

Moving Pictures Toronto, ON

Moving Pictures Festival of Dance on Film and Video Mediating Movement Panel Discussion, October 26, 2003, Toronto

Moderator: Kelly Hargraves

Panelists: Norma Sue Fisher-Stitt, Linda Jasper, Philip Szporer

Rapporteur: Amy Bowring

DanceFilm: A Question of Hybridity

Summary

You brought up many issues but I just want to take a couple of them and situate them in the larger picture of dance in Canada.

I see a theme in this discussion of bridging two worlds, which is very telling when one considers dance in Canada today, its discourse, its leadership, its factions – bridging worlds, I think, describes where Canadian dance needs to head in the new millennium.

You spoke of the two disciplines, dance and film, and how and where they meet. The big question seems to be: have these disciplines effectively merged into a true hybrid? I think the Bravo!Fact evening showed us many examples in Canadian dance filmmaking. In some of these short films we saw site-specific choreography simply placed in front of a camera, but these works tended to fall short of truly merging the two disciplines. Cinematic techniques, as learned by film students for example, were not necessarily engaged by the artists to the fullest possibility. However, there were some films in which greater collaboration between dance and film artists can be seen, where the look of the film had a richness and vividness, and also where the body's place within the camera was very thought out by the collaborators to create a more holistic merger of two artistic disciplines.

Looking at the examples of these short films brings us to another issue you raised: training. Are we effectively training a new generation of dance-filmmaker? How can the artistic and the educational milieus come together to create the kind of training required to foster the development of artists who will effectively balance the disciplines of dance and film to create a truly new art form as opposed to a loose merger of disciplines.

This brings up the notion of experimentation and the need to allow for this. Perhaps this is an area where funders need to be addressed so that programs allow for the organic germination of a dance film work, a system that will simulate the freedom that artists such as Ginette Laurin or Serge Bennathan have in which they spend a year letting a new work germinate before they hit the studio and later the stage.

I think Philip's example of *Lodola* illustrates where we can go in dancefilm in Canada. The filmmaker Philip Baylocq admits to being inspired by director Norman McLaren's film *Pas de Deux*. Baylocq's film illustrates a learning between generations as well as the benefit of time in art creation and I personally feel that this film is quite exemplary of a true dancefilm, a new art form and a vision for the meeting of dance and film.

DanceFilm: A Question of Hybridity

By Amy Bowring

The notion of combining the art forms of dance and film seems like an obvious pairing: moving bodies and moving images merging into one art form. Indeed, these forms were brought together in the early days of motion pictures when the Lumière brothers filmed modern dance pioneer Loie Fuller performing her *Serpentine Dance*; Canadians caught a glimpse of this Lumière film at the 1896 Toronto Industrial Exhibition. Experimentation in dance and film was not far behind. In 1935, just prior to his move to Canada, pioneering animator and director Norman McLaren made *Polychrome Fantasy*. He shot crystal formations through a microscope using polarized light and these surreal images create the backdrop to choreography that combines Duncanesque movement with Revived Greek Dance performed by a group of art students. Outside of the documentary genre, dance and film have continued to merge throughout the twentieth century developing as a distinct art form through such works as Roger Blais' *Shadow on the Prairie* (1953, choreography: Gweneth Lloyd), McLaren's *Pas de Deux* (1968, choreography: Ludmilla Chiriaeff) and *Ballet Adagio* (1971, choreography: Asaf Messerer), and Denis Poulin's *Ni Scenes, Ni Coulistes* (1978, choreography: Martine Epoque). In the 1980s, there was a mini-explosion of the form through the works of filmmakers such as Moze Mossanen and Rhombus Media's Barbara Willis-Sweete, triggering expanded interest in the form by funders, broadcasters and festival organizers. In the new millennium, dancefilm is a thriving art form unto itself but the question remains: have dance and film truly merged into their own hybrid art form? When questioning hybridity, the issues of collaboration and intention in respect to the creative artists involved demands investigation; furthermore, the development of artists regarding training and the need for time and funding to support experimentation within the new art form also requires study?

The 2004 showing of Bravo!Fact Dance Shorts at the Moving Pictures Festival of Dance on Film and Video provided many examples in Canadian dance filmmaking. In some of these short films one saw site-specific choreography simply placed in front of a camera, but these works tended to fall short of truly merging the two disciplines. Cinematic techniques related to camera movement, editing and lighting were not necessarily employed by the artists to the fullest possibility. However, there were films in which greater collaboration between dance and film artists was seen, where the look of the film had a richness and vividness, and where the body's place within the camera was given particular attention by the collaborators to create a more holistic merger of two artistic disciplines. Dance and film are inherently collaborative art forms on their own and therefore their collaborative quality increases significantly when the forms are merged. But when creating one artwork from two disciplines who has the final word on artistic decisions? Collaborators must consider framing, lighting, camera movement, editing, choreography, costuming, location, design, and most importantly intention and overall vision.

The camera guides the viewer's eye in a way that is non-existent in a live performance situation, therefore, does the choreographer deserve to have input on how the body is framed by the camera? Similarly, does the filmmaker have the right to manipulate the choreography through the editing process? A true hybrid perhaps suggests that instead of two specialists working in collaboration, artists with training in both disciplines are actually required.

Is a new generation of dance-filmmaker being effectively trained? How can the artistic and the educational milieus come together to create the kind of training required to foster the development of artists who will thoroughly balance the disciplines of dance and film to create a truly new art form as opposed to a loose merger of disciplines? Currently, filmmakers rarely make the crossover to choreography, but choreographers are increasingly taking on filmmaker roles. Is this trend fair to the trained filmmaker? Do untrained choreographer-filmmakers actually hinder the development of a true hybrid form of dancefilm? When should dancefilm training be introduced in an artist's development? Does one train as a dance artist or filmmaker first, therefore becoming grounded in one discipline, and then train as a dance-filmmaker? Or does the creation of a new art form allow for training in that art form as a specific discipline? Answers to these questions are difficult to ascertain but certainly the artistic and educational communities should be investigating new approaches to teaching this hybrid form and developing future generations of dance-filmmakers.

Considering the development of future dance-filmmakers brings up the notion of experimentation and the need for artists to have the time and funding to permit exploration. This is an area where funding bodies need to be addressed so that programs allow for the organic germination of a dancefilm work – a system that will simulate the freedom that choreographers such as Ginette Laurin or Serge Bennathan have in which they spend a year letting a new work germinate before they begin rehearsals. A lack of sufficient funding and the need to cut costs is likely part of the cause for choreographers to take on multiple roles in making dancefilms instead of fully collaborating with film artists. Experimentation must be encouraged in order to see this hybrid form continue to develop into a new art form where a vision of dance and film meet.

The art of dancefilm in Canada has evolved considerably in recent decades but there are still many issues to consider regarding collaboration and vision, training, and experimentation. Where are lines drawn between the collaborators' roles and where do they overlap? How do the dance and film milieus work with educators to produce future generations of dancefilm artists? And where do funding bodies fit within the development of this art form? The Moving Pictures Festival of Dance on Film and Video seems a likely candidate for fostering such discussions as it is a venue that can bring together dance artists, filmmakers, educators and funders.