Making Television Dance (Again)
Katrina McPherson and Douglas Rosenberg

This special half-issue of the *International Journal of Screendance* is inspired by Bob Lockyer, long-term producer of dance at the BBC, who died in 2022 aged 80. Through his directing and commissioning of dance for broadcast television, as well as his teaching and writing on the subject, Bob Lockyer had a big and lasting impact on screendance.

For us, Katrina and Doug, as for many others, Bob was a friend, a mentor and a significant presence in our chosen artistic field. In the research presented here, and as an homage to Bob, we assert the place of TV as a catalyst in the evolution of screendance and in our own artistic practices. In doing so, we seek to redress the balance on what we see as the underrepresentation of the importance of television, both as an entity and a system — and of video art, TV's avant-garde offspring — in the story of screendance.

We in addition propose that dance for television created a site in, around and despite which experimentation could flourish. This happened particularly in a period when the television technologies expanded and platforms fragmented, moving beyond their initial monolithic nature, presenting opportunities and cracks into which imaginative executives could sneak new ways of thinking about, presenting and producing art — and in Lockyer's case dance — into the broadcast schedules.

The legacy of television has been internalized by contemporary screendance, as witnessed in the reinstatement of TV production processes, hierarchies, intentionality and aesthetics in the form. Even as we write, television remains the most flexible, malleable and fluid space of production, appropriating each new technology and social movement into its programming. As we move further away from the era of mainstream television, it feels important to highlight the often lesser-known connections between early film, video and electronic media broadly. In particular, we focus on the pivot from the experimental film of the 1950s and early 1960s to video art and the nascent interdisciplinary days of electronic media in the 1970s and beyond, and their impact on screendance. We situate this intertwined history in an intimate non-space, where camera, dancer and the editing of both gave rise to a sense of experimentation of the medium inside the televisual media itself. With a largely US-UK focus, and yet acknowledging the global reach of the themes discussed, the research presented here dips back into existing archives, interviews, published texts, program notes and pamphlets, as well as the writers' own first-person experiences.

We describe the televisual as a site where artists contributed and destabilized institutional broadcast television. For artists like us, working at first with analogue video, the materiality of the form embedded dance in an electronic landscape, the body in motion inserted in the fields and frames of the image. This meshing of form and content at once challenged and inhabited television, and disrupted the normative, narrative-driven portrayal of its culture.

Whilst discourse around dance on screen often relies on narratives of film and cinema to buttress the form, the bigger presence in contemporary screendance is found in the vestiges of dance's engagement with broadcast television and experimental video. This research is an attempt to begin to reinscribe the histories of dance on television and dance in video art into the contemporary narratives of screendance. This is not intended as a call for the return to older so-called 'lo-fi' technologies, but rather a provocation to locate the spaces for and of experimentation that screendance might (re)occupy moving forward.

ABOUT BOB LOCKYER

> Television is essentially a medium of information and narrative – it tells stories.
> Dance, and abstract dance in particular, is difficult to present on television.
> — Bob Lockyer in *Parallel Lines* (p.132)

Lockyer's legacy goes to the heart of the experimental relationship between dance and television. In his life's work — as director, producer, commissioner and educator — he sought to address the possibilities and the challenges of the relationship between dance and television.

In the introduction to *Making Video Dance* (McPherson, 2019), Lockyer describes his earliest encounters with dance being made for television when, in the 1960s, he was the assistant to Sadler's Wells dancer turned TV producer Margaret Dales on an experimental dance-based series called *Zodiac*. Here, leading modern ballet choreographers of the time in the UK, such as Peter Darrell and Kenneth MacMillan, made innovative twenty-minute dance stories for television. Working on this series gave Lockyer his first taste of directing and of the experimental potential of dance on screen.

Later, as a director himself, Lockyer pushed boundaries as he explored ways in which to represent the essence of a live choreographic work on the screen. Published in the now out-of-print Arts Council of Great Britain book *Parallel Lines* (1993), there is a chapter by Lockyer entitled "Stage Dance on Television." Here he writes in some detail about the creative solutions he found making television versions of three different works by choreographer Robert Cohan in the 1970s. In particular, Lockyer gives an insight into the transfiguration of stage space into camera space that was central to his understanding of the needs of the small screen in relation to dance performance. In his writing, Lockyer reflects on the process of adaptation and intermediality, taking a characteristically pragmatic approach:

> Cohan let me have the set, a sort of cathedral nave yet I felt that, in the television version, it was too dominating. This was because the studio in which we recorded it was too small and we could not distance the dancing sufficiently from the set to counteract the foreshortening effect of the camera. (Lockyer, 1993, 134)
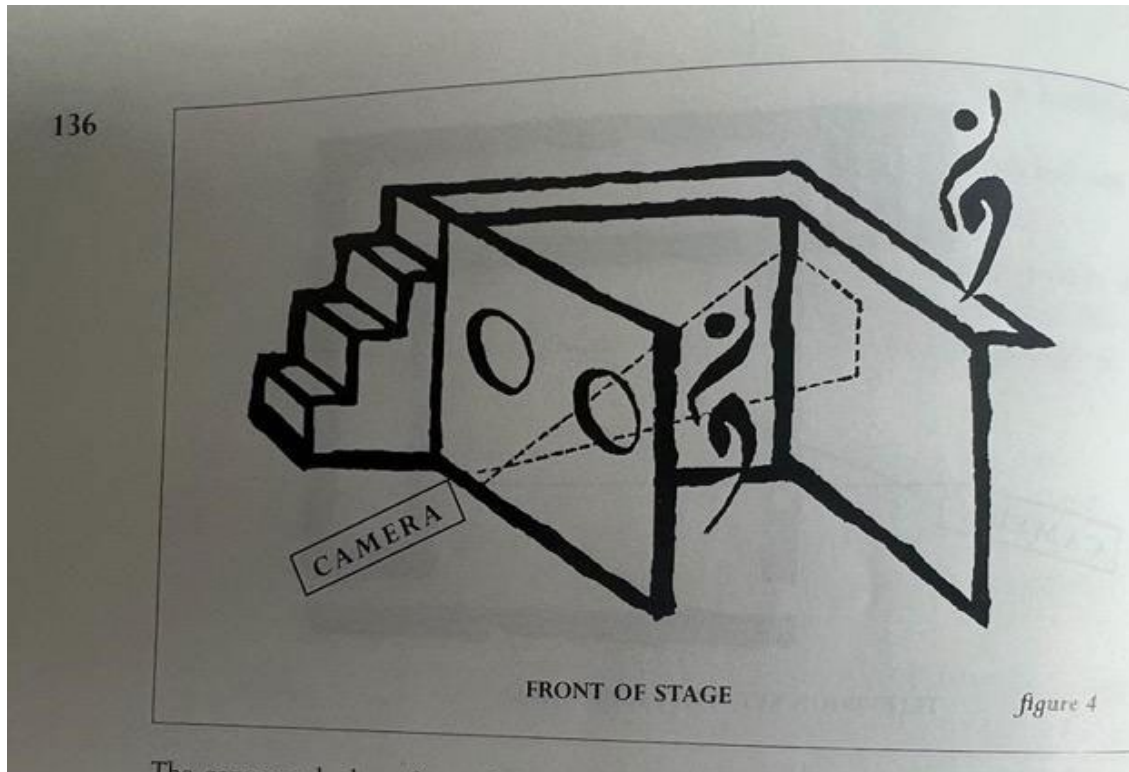
Screenshot from Waterless Method of Swimming Instruction (Cohan, Lockyer, 1980)

Here, we can note the continued reliance on the theatricality that was a staple of television at that time. Carried over from TV's modelling of live work, the origins of dance on television maintained a similar dependence on the illusionary spaces of theater, transposed here into the TV studio.

Lockyer continues:

> Cohan's Waterless Method of Swimming Instruction (1974, TV 1980) is set in and around the swimming pool of an ocean-going cruise liner. On stage, the proscenium arch is the fourth wall of the pool. On the left is a changing room with port-hole windows through which the swimmers can watch people in the pool, a door centre back opens into the swimming pool and a ladder leads from the pool to the walkway that surrounds it.

> For the television version, a removable fourth wall was built and the changing room was re-designed so that I could look through the port holes into the pool. These changes gave greater access to the dance and, by using a camera crane, I could isolate the walkway round the pool. The result was, for me, a successful translation of the stage work (Lockyer, 135).

Preparation diagrams for Waterless Method of Swimming Instruction (Lockyer, 1980)

We are reminded again of the synergies between the televisual and the stage choreography. The push-pull of the "original" and the reconceived, site-specific work for television still remains fraught. As Lockyer grapples with the problem of reconciling both versions, he recalls asking:

> How can this impression (of strobe lighting effect on the live stage) be transferred to TV? For the ending of FOREST, Cohan and I had superimposed two images of a line of men coming to camera. This was done in the final edit, and one of the images of the men was delayed by a few seconds, so that it was out of sync with, and superimposed on, the other, it gave the strange, mysterious other worldly effect that we wanted. It was a chance discovery and not envisaged at the time of recording (Lockyer, 136).

In the migration from stage to screen, spaces opened by technical problems created opportunities for experimentation. The solutions were often found in the recording processes and in the materiality of the video format itself: the spatially mobile camera situating the spectator in a new relationship to the choreography; the weaving of the dancing bodies into the screenic image to alter reality. The legacy of adaptation favors a temporal facsimile of the original. Nevertheless, the idea that the televisual dance was in and of itself a creative space, endures.

Bob Lockyer's hand in establishing a visual culture of dance on screen cannot be overstated. His productions found their way beyond the BBC and into weekly TV shows abroad, into VHS and

DVD form and festivals, and became a reference for aspiring screendance makers worldwide, as for arts broadcasters and producers. His impact on dance for television, along with his contributions to UK dance in general, were highlighted in the many obituaries and tributes published after his death:

The Telegraph wrote:

> He would be responsible for significant recordings of Bronislava Nijinska's Les Noces (1978), with the Royal Ballet, and Merce Cunningham's Points in Space (1987), the latter conceived and the former radically reconceived for camera filming.

Lockyer's work with Lloyd Newson's iconoclastic new contemporary troupe DV8 Physical Theatre further proved the point. Newson's acclaimed 1990s stage productions Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men, Strange Fish and Enter Achilles were transfigured and intensified by their reinvention as 50-minute TV dance films. The culmination of Lockyer's approach was the body of more than fifty 15-minute dance films he commissioned, the late-night BBC Dance for the Camera series (1994-2000)." (Telegraph Obituaries, 17 June 2022.

Lockyer encouraged collaboration between directors and choreographers, particularly through the *Dance for the Camera* commissioning program, working alongside Rodney Wilson at the Arts Council of Great Britain. Continuing over several years, and with (by today's standards) large production budgets and coveted space for broadcast slots, this series was extremely influential, not only through the wide dissemination of the work made as part of it, but also for the schemes and commissioned works that emulated it. Important, too, was the work made outside and sometimes in opposition to those commissioned programs.

(An extended interview with Boc Lockyer, conducted by Douglas Rosenberg in 2016 is republished in full further on in this volume.)
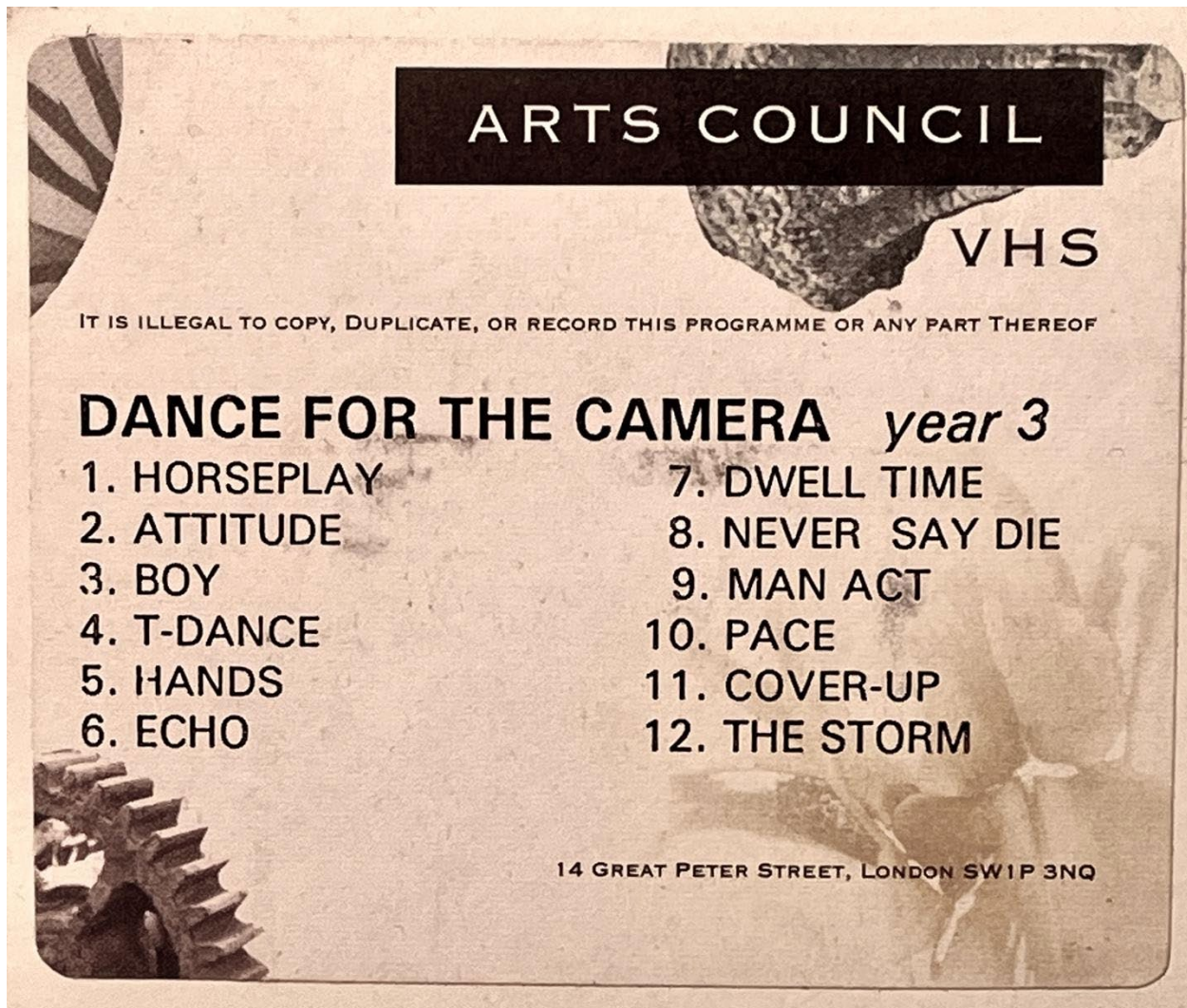
Label of a distribution VHS tape published by The Arts Council of Great Britain c. 1996.

THE TELEVISION–VIDEO ART DIALECTIC

Televisual media has always been held to rigorous technical specifications so as to be "legally" broadcast over the airwaves. In retrospect, the paradigm created by television's strictly enforced format may be seen as a provocation to artists wishing to distort the status quo of broadcast television. The boundaries were clear — TV was made by other people and sent to you, the viewer, representing a limited arena of ideas, strictly adhering to a producer-receiver paradigm. As video technologies evolved, significantly through the 1960s, the same tools began to become available to artists, dancers, choreographers and others, and generations of new makers were able to dismantle and reconfigure the production and distribution models of the very idea of television. What they made represents an alternative electronic landscape, one that challenges the dominance of the visual culture of the "golden days" of television consumption, from the

1950s through the 1970s and beyond. They did so by utilizing the technical tools of the medium, and simultaneously engaging with the very site of television. By inhabiting the materiality of television, video artists — and we argue video *dance* artists — thereby sought to disrupt the pervasive normative and narrative driven the culture of television.

The medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.
— Marshall McLuhan

"The medium is the message" is a phrase coined by the Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan and the name of the first chapter in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964. McLuhan's pithy use of language to represent the complex and nuanced mechanics of mediation by the contemporary technologies of his era, animated artists' early forays into the creative uses of media.
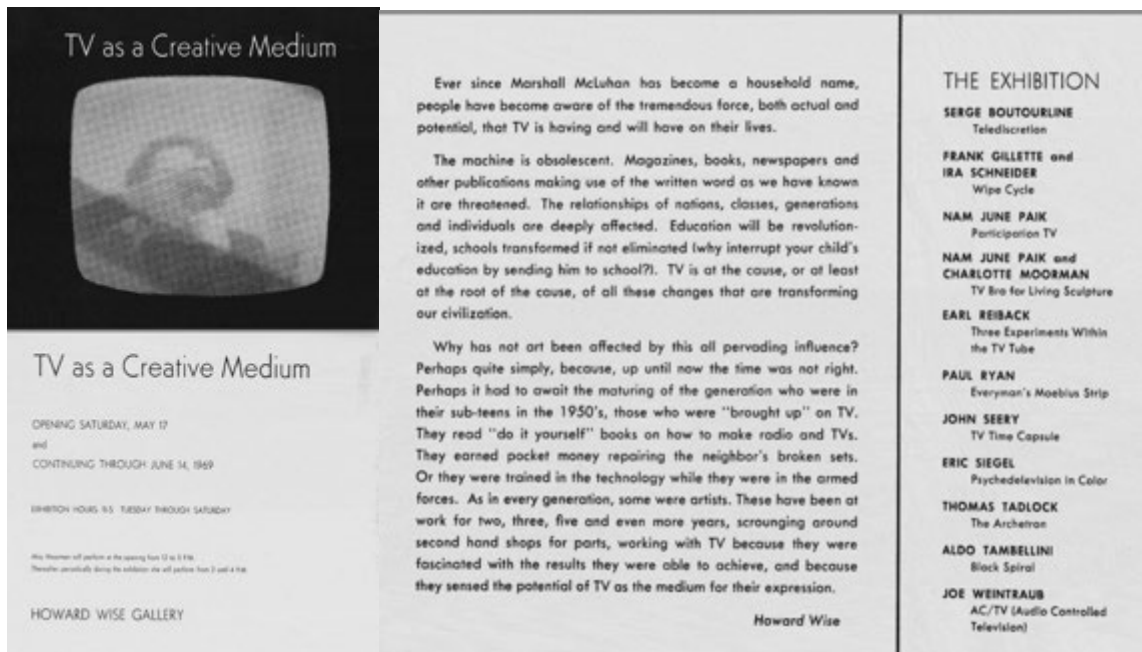
" . . . they sensed the potential of TV as the medium for their expression" from the TV as a Creative Medium exhibition program, Howard Wise Gallery, New York, 1969.

In 1969, the New York gallerist Howard Wise curated an exhibition that featured video works by artists including Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman from the Fluxus group, multichannel installations by Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider, and others, that reflected McLuhan's prophetic idea about how the delivery systems of media shaped its reception by the viewer.

Wise's landmark exhibition reverberated throughout the art world and helped to insert the art form of video into the greater critical discourse of the arts. Within a year, in January 1970,

the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University presented what was widely regarded as the first museum exhibition of artists' video. The idea that the televisual was a place where artists might contribute and destabilize institutional broadcast television persisted. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s, in the USA, England, Scotland and elsewhere, video art found its way into museums and attracted the considerable attention of curators, writers and the public.

At the same time, the interest in independent television production moved out into numerous communities as video equipment become more accessible and thus affordable, prompting the creation of highly accessible community video production centers across the United States. One such space, Artists' Television Access, a San Francisco-based, artist-run, non-profit organization that cultivates and promotes culturally aware, underground media and experimental art, still persists some forty years after its founding. ATA, born out of a punk music sensibility, provides an accessible screening venue and gallery for the presentation of programmed and guest-curated screenings, exhibitions, performances, workshops and events. The legendary institution adheres to its original mission of fostering a supportive community for the exhibition of innovative art and the exchange of non-conformist, media-based ideas. Even in the era of streaming media and digital video, the idea of television manages to morph into contemporary practice.

Another exhibition titled *The Arts For Television* was held in 1987 at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and typified the emerging critical discourse around what the medium of television could do when untethered from the ingrained sensibilities of the broadcast world. Curated by Kathy Rae Huffmann, the exhibition and catalog deployed McLuhan's philosophical provocations to support the exhibition's point of view. While *The Arts for Television* perhaps seems an arcane idea in the present, the essays included in the exhibition catalogue speak to a critical moment in which artists and curators (philosophers and theorists as well) began to think about how to sever the artistic practice of making Video Art from the conditions of production that linked video to broadcast television. By using practice to think through such an idea, artists including Dara Birnbaum, Nam Jun Paik, Eden Velez and writers such as Huffman herself, Bob Riley, Dorine Mignot and their collaborators, arrived at a fluid conceptual model wherein the technology of representation (video) became detachable from its service to form (television) and artists were able to articulate contemporary ideas within the medium of television, however autonomous from the structure of television. Television was thus framed as a creative medium in opposition to the idea that TV was merely a delivery system for discrete programming. The gesture was deeply resonant for artists in an era in which video technology had become both portable and accessible.

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The Museum of Modern Art

THE ARTS FOR TELEVISION
April 20 - May 30, 1989

Opening at The Museum of Modern Art on April 20, 1989, THE ARTS FOR TELEVISION is the first exhibition of its kind to examine television as a forum for the contemporary arts. This international survey of videotapes by sixty-seven artists is presented in weekly thematic programs: dance, music, theater, literature, video imaging, and experimental television (schedule attached). The exhibition is on view through May 30 in the Edward John Noble Education Center.

Created between 1966 and 1987, the videos represented in the exhibition are examples of alternative programming produced specially for television. These include American productions from WGBH-TV, Boston; WNET-TV, New York; and KTCA-TV, San Francisco; and programs from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, and Yugoslavia. Tapes range in length from three minutes to over an hour.

In Dance For Television (April 20 - 25), nine tapes demonstrate the use of television's abstract space. Included are works by choreographers Trisha Brown, James Byrne, Merce Cunningham, and Mary Lucier, among others. Music For Television (April 27 - May 2) presents sixteen works by such videomakers as Laurie Anderson, Robert Ashley, Kit Fitzgerald, and Robert Longo, who examine music as a means to liberate the image from narrative constraint.

In 1989, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented a second iteration of *The Arts for Television*. This second exhibition greatly expanded the reach of the arts into the space of television and included a number of "Dance for Television" selections by choreographers, video artists and filmmakers. These were placed in the milieu of categories of "art" in televisual space

including "Music for Television," "Theater for Television," "Literature for Television," "The Video Image" and "Not Necessarily Television".

The Museum of Modern Art

THE ARTS FOR TELEVISION

April 20 - May 30, 1989

Viewing Schedule

DANCE FOR TELEVISION
April 20 - 25 at 1:00 p.m.

Merce by Merce by Paik (1975). Charles Atlas/Merce Cunningham/Nam June Paik/Shigeko Kubota. 30 minutes

Dancing on the Edge (1980-81). Trisha Brown. 29 minutes

Portrait (1983). Hans Van Manen. 10 minutes

Repetitions (1984). Marie Andre. 45 minutes

Ex-Romance (1984-87). Charles Atlas. 50 minutes

Visual Shuffle (1986). John Sanborn/Mary Perillo. 7 minutes

Lament (1985). James Byrne/Eiko & Koma. 9 minutes

If I Could Fly, I Would Fly (1987). Mary Lucier. 25 minutes

Waterproof (1986). Jean-Louis Le Tacon. 22 minutes

MUSIC FOR TELEVISION
April 27 - May 2 at 1:00 p.m.

O Superman (1981). Laurie Anderson. 9 minutes

Ear to the Ground (1982). John Sanborn/Kit Fitzgerald. 5 minutes

Rene and Georgette Magritte With Their Dog After the War (1984). Joan Logue. 4 minutes

To Sorrow (1984). Kit Fitzgerald. 5 minutes

Bizarre Love Triangle (1987). Robert Longo. 4 minutes

You Ain't Fresh (1986). Julia Hayward. 4 minutes

I Want Some Insecticide (1986). Brenda Miller. 4 minutes

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Television was part-modernity, part-alchemy, floating through the ether to a dispersed audience, huddled communally in front of a magic box. It would stand to reason that what happened on — and in — that box would be magic too, or could be. Television was a space of possibility within

modernity after the Industrial Revolution. As television became mainstream, it was quickly apparent that viewers might expect the unexpected. This is where Berthold Brecht's theories about the fourth wall were reified, first in black and white and later in color. It was a space that extended the possibilities of theatre and radio into a new tele-visual frontier. It was a time that expected, and even more, demanded experimentation and enchantment.

Television exhibited little of the preciousness of cinema, or the epic self-involvement of the movie business. It brought us parallel streams of narrative, non-linear sensibilities, time frames running simultaneously across a single program, and a multitude (relatively) of channels to choose from. TV was pastiche before postmodernism. It was made for disruption and made to disrupt the viewers' understanding of narrative, storytelling and visual culture across a modern template of temporality and signifiers. Moreover, whilst cinema relied on the suspension of disbelief, TV implied that its stories were real. It blurred the boundaries between high and low, framing the everyday and epic, and juxtaposing the domestic with the public, both in the flow of broadcast and in the setting of the apparatus itself:

> Since the seventies video has come a long way, indeed the very term 'video' – originally adopted by artists throughout the world to signify an alternative stance to 'television' – has become an everyday word and as such is mis-used by just about everybody. In many ways, this is encouraging to the artist, freed from its experimental or even avant-garde caches, artists' video has evolved into a multi-practice activity: from performance related, through feminist, political, synesthetic, structuralist, etc. etc. In all these manifestations and different concerns, there is a common thread, and that thread is television. (Partridge, 1990, 25)

Artists working in a diverse range of media embraced the creative possibilities of video, bringing to their explorations the specific and general concepts, concerns and ambitions of their native artforms. The resulting hybridity was not uniform across these artists' work, nor was the relationship between the media necessarily one of equality. For artists working in live performance, video provided a way of "fixing" the work, of extending its life and widening audiences through new routes of distribution. Some took ownership over this process, sensing — or at the very least, not resisting — the potential of the form and the materiality of video tape. The performance documentation thus became an iteration of the artist's work, enfolded into their practice and shaping its onward trajectory.

Avant-garde dancer and choreographer Blondell Cummings (1940-2015) embraced the media of television and video as a tool for documentation and as an influence for experimental live choreography as well. Creating in the 1970s and 1980s, Cummings called her practice "moving pictures," highlighting her understanding of the potential two-way flow between live theatre, dance and performance art and the emergent video and television forms. This embodiment of the televisual in Cumming's work still feels deeply connected to the original. Encountering Cumming's seminal autobiographical solo *Chicken Soup* work on the Internet, writer Elinor Hitt

observes how the artist's screen performances challenge notions of the limitations of video documentation in comparison with "broadcast quality" television:

> Forty years after its conception, Chicken Soup haunts the Internet's public domain in strange ways. One of the only places that the piece is available in its entirety is on YouTube, a video taken from a 1988 TV program called Alive From Off Center. In many respects, it is a successful if incidental effort at preservation—the video quality perfect, and the score, composed by Cummings, Brian Eno, and Meredith Monk, coming through loud and clear. But the video setting has been curated too intensely, unlike her works on stage. The universality of Cummings's gestures and words are placed in the very particular historical context of a mid-century, middle-class American kitchen, in which Cummings simultaneously evokes bourgeoise housewife life and female domestic labor: She wears a crisp, collared white dress and apron and moves in the stage set complete with countertop, stove, and kitchen sink. This production too heavily guides us toward a fixed interpretation of the abstract words and movement themselves. (Hitt, 2023)

Hitt argues, however, that it is in the spaces created through absence of detail in the rudimentary video-taped documentation of the performance, rather than in its television adaptation, that Cumming's considerable power and life force lives on. The writer contrasts the televisual adaptation of *Chicken Soup* with an excerpt, also found online, of a rudimental video documentation of Cumming's life performance the same work at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in July 1989:

Screenshot from Chicken Soup (Cummings, 1981/1989)

> It is in the Jacob's Pillow footage that one can imagine Chicken Soup in its most authentic form. The music is the greatest difference, barely recognizable compared to the machine-like audio in the Alive From Off Center version. Though you can pick out some of the same rhythms and melodies, the music seems to be played live by a single pianist using the score as a template on which to improvise. The set, too, could not be more understated.

Cummings sits at a dark table that almost blends unnoticed against the black backdrop. She is clad, instead of a housewife's costume, in a simple white dress with a large gathered skirt. What emerges is a much more impressionistic, introspective Chicken Soup. This blank canvas of stage could be anyone's kitchen in any period of time—an invitation for the audience to graft their own experiences onto Cummings choreography. This kitchen might even exist apart from any concrete time or place, belonging to communal memory. What is nearly lost in the blur of video is the precision of Cummings's expressions, what Glenn Philips of the Getty Museum calls her "facial choreography". But that lost element comes across in the palpable silence of the audience, the emotional tenor of the theater space itself—a quality that is rarely transmissible by video and that speaks to Cummings's power as a performer. (Hitt, 2023)

TELEVISUAL DANCE

Cinema rejected theater. Television rejected cinema, video art rejected experimental film, digital media rejected the analog world, yet television persists, cannibalizing every form that came before or after. Even as we write, television remains the most flexible, malleable and fluid space of production, appropriating each new technology and social movement into its programming. Commercial TV has, since its beginning, employed bodies in motion, performative bodies, to sell its sponsors' products. From singing, dancing cigarette packs to ballet-trained dancers selling watches or clothing, bodies take space in both advertisements and general entertainment programming.

Television has an appetite that needs to be constantly fed. It hoovers up stories and characters from the off-screen world (does that place even exist anymore?) as it seeks to fill its allotted programming slots. In addition to fictional, script driven and "reality television," cultural activities including those derived from theatre, dance and the art world have provided an endless supply of content. Like film, television started as an experimental technology, and was ultimately co-opted by the entertainment industry. However, as with cinema, the dancing body was involved from the start — a broadcast of ballerina Maria Gambarelli performing for the camera took place just six weeks after the BBC was launched, using John Logie Baird's visual transmission system in August 1932 (Penman, 1993, p. 103). Over the decades that followed, ballet and modern dance were a staple, yet most of these broadcasts were recorded "relays" of theatrical works, presented on the small screen for the continuity of the live action. These outputs were effectively documentations, albeit increasingly sophisticated, designed to bring the glamorous theatrical experience into the living room. It was a public service.

From the 1930s onwards, there have been individuals who have sought to push the boundaries of dance on television, many forgotten, a few remembered or rediscovered. Recent research by Cara Hagan, included in her book *Screendance from Film to Festival*, brings to attention the work of Pauline Koner and Kitty Doner, "the first choreographers to use television as a site for screendance practice" (Hagan, 2022, p. 36). Working in New York in the 1940s, Koner and Doner's short, specially devised episodes were truly innovative dance for television. Importantly, these

producer/ directors also articulated their practices, encouraging stage choreographers to develop "camera consciousness" and describing their hybrid technique of "cameragraphing" (Hagan, 2022, p. 37). In the 1960s, Swedish choreographer Birgit Cullberg was developing radical approaches to making dance for television.

The styles of dance, and how they were presented as light entertainment on and through television, were limited and specific, and largely represented what was deemed to be acceptable and appealing to the "mainstream" at that time. As such, more voices and bodies were excluded than included. For all its radical potential, dance for television was largely based on what was culturally acceptable to those in the position to make such decisions and act on and sustain these preferences.

Elected in 1979, UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal drive towards free markets and "entrepreneurialism" resulted in the privatization of numerous British industries. This led to the launch of Channel 4 in 1982 and ushered in the new regulation that a percentage of BBC output was to be created by independent production companies. Ironically, considering the oppressive right-wing policies of Thatcherism, this would facilitate the commissioning and broadcast of television that was radically different in form and content from what had gone before, and was anything but conservative. TV in the UK expanded rapidly, and much of it changed beyond recognition. This was also connected to the evolution of the technology available to make television and who was given the time and space to use it.

This cultural shift, and the resulting injection of funding and scheduling, were to become the crucible from which a new wave of screendance would emerge. In the UK by the mid 1980s, there were increasingly frequent commissioning of original dance for television by series such as *Dance Lines* on Channel 4 (1986-1992), over seen by Michael Kustov, and subsequently the longer-running *Dance for the Camera* series on the BBC (1990-2004), initiated and executive produced by Bob Lockyer.

The *Dance for the Camera* commissioning arguably operated within the rigid structures of the BBC, and yet were often ground-breaking and collaborative. They come out of a tradition of experimentation on television with different manifestations in different parts of the world. While not equitably produced in many countries due in part to under-resourcing, with the advent of VHS video recording, much of the most interesting and provocative dance-television work circulated globally via bootleg tapes. It was through this informal distribution system that televisual dance engaged its most ardent supporters and practitioners, in the days before the Internet and the proliferation of festivals world-wide. The means of production for television was both a set of tools and a means of circulation and the two were, at that time, linked. Even when filmed with Super 16 or other celluloid stock, the works were constructed for the platform of television, to impact the broader television audience, (and ultimately engineered to conform to the industry's broadcast standards).

Televisual experiments with dance in the 1980s cohabited with a particular kind of choreography that was expressive, theatrical, sometimes brutal and violent. The work that we encountered on television, often late at night, coincided with the zeitgeist's state of agitation and revolutionary

spirit as video, art, and the vestiges of experimental film collided and blurred together. Channels such as MTV featured the mash-up of pop music and of-the-moment video production. The early 1980s saw the emergence of a queer space within broadcast television as a new wave of anti-rock bands infiltrated music video and the simultaneous attention to the politics of the HIV/AIDS pandemic become a part of mainstream discourse. We certainly see this in Bob Lockyer's work with Lloyd Newson, David Hinton and DV8 in making *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, *Enter Achilles* and *Strange Fish* for the BBC.

We also saw a similar framework for dance on television in the States via the program *Alive From Off Center* and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) whose individual affiliates across the country produced a significant amount of experimental collaborative and boundary-breaking work focused on dance in its mediated form. Canada also had similar initiatives for commissioning cutting edge dance films for television via BravoFACT!

In the 1980's, the emergence of personal narratives and frank sexuality met head on, the vice grip of the right with its attempts at the suppression of artistic freedom, and all conspired to create a sense that, while mass culture was approaching some kind of nadir, the technologies of representation technology might save us. In the spirit of montage and post-punk postmodernism, collaboration happened across every art form, creating important cross-cultural inroads. It was a time on intense transmedia activity, where street culture of a particular type migrated onto the screen. Images ingrained in our minds kick off to an angry start with the New Romantic ballerina in Derek Jarman's *Jubilee*, a provocative, prophetic and not -unproblematic shout at what the artist-filmmaker saw as the potential for hypocrisy across all strata of society.

Screenshot from *Jubilee* (Jarman, 1978)

For some television dance, it was a moment of divine symmetry. The choreography of the era had moved into territory that was bold and expressive, and ultimately seemed to resurrect a Dada sensibility. Scottish choreographer Michael Clark mixed neo-classical with neo-punk, working with the band The Fall, designer Leigh Bowery, and dancers including Gaby Agis and Matthew Hawkins to create *Hail, the New Puritan,* a faux cinema-verité style depiction of their chaotic yet creative everyday interactions, directed by New York video artist Charles Atlas and broadcast on Channel 4 as part of the 1986 Dance on 4 series. Canadian Edouard Lock made choreography for David Bowie's live shows and for his own modern dance company *Lalala Human* steps, in whose video dance of the same name Lock and superstar dancer Louise Lecavalier embodied a spikey turbo-charged Fred and Ginger. Coming out of the British cabaret pub circuit, Lee Anderson's all-female group The Cholmondeleys and Liz Aggiss' with her variation of anarchic Austruckstanz infiltrated their aesthetics into the Dance for the Camera consciousness. Through foundational television techniques such as the close-up, mise-en-scène, continuity editing and audio-visual design, these original works for screen enabled and enhanced a wider public's connection with an era of dance performance work that might otherwise have remained obscure.

(SCREEN) DANCE IN THE ELECTRONIC LANDSCAPE

By the early 1970s, two distinct streams of influence had emerged, one from experimental film including the work of Maya Daren, Shirley Clark, Hillary Harris and others, and the other from the emergent form of video art, and the influence of Nam June Paik, Bruce Nauman and Joan Jonas to mention a few. This is evident not only in the practices of making but also in the fabric of the work itself. In both cases, artists interested in framing the body within the materiality of durational performative work for the screen relied on dance and performers of dance to carry the viewers' gaze. The diasporic nature of this perspective accumulated the aesthetics, methodologies and conceptual strategies of the spaces which they traversed within the four corners of the moving image.

TV was an electronic landscape and experimental dance made for television often amplified the visuality of the era. Thus, the electronic palettes of artists such as Merce Cunningham and Doris Chase were literally those of video art: primary colors, over-amped and highly synthesized; shimmering and virtually two dimensions, flat and vibrant at the same time.

For artists working in analogue video, the materiality of the form allowed them to situate dancing bodies not on top of technology, *but inextricably embedded in the electronic landscape*, creating a televisual body in motion inserted in the fields and frames of the image. The lack of legibility of this lower resolution media allowed for a simultaneously poetic and painterly visual language to emerge. In such work, created during the era of television we are speaking of, the inherent soft focus of the image invited the viewer to become lost in an aura of gaussian blur. Here movement was decentered in the space of the frame and simultaneously called attention to the edges of that frame (images were "painted" right up to its borders) creating a tension between the boundaries of the image and screen space. Bodies were situated deeply inside the image, fragmented and recorporealized within the medium, movement disappearing into the varying

opacity of the electronic fields. As a by-product, this work was often about deconstructing what dance and choreography might be within screen space, thus much of the work this essay is concerned with may be taken as a collective manifesto:

YES to the cinematic formalism of Maya Deren, Amy Greenfield, Pooh Kaye and Yoshiko Chuma and also YES to the videotape experimentations of Charles Atlas, Nam June Paik, Doris Chase and Joan Jonas. YES to disruption of the screendance status quo and YES to the vestiges of the televisual.

Doris Chase, Circles II, 1971

In her 1997 essay "Televisualised," published in *Dance Theatre Journal*, Sherrill Dodds writes: "As video dance is a creative exploration of both dance and television, unconventional filming techniques and striking images are abundant." (Dodds, 1997, pp. 44-47)

The choice of terminology (video dance) is important in that video dance links the practice to a long process of separating televisual media production into its disparate parts. After the earliest days of broadcast television, its initial period of live-only broadcasts, followed by experimentation with film, TV at the mid-century (1950s and 1960s) was dependent on the technologies of video for both its creation and distribution. In the 1960s, as portable video recording equipment became available, artists such as Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, Steina

and Woody Vasulka and others, adopted the medium of video as a nascent art form. The roots of video art were clearly in the art world as artists purposefully separated themselves from the histories and practices of film based moving image production. While there was some aesthetic overlap between film and video artists, video art became entrenched in museums, galleries and elsewhere as a new forum for self-expression that was of the electronic era.

Thus, following the linguistic logic of Dodds' choice above, video art (and video dance) appropriated the means of television (video recording) and created new dynamic juxtapositions when makers applied new obstructions and manifestos to the method of recording and the use of the tools of cinema. The video artist Doug Hall described "video's pedigree" as "anything but pure." Hall wrote in *Illuminating Video* in 2005, that video was:

> …conceived from a promiscuous mix of disciplines in the great optimism of post-WW11 culture, its stock of practitioners includes a jumble of musicians, poets, documentarians, sculptors, painters, dancers and technology freaks. Its lineage can be traced to the discourses of art, science, linguistics, technology, mass media, and politics. Cutting across such diverse fields, early video displays a broad range of concerns, often linked by nothing more than the tools themselves (Hall & Fifer, 2005, p. 14).

Doug Hall was one of Douglas Rosenberg's teachers at Art School and he is quoted at length in Rosenberg's book, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image*. Hall's summation of the roots of video as an art form, also expose the interdisciplinary aspirations present in the milieu at the time. Unencumbered by the history of film or other art forms, video was immediately an open field of experimentation and collaboration. Hall himself had worked with dancers in some of his projects as did Nam Jun Paik who, with Charles Atlas, Shigeko Kubota, and John Cage, collaborated with Merce Cunningham on *Merce by Merce by Paik/Blue Studio*, 1978, a half-hour program which was broadcast on WNET Television. The experimental nature of both the film and the institution of Public Television in that historical moment, allowed for a broadcast television experience that immediately seeped into the consciousness of a generation of artists for whom such collaborations would constitute a new way of working across material and disciplinary boundaries.

Merce by Merce by Paik (1978), Nam Jun Paik and Merce Cunningham

Dodds suggests that there was a way to organize such work under the heading of "televisual." She argues,

> The "televisual" names a media culture generally in which television's multiple dimensions have shaped and continue to alter the coordinates through which we understand, theorise, intervene, and challenge contemporary media culture. Televisual culture is a culture which both encompasses and crosses all aspects of television, from its experiential dimensions to its aesthetic strategies, from its technological developments to its cross-medial consequences (Dodds, 1997, p. 45).

The televisual then, makes a space for those bodies visualized via the formalized technologies of television that are a part of a landscape built from video, cameras, bodies, temporal devices and movement. It is television as both an idea and a structural, historic methodology, that animates a particular understanding of what has become a practice across multiple platforms, mostly not television. However, the imprint of television, its mannerisms, form, circulation and its desires along with the embedded viewing practices of television, hover like a ghost around the contemporary practice of screendance.

Video dance and later screendance are a forensic DNA match to video art and, by extension, television. While screendance generally has a familial line to film and cinema, the greatest leap forward in the field has been in the television and post-television space of video and its antecedents. The impact of "the televisual" along with the evolution of accessible video recording, editing and circulation technologies since the advent of Sony's Porta-Pak in the early 1960s, supercharged the use of video as the creative medium for artists through the 1970s and beyond. Even with the technical transition from analog technologies to digital that brings us into the present, the legacy and persistence of video's genetics straddles generations. There is something heirloom about television, the way the box has transformed itself to a sleek, thin

surface, discarding its apparatus and accoutrements along the way. Now less commanding of our attention, rather than imposing its presence or "objectness", it hovers. Television is even more ubiquitous than ever but less conspicuous. TV has invaded our collective memory through a kind of osmosis; generations who did not grow up with it as the central point of reference, indeed the piece of furniture that drew families together, still gravitate to the space of screens to consume content that, it seems, still flows from television's wellspring.

> *We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.*

> —Baudillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*

Broadcast television was like a church, or a place of worship, and infiltrating it was like a kind of criminal act, or at least an act of great resistance by dance filmmakers. Television was ever-present in independent media practice. Personal vision was the currency of the televisual era, when excess was an aesthetic choice. Screendance makers committed their work to plastic cassettes, VHS, betacam, and other tape-based formats, and carried them around like treasures, the copies of which were knowingly lesser than the originals. We committed our work to the most fragile of archives, and often circulated it by putting it in a backpack and getting on a plane or train to take it physically to a festival or screening venue. Once inside such spaces, the work disrupted its environment in the most aesthetically challenging ways possible.

Screendance quickly became a liberatory tool for decentralizing the distribution systems of dance. As television was displaced by the Internet and social media, festivals built on digital platforms moved to fill the vacuum, creating opportunities for exchange, exhibition and international collaboration. Along with expansive technology, the circulation systems of screendance made it possible to level the field in a rapid time frame. In looking closely, however, we can recognize a pattern that begins with dance as an experiment in the liberation of the body on screen and becomes institutionalized in ways that minimize experimentation and a more anarchic use of the space of media.

Analogue technologies, however cumbersome, and the limited possibility of mass circulation of works made within that milieu, amplified the artists' engagement with ideas and experimentation in ways that are perhaps not obvious. Now, the ubiquitous access to both the media of representation and its circulation, conspire to create impenetrable images, the surface quality of which make it almost impossible for artists to disrupt. The hyper-efficiency and hyper-resolution of the "in hand" technologies produce photographic representations of the world. These devices do not initiate elegant framing or pans or tilts or dollies. Their job is to deliver sufficient data that can be evolved and resolved in postproduction. In contrast to this contemporary homogenizing media, the televisual image was a kind of drug induced, hallucinatory, sometimes surreal flight of fancy.

The technologies of recording in the contemporary digital landscape aim to fix things that may not in fact be broken. They are often the very things that video artists worked with: the restricting

frame; the glitch; soft focus; the space in between fields. In contrast, sensor-based technology hardens the image. To soften such images requires sophisticated, software-determined postproduction processes that ironically is often meant to mimic the deficiencies of analogue technologies. Previously conscious choices, or iconic visual language caused by the circumstances of low-fidelity imaging technologies are now conflated into user-friendly apps.

Some work made for the screen in the 1960s and 1970s was not specifically intended for television broadcast, though it was a reflection of the homogenization of television and the way the TV framed our experience of life as viewers. In other words, television provided the structure for artists to remake the very conventions of television and experimental work, on the street, in the landscape and in their studios. Video art first had to dismantle the viewer's understanding of the architecture of television, the box, in which all media arrived, whether news, sports dance, or other. The viewing constraints of television became, in a sense, a kind of platform determinism. However, early video artists sought to deconstruct our relationship with the apparatus that delivered mediated images.

Conversely, the flow of media is consumed now via handheld devices, laptops, and other computer screens, with a tacit assumption that the architecture of the screens is of little importance to the consumption of the images contained within them. Artists have historically thrived in situations in which they have something to rail against, aspire to, infiltrate, question and, ultimately, defeat. Without the adversarial relationship of the historical space of the televisual, there are no natural enemies. Without such frisson, we are left to wonder what's next for the artform.

Screendance is a confluence of postmodern movement vocabulary and the deconstruction of cinematic space, or televisual space in the 1970s. Performances made for the camera benefit from the capacity of optical technologies, even in still images, to extrapolate movement through a particular kind of performance. Such a performance makes itself known within the restricted space of the frame of the camera. By frustrating the feasibility of place and body, the camera exerts a capacity to frame experience within a single glance. However, dance in the space of the televisual (until recently) has not historically foregrounded dance as a siloed alternate version of its linear live self, but rather as a part of the fabric of the televisual image. As with prevailing ideas about site specificity in other art forms, *television* was historically considered by media artists to be equally site-specific. Thus, images of dancing bodies were deeply embedded in the visual field.

In 2000, the preeminent dance scholar Sally Banes presented a paper at the Dance for Camera Symposium at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Titled *Making Tharp Baryshnikov*, Banes analyses Tharp's 1977 WNET Television Laboratory commissioned video project called *Making Television Dance* (the title of this essay is similarly a play Tharp's title). In her paper, which is published in full later in this volume, Banes deconstructs the logic and form of the avant-garde approach to televisual dance by noting:

> Indeed, we see a great deal of the backstage process of making this piece, but
> we never do see the entire dance piece performed live. And, of course, that is
> because this dance piece never existed "live." Studio audiences saw the

> dancing as it was being filmed, but the piece itself, made for the television screen, is inseparable from what the live studio audience could not see: the camerawork (closeups, long-shots, pans, and so on), the editing, and the video effects (such as keying, retrograde, multiple images, and superimposed freezes). What we, the television audience, see as the finished product--what was ultimately broadcast--is a composite of process and several different "finished" products. For Making Television Dance is basically a view of the inside, the not the outside, of a lengthy cine-choreographic process. (Banes, 2000)

Thus, Banes provides a key to the radical use of the technologies of television via its understanding of dance; the televisual in Twyla Tharp's vision is at once infinitely layered, atemporal, site-specific and non-linear. Most importantly, as Banes so presciently described, the "dance piece never existed "live."

Also published later in this volume, Pamela Krayenbuhl's research presented in the article *Twyla Tharp's Making Television Dance (1977) and the Technologized Dancing Body*, recuperates a significant historical thread of a dance and technology dialectic which conspired to create an egalitarian space within publicly broadcast television. Krayenbuhl writes about the "transitional period" between the analog and the digital wherein Twyla Tharp's *Making Television Dance* and the ethos of 1970s were a liminal space in which the overlaps of dance and the moving image created a kind of altruistic moment in television. It was a moment into which young "techies" delivered the future to an older generation of broadcast executives. She states,

> Through Making Television Dance, I argue that dance experiments with analog television, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, represented a crucial chapter in the history of the increasingly technologized moving body. Though rarely discussed in either television scholarship or dance scholarship, Making Television Dance was explicitly interested in uncovering what the marriage of dance and television (as distinct from film) made possible formally and technologically (Krayenbuhl, 2024).

The contemporary version of screendance has the genetic markers of television dance within its DNA. That said, contemporary screendance (increasingly) reinforces the tropes of theatrical dance, in such a way as to speak past the camera as opposed to with or to the camera, and technology once again leads the way. This time, however, it is in a way that does not readily offer a space for artistic disruption. The Smartphone camera is characteristically 'no camera' and there is little trace of the format within the digital image. There is no dropout, no glitch, in this all-seeing, all capturing sensor-oriented device. The restricting architecture of the frame generally, whether still or moving image, is such that, in its limitation, opens up a vast sea of possibility. Whilst accessible, cameras now have fewer limitations, therefore, ironically, fewer possibilities, in postproduction, everything is fixable, zoomable, programmable and the medium thus becomes invisible.

The restrictions inherent in the analogue medium provided the energy, materiality and discourse through which screendance emerged. It is harder to detect concepts of intervention and experimentation today. Where previously screendance misbehaved, now works are made largely according to an expected format and with festivals in mind. The energy of the interloper is dissipated as screendance is funneled through submission portals and codified processes, and experienced in a space into which it has been invited. The Internet and social media seem more open, and free of broadcaster conventions and budgets, which arguably tended to constrict, yet simultaneously motivated action and counteraction. However, it seems that these online sites do not necessarily offer a context for screendance, or a curatorial perspective, or a format to push against. Screendance comes into existence today without the challenges and fissures that have, in previous times, subverted the form.

Television is a system, an idea that has been, subsequent to its invention, historically adaptable to each succeeding, moving image technology. Yet, screendance still seems to be tethered to the visual culture of television, to its gravitational pull. Contemporary screendance behaves as if it is being made for television.

What happened to our revolution?

Katrina McPherson and Douglas Rosenberg, May 2024.

Biographies

Katrina McPherson is a director, artist and educator. Her collaborative screen-based works are regularly presented at festivals, theatres and galleries world-wide. Katrina had a 15-year career as a television director, making arts programmes for the BBC, Channel Four and ITV. She is the author of *Making Video Dance* (Routledge, 2019) and Course Leader of the MA Screendance at London Contemporary Dance School. Katrina has a PhD by Publication from Edinburgh Napier University in 2023.

Douglas Rosenberg is an interdisciplinary artist, filmmaker, author and the Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His work in performance, video, installation, and other media has been exhibited internationally for over 30 years. He is the author of Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image (Oxford Press). His most recent book is Staring at the Sky: Essays on Art and Culture, published by Korpen Press.

A Conversation, about Screendance and the Televisual, McPherson and Rosenberg

As we wrote **Making Television Dance (again),** we did so as artists whose work made for the screen courses through video art, video dance, experimental film, television and the contemporary field of screendance. Although we – McPherson and Rosenberg — have never created work together, we can track our parallel histories and in doing so, recognize a particular trajectory that owes much to the very idea of the televisual. We are interested in television not for the sake of nostalgia, but a fuller understanding of its role and presence in the histories of screendance. In order to further articulate this, in June 2023, we interviewed each other about the topic of this essay:

Douglas Rosenberg: What was your entry point into video as an art form and its relationship with dance, Katrina?

KM: My impulse stemmed from a wish to bring dance to a wider, more diverse audience through making dance for television. But I was not specifically emulating anything that I had seen. I grew up in a household with no TV and had limited access as a student. It was the *possibility* of televisual dance that inspired me. It was also the idea of intervention. How about you, Doug, how did you find your way to this field?

DR: Television is in my DNA. Studying video and performance in the early 1980s at the San Francisco Art Institute, I was part of a milieu of first-and second-generation video artists, all of whom had come through training in the various "traditional" art forms and worked with a porous understanding of disciplinary boundaries, but with the conviction that what they were doing, inventing video art, was indeed something like a calling. The landscape of video art, with its festivals and distribution systems, was very much like that of contemporary screendance.

KM: Having studied dance at Laban in London in the mid-late 1980s, I grew into my professional life alongside and with the expansion of screendance. At the time, in countries such as the UK, USA, Australia, France and the Netherlands, interest by broadcasters in dance for television was at a new high, in Canada, Bravo had launched as a television service dedicated to film and the performing arts, and in the UK during the 1980s, Channel Four and the BBC were experimenting with new formats for televising art, and dance.

DR: In the States, shows like *Alive From Off Center* appeared on television, expanding the consciousness of its viewers through ground-breaking, intermedia projects and collaborations between choreographers musicians, visual artists, etc. It was broadcast weekly from Minnesota Public Television and was hosted for a while by Laurie Anderson and featured incredible work by collaborative teams of artists, choreographers, video makers, musicians and others. It seemed like it had slipped under the radar and found a place through television in the counterculture of the moment. The series coincided with an early iteration of the culture wars (around 1984), when a group of artists referred to as the "NEA Four" were excoriated for accepting government funding from the National Endowment of the Arts for their anti-establishment, sex-positive, performative work. That these two things could happen simultaneously was made possible

because the right-wing in America had not yet set its sights on dismantling funding for public broadcasting as they had for support of the arts generally through the National Endowment for the Arts.

June Watanabe, Douglas Rosenberg, 1987

Randomoptic Video Piano, Vanessa Smith (dancer) Anna Gillespie (piano), Katrina McPherson, 1991

KM: It's so interesting because what emerged from this era was a new generation of 'hybrid video dance' artists, educated in dance and in film or video, who began to embrace the screen rather than the stage as the primary site for their movement-based practice. These included, amongst others, Becky Edmonds, Miranda Pennell, Michele Fox, and Lucy Cash in the UK, Evann Siebens and Litza Bixler in the USA, Laura Taler in Canada and Tracie Mitchell in Australia. Like me, these were not choreographers who made work for the theatre who then collaborated with directors to make one-off works for television. Nor were we directors who gravitated toward dance as a subject for our films and videos. Our training in and embodied knowledge of both movement making and film/video production shaped our experimental and distinctive screen-based practices.

DR: When I was in graduate school at the San Francisco Art Institute, there were a number of vibrant artist-run spaces in the city that were showing video art and experimental dance and theatre…and there were community video production spaces where artists could become community television producers and have their work broadcast on the stations at the far end of the dial. I had begun to take dance classes and other body-based workshops while studying video art and performance at art school and San Francisco had a rich and diverse arts scene that flowed from a very Bohemian aesthetic, so dance companies collaborated with visual artists and poets and there was a lot of interdisciplinarity. Folks had migrated to San Francisco from New York and were aware of the Judson Church Group and the work of Cunningham and Cage. The Korean born video artist Nam Jun Paik was in that mix too… I took a workshop with him at Video Free America, an artist-run video production facility in San Francisco in the 80s. And I was lucky to connect with the Bay Area choreographer June Watanabe, with whom I had taken modern dance classes and began a decade-long working relationship. We began to find ways to combine video with dance in a live, theatrical situation which, of course, led to making work directly for the camera.

KM: In the summer of 1988, two things happened that would determine the direction of my life. Firstly, Bob Lockyer taught a four-day workshop on television dance for choreographers at the Laban Centre Theatre. Although aimed at established choreographers, I persuaded Marion North, Director of Laban, that I needed to do this course and, a newly graduated student, I was awarded a place. We worked with dancers from Matthew Bourne's *Adventures in Motion Pictures* (Bourne had also studied at Laban) and a small team of camera operators and editors, Bob Lockyer introduced us to the foundational concepts and techniques for adapting dance into the televisual space. We had the opportunity to direct the cameras and the live vision mixing, each making our own screen version of one of A.M.P.'s live choreographic works. It was enormous fun, and I was immediately hooked. Despite having no idea how as a young female dance artist, I felt instinctively that this was the direction that I wanted to take my work and career. Also, that summer, *Dance Theatre Journal* had a special issue focused on the *Dance Lines* series that was being made for Channel 4 at the time. This became an important source of conceptual inspiration for me!

DR Ha! I think my equivalent was the catalog for Amy Greenfield and Elaine Summers' curation, called *FilmDance*, the famous little black book from an exhibition of screenic work in all moving image formats from the 1890s through 1983. that catalog was filled with images and critical writing by artists and others. This floated around the screendance world for years, often in xerox form and remains essential reading.

KM: Yes, and so, there were not yet any institutional spaces that recognized video dance or screendance as an autonomous form and so no formal learning opportunities. My wish to learn and experiment with the technologies and processes of video production led me to the influential Electronic Imaging postgraduate diploma at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design in Dundee. This ground-breaking, practice-oriented course was equipped with state -of the art video and audio making-equipment, embedded in an art college and many of the tutors were influential and emergent video artists of the time, including Lei Cox, Rose Gerrard and Steve Partridge. It was there that I started to combine my embodied knowledge of postmodern dance practices with the video art ideas that I encountered to make experimental dance for and with the television screen.

DR: Similarly, I also had no training in combining dance and video as such. In the mid 1980s I was simply combining everything that interested me into the space of the screen in the context of "performance," which I understood to be quite broad. Around that same time, June Watanabe and I received a commission from the American Dance Festival to collaborate on a work for the stage, so spent the summer there making a largescale piece that combined dance and video as inseparable from each other. That led to a decades-long job for me at ADF documenting dance and starting a class in "videodance" that I taught for many years there. It was during that time that I began to see my work in the context of broadcast television and had a number of projects featured on television in various situations.

KM: Whilst at DJCA, I became fascinated by the idea that video dance might disrupt and alter the flow of broadcast television and be seen by people who were not necessarily seeking it out. I knew of David Hall's *TV Interruptions* which were commissioned and broadcast by Scottish TV in 1971. I had also read that Merce Cunningham had asked what would happen if 30 seconds of dance appeared on television unannounced and so I experimented with this idea in *A Space of Time* (1991), a series of 8 x 30 second video dance pieces which I made in collaboration with dance artists Vanessa Smith and Karen Grant, with whom I co-directed the experimental group Randomoptic Pick Up Company. Fellow Electronic Imaging student Bel Emslie created animated elements that echoed the themes of the locations using cutting edge technologies of the time, for example, the computer graphics workstation Quantel Paintbox. With everything assembled, I then spent many hours in the spaceship flight deck-like edit suit, layering images, altering tape speeds, mixing channels, keying and composted the thirty second pieces. Watching *A Space of Time* now, I see the in-the-moment decisions on timing and opacity that give each 30 second video dance a distinct identity; there are hesitations, missed moments and glorious combinations in those cracks – my embodied exploration of the televisual medium.
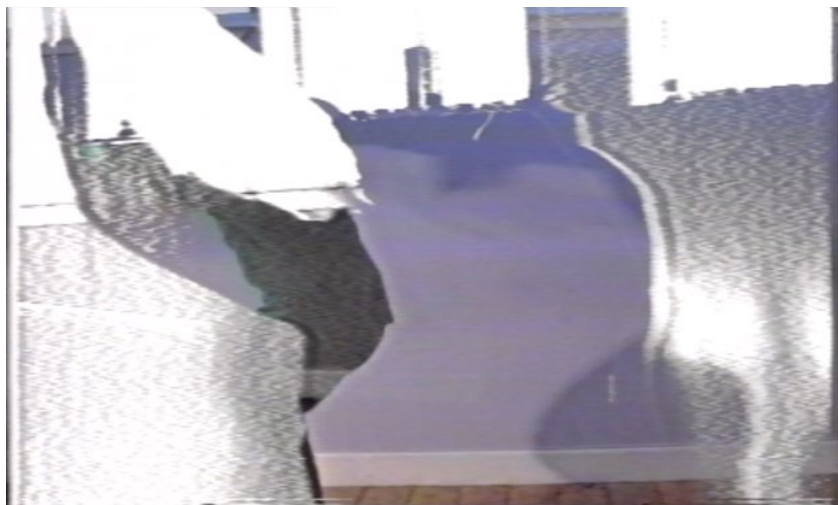
Still from A Space of Time, Katrina McPherson, 1991

Still from A Space of Time, Katrina McPherson, 1991

Still from La Mécanique, Douglas Rosenberg, 1986

DR: I performed in my own work often in electronic or actual landscapes. As I was coming from the world of Video Art and Performance, site-specificity was very important for me and something that informed my work for screen as well. In 1989, the filmmaker James Byrne curated a program called, *Eyes Wide Open: New Directions in Dance and Performance Video* at Dance Theater Workshop in New York. My work was included amongst a diverse group of artists working across disciplines to create performative work for the screen. Included in that show were folks like Arnie Zane, Sally Silvers and filmmaker Henry Hills and others for whom video space was a new frontier for the exploration of bodies on screen. James Byrne had directed an exquisite film with Eiko and Koma called *Lament* which I had seen, and the show at DTW helped clarify that what I was doing was part of some larger move that artists outside of my community were thinking about. It really allowed me to conceptualize dance (on screen) in a very expansive way.

Still from La Mécanique, Douglas Rosenberg, 1986

KM: 1995 was the moment when I was able to take the experimental video dance practice that I had been developing for 7 years into the broadcast arena, and it was through myself, dancer-choreographer Marisa Zanotti and composer Phillip Jeck being commissioned by Bob Lockyer and Rodney Wilson to make a 5-minute Dance for the Camera. Pace was experimental on all levels, from the improvised-score based approach to movement, camera and editing, through its non-linear, non-narrative structure to the state-of-the art technologies used to make it. Despite its aesthetic seeming lo-fi by today's standards, we filmed *Pace* on hi-8 video tape and edited on Avid, both cutting-edge technologies in the mid-1990s that required the BBC to make special dispensation to broadcast.

The journey of a work like *Pace traces the* evolving and shifting sites for screendance over the past three decades, an example of how the commissioning of experimental work, championed by someone as forward-looking and open to challenge as Bob Lockyer, can enable work that sustains and contributes beyond its initial site and stated intention. First broadcast on BBC2, *Pace* was subsequently screened at international festivals, including Oberhausen Short Film Festival in Germany and the specialist IMZ Dance Screen, where it was projected in a large-screen cinematic format. *Pace* was then included in some VHS collections sold at specialist bookshops, before upgrading to DVD for distribution as part of a collection of dance films that I had directed called *Five Video Dances* (2006). Over the years, *Pace* has been analysed and written about in books and articles, as well as by students in their theses and dissertations. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, *Pace* found its audience in galleries when it was curated by John Akomfrah to be part of the *History is Now* exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery in 2015, and it was included in the CutLog exhibition at the Royal Scottish Academy gallery in Edinburgh in 2019. *Pace* is now viewed on the Internet, probably most often on a smartphone.

DR: Yes, it is interesting and a bit confounding, that the histories of screendance do not live in a perpetual archive in the way that the creative output of other art forms does. Of course, we all

have personal archives, living somewhere on Vimeo or old hard drives, etc. But, I am not sure that my own work is best accessed in a decontextualized version of internet ephemera. The festival model functions in a way that leads to the virtual evaporation of the work of screendance artists almost as it is being presented. The success of the field is perhaps also its most pressing problem, which is, how do we translate the global phenomena of screendance to some sort of sustainable and flexible, accessible archive? You and I have talked about our shared histories and the way we have navigated our artform over many years. I still am of a mind that, as artists we learn from our histories and that access to a broad archive of work in the field, whether it be painting, quilting or screendance, reinforces the present and offers some kind of foundational knowledge from which to push away from or gravitate toward. A festival recently included my film called, *Of the Heart*, from the mid 2000s, in a 20-year survey of screendance. It was amazing the see the piece in the context of other films from that time frame along with newer work. In such curations, you can see time passing, you can see the changes in the way artists perceive the medium and you can see the threads that persist as we consider bodies on screen across decades. Rosalind Krauss has noted that media-based work does not exist outside of "the replay." I would add that it must also be written into existence by those of us who remember its histories and those who are curating the histories of any moment via the objects and gestures of artists.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH BOB LOCKYER

Bob Lockyer, former executive producer for dance programs at BBC
Television and founding chair of Dance UK, was interviewed by Douglas Rosenberg at the University of Brighton in 2008. This interview was transcribed from video.

Douglas Rosenberg: I'll start off with some history—basic stuff: how did you start; what were you thinking; what was your plan; what happened; how did you get to where you are; how did you get to this point here—?

Bob Lockyer: Well, my professional working life was at BBC television. Television at that time (and I should say that when I left it ceased to be) was a creative medium. Writers were writing for television—the television play. It happened in America, it happened in Europe, it happened in England and elsewhere, but the major problem [was] that choreographers making dance programs weren't getting a chance. There was dance on television, but that was mainly either replays, or things that were brought into the television studio. I mean, it's hard to remember when I started; the idea of videotape was very new. The idea of a digital camera—I don't even know if it was Mr. Sony's dream or not—if there was a Mr. Sony. The first bit of videotape, which I would actually keep in my wallet to show people [was] two inches wide. You couldn't cut it directly, and it cost a vast amount of money. But, I really felt that choreographers, if we could find some choreographers, should use the medium of television. A national broadcasting organization was the only way to do it, because you didn't have lightweight equipment.

Actually, the first chance I had as a director was working with Lynn Seymour on a project, which was based on the poem "The Swan." I've actually got [to get] it out to look at tomorrow—just to see how good or bad it is—because I haven't decided whether I am going to screen it at something. It lasted fifteen minutes, was set to a string quartet, and it was totally created for the camera. In fact, it was much more created for the camera than was planned because, for various reasons, we ran out time and, at the last moment, we had to reduplicate shots to make up the time. The thing was, it was being what I call 'washing line.' The washing line is the music, and then we had to fit the visuals to the washing line; the music wasn't written afterwards.

That was the first thing we did and then [because of] various funding difficulties, nothing else happened; we were bringing in works and making work in the television studio of stage works, but we were not making creative works. That chance came at the BBC when Mrs. Thatcher decided, in her crusade against the BBC, that the BBC had to have twenty-five percent of its output made by independents; that immediately allowed us to go to work with the arts council. And so, dance for the camera was born as a result of Mrs. Thatcher's right-wing attack on the BBC, trying to make production companies make work. That was the birth of dance for the camera.

DR: As far as the starting point . . . it would be helpful to have a date.

BL: You see, it must be . . . I think we're talking the late eighties, I think. I'm terribly bad about dates. I'm just always looking ahead; I'm never looking back. I suppose I should have looked up and seen—but I think it must be the late eighties, early nineties; it's about ten years. Where are we now? About ten or twelve years. Out of that collaboration with the arts council, we made over fifty films; which is quite something.

DR: So let me ask you, because you sort of slid into this notion that dance and television went together, or should go together. Can you go back now and talk a little bit about why? First of all, what was your interest in dance? And second of all, why did you think the marriage would be valuable?

BL: Well, I got into dance because I'm dyslexic. In the days of live television, you had to prompt actors. You prompted actors with a little button that you pressed, and that cut out the sound leaving the studio and leaving the transmitters. So, you gave them a prompt from the prompt corner in the theater. And I got that completely up the spout one day and was sent home from the BBC; it was: "Go home at once!" Then I was called back and they said, "Oh, you must work with Margaret Dale," who was sort of an ex-dancer who worked at the BBC doing dance programs. She mostly brought the Royal Ballet into the studio. But, she worked with [Birgit] Culberg, and various other people, bringing them into the studio to make work, to make television versions of stage works. I started working with her and got involved with Peter Wright, who came in as a television director for a time, before he went back to the theater. I started writing scenarios of short dance films, some of which were made, and some weren't. I just felt absolutely, just strongly, that the choreographic eye was something that was important to bring to the screen. I think there are choreographers who are not interested in it in any way at all; it just does not cross their mind. They don't understand what the camera can do. I mean, I think, it's where the moment of creation happens. In making a dance for the stage—it is in the rehearsal room [first]—then it ends up on stage. In making a film, you have the rehearsal process, the shooting process, and the creation really happens in the cutting room. Certain choreographers are not interested in that process at all. Others of them will just stay there, working away, discovering what one frame, two frames, can do to the whole meaning of the complete film, and are really fascinated by it. That's what we were trying to do—what I was trying to do—was to give them another form of expression.

DR: You're sort of articulating an arc of activity from, more or less, restaging choreographic works for television to—towards the end of your work, which you did at the BBC—creating work out of whole cloth. So, that's quite an arc and the end product is quite different, I think.

BL: Totally different.

DR: So can you talk about how that evolution occurred? And what occurred in that evolution?

BL: Well, I suppose working for a public broadcast . . . I absolutely believe the best stage work should be made available to as many people as possible. And, as the touring costs of dance companies increased enormously, the opportunity of seeing work, I felt, was terribly important.

That's what I mainly did; most of my time at the BBC, I was a director who brought stage works into the studio, and re-created them. But, what I then discovered—that I knew—was the whole idea that screen-time and stage-time is something that is very, very different. [When] you are directing something that then already existed, you had to be very careful not to let the cat out of the bag too early, or you were left with a bag. If you're dealing in a narrative, which is a story line, there were needs for reaction, counter-reaction, because everybody by then had a television, and understood the language of television, and the screen. They understood the screen language, which didn't necessarily work with the stage work. And that's what I was trying to do, was to give choreographers—directors liked to work with choreographers—the opportunity to understand that. [To] use what the screen can do, and what the juxtaposition of shots can do, because the frame is all you have. Whereas, on the stage, you are sitting there and you have no proof where the audience is actually looking. Some people may be looking into the eyes of the person sitting next to them or looking at the stage, but not looking at the center of what the choreographer was thinking about. In a funny way . . . I always said that . . . if you . . . bring a work into the studio, to film a stage work, you actually don't need all those things with the lighting, because the lighting is there to direct the audience at what to look at, what the choreographer wants people to look at. So, in fact, the lighting and the cutting of the script are almost identical.

DR: So where was the transition point, then, for you?

BL: Well, there was never really a transition point, because they both kind of went along in parallel. I mean, the other problem is one of cost. If you were doing a work that was already created, it's actually the creation costs that have been paid for—the dancers have danced them, and worked them. So, if you take something like a Lloyd Newson or DV8 work, "Enter Achilles," which we did, or "Strange Fish," the film versions, which are totally different from the stage versions, which actually came at the end of the production period. They had been produced, they had worked on the stage, they had toured—perhaps in some cases for a year or eighteen months—and then they were re-made with original performers for a film. That process was very exciting and very different, because what happened was, in both cases, the setting of them became totally realistic. In "Enter Achilles," it moved from a strange stage set into an old disused pub—in real spaces—and the dancers re-inhabited this old pub with all its furnishings.

DR: So, how did that happen?

BL: Well, that was a decision that Lloyd made with some discussion with me, mainly on his own. He just knew that what works in the theatrical space would not work in television. You are so used to seeing reality, whether it's a war in Iraq, or you're watching nature programs, it's based on reality. Therefore, that's what he . . . that's how he did it. I think that the whole idea of the theatrical would not have worked; a great ramp stage that lifted up like a craggy mountain at the end is a very theatrical thing. So, the whole thing changed, and in the same way, time-wise, it shrunk from ninety minutes to a television hour. So, forty minutes of the material was cut away, for the reason that one close-up can tell you a lot more than a three-minute dance, perhaps. And that, I think, is something that choreographers have yet [to understand]—that you actually, with small gestures, are telling enormous stories.

DR: When you're talking, I'm thinking of the parallels between what you're describing and literary translations from text, books or fiction, to cinema. There's a . . . I never thought about this before . . .

BL: Yeah, there's a great similarity . . .

DR: Because you're thinking about dance as the original text . . .

BL: Yes . . .

DR: Which is being translated, in a way, in the same way that any other text would be translated . . .

BL: Yes—so yes, I think that's it. Except, often in a dance situation you have . . . the music is actually again, the washing line . . . and you can't take four bars out of the original piece of music, if it's something incredibly well known. But, you can do it if the music has been written and it can be re-written or re-used. I mean, [that was] the advantage of just using Lloyd's piece, as an example. It was a montage, it had a soundscape; you could play with the links of all those things. Cut out a verse, in other words, and lose the two minutes of that [verse], but shorten it all.

DR: So, were you aware . . . was there a consciousness at all of what was going on, what was afoot, when you were making this kind of work? It was a pretty huge change, a pretty powerful cultural phenomenon.

BL: Yeah, I think there was a political move at the BBC at the beginning, which was the BBC as a patron, an arts patron; and that certainly was one of the pushes. Whether that came as a result of what we had done . . . they suddenly started writing about it, and it was in the annual report. As the importance of the BBC as a patron of the arts, whether that came first or we were first . . . I have a feeling it came after, I think we were leading the way. I mean, I pushed at a slightly open door. I'm not sure that they knew what they were getting, but we succeeded in winning successfully quite a lot of awards with the project, so I think it was quite exciting. But then, politically, it has now completely changed; the whole process of commissioning has changed, and it has sadly fallen off the table.

DR: But, for better or for worse, you created a model.

BL: Yes, yes, we created a model and I was incredibly lucky that I then went around the world talking about it, and teaching it, so I was quite lucky that way. And that, I think, was a bit [of a] strange way, because I was on the staff and getting a salary . . . and there were down times. If I could fill the down times by going somewhere, I was out of their minds and out of the way. So, I was incredibly lucky. I went to Australia and worked with various people there, went to Canada a couple of times, and Bannf, where I met Katrina McPherson, [while] working. I mean, so I was incredibly lucky.

DR: As is everyone else in the community. Again, for better or for worse, you created a model.

BL: We created a model, whether it was the right model or not, I'm not sure. The problem was the one model is then taken up, for good or for worse around the world, you might say, almost. But, I mean, it was a model of plurality—if that's the right word—yes, a plurality of funding. It allowed a broadcaster and two major arts funders, or people, and the company itself, to come in with the amount of money you needed.

DR: So let me just state this question again: For better or worse, your activities, left, or created a model that became the dominant model. If you could reflect on that a little bit and start off by describing what this model is, first of all.

BL: I suppose "Dance For The Camera" created a model—the BBC and the Arts Council created a model, which was taken up around the world. [It] was the idea that teams of people, a choreographer and a director, come up with an idea, a creative idea. They submit that on one side of paper. Originally, they then went away with development money, and if they were lucky with the development [money], they went to the commissioning stage, made the work at the end, and we as the commissioning editors—like in all films—came in, looked at it, accepted it, or didn't accept it. That's it, briefly. The idea was that it allowed [us] to have a large number of people coming in, putting in ideas, and then slowly working down to people who were getting the commission. I think, on the whole, that [it] was quite successful. The problem was, over the ten years, more people wanted to come in, and there was an encouragement of the new people. I think if there was a criticism, it was the old stages, or the people on a learning curve of experience [who] didn't get a chance to have another go, or two goes or three goes. You're not going to make a masterpiece- or perhaps, you are going to make a masterpiece the first time. Perhaps not the second, but it's the third, fourth time [you] begin to understand the language you're working with. I think there was, then, the whole problem of the duration. I think we were all very concerned, but certainly the powers that be at the BBC wanted something that would fill the television slots. And to actually make a twenty-minute dance film—twenty-five, thirty minutes, or whatever the necessary slot—takes a lot of time, and a great deal of money. So that's why fifteen minutes, for example, was the maximum we did for the dance on the camera. We did five and we did nine, and I think the sort of ten-minute slot was the best. [It] was manageable in the budget, and in the time, and actually with the people, working with the people, [they] could actually do [it] with the money that they were given. I mean the thing was that we were absolutely insistent that the creative team actually did get some money out of it. So often in arts things, doing things for love becomes so important; but I think it's important that you actually earned your bottom dollar.

DR: Well, I'm using the term "model," but part of the model . . . once again, if you could go back and sort of talk about this. You described some formal constraints, which lead to the residual effect of, in a way, this sort of short attention span.

BL: Yes, I think I, yes . . .

DR: Do you want to just go with that?

BL: Yes, I'm trying to yes, I suppose, for better or for worse, the dance for camera projects set up a formulaic system. It was very much based on television and the whole idea of television, and sustaining how long people could watch television for. I always think that you don't actually watch television—you listen to it. You move out of the room, you go onto this . . . it's very rare that you sit there glued to the television. You listen to it while you stroke the cat, have a cigarette, glass of wine, or whatever. So, it was working within the formats of television that these projects were devised. And what was fundable, and what was acceptable would get screen time. So that's why they were a series of short, short films, and not hour-long films. Also, budget-wise, one was never going to get a budget that would allow a choreographer to make an hour-long dance film. In fact, I don't think, even now, there is anywhere a choreographer that could make an hour-long dance film without some training, knowledge of the medium. Perhaps there is now. But I don't know . . . whether they would actually want to is another thing. So, I mean, we built this thing, but the other great regret about "Dance For The Camera" was the actual distribution of it. It was designed for television to have one transmission, or two transmissions. And that's all it got, and they were forgotten. The great problem with dance, with dance itself on stage, is that there's no past. If you are a student who is studying dance now, and you want to know who Martha Graham was, then you can dig out the old movies of Martha, because they are actually available. But if you were looking at dance in the United Kingdom, it's very hard to look up, and find footage of the Ballet Rambert, for example, in the fifties, or early Christopher Bruce; all those things are not there for you to look at as a dance student. And I think that is a problem. Also, students of dance for the camera, which now, [there are] seemingly courses are starting up all over the place, they have no idea of the past, or what people have done. The work of David Hinton, and his work "Touch" and "Birds," and those sorts of things, and his work with Lloyd are not really available for study. So, everybody starts new, which I think is one of the great sadnesses.

DR: One of the other things that I wanted to talk to you about a little bit, because I keep coming upon new things, one of the things that I've been thinking a lot about lately, is the nature . . . or not nature, of the actual curating in the screendance community. For instance, a festival shows ten or fifteen films—they have nothing to do with each other; there's no relationship, you have to make a relationship. So, it's like walking through a gallery seeing paintings of fifty different people. So again, for me, it's become the status quo; and for me, it's a big concern. I don't know if you want to talk about that. Things like genres in dance films . . .

BL: I think what we did at the BBC, at the arts council . . . we made a number of films, fifty films; and the development of the work in Australia, in New Zealand, in Canada. Everyone was so excited that they actually made their five films. They were very proud and then showed them, and the idea of dance screen exhibits, and dance screen festivals opened up. And everyone said "how wonderful" or "gosh, how not wonderful." We've now got to the stage where there is a body of work, a considerable body of work. I have no idea how much, but I suppose there must be 5–10,000 small dance films around. But, there's really no one who knows anything about them, or who can get a hold of them. You know, there are a number of curators who curate the festivals, but often their festivals are just screening what has happened in the latest films. They're

not saying, well what I'd like to do is a film series about the work of one particular choreographer/director or however; or one period of time. There is a sense that being able to look at your past, no one is actually looking, and writing, and talking about the art form. And, it's funny that that's what we need to do. We need to be proud of our past and be extremely critical of the work that has gone—but creatively critical about it. We just can't say it's all rubbish, but why we think it is rubbish . . . and writing about how people are using the language, the choreographic language, and the filmic language, and that's not happening. Well, it's not happening as far as I know in the UK, I don't think it's happening anywhere, and that is a great loss. Because, whatever it is, it's actually having a body of work that you can read about things. You can say to people, "here, have you seen this article by somebody?" You can print it off; it may be on the web, but when you print it out and read it, the art form has come of age. At this moment, I don't think we have come of age; we're still in the playroom I think.

DR: It seems to me that much of the feeling, in general, now is simply based on circumstance. So in other words, there's funding for this or that, the circumstance is that it produces some films; or we started a festival, and they've gotten entries from a hundred people. So, the circumstance is that they show these. It's reactive rather than proactive.

BL: Well yes, it's much . . . yes . . . are you going to be proactive, or are you going to be reactive, as you say. I think, you know, it's much easier, in a funny way, to be reactive than it is to be proactive. You know, it's easier to say, "look I've got these twenty-five films which I've discovered, which are wonderful, and we've got to have some money to screen them." That's [more] possible to get together [than to] say "I want to commission these twenty-five people to make films based on—" or whatever the thing, you know the idea, the concept is: loneliness, oneness, whatever; to find that kind of money to commission work, is incredibly hard. It's also the same thing of not having a past; you if you can't get hold of people's films to say, "look this is Laura Taler: I'd very much like to get Laura to make a film about being a refugee, or about being a stranger in a new city." Or whatever the concept is, it's very hard to get, very, very hard—certainly in the United Kingdom. Looking at the cinema, and more and more in television as well, it's a totally written medium, the whole understanding of funding is for the written word. It is the script; everyone can have their opinion on a script it can be re-written—people can talk for hours about 'ands' and 'buts'; and should scene 14a come before14c; and what about if we transport it all to New York, wouldn't that be better because I don't think we can sell it in the Midwest if it's Ipswich in the east part of England, it's got to be in America, and we can give you more money for it. They've got something in their hands that they can work on, but if you're working on a choreographic idea, which is a physical idea, it is incredibly hard to explain what it is. To explain to somebody who has no knowledge of movement, no knowledge of the person you're fighting for, that's the difficult thing. Choreographers, some are wonderfully articulate about their work, and some aren't, and that's the really difficult thing. How do you describe a dance film if you're going off to raise funding for it?

DR: Which would bring up the question, how do you describe a dance?

BL: Yeah.

DR: Once you begin to describe movement, you demystify it, and it becomes . . .

BL: Well, well you know, I was just thinking, Pina Bausch was in London a few months ago with "Café Muller." I think everybody in that audience had a different view about what it was all about. What were those people pushing their way through those chairs, opening those big doors and making their way into the room? What was it all about? Why was it gray, strange, and what was it? That's the wonder of it, is that it's actually working. You know, you switch on the telly and there are the mean streets of New York and the hallowed police car, you are immediately there, knowing where you are. The excitement about pure movement, I think, is that you're not quite sure where you are; although, we might understand so much more than people realize, by how people sit, what they do, how they walk. We know so much about people from that; I mean, body language tells all. Body language is ninety percent of communication. We do know what people are feeling if you go somewhere; you can see whether people are happy or sad; you can tell through body language, and that's what you can certainly do, I think, on film. Dance film is not about dancing on the screen, it's not Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, it's something other than that. It's interesting how little dancing, dance-screen work may have in it. I mean, you [can] choreograph with an eyebrow as excitingly as you can with a *grande jeté* across the stage; in fact, more powerfully. I think there are various moments in big movies where, if you start looking at them, there are sequences where there is no language at all. I'm getting ready to deliver this lecture, I was looking at the *The Leopard*, Visconti's film, and there's this party at the end, which lasts about twenty-five minutes. There's very little dialogue, and what dialogue they have doesn't matter to the story at all. You get the whole collapse of this man, the Prince going down, and suddenly discovering that old age is taking over, and youth is coming in, and the society that he has been brought up in is slowly beginning to collapse. It ends with, well it doesn't end but . . . with a wonderful scene, in close up of Burt Lancaster with a tear just coming into his eye. It is an amazing screen work. I've also looked at *Mon Oncle*, the Jacques Tati film. [In that film], the language doesn't matter; it's not mime, it's the use of real movement, in these cases, real historical settings that are coming to tell you things—telling you a great deal.

DR: So if you were now to describe any situation you want to describe, and see it through, what would you imagine dance film to be? If you could imagine a new era . . . maybe it's the same as before. If you could make it all up, what would your vision be?

BL: I'm not sure what my vision would be. I'm not sure if my vision would be very different from when I started out, which was giving people the opportunity to use the medium, and explore the medium in a new way. I think I would like—if I was given a million- or five-million dollars, or whatever—is to work with two or three people who I admire [and] to carry forward an idea which we could work towards in a different way, which may lead to something, to finding out something new. But, I think it takes time, and it takes creative time, and I think that's certainly, in choreography and in dance screen time, that's not what's there; there is not a possibility of really sitting down and thinking of ideas and storyboarding ideas, which you can then take somewhere. That's what I would like to see. I would like to be given three, twenty-minute films or something;

to commission three people who I admire enormously to make three different projects. I think it might take us into different areas.

DR: I'm also thinking about the transition. Your work was made for television.

BL: It was made for television because that's where I worked, and that's where the opportunities were. Television is this monster that ate material, and instead of showing another ballgame, why don't we show a bit of art? That's really why, I mean, I felt very strongly that the arts should get, and dance in particular, should get their moments of glory on telly.

DR: That's fine . . .

BL: I think what has changed now, is that with multi-screens, with everything, with the digital age, with the lowering of the common denominator, it's become very different. The problem is, you know, the worldwide web and being able to download projects. But, whatever you can do, whether you're pay-to-view or [however] you are going to get that money, that initial money [must come] from someone to make the project. Whatever happens, you may open up the possibilities of screenings. [Wherever] you do it, it's there, and you can see it on your telly, or wherever you watch it: on your mobile phone or your computer. The initial funding has got to be there to make the film. Or, you can go away and of course make something, shoot it on your mobile phone and transmit it on YouTube, or however you do it. Some of it is, I'm afraid, crap; a lot of it is crap. But, it's giving people time, really, to think. Thinking time and development time, which is most important.

DR: So at the beginning, the translation issue . . . for instance, *Laurence of Arabia* was made for the wide screen; it suffers when it's viewed on television. So, the opposite of that: the work that's made for the television screen has been taken, again, fully formed and . . .

BL: Put on the big screen . . .

DR: But when brought into the festival situation and projected really large, there's not much thought about what happens in that translation. Do you know what I mean? I wonder if you have any thoughts about that; the way that dance film has just migrated from one venue to another without some sort of context or consideration; if that's an issue.

BL: I don't mind where it's [screened], as long as it's screened well. I don't mind whether it's appearing on the small screen or a big screen. I object if it's clipping bits off the top, or if it's slightly out of focus, or those things. I'm very surprised sometimes at how good something made for the small screen appears on the big screen. Then again, the amount of what you can get away with when it's only being the tiniest amount of space on your television screen . . . when you blow it up, there becomes, suddenly, a bloody big hole in it or something. You know, continuity goes to somewhere- I don't know. You don't necessarily notice on a television screen, but you do notice when it's blown up large. In the wonderful world of high definition, [there are] going to be even more of those changes; things are going to be made clearer. You know, as the technology

gets better, it shows everything. Whereas in the days where the technology was very simple and very straightforward, it was black and white, or perhaps in color, you could hide an awful lot of things behind it. Now you can see it, if you look at old movies and things. We're now so used to wanting to see it all—warts and all—but that all costs a great deal of money.

DR: You mentioned earlier the Lloyd Newson, the DV8 stuff, which was rife with content—I mean it was deep work. Again, what seems to happen in most, in many, movements, as more and more people come to the form, what lasts *is* form. So it seems like you might see a hundred dance films now—and in my opinion most of them would be more formal: a dancer in the rain, a dancer in a building—without any sort of depth . . .

BL: Yeah I think there is a danger, but I think this has to do with being young, and growing from things you want to do with your friends. You think, "gosh, isn't it wonderful? Where can we go film?" I think if I see another disused factory, where everyone clomps along in a disused factory, everyone seems to have to make their film in a disused factory. A lot of it, no thought is given to it. What is the disused factory bringing to what you're dancing about? You could just take the dance, and put it on stage, and it would be just as viable. In fact, it might be better because what you're doing is just filming a piece of dance. You're not using the film camera to say something different in the editing process. When people say, "Let's record my dance," that's what a lot of people are doing. You've got to make the first dance step you make believable. If it's not believable in the context that you're dancing it in, you've lost your audience straight away. If you lost them, then it's no more than a pop video.

What we are trying to do is something that has more meaning, which requires thought, rather than sitting watching a pop video. I think that's not what people are being taught, or thinking about—the actual contextualization of their movement, and their film—and what the idea [is]. Is there really a true idea, and is theatric movement the way to express this idea, on film or on the screen? And often, that's not it; often, you just have a very nice piece of dance that could have happened on the stage, which people film. What Lloyd Newson did, was take a stage work and the ideas—intellectual ideas—behind the stage work, which may have been two to three years of intellectual study and thought, and rehearsal, and then 18 months of performance with a group of actor dancers, which then was squeezed out and made, condensed down to a piece of screen work. In that condensing down—because that's what the screen does, it condenses down—all you want is a shot of me and a shot of somebody, and there is an interaction taking place that we don't necessarily have to express in a dance way or in a melodic way; so it's actually what dance movement, dance screen movement is . . .

Where does the art form fit in, if it is an art form? It doesn't fit in the world of the cinematic literature. It doesn't fit in the world of television criticism because there isn't any around the world. It doesn't fit with British Film Institute cinema or all those things because it's not cinema. It's not in the movement of the art film business, which is the big business at the moment really. So it has its practitioners, but it doesn't have its supporters and that's the major problem. I think in the next two to three years, [we have] to find a way, [by] finding supporters who will write about it, talk about it and be able to screen it. And then I think it'll be able to grow.

DR: It's, ironically, kind of a blank screen right now . . .

BL: Yeah. Dance film comes out of, and it's part of, the television and the movie business and the role of the producer and the executive producer, in that business is a very creative and important one. And I think that the role of the independent artist working alone in his garret, or her garret, making this product, is quite difficult. I mean, I think if you're a writer, you may well send chapters of your book to somebody you trust to look at. On the screen, I think that there is a sense that you have got to share as a dance filmmaker. If you're making dance film, you've got to share that work with other people in the creative process. Film is a shared creative process. In a funny way, you can now do it on your computer at home in one room. When I started, it was always a community that you were working with—your film editor or your video editor—who were working together. He would suggest things and you would suggest things, and you say, "Well I don't like that, but I like *that*. What if we combine those two?" I think that dance making, films and television programs have always been a community activity . . . And, I think that there is a danger of becoming just a one-man band, a solo thing. You get so focused in on what you want that you cannot necessarily, we say, see the wood through the trees. I think that the use of somebody coming with a clean eye to it is terribly important and that [it] would help a great number of films that I see. I mean, the theater in Europe has dramaturges and things like that, and I think that it's not just an isolated form. It's a people, it's a form where you need input all the time, and I think as much input as you can get makes your film that much better.

DR: We could talk forever. Let me ask you, is there anything that I haven't addressed that you . . .

BL: No, I can't think . . . can I think? No, I don't think there is. Leave that for another time.

MAKING THARP BARYSHNIKOV

Sally Banes, 2000
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In 1977, Twyla Tharp's *Making Television Dance*, an hour-long videotape made in collaboration with director Don Mischer for WNET's Television Laboratory, was aired nationally on PBS. This paper is an analysis of a small portion of *Making Television Dance*, Tharp's brief solo, which ends the screendance event. I will argue that in this solo, Tharp seems to recorporealize herself as Mikhail Baryshnikov, even a Baryshnikov with enhanced powers. Watching the dance now, and thinking about the historical context of the piece relative to the emerging feminist movement of the 1970s, one wonders if she does this partly to assert through her screen-choreography a feminist political stance of women claiming equal rights with men, perhaps even claiming superior powers--as if to say, in this case, "Anything you can do, Misha, I can do better." Yet paradoxically, through her assertion of what one might call masculine "privilege" in a complexly layered gender-bending screen choreography, she also seems to argue for an inclusive androgyny that expands dance roles for both men and women.

In the mid-seventies, when WNET first commissioned her to create *Making Television Dance*, Tharp had reached a turning point in her career as a choreographer. She had moved from the downtown avant-garde (and the university and museum circuit in which some downtown dancers traveled) to commercial and artistic success, and her style and ambitions changed accordingly. In 1972, The Bix Pieces had its premiere at the International Festival of Dance in Paris. That dance, with elegant satin costumes and sensuous, silky dancing set to popular music of the 1920s, was far removed from the rigorous Tharp pieces of the late 60s--which were often complex meditations on mathematical structures danced in silence, for instance, *The One Hundreds*: "a hundred eleven-second segments...performed by two dancers in unison. Then five people each do twenty different segments simultaneously so that the one hundred segments are represented in one-fifth the time, and then one hundred people each do one segment in eleven seconds." The "Studio Introductions" section of *Making Television Dance* graphically traces Tharp's upward career trajectory in geographical and architectural terms, as she rehearses études for the individual members of her company in various dance studios, from her very first tiny and dilapidated studio on Great Jones Street off the Bowery to the high precincts of American Ballet Theatre's rehearsal halls uptown.

By the mid-Seventies, that is, Tharp, working in television and film and receiving commissions from major ballet companies, as well as producing seasons by her modern dance company in New York, had quite consciously become a commercial success--something still disdained by her peers in the downtown dance world. *Making Television Dance* has a distinctively 70s look, not only because of the ways the dancers and film crew dress, wear their hair, and talk, but especially because it mixes raw documentary black-and-white video with polished color images, underscores through both images and commentary the workliness of dance (and art), and intensely emphasizes process over product.

Indeed, we see a great deal of the backstage process of making this piece, but we never do see the entire dance piece performed live. And, of course, that is because this dance piece never existed "live." Studio audiences saw the dancing as it was being filmed, but the piece itself, made for the television screen, is inseparable from what the live studio audience could not see: the camerawork (closeups, long-shots, pans, and so on), the editing, and the video effects (such as keying, retrograde, multiple images, and superimposed freezes). What we, the television audience, see as the finished product--what was ultimately broadcast--is a composite of process and several different "finished" products. For *Making Television Dance* is basically a view of the inside, the not the outside, of a lengthy cine-choreographic process.

Making Television Dance is also very much a piece of the 70s in that it expresses certain feminist values--one of which is a brand of liberal civil-rights feminism, claiming equal rights for women on the dance stage and in the dance profession, as well as in the television studio (where very few women worked as directors) and in intellectual life. Tharp (and other women choreographers of the 70s) claimed equal rights for women by creating dance images of women as intellectual powerhouses. Tharp's work at this time parallels that of "liberal feminism," which sought equal opportunities for women in the workplace, at home, and under the law. In *Making Television Dance*, part of what we witness in the process is that Tharp is very much in charge of the project and, although experimenting with a new form, well on top of her learning curve in terms of dealing with television technology as well as the television crew. Her voiceover commentary, especially, signals her position as a woman who is confident and authoritative, an expert in her profession. In this respect, she claims equal rights with men to be in charge--to direct not only a dance company, but the making of a television program.

Yet I would say that in Tharp's work of the mid-70s one can also see other feminist strands, including a playful commitment to confusing gender codes and appearances, for other reasons than equal rights feminism--for aesthetic as well as moral purposes. Unlike her downtown peers, who created a dance community based on alternative political structures like the collective, where women could flourish in a supportive atmosphere, in the 70s Tharp chose to challenge the gender prejudices of the ballet establishment. She was well aware of the glass ceiling for women choreographers in the hierarchical world of ballet, where even in the twenty-first century, for the most part men create dances and women dance them (along with the occasional male superstar). And yet Tharp's account of her own assertive negotiations with the management of American Ballet Theatre regarding her contract for Push Comes to Shove sounds remarkably like Agnes de Mille's story of her own intransigence when it came to creating Rodeo for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in the early 1940s.

Of course, several of Tharp's works of the mid-1970s -and especially the solo in *Making Television Dance* -have something important in common with de Mille and with Rodeo, in that they set American vernacular country dancing into a ballet context (though in gender-bending ways that de Mille approached with her all-woman cast of the earliest version of *Rodeo* but could not, in the 40s, fully realize). Tharp may also have been inspired by Balanchine's various Americana dances, especially his *Square Dance*, originally choreographed in 1957 but revived for the New York City Ballet just in time for the U.S. Bicentennial in May 1976.

Though she didn't have a caller onstage, as Balanchine had in his *Square Dance*, Tharp's musical choice for the studio event in *Making Television Dance* was what she identifies as bluegrass music--perhaps better characterized as country fiddling closely related to square dance music. In this videotape, one of the things she creates is a screen-squaredance for herself. This, too, bespeaks a 70s sensibility. With the celebration of the Bicentennial and its attendant nostalgia for Americana in 1976, there was an enormous resurgence of square dancing; country dancing, line dancing, and country music were also linked to the bucolic hippie "back to the land" movement (of which Tharp herself briefly partook in the early 70s) and to the Foxfire movement.the 1970s. Indeed, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were known to be avid square dancers. In *Making Television Dance* and in her other works of this period that use country music, Tharp seems to embrace part of that countercultural ethos while also recognizing her need to emerge from it, to move on to a different role--that of a professional woman and serious urban artist (at the same time, she records in her autobiography, she was breaking up with her husband Robert Huot, whose art career she had always deferred to and who now had dropped out to live in the country; the result was that she moved to a downtown loft to become the single working mother of an infant).

In *Making Television Dance,* Tharp's love for both vernacular dancing and ballet dancing combine with her mathematical rigor and her dry sense of humor as she declares the television screen nearly a square and, through video effects, clones herself electronically eight times to dance all the parts in a minimalist square dance.

Before I analyze the solo, I want briefly to discuss the section of *Making Television Dance* in which Tharp and Baryshnikov rehearse *Once More, Frank* (1976), a series of dances Tharp created to Frank Sinatra songs. Television critic John O'Connor, in his review of *Making Television Dance* in the *New York Times*, calls Baryshnikov's presence gratuitous, but clearly it is not. For Tharp is building a visual homology between herself and Baryshnikov in this section, a homology that partly erases their gender differences and partly emphasizes them. That is, they may still be seen as a heterosexual couple, but a couple perfectly equal in stature, literally as well as figuratively, and in dance capacities.

Tharp writes, about the process of choreographing for Baryshnikov: "As though he had ingested my body, he would mime my action perfectly....Misha was an excellent mime and he always loved becoming characters--including me....Actually it was easy for him to pick up my movements because our proportions are uncannily similar." In *Push Comes to Shove*, she seems to capitalize on this mimicry and to transform Baryshnikov, during certain moments, into herself.

But if in *Push Comes to Shove*, she makes Baryshnikov Tharp, in *Making Television Dance*, Tharp performs the opposite operation. In making Tharp Baryshnikov, she takes on a male persona (just as she had earlier in some ways in *The Bix Pieces*). Tharp writes, very explicitly, "I have always felt that one of the things dance should do--its business being so clearly physical--is challenge the culture's gender stereotypes." In the solo section of *Making Television Dance*, Tharp's movements are clearly borrowed from a male repertory, both balletic and vernacular. She has

appropriated for herself what she calls Baryshnikov's "unsurpassed virtuosity in the male domain of ballet--jumps, multiple pirouettes, batterie."

In the solo, Tharp has simultaneously successfully borrowed from male balletic virtuosity and the loping cowboy stance and dance that de Mille's Cowgirl aimed for in *Rodeo*. At a distance (as in the rehearsal of the solo toward the end of the program), it's hard to tell whether this figure is male or female. Though seen in long shot at a distance, because there is also a smaller version of Tharp on screen, she seems to be comparatively large-scale, like a man. She has a short haircut that could serve either sex and is dressed in tight blue jeans, an open-necked white shirt, and shoes with chunky heels (all of which by the 70s were coded as appropriate for either gender). But in terms of country music/country dance culture, to wear blue jeans is to be coded as male. She makes bowlegged leg gestures; flails her arms; takes a wide stance; goes down to the floor to spin; does tight, virtuosic footwork; swivels her pelvis; swaggers; flexes her ankles; and pulls the body up into a sexy freeze. All of these movements are from the country dancing part of the equation, and they are coded as male. Indeed, some of them (for instance, the swagger and the scale of the arm and leg gestures) are marked as male in the larger culture. So Tharp has supplied us with all sorts of signs to read this as a male image.

In the voiceover narration, Tharp identifies herself as coming from the country ("things grow there," she says, marking country roots as vigorous, productive ones) and states that she associates bluegrass music with her father, who himself fiddled occasionally and on family trips would fight with her mother when Mrs. Tharp wanted to switch the car radio to the classical music station. Thus Tharp sets up a gendered as well as a class and national division of culture, in which classical music (and with it, perhaps, classical dancing) is identified as female, European, elite, and boring, while bluegrass music (and country dancing, including square dancing and eccentric solo dancing) is characterized as male, American, folksy, and vigorous. Clearly Tharp is interested in finding dance vigor and thus in poaching in male territory.

In the final version of the solo, Tharp introduces more balletic movements--multiple pirouettes, rondes de jambe, and high kicks or battements--but she has both Americanized them (showing, as she had in *The Bix Pieces*, the close relationship between the vocabularies of ballet and vernacular dancing) and deliberately appropriated them from the male side of the highly gender-coded ballet gamut. Her pirouettes are done with a typically male extended leg that traces a large arc in space as it moves from the front around the body to the back and then closes, rather than staying neatly folded and in place the whole time--as the "working" leg does during the turn in a female pirouette. Her leaps and jumps are large and extended, like a man's, including a big jump in splits, Russian-style. Her arms open wide, like a man's, and she doesn't point her foot, rejecting the canonically beautiful curve of the arched female foot and opting instead for a clunky male country look. In general, her presentation of her body is broad, almost cocky.

"Male movement," then, whether in country dancing or ballet, has to do with taking up space, with large bodily gestures, with the handling of the limbs as a single unit, and with asymmetrical footwork and arm movements, as well as with a certain assertive energy that Tharp taps in the solo. For instance, there is a moment in the solo--after she completes the multiple pirouettes--

when Tharp moves her arms around above her head as she makes large leg gestures. This is an image of spatial dominance and assertive agency that in our culture is coded as male and constrasts strongly with the female-coded dance image of striking a beautiful pose.

The camera, too, creates a "gender advertisement" (to borrow Erving Goffman's term) that at first seems masculine but then becomes complicated in terms of gender-coding. Tharp starts out as a small figure in the frame (mitigating the other masculine signs) and then grows much larger. Yet although her scale in the close shot, as she entirely fills the frame, seems to claim space in ways coded as male (as in the standard male choice to sit with legs wide apart, in contrast to the standard female choice to sit with legs crossed), the camera creates a striking ambiguity--a double coding--regarding gender. As it moves into a close shot, we can see that Tharp's body may in some ways look male (the clothing, the haircut, the movements) but is, indeed, female--closer up, we can now see, in that seemingly androgynous body, her full hips and delicate face. We can see her as <u>both</u> male and female.

With every jump, the image of Tharp frozen in the air lingers on the screen as the dance continues in real time. That is, through the particular video effect used in this section, Tharp ostentatiously appropriates the special trademark of Baryshnikov, known internationally at that time for his elevation and for the way he seemed endlessly to stay poised airborne during his jumps. (Compare Talley Beatty's suspended airborne movements in Maya Deren's *Study in Choreography for the Camera*.) And yet the video effects allow Tharp to surpass Baryshnikov, staying up in the air longer than would be humanly possible, even for that Russian superstar. In this screendance solo, Tharp recorporealizes herself as Baryshnikov, but she becomes a super-Baryshnikov, with augmented powers--powers heightened not by the "magic" so often associated with dance, especially with ballet and its fairytale themes, but by the down-to-earth, assertively feminist, harnessing of science through modern technology, which makes television dance.

Perhaps this "travesty dance," set to her father's favorite music, in some ways allows Tharp to become her father, or her father's favorite son. Perhaps it allows her to become that other father, Balanchine, in her choreographic creation of a brilliant fusion of ballet and vernacular dancing vying with his achievements in *Square Dance* as well as *Agon* and other ballets. Perhaps it allows her to finish de Mille's work by making a Cowgirl who truly becomes a Cowboy. But other aspects of it make clear that Tharp's competitive eye is on Baryshnikov. If in *Push Comes to Shove* he became Tharp, imitating her floppy, fluid, jazzy wiggles, in this solo Tharp becomes Baryshnikov.

And yet, even as she does so, she adds another layer of gender-bending to that recorporealization, mixing male and female, refracting the soft, raggedy movement she gave him in *Push* through a masculine stance--as if she were quoting Baryshnikov quoting her. After seeing *Once More, Frank* in this *Making Television Dance* solo, and even more so if we know *Push Comes to Shove*, we are led to see Baryshnikov as Tharp, and vice versa, and finally, as a result, to see Tharp as Baryshnikov as Tharp. This multiple layering of genders through intertextuality creates a complex image of androgyny that is in tune with the aspect of 70s feminism that challenged gender stereotypes. Rather than creating a twentieth-century version of travesty dancing in

which she "becomes a man," by recorporealizing herself as Baryshnikov in this particular way, Tharp enables both men and women to widen the purview of what they may dance, and to compete aesthetically--to compete in the best sense, for excellence--on a level playing field.

Biography

Sally Banes (1950-2020) was a performer, dance critic, historian, producer, and a pioneer in the field of dance studies. She wrote extensively and her books include the highly influential *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), *Before, Between, and Beyond: Three Decades of Dance Writing* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2007) and *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Duke University Press, 1993).