

## **Screendance Proposal**

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Daniel Boord, Erika Randall,  
Stephanie Tuley, Luis Valdovino.

“There’s no reason why there could not be rigorous dance training as well as training for the eye. This includes studio practice, drawing, intense study of the history of paintings, film viewing, etc. The history of art is the history of the image, and that’s what we’re all focused on here. We’re interested in extending this history and defining it. Anything that deals with this has to be considered, and studied [...] A curriculum could be constructed to address these concerns at different levels.”

Elliot Caplan,  
(Screendance pioneer and film/video production collaborator with Merce Cunningham and John Cage)  
Interview for ICJMT Report, December 2012

### **I. Summary**

We are proposing an interdisciplinary terminal degree program in Screendance. The program will include an MFA, a graduate certificate, and an undergraduate minor. Screendance emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a hybrid art form. Today, it is a driving force for innovation that explores the nexus of visual art, sound, and movement. The convergence of emergent technologies with the arts – from performance to the moving image – creates points of intersection for artistic collaboration. To be successful and informed, collaborations call for not only technical competencies, but an art historic and critical perspective encompassing issues of culture, viewership, identity, and agency. We are therefore proposing a program that develops the performer/artist of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to comprehensively meet the challenges of our professional artistic environment.

### **II. Historical Context and Contemporary Practices**

Early innovators in Screendance include Maya Deren, Merce Cunningham, Elliot Caplan, Nam June Paik, Yvonne Rainer, and Alwin Nikolais. Today there is a vibrant community of notable artists in the field including British choreographer/director Lloyd Newson of DV8 Physical Theatre, Australian directors/choreographers Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman of The Physical TV Company, American director Mitchell Rose, American filmmaker Charles Atlas (Media Dance), Belgian director Thierry de Mey, and New Zealand director/choreographer Shona McCullagh, to name a few.

Maya Deren’s essay *Cinematography: A Creative Use of Reality* posits a vocabulary of visual forms that can be used by both dancers and filmmakers. As a dancer/filmmaker, Deren blurred the distinctions between these practices by proposing a unifying poetics of movement and image, now a foundational concept for Screendance. As such, it is a flexible term that can be understood to encompass a variety of formal practices, including single-channel, multiple-channel, site-specific, installation, and performance works.

Screendance and movement media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is easily created and shared and therefore has the potential to become a primary source of expression and communication. Screendance today can be seen at venues which span and challenge the traditional high/low art divide, such as art galleries, international film festivals, popular television programs, and YouTube. As movement-media artist Anna Brady Nuse states, “Screendance, as a separate category of media content, is all around, but effectively hidden in plain sight from the public’s point of view.”

While Screendance is part of the curricula at institutions throughout the U.S. (See addendum), none have completely incorporated interdisciplinarity as a necessary function of their program(s). Our approach, however, emphasizes interdisciplinary study and collaboration within the arts. As such, CU will become a unique center for the growing community of students and artists throughout the country whose practice combines dance and performance with sound and visual media.

Current faculty continue to demonstrate creative and research-based interest in Screendance, including Luis Valdovino (Art and Art History,) Daniel Boord (Film Studies), Michael Theodore (School of Music,) Erika Randall (Theatre and Dance,) Michelle Ellsworth (Theatre and Dance,) and Donna Mejia (Theatre and Dance). Consequently, there is a growing community of students interested in Screendance who would benefit tremendously from the support only a dedicated program can provide. Furthermore, CU’s Stan Brakhage Center for Media Arts has expressed interest in participating with the Screendance program to help foster a campus-wide interdisciplinary environment for media arts education and practice. This proposal also aligns well with ongoing ICJMT curricular developments.

### **III. The Screendance Program**

The Screendance program will feature a fluid and collaborative pedagogy that promotes the development of the performer/artist within a creative interdisciplinary process. MFA students will achieve a terminal degree through a rigorous, practice-based approach to conceptual, formal, and aesthetic problem solving. Through immersive training, students will hone their skills in the three curricular aspects of Screendance: dance/movement, visual media, and sound. They will learn a variety of technical and creative skills through the focused production of original work.

The course of study will be structured around curricular environments comprised of graduate seminars and workshops. Master classes with leading practitioners in the field will enhance the workshops, which will be focused on addressing specific artistic challenges. Seminars will expose students to a range of contemporary and historically significant work concerning cinema and performance, and an analysis and interpretation of visual art. These courses will be team-taught by Art, Cinema, and Dance faculty. This program will also share courses with new programs in digital art studies. The MFA program will culminate with the production of an original artwork contextualized by a rigorous written analysis.

A graduate certificate will bring together students from a variety of disciplines, giving them the opportunity to explore creative concerns, which enhances and informs their main course of study. This population of students will likewise enrich the MFA program with their diverse interest and backgrounds. An undergraduate minor will be available to students of any major who wish to add Screendance to their course of study. Students receiving an MFA may pursue careers in independent and/or commercial art practice, documentary of dance and movement, professional dance organizations, choreography, motion picture production and in academia. Graduates who choose to seek work in other fields will be prepared to be dynamic team-members with a hands on understanding of creative problem solving, interdisciplinary thinking, experimentation, and the professional application of emergent technologies.

#### **IV. Resources Required**

The Screendance program will aim to serve 15 MFA candidates, 6 graduate certificate students, and 25 undergraduates. CU faculty whose work and teaching aligns with the mission of the program should have the option to participate as teachers and/or researchers. Team-taught courses will require the continual presence of the faculty team; therefore, a new model for team-teaching should be organized so those faculty receive full credit for these classes. We estimate the need for three new faculty lines to be open to candidates with outstanding creative work in this area to provide leadership for the program going forward.

Screendance will utilize current CU resources, such as the 2,700 square foot Black Box Theater in the ATLAS building. The Black Box features a state-of-the-art lighting grid, sprung floor, HD projection, and multi-channel sound system. Students will need regular access to dedicated studio space and equipment. A dedicated administrative and technical staff will provide support for the program. The program will function well in a newly conceived media arts academic entity or unit that recognizes and values team teaching and interdisciplinary creative work.

## **Addendum**

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## Faculty Biographies

**Dan Boord**, Professor Film Studies, Chair of Film Studies from 2005-2009, is Director of the Stan Brakhage Center. Boord teaches creative documentary within the Film Studies Program. His video works have screened at Documenta Madrid and MoMA's documentary fortnight. They have also twice been selected for screening at La Biennale Di Venezia, the Venice Film Festival. His works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Long Beach Museum in Long Beach, California (now part of the Getty Museum, Video Art Collection), and at the Art Museum, the University of California, Berkeley.

**Erika Randall**, Assistant Professor, Theater and Dance, co-wrote, directed, produced and choreographed the feature dance film, *Leading Ladies*, which premiered at the Sonoma International Film Festival in 2010, and has played to sold-out audiences at over 40 festivals world-wide and won "Best Feature" at the Palm Beach Women's Film Festival. Her interest in dance, its relationship to popular culture, and its ability to impact change, is at the heart of all of her research and teaching. Her multi-media work has been shown at the Digital Cabaret Technology Conference in Urbana, Illinois and at the Underground and the Leo Kreilsheimer Theatre in Seattle, WA.

**Stephanie Tuley** is a scholar, choreographer, and teacher whose research examines the relationship between ballet pedagogy and such notions as identity, nationhood, empire, propaganda, and warfare. In 2011 she was awarded a prestigious Endeavour Research Fellowship from the Australian government to examine the historical development of pedagogical practices in Australian ballet. She is currently developing this research, which was conducted at The Australian Ballet School, The National Library of Australia, and The Queensland University of Technology, into a book. She has presented her research at conferences nationally and internationally.

**Luis Valdovino** received a MFA from the University of Illinois in 1987. He is a Professor in the Art and Art History Department and has been in charge of the video area since 1993. Valdovino has received grants from the American Film Institute, the National Endowment for the Arts, Arts International/N.E.A., Illinois Arts Council, Colorado Council on the Arts, Helena Presents, and the Center for New Television, Chicago. His works have been included in numerous exhibitions including The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY, The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

## Programs Researched

### Arizona State University

*Master of Fine Arts in Dance (Interdisciplinary Digital Media and Performance) – Interdisciplinary program with the School of Arts, Media and Engineering*

The MFA in Dance with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Digital Media and Performance is designed to integrate as easily as possible with the existing MFA program in Dance offered in collaboration with the School of Arts, Media & Engineering (AME). The degree is 60 credit hours and normally involves three years of residency. Requirements include ongoing showings of work, 18 credit hours of required coursework in the concentration taught by AME, 19 credit hours in Herberger Institute Dance, 15 credits of electives, a final MFA Project (eight credits), written document and oral defense.

The specialization in Interdisciplinary Digital Media and Performance expands on the strength of Herberger Institute Dance in the specific area of interactive arts and provides a highly select group of graduate students with a more rigorous, in-depth and fully supported opportunity to specialize in dance and interdisciplinary digital arts. The interdisciplinary classes and research activities of the trans-disciplinary AME that form part of this specialization give you access to the high-end media technology studios of AME, to project funding and interdisciplinary collaborators.

### Media Studies at Buffalo

The Department of Media Study and Department of Theater and Dance propose a joint course in learning how to document performance for camera. This intensive production class will be co-taught in two separate studio locations by Elliot Caplan, Professor/Film, and Melanie Aceto, Assistant Professor/Dance. DMS students will have the opportunity to observe and document Modern 5 dance technique class with cameras for the purpose of learning how to photograph the moving body in space.

*The Intermedia Performance Studio (IPS)* is a collaborative initiative housed at the University at Buffalo/State University of New York (UB) including researchers, scientists, and artists from the departments of Media Study, Theatre & Dance, and Computer Science and Engineering. The IPS was designed to create intermedia experiments in virtual and mixed reality, digital technology, computer science and live performance.

### University of Michigan

*Screendance: Collaborations in Movement and Video Media*

From Maya Deren to Merce Cunningham, to music video and beyond, this course will explore the unique challenges of capturing and creating dance for the camera. Through class screenings of film and video work, class exercises, reading and discussion, students will learn about various historical and contemporary issues and approaches in combining dance and the moving image. Students will work alone and in small collaborative groups to create their own works integrating dance and video. At the end of the course, students should be able to articulate meaning in dance on film or video and discuss, analyze, and critique both student projects and "professional" dance screen works. Through creative

projects, students will develop their own visual style and an increased proficiency with digital video cameras and editing.

### **Middlebury**

#### *Goals for graduating majors in Dance:*

Dance majors have the option of emphasizing one of three foci in dance: choreography and performance, dance scholarship, or somatics. Our majors are expected to have a scholarly and embodied perspective of their studies regardless of special focus. In addition, all of our graduating students are expected to gain experience in the theatrical possibilities of lighting design and digital video and develop the ability to articulate, to those familiar and unfamiliar with the field, the interdisciplinary aspects of dance and the potential for dance to both reflect and impact culture.

### **Santa Cruz**

#### *Intermedia*

As a dynamic mix of media and genres, the Intermedia area encourages students to explore ideas through alternative visual filters. Mixed media, installation, space/time inquiry and performance art allow engagement with maximum sensory impact. Intermedia I artists focus their creative energies on four projects: an installation, a mapping piece, a narrative sequence piece and performance collaboration. Intermedia II allows students to build a body of work based upon individually-chosen themes.

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