

# Body Visions: Interdisciplinary Dialogues in Dance and Film

Final Research and Results Report by Kersti Grunditz Brennan, PhD

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## 1. Introduction

The **Body Visions** project represents an approach to integrating dance, dramaturgy, and filmmaking into a cohesive educational model. Supported by Vitlycke Centre for Performing Arts (Sweden) and AB Dance Research (Italy), with the later inclusion of HDK Valand Gothenburg University (Sweden) and Stockholm University of the Arts/Dance, the project aimed to foster interdisciplinary collaboration among dance and film students through creative workshops and remote collaboration.

The project was realized in 2023 - 2024.

### Research Objectives:

- Develop and implement interdisciplinary methodologies for artistic creation.
- Enhance participants' skills in performing arts, audiovisual techniques, and dramaturgy.
- Promote the use of remote collaborative tools to bridge physical workshops.

This report synthesizes findings based on planned activities, group interviews with students, and a recorded discussion with project staff. Note that student evaluation of general teaching methods and project structure outside of the team collaboration, as well as evaluation of levels of participation and analysis of the student drop-out rate is outside of the scope of this report. Anonymized results provide insights into collaborative methods, student experiences of the creative process, and overall project outcomes.

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## 2. Historical and Artistic Foundations of Dance for Camera

### Historical Context

The relationship between dance and film has evolved significantly since the late 19th century. Early experiments in motion capture, such as the *Annabelle Dances and Dances* series (1894–1897), marked the initial intersection of movement and the moving image. These works, filmed by the Edison Company, used hand-painted color techniques to highlight the dynamic flow of costume and motion, affirming the camera's potential to capture and enhance physical performance (Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009).

Dance for camera, often referred to as screendance, developed as a distinct art form, combining the spatial and rhythmic qualities of dance with the visual storytelling capacities of film. This hybrid medium shifts the focus from traditional stage performance to an exploration of choreography within the cinematic frame (Rosenberg, 2016).

## Key Theoretical Perspectives

### 1. **Choreography in Screendance:**

Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut (2009) describe choreography as the art of manipulating movement, where time, space, and energy are phrased into affective forms and structures. Their work underscores how screendance expands choreography beyond the theatrical stage to include site-specific and broadcast contexts and assert that choreography in screendance adapts to its context, with time, space, and energy manipulated through both performance and editing processes.

### 1. **Editing as Choreography:**

Karen Pearlman (2009) draws parallels between editing and choreographic practice in *Cutting Rhythms: Shaping the Film Edit*. Editors, like choreographers, craft rhythm and pacing, transforming raw footage into sequences that evoke emotional and aesthetic responses.

### 2. **Alternative Approaches to Choreography:**

Priscilla Guy (2016) examines how editing in screendance can redefine choreography. By treating editing as a co-creative act, the traditional boundaries between choreographer, dancer, and filmmaker dissolve, fostering innovative approaches to movement narratives.

## Artistic Milestones

### 1. **Hollywood Musicals:**

The works of Busby Berkeley, particularly in films like *Footlight Parade* (1933) and *Gold Diggers of 1935*, transformed cinematic dance. His kaleidoscopic compositions utilized the camera's perspective to create intricate visual patterns, showcasing the potential of film to reimagine choreography. (Brannigan, 2011).

### 2. **Maya Deren:**

Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) illustrated the unique potential of film to shape and reframe physical movement. Her work pioneered the integration of surrealist film techniques with physical expression (Mitoma & Zimmer, 2002).

### 3. **Indian cinema:**

With its integration of traditional dance forms and contemporary techniques, has early on enriched the screendance vocabulary through films like Uday Shankar's *Kalpana* (1948).

### 4. **Contemporary Contributions:**

Wim Wenders' *Pina* (2011) brought the work of choreographer Pina Bausch to life, emphasizing the interplay of human emotion, movement, and cinematic framing.

## Artistic Foundations of Screendance

### 1. **Spatial Dynamics:**

Screendance, and the transition from stage to screen, redefines spatial relationships, with the camera's frame becoming a dynamic stage that directs the

viewer's gaze (Pearlman, 2009) and offering perspectives unavailable in live performance.

2. **Rhythm and Timing:**

Screendance leverages filmic techniques—such as slow motion, cuts, and temporal manipulation—to enhance or disrupt the rhythm of movement, as exemplified in *Mad Max: Fury Road*'s action editing or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*'s aerial combat scenes. (Brannigan, 2011).

3. **Cultural Influences:**

Traditional dance forms from around the world have significantly informed screendance. The blending of classical Indian dance, as seen in films like *Devdas* (2002) and *Kalpana* (1948), with cinematic conventions showcases the medium's capacity to both preserve and innovate cultural heritage. (Mitoma & Zimmer, 2002).

4. **Multidisciplinary Integration:**

Screendance thrives on collaboration across disciplines. Projects like Farah Azrak and Robin Bahhi's *Screendance* (2014) highlight the potential of interdisciplinary residencies in pushing artistic boundaries.

## Relevance to Body Visions

The **Body Visions** project draws directly from these historical and artistic foundations:

- The workshops' emphasis on framing, sound, and movement echoes Pearlman's concept of editing as choreography.
- Students' use of site-specific locations connects to the traditions of screendance pioneers like Deren, integrating space as a co-performer.
- The interdisciplinary nature of the project, combining dance, film, and dramaturgy, builds on the collaborative ethos championed by screendance practitioners.

By situating its practices within this historical and artistic lineage, Body Visions not only advances educational and artistic innovation but also contributes to the ongoing evolution of screendance as a transformative medium.

This contextualizing overview of foundations is leaning on the opening reflections on the relationship between film and dance introduced by Ram Krishna Ranjan, Jyoti Mistry and Kersti Grunditz Brennan in the HDK Valand course "MA Intensive #3 – Movement: Body, Camera and Edit".

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## 3. Research Framework

### Methodology and Activities

The research comprised three workshops, each focusing on distinct themes and practices:

1. **Workshop 1: Performing and Audiovisual Arts (Sweden, October 2023):**

Introduced fundamentals of contemporary dance practices, filmmaking, and sound design. Students formed interdisciplinary teams and explored creating short multimedia projects.

2. **Workshop 2: Dramaturgy and Live Arts (Italy, April 2024):**  
Focused on dramaturgical approaches to body movement, improvisation, and narrative construction, with an emphasis on relationships between movement and audiovisual arts. Teams explored individual and group compositions in response to specific locations.
3. **Workshop 3: Multimedia Body Workshop (Sweden, August 2024):**  
Culminated in the production of short dance films, with teams working collaboratively to integrate movement, location-based filming, and post-production techniques.

## Documentation Approach

Student and staff feedback was collected through group interviews in with each student team in Zoom sessions, and an audio-recorded staff discussion. The focus was on identifying successful methods, challenges, and growth areas in interdisciplinary collaboration.

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## 4. Results and Discussion

### Student Experiences

#### Overview:

Participants experienced a dynamic interplay of creative disciplines, facing both challenges and growth opportunities. The process revealed significant insights into interdisciplinary collaboration, with themes of trust, adaptability, and communication emerging as central to success.

#### Processes and Methods:

Across the workshops, teams explored the integration of movement, dramaturgy, and audiovisual arts through iterative practices:

- **Developing Shared Concepts:**  
Teams began by exchanging ideas, drawing inspiration from visual, narrative, and material sources. Common starting points ranged from simple actions, such as chewing gum, to abstract themes like memory and authenticity. This foundation helped establish a conceptual framework for each group's artistic exploration.
- **Experimenting with Space and Movement:**  
Locations played a key role in shaping creative processes. Participants engaged in physical exploration of spaces, adapting their movements to architectural elements, natural landscapes, and the constraints or opportunities offered by filming equipment.
- **Choreographing for Film:**  
Teams emphasized translating dance into the language of film. This required rethinking choreography to suit the frame, considering perspective, focus, and shot composition. The process revealed the need for dancers to embody their roles differently when viewed through a lens.

- **Adapting to Collaborative Structures:**  
Students navigated challenges of remote and in-person collaboration, often learning to balance individual roles with group dynamics. Clear communication strategies, such as using non-verbal cues or developing visual storyboards, were key to aligning interdisciplinary efforts.

## Staff Insights

The staff discussion provided valuable perspectives on the project's implementation and outcomes. Key themes included:

- **Interdisciplinary Benefits and Challenges:**  
Staff noted that the integration of dance, filmmaking, and dramaturgy offered unique creative possibilities. However, bridging these disciplines required intentional facilitation to address differences in language, methodologies, and creative priorities.
- **Remote Collaboration Limitations:**  
While remote tools allowed continuity between workshops, they often hindered deeper engagement, particularly for movement-based work. Staff recommended refining the use of these tools in future iterations, potentially incorporating more structured virtual sessions.
- **Growth in Students' Skills:**  
Students demonstrated increased competence in interdisciplinary collaboration, with many taking ownership of their projects and applying learned skills creatively. However, logistical constraints, such as limited time for post-production, occasionally restricted the depth of outcomes.

## Key Observations and Insights

- **Innovations in Artistic Practices:**  
The project demonstrated the potential of integrating dance and filmmaking, encouraging participants to see the camera not just as a recording device but as an active participant in the choreographic process.
- **Importance of Physical Collaboration:**  
Remote collaboration provided a starting point but often fell short of fostering the spontaneity and depth achieved in physical workshops. Direct interaction was essential for building trust and refining artistic outputs.
- **Navigating Collaborative Dynamics:**  
Teams that embraced clear communication strategies and respected interdisciplinary contributions were more successful in aligning their creative visions. Structured approaches, such as shared references or role clarity, often improved outcomes.

## Recommendations and Future Directions

Based on the insights gathered, the following recommendations are proposed for similar interdisciplinary initiatives:

- **Structured Frameworks for Collaboration:**  
Clearly defined roles and expectations can help balance contributions from different disciplines, especially during remote work phases.

- **Focus on Film-Specific Choreography:**  
Workshops should emphasize the unique demands of choreographing for film, including framing, timing, and visual storytelling.
  - **Extend Post-Production Time:**  
Allowing more time for editing and sound design would enable teams to fully realize their creative visions.
  - **Strengthen Remote Collaboration Tools:**  
Incorporating guided virtual sessions and interactive platforms could enhance engagement between workshops.
  - **Ongoing Dissemination:**  
Sharing the project's dance films and findings through festivals, publications, and symposiums would extend its impact and inspire broader adoption of interdisciplinary methods.
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## 5. Conclusion

The **Body Visions** project piloted a novel model for interdisciplinary training and creation in performing arts. While challenges in remote collaboration and time constraints emerged, the process fostered both artistic and educational innovation. By drawing on historical and artistic precedents and exploring new collaborative methodologies, it contributed to both artistic practice and education.

By rethinking traditional approaches and embracing interdisciplinary practices, the project enhanced participants' skills and will potentially also contribute to advancing contemporary performing arts education.

The final outputs—including short dance films, process documentation, and symposium discussions—serve as a testament to the power of collaboration in pushing creative boundaries and to the potential of screendance to bridge disciplines and inspire new creative approaches.

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