how I will feel before the screenings that will take place this fall). But that's part of the process. I think I get nervous because I want the audience to connect with the work. Even after 30 years of screenings, you never know what will happen. But I do love the film, it still makes me laugh and cry and feel all the good things. It also remains a bit mysterious to me and that makes watching it exciting. There's an unsettling duality of distance and proximity that the work brings. It's incredibly intimate and moving, but also so distant, as if it's taking place in another space, another time. I really value all the layers of feelings it brings.

Laura Taler headshot, photo Charlotte Frank

In 2025, *the village trilogy* will screen in Montreal, Toronto, Peterborough and Vancouver in conjunction with masterclasses taught by Laura Taler.

***Matryoshka Crush* (2025), Taler's latest video installation will run June 11 to August 16 2025 at AXENÉO7 in Gatineau, Québec.**

Taler's video installation *Hex: Begin Again* (2018) will run November 1 to December 13, 2025 at Occurrence, 5455 De Gaspé, Montréal, Québec

Learn more about Laura Taler's practice at https://laurataler.ca/

Reflections on Dance Camera West

Interview by Cara Hagan

In April of 2024, Cara Hagan sat down with Kelly Hargraves, co-founder of Dance Camera West, the oldest dance film festival in Los Angeles to talk about the origins of the festival and what makes it special. Of high importance is DCW's commitment to distribution and diversity in dance film, which influences how the festival is produced and what activities are on offer each season.

Cara Hagan: Kelly, can you tell me when and how Dance Camera West began?

Kelly Hargraves: The festival started in 2000. I moved to Los Angeles from New York, where I had been working at Dance on Camera and at NYU doing my dance film research. I decided I wanted to do a festival in LA. I was introduced to Lynette Kessler, who was also interested in dance film festivals, so we joined forces. Like a lot of festivals, we saw that there was this amazing art form that people around us had no access to and said, "let's change that!" Before all that I worked at film festivals in Montreal, so this festival is a perfect combination of my day jobs in film and my passion in dance.

CH: Something unique about Dance Camera West as compared to other screendance festivals is that in addition to screening films, you work to distribute them. How did you get into distributing dance films?

KH: In New York, I shared an office with the VP of distribution at First Run Features, who I still work for. I would be watching [dance films] while writing my thesis and he said, "these are amazing, can you get me more?" So we created the Dance for Camera DVD in 2002 and later Dance for Camera 2 in 2008. Those two volumes are still in universities around the world. Instead of a third DVD volume, I approached a streaming partner I worked with called Ovid tv. I know who to ask. It's not a hard sell because it's a beautiful art form even if they know they're not going to make a lot of money. When it gets down to me paying royalties, the math is just impossible because it gets down to pennies.

CH: You describe Dance Camera West as a festival that supports artists. Talk to me specifically about how Dance Camera West supports artists beyond screenings, and how those support systems came to be within the organization.

KH: First of all, it's giving [artists] a platform and a place to show these films professionally, as well as and a way to build a community. That community-building has remained an essential focus of the festival, especially since I returned as Artistic Director in 2018 after taking a hiatus to make my own work from 2007 to 2017. After COVID, that was also a huge focus. In 2021 we rebounded and were able to show 70 films with about 35 filmmakers attend from all over the world. That vibe is what we go for. That's why we do things like revival films (like *Stop Making Sense and PINA in 3D)* and parties and luncheons. Thank God I have a board who likes to do that kind of stuff because it's a lot of time and money to pull off, but really builds that sense of community. We do a lot of workshops now. We've brought in Karen Pearlman, Katrina McPherson, Javier DeFrutos, Gabri Christa, and Cara Hagan. We've had some good community

partners and sponsors so some workshops are free and a lot of people attend. Beyond that we now produce some films through the KDACC Creative Corps grant in Central California and the NEA Project grant program. It's a three-prong mission now: PREPARE: PRODUCE: PRESENT.

CH: To follow up on that, you've been working on diversifying the field of screendance through your efforts. How?

KH: The first thing we did was diversify who watches the films, so it's not just me and two of my middle-aged white lady friends. After working at the performing arts center REDCAT, and living in LA where we pay a lot of attention to identity, I couldn't let myself do that. So we identified almost a hundred LA-based performers and filmmakers and each year 30 to 40 show up to watch the films on a preview selection committee. Of course, I don't always agree with them, but, that's the point. It's not supposed to be what I want. So that's our curation process — If there is one, that's it. This also helps diversify the audience. We also invite other LA artists to present special programs, like Suchi Bronfman's *Dancing Behind Prison Walls*. The goals are making better work by changing what's on screen, and changing who's behind the camera. We've been successfully seeing our films tour and win awards. Irishia Hubbard-Romaine for example, who said that she hadn't planned to be a dance filmmaker, has been in our mentoring program, been commissioned for work, and has been on our Board. Now she's a professor and her work is everywhere! She wins awards, she's in a ton of festivals. And so this is about creating a support system for talented emerging artists to grow.

Finding revenue for artists is also a part of the support. We have a PBS broadcast deal, and we tour films. We find grants where and whenever we can. We work to be a conduit to opportunities. The KDACC grant is connected to social justice projects because of the people making them. We have one film that's with the homeless population, one with an African-American fitness instructor, one featuring an L-G-B-T-Q individual going through transition and mental illness, and one about domestic labor where we worked with community members as performers. The artists are making documentaries, where movement is the language.

I'm really grateful and happy that so many people are part of the DCW community and that I can support them. It's great. Some years!

CH: That is incredible. Thanks for sharing! Any advice for folks wanting to get into screendance from a programming and festival producing perspective?

KH: Make work, watch a lot of films, show up, get organized and be connected to your community of artists.

Interview with the 2021 Curators for the Third Coast Dance Film Festival
A companion to *The Third Coast Dance Film Festival and COVID-19 Adaptive Programing in 2021*

by Rosie Trump

In December of 2020, I conducted interviews with each of the three guest curators Ellen Duffy, Eve Allen Garza, and Laura Gutierrez for the Third Coast Dance Film Festival. The aim of the interviews was to reflect on and document the curatorial process. The interviews include a general discussion of process, but also directed conversation around how COVID-19 impacted the experience of seeing and evaluating screendance. These conversations take into consideration all the films that were reviewed for the festival, not just the finalists selected for the screenings in February 2021. (Interviews have been edited for clarity and brevity).

Laura Gutierrez
Interviewed on December 12, 2020

Rosie Trump: I am thinking about your background with this form, from having attended the Third Coast Film Festival in the early years in Houston, having been a dancer in various dance film projects, and being a guest curator in other dance film festivals. Did you have expectations going into the curatorial process, in terms of what you might see, thinking about your own viewer aesthetics?

Laura Gutierrez: Immediately the thing that comes to mind is the submission count. I just knew that there was going to be so much more than past seasons, just because of the nature of where dancers are at [because of shelter in place]. Film is the go-to format to safely reach audiences right now.

RT: You anticipated there was going to be COVID responsiveness in the submissions before you even began viewing?

LG: Yes absolutely. I was expecting a wide range of production value, because of that window between April to June [2020] when we started reviewing films. When everyone was creating in isolation with whatever they had-- their cell phones or a friend's camera. Also, I automatically assumed all the films would be outside or in people's homes. I was most curious to see how people were using their cameras and spaces.

RT: Did you notice themes or a certain tone arc in the submission this season?

LG: Animation and hybrid animation. Other themes I noticed were whimsical and dream-like scenarios, landscapes, and outside elements.

RT: It seemed like people were hyper mindful of environment, interior or exterior, thinking about global warming or thinking about quarantine-- it was really foregrounded.

LG: I remember noticing a lot darker themes and performances.

RT: I agree a lot of the work had a very heavy tone. Reflections around the psychological, uneasy and weighted.

LG: I also recall how powerful it was to see a work that was so quirky, it was a relief and a break from the heavy. Seeing something joyous-- I was ready for it!

RT: A lot of submissions dealt so well with portraying the current anxiety and fear so many of us were feeling. There was work that was really relatable, showing me the anxiety I was experiencing in the moment, but then the other side of it there was also the work that I needed to see that transformed and lifted me from how I was feeling.

So thinking about that as a curator, what's the balance between work that reflects our current situation and then work that delivers us beyond our current moment?

LG: Yes, and another thing I was thinking about coming from a technical emphasis in dance. How do we use our circumstances as inspiration, but also push artistically and challenge technically? It anchored me in the choice making. I was looking for high artistic quality with filming and editing.

RT: Are there any other observations about the curator experience?

LG: In terms of articulating that we want to highlight female directors and choreographers and BIPOC submissions, that was a relief in a way, as a Latinx person, being part of something where someone has already acknowledged that and taken it into consideration, helped.

Eve Allen Garza
Interviewed on December 3, 2020

Rosie Trump: Did you notice themes or a certain tone arc in the submission this season?

Eve Allen Garza: I remember when I first started watching the submissions thinking, "Oh this one's about COVID, and oh this one's about COVID, too." Because in the beginning of reviewing, I didn't think that was going to be what I experienced. I knew there would be some—but it was so soon. COVID shut downs happened at the end of March and the Third Coast Dance Film Festival's first submission deadline was June 1. There were an astounding amount of films that were made in a one or two-month period.

RT: Do you feel like COVID influenced your curatorial point of view?

EAG: No. I think I was still able to decide if a film was checking the boxes of what I was most interested in. Was it light-hearted, clever, succinct, innovative? These were all the things I was looking for whether they were responding to COVID or not.

RT: Your film pick for the best of festival award "Dancing is an Old Friend" [directed by Marta Renzi] was a film that was clearly made during the time of COVID, can you talk about your response to that film? Because I think something that resonated for both of us, in regards to this film was the way other themes shined through the lens of COVID quarantine, specifically.

EAG: I related to that one a lot, thinking about starting a family and having a baby, it was very personal. Dance doesn't go away as you go through life stages. I appreciate that it was low budget, that it was two women, that checking on a friend during COVID was what instigated this project. It felt relevant, but it didn't feel heavy, and also relatable to non-dancers. It was so genuine. It felt really honest.

Ellen Duffy
Interviewed on December 16, 2020

Rosie Trump: You were a curator for last season's program, as well as this year's. What differences, if any, did you notice right away?

Ellen Duffy: Crisis response was a huge theme this year. I also think the intersection of dance and technology is becoming a much bigger highway for people, and it's cool to see what people are making. I am excited by work that makes me ask: How did you make that? What was the process?

RT: How did your own personal COVID experiences this summer impact how you saw your role as a curator? Did you relate to the work differently (perhaps because of quarantine, uncertainty, income instability, stress?)

ED: There were a lot of themes I really related to: isolation and feeling stifled by stress. As a curator, I looked for those things in the films that were dealing with being uncertain about the future. I have come to the realization lately of how excellently social and economic issues can be presented by dance and the arts, so I was looking for films that spoke to those issues. This collective experience of COVID foregrounds the similar themes and ideas people are working on.

RT R: The idea of collective is interesting, because there are a lot of collective connections happening through dance and the arts, and socially. But also in some ways we are more isolated than ever with travel restrictions, events being canceled, not being able to gather. It's a dichotomy that was reflected in a lot of the film submissions.