

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 Area¹ 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. Heck, 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 from 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 siren². 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 departments³. 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.



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 event³.

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.

Figure 5: Page from SFDF 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 Glow⁵. A necessary step forward would be the establishment of an accessible open-source archive, strands of which are already in the works⁶.

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 accompaniment (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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