

Curatorial Practices for Intersectional Programming

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Abstract

Screendance finds its roots in the traditions of concert dance, museum culture, and film festivals. Film festivals - from which we borrow the structure for programming screendance - boast a history of discrimination towards bodies of color, varied gender expressions, bodies of different abilities, and more. Through an exploration of the history and socio-cultural context of film festivals in the west and dialogue with curators and directors from a handful of screendance festivals across the United States, this piece will present a set of curatorial challenges particular to our field, the creative solutions being explored by presenters and champions of screendance, and a consideration of where the field falls short, so we can better mitigate issues of underrepresentation of marginalized groups in screendance spaces.

Keywords: Screendance, Curation, Programming, Discrimination, Race, Film, Media

We do not discriminate. San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status in any of its activities or operations.¹

Many screendance festivals operating in the United States today have statements like the one above in their literature. If they do not, many festivals and curators hope and attempt to echo such sentiments in their work through their programming. While many screendance curators may be aware of issues of underrepresentation in media spaces and are working to embrace diversity in terms of the work they screen, the artists they support and the audiences they attract to their screenings, the challenges to producing inclusive creative spaces with respect to race and other identities are manifold. Issues of accessibility, implicit bias, and the ways screendance continues to be tethered to the institutions and traditions that precede it create barriers to fully realizing the dream of truly inclusive, equitable, and intersectional experiences for artists and audiences, alike.

Through an exploration of the history and socio-cultural context of film festivals in the west and dialogue with curators and directors from a handful of screendance festivals across the United States, this piece will present a set of challenges particular to our field, the creative solutions being explored by presenters and champions of screendance, and a consideration of where the field falls short, so we can better mitigate issues of underrepresentation of marginalized groups in screendance spaces.

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Screendance, with its ties to cinema, museum culture and concert dance finds its roots in a long, Eurocentric history of discursive socio-political discourse that is fraught with theoretical contradiction. In particular, film festivals – the structure of which we have borrowed to showcase the work made in our communities – have historically acted as sites of socio-political agenda, promoting either fascist or anti-fascist ideals, promoting nationalism or globalism, and courting Hollywood money. An extreme example of this history is demonstrated in one of the first film festivals in the world, The Mostra Cinematografica di Venezia, and the film festivals that came shortly after in opposition to it. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong's research in her book, *Film Festivals: Culture, People and Power on Screen*, explains the Mostra in this way:

The Mostra Cinematografica di Venezia, which began in 1932, was a creation of Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime, which saw cinema as 'the most powerful weapon...' Given the blatant Fascist/Nazi sympathies of the Mostra Cinematografica di Venezia, Cannes must first be read as a national as well as artistic response within this new arena of cinematic debate.²

Moving farther into the 20th century, the growing popularity of both film festivals and Hollywood in the United States brought us a racist, capitalist system akin to its Europeanist roots in which filmmakers and audiences of color were relegated to specialized forums, or given no visibility, at all. While many festivals touted artistic diversity of theme and aesthetics throughout the mid 1900s, they did not offer the world the opportunity to experience the artistry of people of color, as well as people of various gender identities, religions and classes. Again, Wong describes the structures of power at work in the film festival world:

Race films—casting ethnically marked actors for audiences who reflected this ethnicization—were screened across the United States, sometimes at racially segregated cinemas, sometimes at midnight shows in mainstream cinemas, and sometimes even in churches. These film practices of African Americans were very much divorced from activities advocated by ciné clubs or film societies.³

The film festivals of the 21st Century offer the communities in which they operate myriad more options than the opposites of Fascism and anti-Fascism, in terms of socio-political and aesthetic theme and content. They are also, at least in theory, integrated both on screen and in the audience. Screendance festivals are of course, among this constellation of specialized film festivals that offer audiences a chance to engage with specific content in intimate ways. And like most cinema festivals across the United States and the contemporary western world, dance film festivals can most generally be labeled as socio-culturally liberal spaces. However, even screendance, with its experimental leanings and examples of counter-cultural explorations such as Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) which featured Talley Beatty at a

time when black men were seldom seen on the cinema screen outside of stereotypical roles, or on the concert stage in well-known ballet and contemporary dance companies, has its own challenges to inclusion which reach back to the roots of film festivals' inception, citing issues of accessibility. Particular to experimental art, and art that is considered "intellectual" in any way, is the assumption that one must have a certain level of education or knowledge to be able to fully appreciate the form. Wong describes how a history of the assumption of knowledge creates barriers to diversity in this way:

... a closer analysis of film festivals yields similarly contradictory impulses in them as well. Just as the engagement of early coffeehouses demanded a literate public, film festivals, especially the most powerful ones, allocate major discursive roles to a selected few ... In terms of class, many festivals consciously build on an elite sense of distinction ... that means that whatever their attractions for those outside this field, working classes are rarely targeted as audiences or listened to except as witnesses.⁴

"An elite sense of distinction" is a phrase that can accurately describe issues of accessibility, and challenges to inclusivity in screendance curation and presentation given its reference to elitism –the same elitism found in the concert dance world that follows us into deliberations when choosing dance films to be screened in programs. This kind of elitism and by extension, racism in the dance world is demonstrated through Frances McElroy's 2016 documentary, *Black Ballerina*, which was a popular offering among screendance and cinema festivals alike during the 2016 and 2017 festival seasons.

An obvious marker of the imbalance described in McElroy's film and in screendance today, is the fact that white, young, thin, cisgender, able, female bodies are the most visible bodies found throughout creative communities that feature the body as an aesthetic subject. Published in *The International Journal of Screendance* in 2017, my article "Visual Politics in American Dance Film: Representation and Disparity" points out that consistently over the past several years of taking demographics from festival submissions for ADF's Movies by Movers – the screendance festival under the auspices of the American Dance Festival which I myself direct, curate, and use as a research platform – that half of all bodies seen on camera in American submissions are white and female, with both female and male white bodies consistently accounting for about two-thirds of all bodies visible on screen in the submissions pool. Similar inequity is found behind the camera, too with regard to directors and choreographers. In all groups, males of color are least represented.⁵

It seems that the directorial and curatorial landscape of screendance looks similar when examining the leadership teams of the United States' most recognized screendance festivals. Again, white women dominate the landscape.⁶ Given this imbalance, and the realities of implicit bias, one could assume that an unconscious preference toward

whiteness would have an influence in programming decisions. After all, the screen has been proven time and time again as a space that elevates whiteness. This has been demonstrated by the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA's annual Hollywood Diversity Report, and Harvard's Project Implicit, which uses the screen to show pictures of people from different races so those taking the test can associate those faces with either positive or negative words. Since its first publication in 2014, the Hollywood Diversity Report has noted consistent underrepresentation on screen and behind the camera of people of color.⁷ Additionally, Project Implicit, which has been taken by over five million people, shows that the majority of the population, people of color included (70% of white people and 50% of people of color), prefer white faces to faces of color on screen, and more readily associate positive words to those white faces.⁸ It should be noted that none of the directors and curators spoken to in preparation for this piece (included ones not mentioned here) actively cull demographical information from their submission pool, and very few record that information for their audiences. As such it stands to reason that demographic diversity in screendance with regard to what is being sent to festivals is an area of awareness that the community as a whole could look into more deeply.

Another "elite sense of distinction" lies within the concept and structure of the festival, itself. The festival structure assumes that the artists submitting have the capital to do so, which directly alters the demographics found in submissions to screendance festivals as opposed to projects found on more accessible internet platforms like, YouTube. This is where most festivals struggle, because unlike cinema which uses the festival as a marketplace for artists to network and sell their work for profit, there exists no such structure for wide distribution in the screendance community. It should be noted that the marketplace concept most often applies to the largest cinema festivals, and to feature films. However, the fact that there exists an industry at all suggests that there exists a pathway for cinema artists to make a living if not through their own work, then the work of others. For screendance this means that those who cannot afford to make art for the sake of love alone, which implies a certain level of class privilege, are prohibited from participating as there is little guarantee of a return on investment. Further, it means that the festivals themselves are often caught between needing to at least break even on expenses for resources like screening space, while still making the price of submissions attainable to a wide range of people. Despite the lack of market opportunities, many festivals still hold high cinematic standards by which the films are judged, placing importance on production value and cinematic execution. Even though consumer equipment like smartphones and free editing software have become advanced enough to compete with prosumer and professional equipment, many times DIY projects that utilize consumer equipment fall through the cracks as they don't often meet the standards of larger festivals that attract projects that are grant supported, institutionally supported through universities and arts organizations, or supported by

private or personal monies. In this way, the festival automatically assumes an elitist stance, unless consciously mitigated.

So, how are screendance curators making conscious efforts and decisions in their programming to mitigate the challenges mentioned above? What are some challenges they face particular to their own festivals? Where are their blind spots? What collective solutions for the screendance community can be gleaned by conversations with multiple curators and directors? The following passages include information culled from pieces of longer conversations with curators and directors from four festivals of varying sizes, aims, and locations. Their individual commentary aids in igniting a larger discussion about what the role of the screendance festival is, and how leadership teams influence the culture of screendance as a whole with regard to issues of diversity and representation.

San Francisco Dance Film Festival (San Francisco, CA)

Judy Flannery is the Artistic Director of the San Francisco Dance Film Festival, which is now in its ninth season. She says that one of the challenges to curating a program each year that shows all of the diversity to be found in dance film is that one cannot control what comes through the submission process. For example, she notes that submissions for 2017 were much more ballet-centric than previous years:

We try to work with just the submissions, but we find sometimes that we just don't have the content that supports our philosophy of diversity in styles, genres and artists. We want to support this field and we want to embrace it in all its glorious diversity. So when we're not getting as many films that support our philosophy, we will make a conscious decision to go out and seek films that will fill a void we have.

While it is not uncommon for curators to actively seek films for their programs, Judy makes it clear that she is a champion of non-traditional approaches to dance genres and enjoys presenting films that go against the status quo in terms of casting. Flannery states that, "this art form will help people see outside of normal – outside of the box. That's why this art form should be celebrated. I think we have a duty as a festival to say, "you need to show diversity!"

Judy also expresses the importance of supporting the local arts community, which adds to the inclusivity of the festival. "I noticed that we were getting a lot of films from Europe and New York," she says. Five years ago, the San Francisco Dance Film Festival started the Collaboratory, a collaborative initiative for San Francisco area dancers and filmmakers that pairs artists who have never worked together before and provides them with resources, screen time during the festival, and opportunities to have their work shown on touring reels that go to community partners. As a result, long-term artistic

relationships are often forged, and artists can support each other in their making. In addition, the festival often pairs local, live dance groups with screened work for multi-faceted events that draw audiences that may choose to support the artists at other events. A good example of this practice was the screening of *Shake the Dust*, a hip-hop documentary, in 2017. The SFDFD collaborated with the San Francisco Hip-Hop Festival and had live performance in conjunction with the screening of the film. Judy cites similar collaborations with lindy hop, contemporary, ballet and other dance groups whose practices are rooted in styles from around the world.

When it comes to audiences, the San Francisco Dance Film Festival is equally as active in cultivating rich dialogue around issues of inclusion and inviting many facets of the community to the festival's events both within the regular season and year-round in between submission cycles. Most notably, the festival engages partners in the community in conjunction with films that are screened, inviting non-artists to dialogue with artists, and vice-versa. For example, in 2016, the festival screened Frances McElroy's acclaimed documentary, *Black Ballerina*. In preparation for the screening, SFDFD asked patrons to buy blocks of tickets that were then offered to groups of children from public schools, dance studios, and community centers and other places where young people of color are taking dance. The screening included a guest appearance by San Francisco Ballet dancer, Kimberly Marie Oliver, who presented the film and assisted in leading a discussion after the film.

My interview with Judy brings up one of the points that inspired me to begin doing the work of culling demographics for ADF's *Movies by Movers* in the first place. As people are *self-selecting* to submit to our festivals, this information gives us insight into who is most readily able to create and disseminate work. It gives us information about stylistic trends happening in the concert dance and media worlds, and how select voices are privileged within those trends. Most importantly, this information calls into question what our role is as curators and programmers. As Judy points out, it is our job to actively seek films that highlight the work of less visible groups and styles of dance.

Unique among many festivals in the United States is the Collaboratory that Judy describes, a rare opportunity in the screendance community for artists to be supported through networking and commission. The reason this type of program is so rare is that many of the festivals aren't able to support this type of program financially. Again, issues of a lack of industry affect our ability to be better stewards of this art form. While the San Francisco Dance Film Festival also struggles financially – all of the festivals interviewed for this piece do in some way – the Collaboratory, and other programs that bolster the local arts community are prioritized in ways that compel the festival's organizers to forge strong community partnerships which help this and other outreach programs to be sustainable.

Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema (Boulder, CO)

David Leserman and Michelle Bernier of the Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema in Boulder, Colorado, which is now in its 15th season, agree that there are challenges to curating in the midst of a time when so much content is available on the Internet and many people simply choose not to submit to festivals. Because part of their mission is to introduce audiences to screendance and to educate them about the art form, in the curatorial process they often curate programs that are not representative of the demographic landscape of screendance that they observe. Michelle says:

Part of me feels like there's dance cinema, then there's all the dance that you see on the Internet and TV. A lot of our audience doesn't look at this [screendance] any differently than they look at that [mass media]. Too, they can see different people dancing on screen on the Internet. They don't have to see how biased things are and how frankly, white-washed things are. In dance film, I think that there is the same bias [as mass media] but on a smaller scale, and we can actually do something so it doesn't look that way when we put a show out. That's the way I think about it. You know our submissions may be whatever, say, as a guess, 80 percent white – it doesn't mean what we show has to be 80 percent white. And because that's what happens in Hollywood and that's what happens on *So You Think You Can Dance*, that's what happens in all the other screen dance that they get, dance cinema might be another good place to remind people that, 'oh, that's not actually all there is out there,' even though that may feel like we are giving an unfair representation of what the field looks like. I actually think that's totally ok. I think that if you're coming here for cultural enrichment, just go smorgasbord style. And let's just do a little bit of everything.

Michelle and David believe in the practice of honesty when confronting new material and not turning away from their areas of unfamiliarity. David readily acknowledges that there are areas where he may fall short with regard to diversity. "There are cultural differences that I don't feel the least bit qualified to make a judgment about. I don't always have the cultural underpinnings to recognize something as valuable."

In the curatorial process, David points out that inclusivity and sensitivity to varied subject matter can be cultivated by having people from marginalized groups on the curatorial team:

"I have a bias toward diversity because I'm a disabled dancer. I danced actively for about ten years in a wheel chair as a mature person. And so I never did perform in a dance in any way before I did it in a wheel chair. And so I'm consciously biased towards disability related dance and we usually show one if we get one. We usually get one every year." David goes on to note that the founder of Sans Souci and fellow curator Ana Baer, is of

Mexican descent and that she brings more sensitivity to the table around race and non-western dance.

Michelle then points to the reality that there are times in the curatorial process when they question their ability to make a judgment on whether something they've received is culturally sensitive as a work of art, or not:

We do run into this issue sometimes, where we feel unqualified to say, "does this feel like an accurate representation of a thing?" because we are talking too, about how we want to assume that every artist that submits something to the festival is also fully qualified to make a statement about the thing they're making a statement about. I want to respect the artists and I want to err on the side that everything the artist does is an artistic choice.

With these acknowledgements, both David and Michelle consider the choice to have a curatorial team of several people from varied backgrounds, both personally and professionally, a way to mitigate some of their individual pitfalls. Michelle says that solo curating would make the program, "heavy-handed." And David and Michelle talk about how conversations about diversity and intersectionality have come up organically in their deliberations as a result of their model of working.

The curatorial team at Sans Souci demonstrate the necessity of dialogue between people of various backgrounds and viewpoints in curation. Through this kind of collaborative curation, we can better understand that issues of representation aren't just about one thing. Issues of race, gender, class, education, ability – they're all intertwined, and in the context of screendance, we have an opportunity to influence how audiences encounter and understand these concepts aesthetically. While each of the Sans Souci curators may not be able to fully consider the cultural and aesthetic aspects of the films they receive and ultimately choose to screen individually, the three of them together can better do the work of creating diverse experiences for their audiences. As a part of the mission of Sans Souci is to introduce and educate audiences about screendance, it is important that the curators recognize how their conversations in the curatorial process influence what audiences may leave with, after their first screendance experience. Having had the pleasure of attending the Sans Souci festival in September of 2017, I can attest to the fact that the team stays true to their mission, creating for the audience a multi-faceted experience through multi-media performance, films featuring a variety of dance forms, people, and production values.

Dance on Camera Festival (New York, NY)

Co-Curator Liz Wolff says that the Dance on Camera Festival, the oldest screendance festival in the United States now in its 46th season – benefits greatly from being situated in New York City, with such a long history. "We have a very open market; the submissions

are far and wide and incredibly varied. We benefit from that cross selection,” she says, and notes that while she hasn’t had the experience of curating in other markets, she’s happy to be doing work in one that invites such diversity because it’s already understood that New York is a cultural and artistic melting pot.

Even so, the Dance Films Association (the organization which houses the Dance on Camera Festival) and the Dance on Camera Festival are known for the attention to detail in their programming, pairing sought-after feature-length films with innovative and lesser-known short films, curating shorts programs with a similar mixture of known and unknown talent, collaborating with community partners, and creating space for engaged dialogue throughout the festival. In comparison to many other festivals around the country, the amount of opportunities for discussion with artists and field experts brings an added dimension to the festival. Of the myriad discussion experiences offered throughout the festival, Wolff says, “We choose work for that reason – to have a conversation – whether it’s about social inequities, differently abled bodies...we keep an eye out to make sure we’re having a full conversation...we definitely delve into open forum discussions, so we’re not just showing a film if we feel it needs discussion...Our job is to translate art to the audience.”

Something that both supports Dance on Camera in having those successful conversations about the films they program and that sets the festival apart from other festivals is its relationship and collaboration with the Film Society of Lincoln Center, which co-presents Dance on Camera. Through relationships cultivated across the Center’s wide range of programming, it provides access to potential audience members throughout the five boroughs, and beyond. Liz explains how this relationship translates into targeted audiences: “They have contacts to work with the community at large – inviting different groups like the School for the Blind [for the 2017 screening of *Looking at the Stars*, about the Fernanda Bianchini Ballet Association for the Blind in São Paulo], reaching out in to the tri-borough area – even if it’s something like a New York City Ballet piece and the School of American Ballet is upstairs, something we can offer the students – if we find there’s a special program that needs special attention, we have a way to help bring in audience.” Again, Wolff recognizes this relationship as a benefit to the festival that festivals in smaller markets may not enjoy.

With a reputation for some of the most varied dance film programming among the dance film community, Dance on Camera’s outreach efforts achieve similarly high standards. Capturing Motion is a program in collaboration with the NYC Department of Education that engages high school students throughout the five boroughs in creating dance films that are then entered into the Capturing Motion annual competition. Winners have their work screened at Dance on Camera. Through the process of workshop, to production and submission, students get to learn about the process of creating a film and working to get it screened. Wolff says, “what you get from these kids is pretty incredible. Capturing Motion gives them an opportunity to express themselves

differently. The Department of Education in New York City has a deep dive into the arts in schools, and Capturing Motion is that marriage of filmmaking and dance.”

Finally, the Dance Films Association regularly collaborates with other curators and organizations to curate and present varied screenings throughout the year. Partners in recent years have included, ADF’s Movies by Movers, Trikselion Arts, DCTV, and more. By opening up a dialogue and collaborating on programming efforts, the Dance Films Association helps to keep the conversation percolating about curation, new work, diversity, screendance and mainstream culture, and how to keep advancing the art of screendance.

The Dance Films Association in many ways exemplifies how a long-established organization can bolster the screendance community as a whole. Situated in a long-standing artistic center, a balance of well-known and lesser-known artists, community partnerships, partnerships with other screendance presenters and organizations, a commitment to the history and preservation of screendance, availability of their material for other presenters to share, production grants for artists, and a platform from which the organization can garner diverse audiences all speak to why Dance on Camera has lasted so long, where other screendance initiatives have perished.⁹ Most unique about Dance on Camera though, is its relationship with the Department of Education. No other festivals I interviewed (and very few across the country) have programs for young filmmakers. Indeed, creating opportunities for youth in such a diverse place as the five boroughs of New York will have positive dividends as those young people become adults, making art in the world.

Tiny Dance Film Festival (San Francisco, CA)

Kat Cole, a co-Curator of the now six-years-old Tiny Dance Film Festival in San Francisco says that in the spirit of accessibility, she and co-Curator Eric Garcia are champions of do-it-yourself films and do not place as high a priority on production value as other festivals might. Because of this, the Tiny Dance Film Festival gets to celebrate the emergence of newer, more accessible technologies, and show films that would be unlikely choices at larger festivals. As a commitment to accessibility for submitting artists, the price for submissions has remained low since the festival’s inception, at only five dollars. This price is well below the price asked by most of the festivals operating in the United States today. For Cole and Garcia, the DIY spirit breaks the pattern of films that fall within a particular realm of representation and allow for a more fluid definition of the art form of screendance. “For example,” Kat says, “there’s these two young dancers and they’ve made a film about race with Barbie dolls, and it’s really fun!” And it is films like this one Cole describes, which sets the Tiny Dance Film Festival apart from some of the larger festivals and gives Tiny Dance its signature quirk.

According to Kat and Eric, their particular brand of aesthetic boundary-stretching and definition blurring, means that for the Tiny Dance Film Festival intersectional programming is a “consciousness that is organic to our own progression as artists.” Detour Dance is the name of the dance company that acts as the umbrella for Tiny Dance and boasts a roster of work that is socio-politically and community engaged. As people who both identify as people of color and queer, Kat and Eric actively encourage people of color, queer people and others who belong to marginalized groups to send work to the festival.

Kat says, “We want to showcase folks that are operating on the outskirts of contemporary dance, of film, of media representation in general. I feel like there is something significant in seeing those bodies on screen, that I always feel good about.”

What the Tiny Dance Film Festival makes most clear, is that the screendance community is in need of spaces that champion and screen work that does not generally find a place at other festivals where the expectations for production value and virtuosity are high. The projects Cole and Garcia look for are expressions of experimentalism that challenge the white, patriarchal experimentalism of performance art history that our genre is tied to.¹⁰ The need for queer, people of color voices to help the community be introduced to other queer, people of color voices, and other marginalized groups is invaluable. While the issue of marginalized people supporting and disseminating the work of other marginalized people has long raised questions of whether or not it is still the job of those people to see, appreciate, and share the value of work they make for non-marginalized communities, it is clear that the work Garcia and Cole are doing with the Tiny Dance Film Festival makes the screendance community a more equitable one.

ADF’s Movies by Movers (Durham, NC and Boone, NC)

To conclude this exploration of intersectional curatorial practices, I need to discuss my own place in this work. I am the director and curator of ADF’s Movies by Movers, and I am a woman of color. My mission in this position, other than celebrating and elevating the art of screendance, has been twofold. First, I wish to articulate and implement a curatorial philosophy, recognizing that in the field of screendance, there exist myriad workshops, courses, conferences, symposia, and books about creating screendance, and on the theory of practice in screendance, but there exists far less in the realm of curation. Second, I wish to use ADF’s Movies by Movers as a research platform to interrogate issues of representation in dance film, recognizing that our issues regarding representation are tied to our philosophical and aesthetic forerunners, like concert dance, cinema, and performance art.

Speaking to my first desire in directing and curating the festival, my curatorial practice is most informed by intersectional feminism. Intersectional feminism – a term which gained popularity beginning in 1989 through the work of critical race theorist Kimberlè

Crenshaw – holds that various forms of oppression – racism, sexism, classism and more, and interconnected and inform the socio-cultural experiences of people whose identities meet at various intersections of oppression. For screendance, this means asking questions about how what we make and program creates space for discourse on the state of the arts landscape with regard to aesthetic hierarchies, representation of marginalized communities, and the goals and context of the works that exist in the world. The questions that emerge from being in conversation with the theories of intersectional feminism in looking at and curating screendance compel me to explore what I refer to as, *visual politics*. My definition of *visual politics* refers to the people and situations we see on screen with respect to the culture created in two-dimensional space by makers and presenters in the collective; influenced by socio-cultural norms in the real world; affected by the lens through which we view the arts and arts industries. In sum, what we see on the screen are a collection of artifacts that make our values as an artistic community visible. In holding intersectional feminism as a bedrock to my practice and process of curating, I find that issues of representation go beyond those tied to racism and sexism. Ableism and ageism are two issues in screendance that take center stage as areas of underrepresentation, misrepresentation, and blatant exclusion. While my work culling demographics from the submission pool to ADF's Movies by Movers involves data from race and gender to help paint a picture of the representational landscape of those submissions, there exists such an underrepresentation of older, and differently abled bodies, that having percentages seems less important than interrogating *how* these bodies are participating in the work. It should be understood that this notion of how people participate in the work goes for all groups I am looking at through my research. Hence, an ever-expanding list of questions regarding trends that I see each year helps to better articulate why this work is important. These are just some of the questions that keep me lying awake at night, especially during submission season:

- Is screendance really a feminist space if nine out of every ten nude bodies I see are young, white, thin, able-bodied, cis-gendered women? What about black women? Fat women? Trans women? Men?
- Is screendance really a feminist space when large groups of men of color (the most underrepresented group in screendance on all fronts), are often seen through the lens of a white director or choreographer? Why don't we see large groups of white actors being seen through the lens of directors and choreographers of color?
- Is screendance really a feminist space when most scenarios where large groups of men of color are seen at once, it is most often *about* being men of color? In fact, is screendance really a feminist space if most of the work created by, with, and for marginalized groups of people are about that marginalization?

- Is it fair that young, white, cisgender participants feel the freedom to make statements on a wide range of cultural and aesthetic topics, when marginalized people do not enjoy that same freedom given their lived experiences?
- Where is American dance in American dance film? Is screendance really a feminist space if a culture cannot more readily embrace forms of art that come from low-income communities and communities of color? Why aren't there more jazz, tap, and hip-hop screendances?¹¹
- Is screendance really a feminist space if differently-abled bodies – both disabled and “untrained” or “non-dance” bodies – are not represented? If screendance doesn't have to necessarily look like dance, why aren't more “non-dance” bodies and their movements being explored? What is our relationship to virtuosity and why does that matter?
- In what ways have we made it clear that our space is off-limits to “non-dancers”?
- How can I make the experience of screendance more inclusive and more accessible? How can I help to make the experience of screendance more feminist?

Curatorially, these questions and my research have inspired me to become more experimental in my curating practice. While there is still the traditional approach of sifting through submissions to find what wants to be screened together or in juxtaposition, and filling in holes in terms of style, demographic, or genre through active solicitation, I also find myself creating more opportunities for audiences to interact with screendance in creative ways. One of my goals as a curator is to dismantle the expectation found historically in cinema, theatre, and experimental art spaces that audiences wishing to engage with the work should have a certain level of education, or previous exposure to fine art as a way of being able to fully appreciate the work.

In 2017 for example, I curated ADF's *Movies by Movers'* first mini-exhibition. I invited a handful of artists to create tiny movies for a collection of iPads organized around a maker's space in Boone, NC called The HOW Space. One minute at a time, patrons were invited to choose which order they saw the films in, curating their own experience. Some patrons likened the experience to hearing a full studio album, with each new track, or movie in this case, providing them with another piece of an overall energetic trajectory. In addition, I invited another handful of artists to send a series of photographs to me to be printed as stop motion flipbooks. Essentially, these little books were dances that patrons could hold in their hands, actively engaging in controlling speed and direction of the movies they held. For our youngest patrons in their teens and early twenties, many of whom have never seen an analogue movie, this was quite novel. There are three important accomplishments of the mini-exhibition. The first being that this exhibition featured work created specifically for the spaces it appeared in. Often when visiting screendance festivals, installations are created with work received

through the submission process, which undermines how the submitting artists wish for that work to be experienced. While I have no way of knowing how each festival chooses which works belong in an installation, I wonder how many of those feature people or approaches to screendance that are not as readily appreciated for their socio-cultural and/or aesthetic content as those films that are popular on the circuit each year. Second, among bodies and dance forms more common to the screendance community, the exhibition featured bodies and forms not often represented. I was most excited about ECHOING, a tiny screendance by practitioner and scholar Tamara Williams, that featured the ring shout – an African-American dance dating back to slavery which is a precursor to many contemporary African-American dance forms. Finally, the exhibition gave new audiences an interactive way to be introduced to screendance that required no prior knowledge of the form, in an open, inviting space. Many patrons expressed a desire to attend the more traditional screenings, after interacting with the screendances at the exhibition, where had they simply been invited to the screenings, they may not have been as inspired to attend.

For the 2018 festival, I have been using Instagram as a screening platform. In February of 2018, I launched ADF's Movies by Movers' first Instafest. By bringing the festival platform to the vast community that social media is, I have been able to find and showcase diverse pieces of work across genres, while highlighting the ways people are using social media and new technologies to create and disseminate work. I am most excited about having dance existing alongside "non-dance" movement forms like skateboarding, parkour, synchronized swimming, juggling, and more from a diverse collection of makers from around the world. I am also excited that the followers of this work are from diverse backgrounds and experience the work in different ways, dependent on the context of their cultural backgrounds and varied life experiences. Like curating for the more traditional screenings at ADF's Movies by Movers, this project has been a mixture of passive receipt – makers may tag @adfsmoviesby in their posts, and I repost their work – and active solicitation. I have been delighted to find new artists with whom to dialogue about their work and am finding a new community of curators (for lack of a better description, though many of these people would not describe themselves as such) using Instagram and other platforms in creative ways, raising questions of what "good art" is, and where to find it.

Through my experiments in curating, I have also found inspiration for my work as a screendance practitioner. Over the past year, I've been working on a collection of solo projects inspired by the finding that the majority of the solo projects (projects where the director, choreographer, actor/mover, cinematographer, editor are all the same person) that came through the submission process in 2017 were made by women of color. Given the production value of the projects, it seems as though they were made not as a way to necessarily explore the practice and possibilities of being a solo screendance maker, but are tied to issues of access to equipment, funds, time, and

collaborators, by people who would still like to participate in the conversation. Perhaps some of these pieces are meant as explorations into editing, perhaps they are meant to make a specific statement as intended by the artists, but one wonders what the use of spending time and money to disseminate a study would be. As of the writing of this piece, I have not yet finished my data collection for the 2018 season. I am interested to see how the numbers play out, in addition to seeing what's actually in the films to determine what the spirit of their making might be. My tiny films explore issues of access and the experience of being a lone artist through screendance made with consumer equipment, and scenarios and images which disrupt dominant narratives. *Aspirant Pursuits*¹² is the most recent film created for the series. Completed in January of 2018, the movie features myself acting in relationship to a white female mannequin to Missy Elliot's song *Pussy Cat*, engaging questions of my relationship as a female performer of color to white women in the context of being seen in both performative and private spaces. The second half of the film is an epilogue, two minutes of slow-motion twerking that asks the viewer to consider their notions of cultural consciousness and understanding around a dance as misunderstood as the twerk, as demonstrated by its representation in the media by celebrities like Miley Cyrus.¹³ More production work is planned for the remainder of 2018 to create two more short films in this vein.

Between my curatorial practice, my research, and my creative output, I hope that I am presenting for our community a well-rounded conversation on the issues that hold us back from fully realizing the aims and dreams of screendance. To truly create an experimental, open source platform that makes space for varied approaches and a multitude of voices and the celebration of hybridity, it would behoove the community to more actively create that platform. If not by us, then by whom?

In Conclusion

It is clear that creative approaches to inclusion and the mitigation of a white washed, heteronormative, ableist, ageist visual culture in festival submissions and festival programs require creative approaches to the work and that a variety of types of festivals – of different sizes, scope and focus are needed to continue moving the community toward a culture that is a departure from the norms and narratives found in dance, cinema, and museum spaces. For festivals that exist outside of larger artistic centers especially, outreach, systems of artist support, collaboration with other cultural organizations and celebrating what is unique about the locality of these festivals seems to have an impact on how those festivals continue to cultivate more diverse rosters of films to share with diverse audiences. And while the festivals discussed here are examples of this kind of creativity in action, more attention is needed to questioning the make-up of our directorial and curatorial landscape, as it has been demonstrated that having people that occupy marginalized identities in positions of leadership and decision-making directly impact how films that feature people from those same groups

are considered. Unlike museum or film studies, there is almost no formal education for curators of screendance. There are very few opportunities for educators and curators to come together to talk about how our approaches to screendance impact how the public views and finds affinity with this art form. Moving forward, encouraging curators to delve deeper into the material they receive to get a better sense of what they're actually receiving and the ways in which their pools of submissions fall short in terms of diversity will help us all, as a community of makers and presenters, be more conscious about what we put out into the world. Working through the lens of intersectionality – acknowledging that issues of representation are related to issues of accessibility, while recognizing the ways histories of hierarchy are ingrained in our assessment of aesthetics, will help us be more inclusive on all fronts while also recognizing the ways screendance continues to change in the 21st century. More dialogue between directors and curators across festivals about what is working and not working, what themes continue to emerge through the work they receive, and how we can better define what our role is as curators will also help to build a stronger, more clear presence in the world.

Biography

Cara Hagan is an artist, educator, scholar and community organizer. She currently serves on faculty as an Assistant Professor of Dance Studies at Appalachian State University. Ms. Hagan is also Director and Curator for ADF's Movies by Movers, an annual, international festival celebrating the conversations between the moving body and the camera at the American Dance Festival.

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Notes

¹ San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema <http://sanssoucifest.org/aboutUs.php>.

² Wong, *Film Festivals*, 37.

³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵ Hagan, "Visual Politics in American Dance Film," 104.

⁶ Research on and personal contacts with sixteen festivals, including but not limited to: Dance Camera West, Dance on Camera, San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema, Cucalorus, San Francisco Dance Film Festival, Greensboro Dance Film Festival, and more.

⁷ Hunt, Ramon, and Tran. 2017 Hollywood Diversity Report.

⁸ Project Implicit <https://www.projectimplicit.net/papers.html>.

⁹ Dance Films Association <http://www.dancefilms.org/dance-on-camera/>.

¹⁰ Erin Brannigan's book, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image*, explores the relationship of screendance to performance art in depth. Additionally, RoseLee Goldberg's book, *Performance Art: From Futurism to Present*, highlights the many ways performance art was both subversive and elitist.

¹¹ Many would argue that American dance can be easily found in American screendance, however there are usually only one or two tap films that come through the process each year. Similarly, there are few films that emerge from the submission process that feature other American forms like Lindy Hop. While hip-hop is seen more often, sometimes its representation on the screen is problematic with regard to a demonstration of knowledge about the history and aims of the form. Our relationship to post-modernism is one that elevates Eurocentric perspectives and hierarchies.

¹² Aspirant Pursuits <https://youtu.be/yr2mmglcADo>.

¹³ Winfrey Harris, "A Twerk Too Far."

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Winfrey Harris, Tamara. "A Twerk Too Far." *The American Prospect*, 5 Sept. 2013, <http://www.prospect.org/article/twerk-too-far>.

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List of screendance festivals USA

ADF's Movies by Movers. Directed and curated by Cara Hagan (author). American Dance Festival, North Carolina. 2015-present. <http://www.americandancefestival.org/projects/moviesbymovers/>

Cucalorus. Directed by Dan Brawley. 1994-present. <http://www.cucalorus.org/>

Dance@30FPS - OSU Dance Annual Festival of Dance Film. Curated by Mitchell Rose. ?-present. <https://vimeo.com/200465113>

Dance and New Media Film Festival. Directed by Cari Ann Shim Sham. 2012-present. <http://tisch.nyu.edu/dance>

Dance Barn Festival. Directed by Molly Johnston and Ayumi Schafer. Curated by Robert Uehlin. 2015-present. <https://www.dancebarncollective.org/festival>

Dance Camera West. Directed by Tonya Barber. 2001-present. <http://www.dancecamerawest.org/>

Dance on Camera. Directed by Galen Bremer. Curated by Liz Wolff and Joanna Ney. 1971-present. <http://www.dancefilms.org/dance-on-camera/>

EMPAC. Directed by Johannes Goebel. Curated by Ashely Ferro-Murray. 2008-present. <http://empac.rpi.edu/>

Greensboro Dance Film Festival. Directed and curated by Robin Gee. 2014-present. <https://www.greensborodancefilms.org/>

New Dance Cinema. Directed and curated by Anji Crain. 2011-present. <http://aplusproductionsnyc.com/>

Oklahoma Dance Film Festival. Directed and curated by Jessica Vokoun. 2008-present. http://www.okdancefilms.com/Oklahoma_Dance_Film_Festival/ABOUT.html

Outlet Dance Project. Directed and Curated by Jamuna Chiarini, Ann Robideaux, and Donia Salem. 2011-present. <https://www.theoutletdanceproject.com/>

San Francisco Dance Film Festival. Directed by Judy Flannery and Regina Bustillos. Curated by Greta Schoenburg et al. 2010-present. <http://www.sfdancefilmfest.org/>

San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema. Directed and curated by David Leserman, Michelle Barneir and Tara Rynders, and Ana Baer. <http://sanssoucifest.org/>

Tiny Dance Film Festival. Directed and curated by Kat Cole and Eric Garcia. 2013-present. <http://www.detourdance.com/tdff/>

Utah Dance Film Festival. Directed and curated by Karen Jensen and Tyne Crockett 2013-present. <http://www.utahdancefilmfestival.org.>

Unpublished Interviews

Kat Cole of the Tiny Dance Film Festival, July 10th, 2017.

Judy Flannery of the San Francisco Dance Film Festival, July 17th, 2017.

David Leserman and Michelle Bernier of the San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema, July 7th 2017.

Liz Wolff, of Dance on Camera, September 1st, 2017.