A Space of Time:

The Evolution of a Screendance Practice

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Submitted Publications

<u>FILMS</u>

Force of Nature (2012). Director and Cinematographer, Katrina McPherson. [Film].

The Time It Takes (2012). Co-director and Cinematographer, Katrina McPherson. [Film].

We record ourselves (2016). Project Director and Co-director, Katrina McPherson. [Film].

Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes (2019). Co-director, Katrina McPherson. [Film].

Luise (2021). Director, Katrina McPherson. [Online catalogue/Film].

<u>JOURNAL ARTICLES</u>

McPherson, K. (2020). Walking in the light: reflections on screendance in a time of pandemic. *The International Journal of Screendance*, Vol. 11 (2020), pp. 52-58. ISSN: 2154-6878. https://screendancejournal.org. Sole author.

McPherson, K. (2019). Reflecting on Light Moves Festival of Screendance 2018. *The International Journal of Screendance*, Vol. 10, pp. 171-177. ISSN: 2154-6878. https://screendancejournal.org. Sole author.

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<u>BOOK</u>

McPherson, K. (2019). *Making Video Dance – a step-by-step guide to creating dance for the screen.* (2nd edition). New York & Oxon: Routledge, pp. 1-285. ISBN: 978-1-138-69912-0 (hbk); ISBN: 978-1-138-69913-7 (pbk); ISBN: 978-1-315-45265-4 (ebk). Sole author.

Book-related website: www.makingvideodance.com

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Abstract

A Space of Time: the evolution of a screendance practice explores the relationship between making, writing and teaching as a model for developing screendance. It is a portfolio submission in which the accompanying thesis examines and expands upon the most recent iterations of the author's artistic research. These take the form of films, articles, an online catalogue and a sole-authored book, all published between 2012 and 2021, and presented alongside the thesis.

Taking a performance ethnographic approach (Denzin, 2005), and acknowledging the complexity of the task at hand, the thesis and publications together provide an account of the author's journey as director, cinematographer, performer, researcher, collaborator, writer, teacher, mother and artist. Screendance exists in a hybrid space between dance and the moving image, and involves performance, film and video, visual arts, music, and sonic arts.

Reflecting the interdisciplinarity of the practice, the thesis draws on different disciplines and their intersections, to provide understandings of innovations in process and form evidenced in the publications. Through fresh perspectives offered by dance studies and documentary theory, as discovered in the writings of, among others, Sally Banes, Vida Midgelow, Stella Bruzzi and Trinh T. Minh-ha, the author shares new insights in relation to the enduring themes of her artistic research. These include the use of improvisation and manifestos; collaboration and exchange; agency, and the democratisation of the production process; and questions around reality, fiction and the identity of the bodies on screen.

The author presents the written component of the portfolio of published works as a self-reflexive activity, in which the embodied experiences of developing and making work, and curatorial perspectives on reception, are shared. Based on current reflections, the thesis proposes a model for screendance pedagogy alongside visions of the next iterations of the author's artistic research. It concludes by positioning its findings back into the public arena. In doing so, the cycle of creating, reflecting and learning continues.

Methodology

The starting point for this analytical commentary is a performance autoethnographic approach (Denzin, 2005). Here, it is the published works, written and filmic, and the self as expressed in this thesis, that together provide a multi-model account. In the unfolding story, I embody the roles of artist, director, cinematographer, performer, researcher, collaborator, writer, teacher and mother. As in the making of the published works, the writing of this thesis has required me to continually reposition myself, accessing and acting upon a process of internal distancing that allows for reflection and articulation (Hunt and Sampson, 2008).

Screendance exists in a hybrid space between dance and the moving image, and involves performance, film and video, visual arts, music and sonic arts. Expanding on the interdisciplinarity of the practice, the thesis draws on contemporary theories from different disciplines and their intersections. Selected for their relevance to my own practice, these theories include current and emerging dance, improvisation and documentary film studies. Together, they build an understanding of the innovations in process and form evidenced in the publications.

A guiding principle in this thesis is that the published works are in and of themselves a contribution to knowledge (Skains, 2018). However, it is when we encounter the publications through the frame of this methodology that their innovation becomes apparent and can be expanded upon. This approach belongs to the *performative paradigm* in which "the art is the research, and the written exposition provides discursive context" (Bolt, 2016, p. 131). This thesis thus reconsiders and reanimates the research inherent in the individual and collective publications and sets out to build a roadmap to future works at a deeper level.

The activity of researching and writing the thesis has been at heart "an act of memory" (Coffey, 1999, p. 127). My main aide-memoires included the submitted publications: the four films, three articles and my sole-authored book, *Making Video Dance* (McPherson, 2006 & 2018). This remembering has essentially been one of reflection and attempting to articulate my lived experience and embodied sense of artistic research, collaboration and exchange, and coming into being as an artist.

The need to articulate (not explain) the practice, and to place the presented publications within that rationale, asks for what Robin Nelson (2013, p.11) calls "clues". These can clarify distinctions between different modes of inquiry, and how those are expressed and evidenced. For Nelson, the intertwining resonances within artistic research include composition, technology, concept, and performance qualities, to which in this thesis I also add perspectives on historical context.

Expanding and deepening the contribution to knowledge provided by the published works, this thesis provides an intimate empirical account of my ongoing dialogue with screendance. In and through it, I notice changes (Ellis, 2016) that have taken place in my artistic research, in myself, and in my relationship to practice and the wider public. The methods described above provided a conceptual framework for the research and writing of this thesis. These are extended and added to over the following chapters, which in turn centre around and respond to the following questions:

- How can interdisciplinary practice be shaped through different fields of influence?
- What different foundational approaches contribute to the evolution of experimental screendance?
- What role can improvisation play in the democratisation of the screendance-making process?
- What are the possible relationships between reality and fiction in screendance, and how is this evidenced in the published works?
- How can reflective writing and articulation of practice contribute to the evolution of a screendance practice – and how can this generative relationship continue to be shared, and potentially shape the field?

Introduction

"Through practice, the artist comes into being" (Bolt, 2016, p. 135).

Screendance is a truly interdisciplinary artform, drawing as it does on dance, performance, film and video, visual arts, music, and the sonic arts. The creative engagement between dance and the moving image goes back to the beginning of cinema and before: Muybridge, Edison, Méliès and the Lumière brothers gravitated towards the human body in motion – and to performers of the dance of their era and location – to demonstrate their first steps towards motion pictures "that marked the passing of time through bodies in motion" (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 33). Throughout the intervening 130 or so years, at various stages and in different contexts, individuals and microcultures have experimented with and sought to promote the formal, aesthetic and expressive possibilities of the intersection between the performing body and screen-based media. It is only in the past few decades, however, that screendance has expanded and crystallised into a global artform. It now has its own evolving creative and dissemination practices, theories and histories; there are many international festivals and symposia dedicated to screendance every year and it is increasingly being taught in universities and colleges internationally.

Thinking, talking and writing about the form has been central to its evolution. With ever-increasing regularity over the past two decades, articles, blogs and books on the subject have been published, and in 2010 the peer-reviewed *The International Journal of Screendance* was founded. That said, despite many attempts to define screendance, this largely non-verbal, movement-based screen practice remains multifaceted, fluid and porous. As Douglas Rosenberg (2016, p. 15) observes in the introduction chapter to *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies*:

> "(Screendance) is a space of difference, without concrete schools of practice or movements, without a particular creation myth or singular narrative, but with numerous identifiable versions of each."

It is into Rosenberg's framework that I place my own work. As a director and filmmaker with an education in dance and video, I was one of the first of a new generation of "truly hybrid video-dance artists" (McPherson, 2006). Starting my practice in the late 1980s, I grew up through adulthood and into my professional life alongside and with the evolution of screendance. My entry into this dialogue came at a time when, in the UK, the USA, Australia, France and the Netherlands in particular, interest in this area of artistic activity was at a new high. Through financial investment by broadcasters and arts funding bodies in those countries, opportunities to see, create and discuss dance on screen significantly increased.

By the late 1980s, 'screendance' as a creative practice was becoming more visible and viable, and artists with backgrounds in both dance and film/video began to embrace the screen, rather than the stage, as the primary site for their movement-based practice. These included, among others, Becky Edmunds, Miranda Pennell, Michele Fox and Lucy Cash in the UK, Evann Siebens and Litza Bixler in the USA, Laura Taler in Canada and Tracey Mitchell in Australia. Like me, these were not choreographers who usually made work for the theatre and 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. Rather our training in, and embodied knowledge of, both movement-making and film/video production shaped our experimental and distinctive screen-based practices.

Since then, the platforms for the dissemination of screendance have migrated from television channels into festival venues, galleries and the Internet, altering the financial piece of the picture too. The technologies used have transformed and with that, so too have the materiality, processes and potential accessibility of the artform as a creative activity. Through this period of growth, and largely through the vision, passion and drive of numerous individuals, screendance continues to flourish across the globe and many of the artists of that era continue to create work and challenge the form.

My own interdisciplinary research and outputs over the past 30 years have helped to theorise and inform the artform. Proactively making, writing about, and teaching screendance, I have contributed significantly and widely to its knowledge base.

Through my films, texts and educational work, I encourage cross-disciplinary understanding, and an equity between the dance and filmic elements in the screendance-making process. The portfolio of published works submitted alongside this thesis, in the form of films and written texts, are outcomes of these activities.

Screendance is an umbrella term which has come to include single-screen, installation, online and interactive works. In the context of this thesis, my use of the term refers to films which combine the moving body and filmmaking to create unique, single-screen works. The films submitted alongside the thesis are not films of live dance, but rather their genesis was the artistic research and experimentation that I present in this thesis. In my practice and theory, screendance is an equitable practice in which one medium should not simply serve the other: the video does not exist to preserve and promote live choreography, nor should the dance be subjected to the needs of film production to the detriment of the on-screen performers (McPherson, 1998). As a creative process, screendance shares skills and characteristics, as well as people and sites of public engagement, with documentation, promotional videos, advertising and so on. What distinguishes screendance is the intention of artistic expression through the merged languages of dance and the moving image.

The screendance that I make is conceived and created for the screen. The structure of the completed work is unique to the film medium. Time and space are fundamental to both live dance performance and to screendance, yet how they are perceived and engaged with is fundamentally different. This is true from the perspective of the artists making the work, as well as for the spectators watching it. At the heart of this distinction is what I have theorised as "reconsidered space and time" (McPherson, 2006; McPherson, 2018). Understanding and working with this concept is an important and defining characteristic of the hybrid form and a core theme in my artistic research, writing and teaching.

From a formal and procedural perspective, reconsidered space and time relates to process and outcomes. In both the first and second editions of my sole-authored workbook *Making Video Dance*, published by Routledge in 2006 and 2018 respectively, as in my practice and teaching, I articulate and expand upon this

principle. I draw attention to times when the translation of the spatial and temporal *continuity* of a section of choreography as it happens in "real time and space" might be required or desired. Examples of this are documentation as a record or live broadcast of a theatrical work. On the other hand, there is the *montage* approach, in which space and time are reconceived entirely and radically for the screen. Laden as it is with possibility and history, symbolism and narrative, montage offers the full exciting potential of screendance and is central to my experimental artistic research, as it is to my writing and teaching.

In screendance, the perception of the body in space is transfigured by the camera moving through three dimensions, and yet experienced by the viewer on a two-dimensional screen. In a live performance, the spectator normally sees the action from one point of view. In screendance, on the other hand, their perspective can be altered shot by shot, and even within one shot, as the camera moves in relation to the action. Changing location, facilitated by editing between images or by a moving camera, is another way that space is "reconsidered" in screendance. Filming in environments other than the stage or studio is also a distinguishing characteristic of screendance, and similarly alters the way in which we think about space in the context of making work. In my screendance, place often shares the frame equally with the human as "body and site become joint players or protagonists in a de-hierarchised relationship between humans and place" (Kloetzel, 2016, p. 31). Moreover, the transference of the action from interior dance spaces to the rich and evocative landscapes of the Scottish Highlands and beyond traces my life journey, as it does the trajectory of my artistic research.

Researching the potential of the camera to go beyond breaking down spatial structures to become an embodied, engaged and empathetic entity in the work is an identifiable theme of my practice and the resulting theorising and pedagogy. As director and director/cinematographer, I draw attention to – and aim to equalise – the relationship between dancer and camera, performer and viewer, watcher and watched, as mediated through the frame. In my hands, the embodied camera shifts between responding to the subject of the frame from the perspective of visual design and from a somatic perspective. This in turn draws on multimodal experiences, past

and present, of the bodies – those in front of and behind or holding the camera, as well as those of the spectators.

In my films, the viewer is also supported to understand the perspective of the on-screen performer through self-reflexive practices: for example, showing the handling of the medium (Haseman, 2006) and the visibility of the interaction between performer and cinematographer, as evidenced in *we record ourselves* and *Force of Nature*, two of the films submitted with this thesis. This empathy is further encouraged through written publications, manifestos and published articles, which share knowledge of the processes involved in making screendance, as well as providing historic and artistic context. The book *Making Video Dance* articulates the principles of screendance production, as embodied in my own practice, and as such also contributes to the evolution of the informed, empathetic viewer.

Another theme running through the narrative of this thesis is the nuanced versions of collaborative relationships I have lived through. Each of the projects I have been involved in, and most often initiated, has involved different artists and skilled technicians in the process at some stage. Writing this thesis has given me the opportunity to scrutinise the types of working relationships that I have been involved in over the years. To do this, I have drawn on David MacDougall's recent writing, in which he parses and elaborates on different types of collaboration practised in filmmaking. These include "dispersed collaboration", "creative assistance", "co-authorship", "sponsorship" and "symbiosis" (MacDougall, 2020, pp. 18-37). These genres have provided a very useful prism through which I reflect on the nature of working together.

Most of the films that I have directed have been the result of "dispersed collaboration" (MacDougall, 2020, p.18) with, among others, dancers and choreographers, cinematographers and costume designers, composers and sound designers. In each of the different projects, the creative and technical input of many talented individuals was brought together and expressed through my clear directorial vision and voice. This was the case in my earliest experimental screendance, such as *Ellipse* (1989), *Fragments I & II* (1991) and *Swoop* (1992), through films such as *Moment* (1998), *Pictureshow* (1997), *Sense-8* (2001), *The Truth* (2003) and *Away*

From Here (2006), as well as dance documentary films such *Adugna* (2001), *Symphony* (2001) and *Force of Nature* (2012). Here, I fulfilled all the roles and responsibilities that are expected of a director and ultimately had the overall vision and the final say. As MacDougall (2020) suggests, this identifies me as the director, which is confirmed by my title on the films' credits.

A particularly significant collaboration was the one that I had with Simon Fildes, with whom I worked for 20 years. I first employed Fildes in 1995 to edit the BBC commission *Pace*, which I was directing. From then on, whenever I was directing a new screendance project, I brought him in as editor, and we built up our trust, evolving a collaboration which I see as displaying 'creative assistance'. Here, the "contribution of the cinematographer or editor is always more than technical, but it is always supplementary to the director" (MacDougall, 2020, pp. 18-37).

Over time, our collaboration became more blurred. We married and had three children together. Fildes and I often co-produced films through Goat Media, the Highland-based production company that we co-founded in 2001. We were also commissioned to make interactive online and installation works, which were largely "co-authored". As regards the single-screen dance films of that 15-year period, however, the roles continued with me as director and Fildes as editor. I increasingly also took the role of cinematographer, a development of practice that I write about later in this thesis. The many productions also involved the input of other creative collaborators, such as on-screen performers, composers and sound designers.

From 2010 onwards, we changed how we credited ourselves, with both *The Time It Takes* (2012) and *Coire Ruadh* (2015) described as "a video dance by Katrina McPherson and Simon Fildes". In *There is a Place* (2010) and *Uath Lochans* (2015), co-authorship credits are also given to the on-screen improvising performers Sang Jijia and Marc Brew respectively, acknowledging the three-way collaboration of performer, cinematographer and editor that resulted in these films. I appreciate and am proud of these films and what they have achieved in terms of multiple international screenings, awards and critical interest. Nevertheless, I also notice that it was during the time that they were made that I began to experience a personal disillusion and loss of interest in making work.

Simon and I stopped working together when our marriage ended in 2015. Our separation caused me a personal crisis and was the catalyst to a significant new period of experimentation in my artistic research (Lebow, 2012). The outcomes of this are the publications submitted with this thesis, which are the focus of chapters three and four. These films, along with the journal articles and the second edition of *Making Video Dance*, were published during the past ten years. This has been a period of my life during which important intellectual and creative spaces have emerged, and different collaborations have been consolidated. My ability to act and build on these has enabled me to not only support my three children as a sole parent for the past eight years, but also to expand and deepen my practice, theory and teaching in ways that I could never have anticipated.

The emphasis on improvisation, as I describe in detail throughout this thesis, places a particular kind of collaboration at the heart of my practice. Essential to this has been the input of the dance artists with whom I have worked most recently, including Kirstie Simson, Simon Ellis, Natalia Barua, Owa Barua and Harold Rheaume. My friendships and working relationships with these artists have shaped me and my practice immeasurably. In this thesis I reflect on this by describing how we worked, and, in doing so, I attempt to get to the essence of what those exchanges represent in terms of my ongoing evolution as a screendance artist.

By active and persistent engagement, in Scotland and internationally, I have reached a place, shared with only a few others, of being a screendance artist with a continuing life-long practice. It is in this space that I have used the research and writing of this thesis to reflect, "retrospectively and contemporaneously" (Van Maanen, 1995, p. 2), noting what has changed and what remains constant within my artistic research, and the personal and public context in which it operates. Through further "anticipatory reflection" (Van Maanen, 1995, p. 2), I also describe where future research might lead me.

Questions and changes, along with learning and making, interact in this thesis in a circular, spiralling, even rhizomatic manner and yet, for the sake of clarity, the chapters follow a largely chronological order.

Chapter one is the most "confessional" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 75), as I write about some of my early influences and inspirations as a teenager and young adult. In doing so, I address the first question at the heart of this thesis: "How can interdisciplinary practice be shaped through different fields of influence?"

Tracing my journey through higher education and first professional work, I reflect on what drew me to explore the "creative possibilities of dance and the moving image" (McPherson, 1998; McPherson, 2006; McPherson, 2018). I note how the impulse came from a community-minded desire to make dance performance available and accessible to a wider audience, with television being the platform through which this could happen. I describe my first steps into dance, and my first experiments in making video-dance. I also detail some of the historical, technological and philosophical contexts from which I emerged, and which influenced me as an early-career artist-director.

Central to this analysis is the writing of dance historian Sally Banes, whose story of what she terms the "postmodern dance-makers" of New York's avant-garde arts scene in the 1960s was seminal to the learning of many of my generation and many that followed (Banes, 1987; Banes, 1995). Reading about postmodern dance as a young artist and scholar, I began to encounter stories of individuals whose practices had also shifted between live performance and experimental screen media. In particular, the work and words of Yvonne Rainer and Amy Greenfield in the 1960s and early 1970s had a significant impact on the evolution of my thinking and practice.

In 1990, through a British Film Institute (BFI) touring programme curated by Moira Sweeney, I was also introduced to the films of Maya Deren, Shirley Clark and Joan Jonas, artist-filmmakers whose place in the evolution of screendance was at the time beginning to be more widely recognised (Sweeney, 1990). Sweeney was early to identify and articulate an experimental strand of dance on screen that is different from the accepted trajectory of narrative-driven Hollywood movies, as exemplified by the films of Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly and Busby Berkeley. By including films by Thomas Edison (1890s), George Méliès (1900s) and the surrealist René Clair

(1920s) in her curation, Sweeney echoes Douglas Rosenberg in his later theorising, highlighting works that are "less concerned with narrative arc than with the phenomenology of bodies in motion as apprehended by optical technologies" (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 35). Through learning about and seeing the early 'cinedance' of these radical trailblazers, I began to place my nascent practice within a wider sphere of experimental and boundary-breaking dance and moving image history.

The perspectives of screendance historians Sherril Dodds (2006) and Sarah Rubridge (1993) also add to my recollections of the heyday of British dance on television, from the early 1980s to the mid-2000s. Within the context of the thesis, they help me describe the backdrop of the emergence of the new generation of "hybrid video-dance artists" (McPherson, 2006), and provide context for my own earliest screen and written publications. In chapter two, I also reflect on my formative decade as a director of factual programmes for television and make connections and distinctions between the skills and experiences that I was gaining in the broadcast world and my early experimental approaches to making video dance.

Chapter two then builds on this initial contextualisation by asking: "what different approaches contributed to the evolution of my own experimental screendance?" These include my investigation into the nature of the camera in screendance, and the potential relationships between on-screen performer, cinematographer/filmmaker and spectator. Exploring ways in which the camera can be used not to objectify the person in the frame, but rather encourage empathy in the spectator, has been a central concern of my artistic research. This began with an early desire to "take the viewer to the heart of the movement" through the thoughtful and meticulously planned positioning and moving of the camera in relation to the dancing body (McPherson, 1998 & 2006; Prinsloo, 2018). Over time, improvisation replaced choreography and storyboarding, as I strove for on-screen spontaneity, initially setting scores – or rules – for the dancers and cinematographer. Eventually, I evolved a freer approach, which I term "mise-en-scene directing" (McPherson, 2018), establishing my role as cinematographer/director. This is exemplified in *The Time It Takes* (2012), one of the films submitted with this thesis.

At this point, I reflect on the films of Becky Edmunds, who similarly interrogates the relationship between performer and spectator as mediated through the camera. I also draw comparisons with Lisa Nelson's earlier research into the potential of the camera to make more visible improvised dance movement, in all its nuanced complexity. Through making these connections, and articulating and analysing the evolution of my own processes, I also address another of the thesis' questions: "what role can improvisation play in the democratisation of the screendance-making process?"

As a director and director/cinematographer of my own screendance works, I have foregrounded the relationship between performer and viewer, as mediated through the camera. Jay Ruby (1977) writes that self-reflexivity in filmmaking is about showing the audience all stages of the process: "PRODUCER – PROCESS – PRODUCT" (p. 3). This self-reflexivity is also evident in the approach to editing screendance that I have evolved through my practice. Montage, looping and repetition draw the spectators' attention to the edit. This is done through the juxtaposition of materials from different temporal and spatial contexts, as well as the use of composite frames or 'spilt-screen'. Making the process evident in this way relates to the idea that the works are performative, and that they contribute to learning (Bolt, 2016). In chapter two, I also connect this visibility of process and sharing of knowledge to Dogma Dance, a manifesto that I launched together with fellow dance filmmakers Deveril (no second name) and Litza Bixler in the late 1990s.

In chapter three, I move on to address the question: "what are the possible relationships between reality and fiction in screendance, and how is this evidenced in the published works?" In doing so, my recourse to documentary theory intensifies as it offers new perspectives on my artistic research. Screendance has typically distanced itself from documentary filmmaking, the consequence perhaps of a nervousness around confused intentions and a perceived need to draw a clear line between the documentation of live performance and original movement-based works created for the screen. Through the research for this thesis, however, I have been struck by the usefulness of looking at my filmmaking from the perspective of the "emergent field of documentary studies" (Winston, 2013, p. 1).

Directing and filming *Force of Nature* created the space for what I now retrospectively reflect on as the next significant disruption in my artistic research. I describe how my engagement with Kirstie Simson and the other improvising dance artists with whom we worked on this dance documentary caused me to question the relationship between reality and fiction in my filmmaking. This blurring of boundaries sparked my transformation from a director/cinematographer employing an embodied, empathetic camera to also being a presence in front of the camera. In the methods employed in *Force of Nature,* not only does the filmmaker become visible, but the traditional hierarchies of agency and authorship are challenged.

Building on this research, the next film *we record ourselves* (2016) resulted from a personal artistic manifesto in which I stipulated that "There is no differentiation between roles, meaning that everyone involved in the process will perform, influence the mise-en-scene, operate the camera and edit the work" (McPherson, 2019, p. 248). Researching within these artistic restrictions, *we record ourselves* questions more conventional screendance processes by offering a fluid, non-hierarchical approach to production roles. In the final work, the performance of the four skilled performers/cinematographers/editors, and the visual and sonic material that they handle, create a restless multiplicity of perspectives and narratives.

Questions of identity and narrative are central to my retrospective reflection on *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes*, the last of the films under discussion in chapter three. The emotionally charged images of this film occupy a space that accesses the expressive potential of screendance, by tapping into the potential to unlock stories, meaning, communication and experimentation in the work. The question that I reflect on now is whether, as spectators, we are witnessing reality or fiction, or something in between? Stella Bruzzi's proposal that the relationship between filmmaker and subject is one of negotiation, and as such a performative act, provides me with some answers (Bruzzi, 2006). Trinh T. Minh-ha's description of her own films as being "fluid, interacting movements" also reveals a way for me to recognise my own practice within a wider conversation (Minh-ha, 2018, no page numbers). These insights deepen my thinking about the nature of performance in *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes*, a film in which the autobiographical elements of the

relationship between Harold and me, as expressed in our improvised movement, is central.

Through the autoethnographic piece of this research, I recognise that the published works also tell a story of my personal development and circumstances. In the act of moving into the frame, I allow my embodied presence to become visible, my body to take up space, my interactions with other subjects and collaborators to be seen. Writing this thesis has clarified for me that my desire to inhabit this creative space reaches right back to my early wish to discover my artform. My long and intense engagement with screendance, and my experimentation with the practice, has ultimately been the finding of my voice, through my body, in and on the screen. This has been a profound discovery for me. It has also led me to research and think about the relationship between lived experience and the fictional nature of my screendance films.

Chapter four begins with a discussion of my most recent published work, the *Luise* project, submitted with this thesis as an online catalogue and short film. The films under discussion in chapter three reveal the tension between reality and fiction in my work. They also explore memory, archive and how we can construct identities through a multiplicity of spaces. Reflecting on them on completion, my creative thinking took another step forward that led to this new work as I asked myself: "If I am going to be seeing my body in the frame, what stories I will find there?"

The idea that persisted and came to the fore was to take as my starting point the story of my maternal grandmother. Luise was a refugee who fled Berlin with her two young children, my mother and aunt, in February 1945. Luise took her own life in 1946 by walking into the North Sea. In 2019, I set out to develop a new original screendance work, based on a collection of photographs that remain of my grandmother. This process builds on my ongoing interest in the fluid potential of the empathetic camera and arises directly from making my body the subject of the screendance frame. The resulting work-in-progress, the *Luise* project, signals the direction in which I see my artistic research heading. The process of (self-)realisation and re-discovery has intensified during the reflective research and writing of this thesis, and I have noticed how my impulse to move away from collaborative

relationships towards a solo working practice has crystalised. In the *Luise* project, I address universal themes of memory, identity and belonging through the document of an embodied, highly personal story. It is a story that merges fictions and realities, set against history. It expands on the artistic research that has been my life's work thus far, and which I reflect on and share throughout the chapters of this thesis.

Chapter four concludes by addressing the question: "How can reflective writing and articulation of practice contribute to the evolution of a screendance practice – and how might this generative relationship continue to be shared, and potentially shape the field?" To answer this, the focus widens to contextualise my own writing within the expanding field of scholarly discourse and publication around screendance.

Manifest in my artistic research is the *idea* of the hybrid artform of screendance, and an *ideal* of equality between the dance and the filmic elements within that process as in the finished work. I have consistently sought to dismantle the barrier between the performer and the spectator as mediated through the camera/cinematographer/director. This quest for community and equality is also expressed in my desire to teach, to write and to share knowledge. This is evidenced in the three journal articles and the second edition of *Making Video Dance*, submitted with the thesis and with which I conclude chapter four.

Chapter One: Finding the Practice: impulses and inspirations

This chapter engages with the first question of this thesis: "How can interdisciplinary practice be shaped through different fields of influence?" In answering, the writing traces the trajectory of my earliest artistic research. In this first chapter, I describe some of the key impulses and influences that shaped the beginnings of my investigation into dance and the moving image, and place my emergence as an early-career artist-director in a historical, technological and philosophical context. These formative experiences and evolving strands of artistic research both shaped my practice and underpin the published works submitted with this thesis.

From looking to moving

At school I was one of the 'A-grade academic kids', good at everything, excelling in languages, history, a smattering of science. Although educated at a school that foregrounded creativity, I did not consider myself to be 'artistic', at least not in terms of handling paint or clay, playing a musical instrument, or acting in a play. I was nevertheless totally enthralled by the concepts, stories and images of art history that were introduced to me in my O and A Level art classes, and I pursued this passion in countless hours spent after school in the Fine Art rooms of Edinburgh's Central Library. Poring over and copying out paragraphs from books about artists and their work, from Leonardo and Botticelli to Paul Nash, Kandinsky and the Bauhaus, I soaked in the pictures on the pages. More than that, I loved that the texts and images spoke to me about how the artists might have been thinking. As written about in the texts, these artists' practices reflected the social and historical contexts in which they lived and worked and often a disruption of what had come before. Even though most of these celebrated individuals were male, I identified with them.

I knew from then on that I wanted to live my life as an artist, to find my voice through creativity. The only problem was that I could not connect this desire to the processes and techniques that I attempted in the practical art classes at school. I could see how, in the hands of my classmates, the traditional media of paint, pencils and clay bent to their intentions. Not so in mine, and I was always left feeling frustrated, and

worried that I was not, and could never become, an artist. What I was unaware of was that screendance, the artform in which I would become so deeply intertwined as a practitioner, writer and teacher, had "not yet been invented" (Kappenberg and Rosenberg, 2010). [1]

From as early as I can remember, I wanted to dance. Although otherwise very open-minded, my Marxist parents never allowed me to take ballet classes as they considered it a bourgeois pastime. I was an enthusiastic Scottish country dancer, but that felt far removed from self-expression and there was little else on offer in Edinburgh in the 1970s. My first opportunity to engage with dance as an artform came at the time I was doing my A Levels when, according to the Companies House register, the Belford Centre for Dance in Edinburgh opened its doors in March 1984. Somehow, I found myself there. There are no further traces of the Belford Centre that I can find on the Internet now; however, from my memories of what I understood at the time, the vision for this artist-run initiative was to offer modern and postmodern dance classes and workshops. These were taught by pre-eminent artists and teachers, many of them brought over as guests from the USA to Scotland. Bolstered by the heady financial freedom of a 17-year-old with a Saturday job, I found my way down to the Belford Centre and signed up for a workshop with Simone Forti.

As she encouraged us to travel through and interact with the space and each other through our embodied memories of how animals move, I immediately felt connected to the image-based movement improvisations that Forti offered us. I felt that I belonged in that place, with those people. It would only be later, studying the history of Western theatre dance at Laban, that I learnt who Simone Forti is: a seminal figure in the development of improvised performance; a member of the revolutionary Judson Church postmodern dance group in 1960s New York; a student of Anna Halprin and collaborator of Nam June Paik, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and others;

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[1] "Screendance has not yet been invented" is the subtitle of the first edition of *The International Journal of Screendance*. In the Introduction to the second Volume, published in 2012, the Journal's co-editor Claudia Kappenberg expands upon this. Kappenberg describes how she turned to Professor Ian Christie's lecture "Cinema has not yet been invented" (which in turn was a reference to André Bazin's declaration) as a device for initiating discourse around the critical review of the evolution of screendance as an artform (Kappenberg, 2012). Kappenberg invited Christie to present his research at the first seminar of the AHRC Screendance Network at the University of Brighton (September 2009). A transcript of this lecture, and the subsequent Q & A, is published in Volume Two of *The International Journal of Screendance.*

an artist, scholar and teacher (Banes, 1987 & 1995). All I knew, as I crawled on all fours across the wooden floor of the Belford studio, swaying my coccyx like a lion, was that this was what I wanted to do with my life. It occurred to me that this "thinking dance" could be a place where I could both express myself artistically *and* satisfy my intellectual interests (Albright, 2003), although at the time I had no idea of the context in terms of the evolution of dance, art and cultural thinking that Forti and her improvisation scores represented (Banes, 1987 & 1995).

As well as being political idealists, my parents brought my brother and me up in a household that appreciated literature, theatre, music and art. My German mother was a lecturer in GDR literature and poetry at the University of Edinburgh and my father a pioneering clinical psychologist. Culture meets individualism. My brother and I were educated at the Edinburgh Steiner School, where our days were infused with arts, crafts, music and performance, and both of us gravitated to lens-based art forms: my brother is a photojournalist and I make films. In our professional artistic lives, we have both interacted with the world largely through the camera.

In my final year at school, with the encouragement of the regular teachers at the Belford Centre and contrary to the expectations of my family and school, I applied to, auditioned for, and gained a place at the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London. At the time Laban was the only institution in the UK to offer an honours degree in Dance Theatre and it had a faculty of many of the most influential dance practitioners and educators of the era. What Laban offered was unique and forward-looking. The degree course combined physical training in modern dance techniques, supplemented with ballet, and an artistic education in the form of choreography, music, lighting and stage and costume design, with academic subjects such as dance history, sociology and movement studies.

From stage to screen: the hybrid artist emerges

In the introduction to the first edition of my book *Making Video Dance* (2006), I wrote the following description of the transition from stage to screen in my nascent artistic practice:

"My own impulse to make video dance came when, on graduating from the Laban Centre, London in 1988 with a degree in Dance Theatre, I wanted to bring dance to as wide an audience as possible. Although I was keen to be a choreographer, I was reluctant to make work that, I felt then, would only be seen by other dance enthusiasts at one of the small, dedicated dance theatres in the big cities. Around that time, in the UK, new ways of making dance for television were being explored through ground-breaking schemes such as Channel 4's *Dancelines* and the BBC's *Dance House*. These offered a refreshing alternative to the broadcasts of full-length ballets 'live' from the stage at Covent Garden Opera House that then made up the majority of dance on UK television. Now experienced film and television directors and choreographers were being brought together to experiment with movement, cameras and editing and the results were broadcast to audiences that, although perhaps small by prime-time television standards, were inconceivable in a live theatre context. As a young dance-maker, I saw many of these short 'video dance' works and was inspired and excited by the potential I could see in this new, hybrid medium" (McPherson, 2006, p. xxviii).

On graduating from Laban in 1988, inspired to learn how to make 'dance for television', I looked for ways in which to gain this knowledge. This was not straightforward, because at the time there was no screendance pedagogy in existence, the subject was not yet taught in universities, and only the very occasional one-off workshop or creative laboratory took place. One such event was a three-day course for established choreographers and television directors taught by Bob Lockyer, the long-term Executive Producer of Dance at the BBC in London, in which I participated in July 1988. Despite feeling very much the outsider as a newly graduated and experimentally minded dance-artist, the requisite conceptual clarity, specificity and new technologies of 'dance for the camera' immediately clicked with me. I was hooked.

My drive to explore the creative possibilities of what I, at the time, preferred to describe as 'dance and the moving image' was motivated by wanting to make

modern and postmodern dance performance accessible to a wide audience, with television being the platform through which this could happen.

Dance and television have a shared history that can be traced back to the very earliest days of the broadcast medium. In an extensive piece of research, published in the form of a chapter in *Parallel Lines*, dance historian Robert Penman (1993, p. 103) tells us that the broadcast of ballerina Maria Gambarelli performing for the camera took place just six weeks after the BBC was launched, using John Logie Baird's system, in August 1932. Over the decades that followed, ballet and modern dance became a staple of British television. 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, that were designed to bring the glamorous theatrical experience into the living room. It was a public service.

Amongst all the archived output, however, there are names mentioned in relation to a more experimental approach to combining dance and television, even very early on. Recent research by Cara Hagan, included in her book *Screendance from Film to Festival*, has brought attention to the work of Pauline Koner and Kitty Doner, described as "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. Moreover, the artists also articulated their practices, encouraging stage choreographers to develop "camera consciousness" and describing their hybrid technique of "cameragraphing" (Hagan, 2022, p. 37).

In the UK, from the 1950s to the 1970s, Sadler's Wells dancer turned TV producer Margaret Dale was prolific and often experimental too. In his introduction chapter of my book *Making Video Dance*, Bob Lockyer describes working as Dales' assistant on a dance-based series called *Zodiac*, in which leading choreographers of the age, such as Peter Darrell and Kenneth MacMillan, made innovative twenty-minute dance stories for television (Lockyer, 2019). In the early 1960s, Swedish choreographer Birgit Cullberg was also developing radical approaches to making dance for television and twice won the Prix Italia (Näslund, 1999). Later, as producer then

executive producer of dance at the BBC, Lockyer continued in the experimental vein, directing works with London Contemporary Dance Company and Robert Cohan before going on to initiate and oversee the influential *Dance for the Camera* commissioning series of the 1990s and early 2000s.

In parallel to this activity, more readily available video technology and the emergence of experimental video art were opening up new and different channels for dance and moving image collaboration. The interconnecting influences of experimental filmmaking, television and video art on dance and performance is beyond the scope of this thesis. That said, I am at this time co-editing, with Douglas Rosenberg, a volume of the *International Journal of Screendance* dedicated to the legacy of experimental video art and television in the evolution of the form. What is important here is to acknowledge that, whilst my own practice entered an expanding field, it was one already based on numerous threads of innovation and experimentation by many individuals over the decades that preceded. This is a story that is continually being discovered, uncovered and further articulated.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the UK, dance on television was moving into a new fertile phase of activity, one in which the BBC and the relatively new broadcaster Channel 4 were finding new ways to present art on television. This resulted in the commissioning of experimental dance for television by series such as *Dance Lines* on Channel 4 (1986-1992) and subsequently the long-running *Dance for the Camera* series on the BBC (1990-2004), both of which had a profound and lasting influence on the evolution of screendance (Allen and Jordan, 1993; Rubridge, 1993; Dodds, 2005). [2]

The usual format for these commissions was that a choreographer, often from the modern dance tradition and with a company and a track record of funding, would pair up with (or be paired up with) a television director to create an original work for the screen. Their project may or may not be based on an already-existing live performance work by the choreographer, who would usually bring the dancers and

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[2] Similar broadcast commissioning schemes occurred in other parts of the world, around the same time, for example in Canada and the USA (Mitoma, Zimmer and Stieber, 2002). It is notable that these are the countries in which, until more recently, the majority of screendance has been produced.

sometimes composers and costume designers on board. The television directors would in turn bring their team of cinematographer, camera assistants, editors and so on with them onto the production. The series were often produced by umbrella production companies chosen by the broadcasters, who would be represented by executive producers.

I was inspired by the potential of this new hybrid form and avidly read the little that I could find published about dance for the screen. This included a special edition of *Dance Theatre Journal* which was dedicated to the *Dance Lines* series and published to coincide with the broadcast of this series in 1988. My utopian vison of a truly hybrid form was soon shattered, however, by my experiences as a production runner on some of the major dance for television series, and I baulked at the attitudes and processes that I observed in action. As a young creative woman, drawn to collaboration and inspired by the process-based, non-hierarchical approaches of the postmodern dancemakers, the television production structure seemed very top heavy, even patriarchal.

What I witnessed coming in as a was a hierarchical situation in which the director (typically men) seemed to call the shots, while the dancers (often women) – and sometimes also the choreographers – seemed largely voiceless. Knowing what I do now about some significant women who played a part in the evolution of dance on television, I can only surmise that this seemingly patriarchal situation was happening as budgets grew bigger. Had I been aware then of the experiments of the past – many of them lost because they were from an era when it was impossible to record television images (Lockyer, 2019, p. xxv) – perhaps I would have been heartened, but then maybe also less determined to find a new way of working? As it was, I fretted particularly about the lack of agency for the on-screen performers. I sensed early on that knowledge is empowering in these situations. I wanted to understand the technologies and filming procedures myself and to initiate new ways of working. My goal became to evolve a practice that brought artists together in a space of equality, to explore the creative possibilities of dance and the moving image in a truly hybrid form. I also wanted to share my growing knowledge with others, through teaching workshops and writing about the work (McPherson, 2008).

Enter video art

My fascination with the creative possibilities of dance on screen continued to grow, and yet there was a lack of any learning opportunities in 'video dance'. A hunger to explore the technologies and processes of video production led me to undertake the postgraduate diploma in Electronic Imaging at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design (DJCA) in Dundee, in the academic year 1990-91. This was a pioneering course where top-spec camera, sound and post-production technologies were taught and experimented with in the context of an art college.

I had become aware of the School of Television particularly through the work of DJCA alumnus Lei Cox, which I came across in the long, blacked-out gallery space upstairs at the Third Eye Centre while Glasgow was City of Culture in 1990. Cox's quirky, multi-layered video art installations were on display alongside those of Mineo Aayamaguchi. In the latter's single-channel works, I was struck by how fragments of the body such as toes or leg were used to draw attention to the spaces within and outwith the television screen. Included in the exhibition was a monitor staging of Channel 4's *Television Interventions*, a series of short experimental videos by artists such as Rose Garrard, Steve Littman, David Mach and Bruce McClean, inspired by David Hall's original *Interruptions* from 1971 (*Rewind*, 2022). I was immediately intrigued and totally inspired by the visual and sonic transformations of time and space that I witnessed in these anarchic installations and non-narrative single-channel works. They did not look or sound like anything I had seen on a screen before, and they appealed to my postmodern dance-inspired fascination with experimental forms and processes.

To my electronic imaging studies, I brought my education in modern and postmodern dance performance and choreography. I now combined this with technical, aesthetic and theoretical learning in video art and television practices. These included cinematography and lighting, offline and online editing, sound recording and post-production processes such as keying, animation, compositing and mixing. In this creative cauldron, I began to evolve the concepts, themes and approaches that would become foundational to my screendance practice in the decades that followed.

Looking back now at this early and important time of discovery and experimentation, I can see that I was largely free of the need or even ability to imitate. This was the time before the Internet and before screendance expanded to the global artform it is today. My early artistic research came largely from a direct engagement with the media of dance and video, rather than being influenced by the work of other dance filmmakers. I had no teacher of screendance to suggest how best to do things. Instead, I was inspired by the concepts, ideas and approaches that I perceived in other artforms, such as live dance, avant-garde film, music and video art, which I then applied to my emerging practice. Through necessity and circumstances, and fuelled by a belief in *what might be*, mine was a highly experimental approach, in which the making of the work was propelled by concepts and inquiry, iterations and reflections, and "misfires" (Bolt, 2016, p. 136). As such, it speaks to what Rosenberg (2016, p.13) describes as a "failing forward that empowers the next wave of the avantgarde".

A trajectory of experimentation

Two years into my own explorations of the creative possibilities of dance and the moving image, a series of four programmes of films, called *Dance Film Dance*, toured to independent cinemas with the BFI's Film and Video Umbrella. This was a potent selection of films which curator Moira Sweeney had programmed to:

> "..highlight the many differing links between dance and cinema, from movement, rhythm and illusion, to the important role that dance has played as in cinema as a means of political intervention" (Sweeney, 1990, no page numbers).

Here for the first time, I saw the films of Maya Deren, Shirley Clark, Joan Jonas, and animators Len Lye and Norman McLaren, set side by side with contemporary video dance by Bouvier/Obadia, Michael Clark, Charles Atlas and Lloyd Newson's DV8. The impact of seeing these works, and being shown how they connected, was a defining moment in my own education and the curatorial perspective offered by Sweeney had a profound impact on me. I sought out more exposure to the early

works, particularly of Maya Deren and Shirley Clark. The fact that both these women had started as dancers and choreographers before turning their attention to film resonated with my own interests and trajectory.

It was primarily these women's published reflections on their own filmmaking processes that inspired me at the time. I saw more of their films by travelling to the BFI library in London, where I watched 16mm prints of their films on a tabletop Steinbeck, threaded up for me by a white-gloved archivist. This intense personal engagement with the ideas and practices of these artists had a profound impact on my ideas and practice development. One of the most enjoyable and affirming experiences of the past 20 years has been that the contribution of these early screendance pioneers is now widely accepted within the field, and they are extensively written about and viewed. Watching, reading about and discussing their work remains central to my own teaching, mentoring and curriculum development.

To facilitate my early experimentation in video dance, in 1989 I co-founded the Glasgow-based Randomoptic Pick Up Company with fellow Scottish Laban graduates and choreographer-dancers Vanessa Smith and Karen Grant. Over the next four years, we created and presented numerous installations and performances at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh and at Tramway, the Third Eye Centre and Scottish Ballet's Robin Howard Theatre in Glasgow. As co-directors of the company, we collectively devised the overall concept of the different works. We were inspired by, and evolved our own versions of, John Cage and Merce Cunningham's chance procedures and scores for creating the new live and filmed dance material. Karen and Vanessa performed, and my role was directing and creating the projection and on-stage television elements that were integral and integrated into the theatre performance. The live works also involved music performances such as prepared piano, three electric guitars at full volume on stage alongside the dancers, and a Nam June Paik-inspired 'video-piano'. We invited other performers, musicians, and photographers from in and around the vibrant artistic subcultures of 1990s Glasgow to work with us on projects such as *Stringfield* (1990), *Viewfinder* (1991) and *Walk On* (1992).

This intensely interdisciplinary practice, combining live performance and digital imaging, was at the time barely recognised by funding bodies such as the Scottish Arts Council. The concept of dance made specifically for and only experienced on a screen also did not easily fall into the categories of dance performance or film production, which were supported by the arts and film councils in Scotland. To circumvent these funding silos, and to achieve the experimental single-screen outputs that I ultimately wanted to make, I became adept at producing stand-alone single-screen pieces from the moving image elements of the live works. These were not documentation of the live performances but rather unique 'video-dance' works. They include *Ellipse* (1989), *Fragments I & II* (1991), *Colourwheel* (1992) and *Swoop* (1992). These and other films I have made are available to watch at https://www.makingvideodance.com.

When I consider these earliest screendance works, I recognise the intense exploration of the medium that still characterises my approach to making screendance. I can also identify techniques that remain consistent throughout my entire output to date, and which reveal my attitude to the making of work. These include: the fragmentation of the choreography through close-up framing; a moving, often handheld camera; the dancer acknowledging the process by gazing into or glimpsing the lens; blank colour screens; montage editing; repetition and looping of images; slow motion video and audio; the use of actuality sounds both in and out of synch with the visual images. These techniques display a tendency towards reflexivity, in that they draw attention to the medium and are consciously presenting, or at least not hiding, the processes that lead to the creation of the works. As such, they also display a desire to share knowledge of the creative process. In relation to documentary filmmaking, Renov (2004, p.35) links this type of approach to Brecht's notion of "radical separation", whereby the viewer is released from the hypnotic potential of the theatrical/filmic event by the foregrounding of the different components of the medium. This is an area of historic research that I would like to explore in more depth, given more time and space, specifically as regards the use of sound in my screendance works.

In her book *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964,* dance historian Sally Banes (1995) shares her meticulously detailed research into the performance

work that was presented at the Greenwich Village performance venue and describes the emergence of this most influential new avant-garde of western dance theatre. Banes connects the activities of energetic, experimental artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and Simone Forti, working individually and collectively across boundaries of artform, expectation and tradition, with wider political, cultural and philosophical developments of the time. Banes (1995, p. xvi) likens the characteristics of the Judson era of dance-making to the phenomenological trends of philosophy when she writes:

> "The phenomenological exhortation: 'Zu dem Sachen!' ('To the Things!') was echoed in the manifestos of artists in every field: Poetry, music, theatre, and dance stressed performance more than the literary aspect of their form, aspiring to more immediacy, more 'presentness', more concrete experience."

Revisiting Banes now, I realise that the influence of postmodern dance movement roots very deeply in my practice, beginning with these Randomoptic experiments. My early research into how the formal elements of video art and postmodern western theatrical dance combine in a new, hybrid form resulted in these performative works. Furthermore, through various iterations of these experiments, my focus was beginning to transgress from the desire to put dance on television towards a more avant-garde mission, one based on my vision for the "creative exploration of the collaborative possibilities of dance and the moving image" (McPherson, 1998, p. 48).

Convergence: television and art in my personal practice

Whilst the experimental impulse steered me away from the dance for television establishment, television provided an important strand of professional skill development and income early on in my career. In my mid-twenties, I became a television director, making factual programmes on arts, entertainment and leisure subjects. Over a period of 12 years, from the early 1990s into the 2000s, I was regularly employed by BBC Scotland, Scottish Television, and many of the bigger independent production companies such as Wark Clements, Wall-to-Wall and Ideal

World. To this role I brought a background in making, reading and thinking about art, a sense of movement and rhythm, and the ability to visualise and choreograph the relationship between the camera and the action being filmed. I had extensive experience of working collaboratively and was able to give clear direction, to organise people and to communicate a vision. These were skills that I had gained as a dance-maker and though my ongoing artistic practice.

This work as a television director influenced the development of my screendance practice in several significant ways. Firstly, I could buy myself time to make art, in that I could take on well-paid directing and series-directing jobs, earning enough to see me through periods of time when I was working on the screendance projects. Secondly, through the television directing, I developed a high-level technical understanding of screen production, which I was able to apply to my evolving ideas on creating, thinking about and teaching screendance. Finally, some of the highly skilled individuals I worked with regularly in television, such as cinematographer Neville Kidd and sound designer/dubbing mixer John Cobban, were keen to also work on my screendance productions, as the experimental approach challenged and interested them. They brought their high level of artistry and competence to the productions, through supportive professional collaborations. I felt that it was important that the experimental screendance had the highest production values possible, giving the work the best chance to be taken seriously as a more mainstream dance for television work would be. This was borne out when *Moment* (1998) won the award for Best Screen Choreography at the IMZ Dance Screen Festival in Monaco in 2000. This independently produced film was up against mainly big-budget broadcast television commissions.

Dance for television, but not *like* dance for television

Despite my initial impulse to bring dance to a wider audience (McPherson, 2006), I have over the years directed only one original screendance work specifically for television. In my broadcast directing work, I did seek out opportunities to film live dance when possible, including the Martha Graham Dance Company and Mark Morris Dance Companies for the BBC's coverage of the Edinburgh Festival. The intention of these short films, however, was to showcase and promote the live work.

In them, the screen essentially becomes a "delivery platform for dance" (Rosenberg, 2018, p. 3), rather than a site for the experimental hybrid form that my artistic research is concerned with.

A film where these two strands converged is *Pace*. In 1995, I was commissioned by the BBC/Arts Council of Great Britain's influential *Dance for the Camera* series to direct this five-minute short, choreographed and performed by Marisa Zanotti and with an original soundtrack by composer Philip Jeck. When Marisa and I applied to the *Dance for the Camera* scheme, we were independent artists in our mid-twenties and our everyday experiences and influences included techno clubbing, track running, improvised movement and video art. Our vision was to harness that energy, draw the TV audiences in and surprise them as this work popped out of the TV scheduling between snooker and the evening news. Some of the foundational approaches of my experimental screendance practice, such as the use of improvisation of dancer and camera and the montage editing, which I discuss further in the following chapter, are already in evidence in *Pace*.

We were commissioned following a proposal and pitch, and yet this gave little indication of the struggles that we would face to fit our experimental approaches into the constraints and expectations of dance for television. The budget of £25,000 for five minutes of programme was generous, and the stakes and the technical opportunities it afforded were high. Despite its aesthetic seeming lo-fi by today's standards, we filmed *Pace* on hi-8 video tape and edited on an online Avid system, both cutting-edge technical systems in the mid-1990s. Our aims were clear, even if meeting the expectations of the producers and commissioners was more challenging. Not for the last time in my career as a director, I had to defend the processes that we chose to follow, our enthusiastic "diving in" (Haseman, 2006, p. 100). We came up against resistance from the commissioning editors to our use of improvisation, as they were expecting a clearly described narrative and storyboards. Our choice of a dance studio as location and practice clothes as costume also went against the highly stylised, theatrical aesthetic of most commissioned dance for television of that era.

Radical at its time of making, *Pace* has continued to occupy the avant-garde over more than 25 years, as it has been at the forefront of evolving and shifting audiences. The changing context in which *Pace* has been viewed is fascinating, in the picture that it builds of how the places and spaces in which screendance is accessed have changed over the years (Dodds, 2019). This shift in place of engagement with the spectator is echoed in a similar merge by some types of documentary film into visual art and appearing in galleries (Renov, 2013).

First broadcast on BBC2 at the prime time of around 9pm, *Pace* was subsequently screened at international festivals, including Oberhausen Short Film Festival in Germany and the specialist IMZ Dance Screen, where it was projected on a big screen. *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. It has been screened as part of conference talks and presentations by key screendance scholars, including Douglas Rosenberg and Claudia Kappenberg. 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.

In this first chapter, I have reflected on my earliest inspirations, tracing my introduction to art, first steps in dance, and early experiments in the emerging artform of video-dance. I have described how my impulse to explore the screen as a site for creativity came from a desire to make dance performance available and accessible to a wider audience. Although television seemed to offer the platform through which this could happen, the dominant production processes that I encountered in the industry did not align with my vision for a democratic, collaborative approach to making work. Instead, I found alternative sites for experimentation, drawing on the professional and financial support that my work as a television director offered me.

My diverse and interdisciplinary experiences converged in the works and processes that are foundational to my practice and to my teaching, as I will reflect on in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Two: Developing the Practice: foundations and approaches

This chapter addresses the question: "what different foundational approaches contribute to the evolution of experimental screendance?" Here I articulate some of the concepts and methods that I have developed in my approach to making and thinking about screendance, including the role of the camera, the use of improvisation, and approaches to editing and sound. Continuing to contextualise my evolving practices, I draw on the films and theories of my contemporary, screendance artist Becky Edmunds, and of Lisa Nelson, whose work with video and Contact Improvisation in the 1970s was ground-breaking and connects strongly to my own. To conclude the chapter, I introduce Dogma Dance, a manifesto-based artistic 'movement' that I co-founded in the late 1990s. Taken together, these topics trace the trajectory of my artistic research, leading ultimately to the published works that are submitted with this thesis. They also demonstrate how I have consistently used reflection as a tool for the onward development of screendance as an artform and offer a template for practice development and knowledge-sharing though publication and teaching.

The role of the camera

In the early years of my practice, I sought to use the camera to "take the viewer to the heart of the action" (McPherson, 1998, 2006 & 2018; Prinsloo, 2018). My preparation for filming was through meticulous storyboarding of the framing, positioning and trajectory of the camera in relation to choreographed dance movement. I drew on Laban's concepts of spatial orientation, combined with chance procedures inspired by John Cage and Merce Cunningham, to determine where and how the camera would be located and move in relation to the dancing performer.

In an article entitled 'Video Dance: Sketches on Process and Structure', published in the artists' magazine *COIL*, I describe my desire to "create a situation where neither artform (dance or video) is compromised, but rather the two fuse to create innovative, dynamic, and compelling work, greater than the sum of its parts"

(McPherson, 1998, p. 49). Already articulated early on in my career, this aim remains consistent and central to my practice to this day. The *COIL* article includes reflections on my research as practice, as well as illustrations in the form of hand-drawn storyboards and screen grabs from video dance works that I had directed at the time, including *Fragments* (1991), *Pace* (1995) and *Pictureshow* (1997). In the published text, I also write about the "dancing partners" of camera and on-screen performer and describe how the camera can "enter the dancer's kinesphere, or space of movement, framing the detail of the movement and creating an intimacy unattainable on the stage" (McPherson, 1998, p.49).

My quest to break down the separation between those in front of and those behind the camera was already fundamental to my early research. I was keen to interrogate and shift the relationship between on-screen performer and viewer, as mediated through the camera lens. From the outset, and perhaps because I came to making screen work as a dancer, I have believed that the camera has the potential to create *empathy* in the viewer. Rather than objectify the on-screen performer, the close-up, moving and often hand-held camera can show what it feels like to *be* them, observed in that moment, in that place and moving in that way.

Documentary theorist Bill Nichols (1993) highlights what appears to be a similar aim in the films of Canadian documentary director Brenda Longfellow. In *Our Marilyn* (Longfellow, 1987), the director juxtaposes two different Marilyn Monroes – a teenage long-distance swimmer and a cultural icon. Through intimate, close-up camerawork and visceral actuality sound, the film's spectators are drawn into the layers of experience of these very different women, using the medium to:

> "… represent, in cinematic form, the female body – not as an
> idealised nude or object of desire, not as a temptress or provider, but
> as a body in action. The desired Marilyn represents a state of physical
> being and action, not a frozen icon or image, not a character in
> someone else's narrative, but a vehicle for the presentation of self"
> (Nichols, 1993, p.185).

The notion that the camera can present "the self" of the on-screen subject in a way that does not objectify the body in motion, but rather lets the viewer feel how it might feel to inhabit that body, is a core theme of my artistic practice. This is something that I have explored extensively, initially from behind the camera and then increasingly with my own body also in the frame, a development which I describe in later sections of this thesis.

An act of empowerment: Becky Edmunds

Screendance artist Becky Edmunds similarly interrogates the relationship between performer and spectator as mediated through the camera. Edmunds and I were exact contemporaries in our undergraduate dance studies at Laban and ran the student union together in our final year. In her work and theorising, I notice that Edmunds describes being drawn to the screen as a site for experimentation because of its potential to democratise dance and make it accessible to a wider audience (2006, p. 7). Edmunds situates her practice in the realm of documentation, yet also questions the binary that exists between documentary and documentation on the one hand, and screendance on the other.

In her approach, she also focuses on the relationship between the filmed and the filmer. Through using scores and strategies that avoid conventional ideas of coverage and continuity filming and editing, Edmunds is seeking new languages for documentation, which not only create interesting viewing experiences, but also empower both performer and video-maker (Edmunds, 2006). Returning to Edmunds' work afresh, it occurs to me now that we both evolved ways to work with the medium that challenge the status quo and, in the process, raise questions about collaboration, improvisation and the nature of screendance itself (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 18).

Edmunds (2006, p. 7) describes her practices of in-camera editing as a means "to create tension" by inserting herself as a creative practitioner into the documentation of live performance. The resulting works – for example, her collaborations with dance artist Fiona Wright – are not straightforward documentations of live work, but rather Edmunds' responses, in the moment, to the essence of the performance. In a sense,

Edmunds takes us to the heart of the spectator's experience; it is an act of empowerment.

Mutual performers: from storyboards to improvisation

In my early research, I prepared for filming through meticulous storyboarding of the camera framing, position and trajectory in relation to choreographed movement. Over time, however, it occurred to me that, for all the precise imagery and varied frames, the dancers never had the chance to really move whilst being filmed – to rush, turn, spin or jump through space as they might in a rehearsal or on stage in a live performance. What was also lacking for me was the spontaneity that I so appreciated in the improvisational processes of postmodern dance that I had witnessed and practiced as a dancer. As Cynthia Novack (1990) observes:

> "Improvisational dancers believe that they are making art while being spontaneous, a contrast to the worked out predetermined tradition of modern dance" (cited in Midgelow, 2019, p.3).

It was from a similar sense of 'worked out-ness' that I felt that I needed to break free. The dance for television culture that I emerged into as a young artist had almost exclusively embraced the filming of set choreography. Although I was not necessarily seeing other screendance that displayed the energy that I craved, I sensed the potential of improvisation to make the spontaneity possible.

The opportunity for me to disrupt my own practice and begin to experiment with using improvisation in the screendance-making practice came when I was working with Quebec choreographer Harold Rheaume in Ottawa in 1993. Harold and I had been invited to spend two weeks in residence with dance company Le Groupe de la Place Royale, developing and making a new screendance film. We filmed in the evocative red-brick cells and long corridors of a nineteenth-century prison (now being used as a youth hostel). We devised a simple narrative as the starting point for the work and Harold created the choreography with the dancers. I carefully storyboarded frames and camera movements in relation to the set choreography, which we then proceeded to film with the crew and dancers on location.

Every morning, as a warm-up for both the cinematographer and the dancers, I decided to try out some improvisations. These had rules such as "the camera tries to frame the dancers, whilst they try not to be in frame", or "the camera circles and the dancers find ways of crossing in and out of the camera's path". These scores – or strategies – enabled the dancers and the cinematographer to move beyond the limits of trying to achieve the specific framing of a particular movement. The collective, playful activity encouraged everyone to communicate and to practise staying alert to each other. It was a fun way to start each filming day.

At the end of filming for the project, when I reviewed the video tapes, it was this improvised material that was the liveliest of all the footage. It had the most engaging sense of energy and spontaneity, with interesting textures and shapes moving through the frame. These contrasted well with the more formally constructed shots, providing a strong variety of material for the edit. Moreover, there was a powerful quality of focussed intentionality in the improvised images, which seemed to have captured the dancers' and cinematographer's "thinking in doing" (Midgelow, 2019, p. 8).

This positive generative experience encouraged me to continue to research ways of using improvisation in my screen practice over the years that followed, opening new and expansive areas for exploration. Over time, and in collaboration with various dance artists, I have developed an approach to making screendance that has improvisation at its heart. This started by using pre-planned instructions or 'scores' for both camera and dancers, informed by the theme of the work and the needs of each scene. In some situations, the material was further developed and set as repeatable choreography for the dancers, with specific framing and movement of the camera. In *Moment,* which I directed in 1998, around 20% of the shots result from an improvisation score set for the dancer(s) and camera. Approximately 40% of the film is rehearsed and set choreography for the dancers, with the cinematographer following an improvised score for how to move the camera – for example, "keep tracking steadily up and down the length of the room", or "swoop the camera from side to side". In other sections of the film, the camera and the performers were tightly choreographed and storyboarded.

Taking the camera into my hands

As described in chapter one, a positive outcome of my career as a television director was forming relationships with some of the professional production crew. The openness of cinematographers Neville Kidd and Jono Smith to working on my screendance works supported the experimentation. They brought high levels of technical expertise to the process and their high-end video cameras ensured the image quality of the works.

That said, after a few years of working in this way, I found myself again wanting to disrupt the status quo of my practice. Although Kidd and Smith brought many positive skills to the filming process, I began to feel frustrated by it. I felt the limitations of having to communicate to someone else my pre-planned scores for the camera in relation to the improvising performers. Instead of this arms-length approach, I now wanted to take the camera fully into my own hands and to film in a more direct and spontaneous way.

This impulse coincided with my starting to have the opportunities to film with dance artists with exceptional levels of skill and experience in improvised performance. These included Kirstie Simson, Dai Jian, Michael Shumacher and Kenzo Kasuda in *Force of Nature*, and Rosalind Masson, Dai Jain and Simon Ellis in *The Time It Takes,* two of the films submitted with this thesis as published works. These performers did not need scores for their improvisations; instead, they responded to each other, to the visual and sonic environments and, in our work together making screendance, to the camera and cinematographer/director's presence.

As an improvising cinematographer, I could now also dispense with the pre-planned scores and storyboards. This process continues to be central to my practice. As I film, the camera shifts between responding to the subject of the frame from the perspective of visual design and a somatic perspective, which draws on multimodal experiences, past and present, of my own body holding the camera. Over time, I began to think of this as an activity of employing 'embodied scores', developed

through experience, reflection and, importantly, regular practice. These draw on the cinematographer's innate sense of how the camera's framing and trajectory will intersect with the other screendance elements, including the on-screen performers' patterns of movement, spatial orientations and physical relationships to each other, the environment and the camera.

Mise-en-scene directing

Building on this and over several projects, I began to develop and conceptualise a wider approach that I came to call "mise-en-scene directing" (McPherson, 2018). This term describes a process that maximises the potential success of using improvisation of the camera and dancers in filming screendance. In this practice, which I write about in the second edition of *Making Video Dance* (McPherson, 2018), the preparation is the careful choosing of the location and design elements such as costumes, props and lighting, all determined by the theme or subject of the film.

The aim of this is to create a situation in which the on-screen performers and the cinematographer are as 'free' as possible in the moment of filming. With the mise-en-scene decided beforehand, the spontaneity of the process arises from the improvised encounter between the dancers and the camera. When working in this way as director/cinematographer, I refrain from imposing any scores or pre-conceived shot designs on the performers or the camera. With the camera in *my* hand, and working with experienced dance improvisers, the setting of predetermined rules of engagement is no longer necessary or even desirable.

The type of camera used also has an impact on the process. Around the time that I began to dispense with preconceived scores for the camera, I began to use DSLR cameras. These cameras typically have changeable lenses, whereas the video camcorders I had used previously have attached zoom lenses. This meant that I had the opportunity to experiment with the spatial qualities of lenses of different focal lengths. I started to work with prime lenses, choosing a particular lens – for example, a 30mm or a 70mm – as the 'score' for different improvised scenes. The shape, size and weight of the camera also impacts on how it can move, although smaller and

lighter is not always best. That said, in my filming approach, the camera is not exclusively handheld. I often choose to use a tripod, as this can facilitate smoother and more sensitive camera movement, particularly when using a longer lens.

In the *Oxford Handbook of Improvisation in Dance*, Vida Midgelow (2019) gives a comprehensive overview of several different scholarly analyses of the phenomenon in live improvised performance, whereby practised technique and experience meet spontaneity and receptivity to the moment. Midgelow refers to Susan Foster's observation that "the improvising dancer tracks back and forth between the 'known' and the 'unknown', between the familiar and the unanticipated and unpredictable" (Foster cited in Midgelow, 2019, p. 11), suggesting that the ability to step into this "gap" is predicated on knowledge and experience, in that "we could never accomplish this encounter with the unknown without engaging the known" (p. 11). This continuum between the unknown and the known (Foster, 2003) speaks to me of the shift in my practice from storyboarding and scored improvisations to the embodied scores. It also echoes the creative tension between the pre-planned mise-en-scene choices such as location and lenses, and the spontaneous, 'in-the-moment' activity of the improvising dancers and cinematographer in the moment of filming.

A way of seeing: Lisa Nelson

Although I have been aware of the work of Lisa Nelson, and over the years have worked with people who have studied and worked with her, it has only been in the final stages of writing this thesis that I have looked more closely at and read about her work and reflections on it. Born in 1947, Nelson trained as a modern dancer and was drawn to improvisation in her twenties. Nelson was one of a few key individuals, with Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith and others, responsible for the invention of Contact Improvisation in the early 1970s. At that time, Nelson also became interested in the experimental possibilities offered by video-making technology and started a period of research into filming and editing which lasted a decade. In an interview in *Contact Quarterly*, a periodical of which Nelson has also been co-editor for many years, she describes how her video work fed back into her approach to live

performance, in a sense offering an externalised "choreographic" layer to the internalised improvisational practices that Nelson was engaging in:

> "Video combines two powerful learning tools: a mechanical eye to dissect the moving parts of looking—focussing, panning, tracking, zooming—and instant playback to show the cause and consequences of your actions. It set me up to explore how the body composes itself: first to focus the senses, then to orchestrate its movement around its imagination and desire for meaning. It was a small step to translate my learning experiences with the camera into working with my senses in the environment, and I did this along the way, integrating them into my daily life, teaching, and dancing with others" (Nelson, 2004, p. 25).

Investigating Nelson's work now, through her own words, I see a strong connection to the practices she was exploring, and my investigations into the relationship between improvised dance and screendance-making. Regarding the use of the camera in filming improvised dance, I recognise Nelson's description of the notion of "attention", describing how the use of the video camera and editing processes enabled her to analyse and apply "choreographic thinking" more clearly to her live improvised dance practice (and to her life). Moreover, in an interview with Kent de Spain, Nelson talks about the connection between the interior and exterior worlds in performance and how "micro-levels" of choreographic skills are at play all at once in the improvising body, making visible "unacknowledged structures of our interior world to the edge of consciousness (where we can at least sense their shadowy presence, if not see them clearly)" (de Spain, 2014, p. 170).

Relating this to my own practice, the active, embodied camera can provide the focus and spatial contextualisation to support an understanding of the movement as it unfolds. The editing provides a similar organising factor. Improvised dance movement, for all its nuanced complexity, can thus be *made more visible.* For Lisa Nelson, the practices of filming and editing on video ultimately led her back to live dancing and to the Tuning Scores for which she is so well known.

Approaches to editing

The making of experimental screendance requires the ability to radically rethink time, as I describe in the introduction chapter of this thesis. My impulse to embrace montage in relation to creating screendance came from a wide range of experiences. In the process of my dance and video art educations, I came across and was inspired by the motivic looping of Steve Reich's music; Dziga Vetov's exuberant camera and Elizaveta Svilova's meaning-leaden editing combined in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929); Maya Deren's reconfiguration of space and time in *Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945); the multi-layered visual rhythms of Shirley Clark's *Bridges Go Round* (1958); reading about the "radical juxtapositions" of the Happenings (Sontag, 1962). I was inspired by the repeated non-representational patterns of Moroccan art, and the fragmentation of the body and of space and time in Gary Hill's video art. The practices of the postmodern dance artists, as described by Sally Banes in her writing, were also integral to my research into the potential of repetition on screendance: the live choreographic works of Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs explored ways of structuring work that eschewed narrative and drew instead on mathematical systems, looping and repetition to "provoke a conscious act of seeing" (Banes, 1987, p. xxv). Lisa Nelson (2004, p. 26) compares video editing to the human memory "with its imperfections": she describes the plasticity of the editing process and how the "(video) recorder puts time in your hands". This recalls the reconsidered space and time that is central to my own practice. True to her practice, Nelson brings this experience back to the live performing body, almost as though it is the process of filming and editing improvised dance that is of greatest significance, rather than the screendance work itself.

During the first six years of my experimenting with making screendance, I filmed and edited on video tape formats such as VHS, SVHS and Hi-band U-matic. Here, my process would have resembled Lisa Nelson's, which was also rooted in the non-linear materiality of the video era. To edit complex repetition sequences on tape, however, required endlessly rewinding and recopying images, limiting the finesse and intensity of looping shots and montage. The BBC *Dance for the Camera* commission of *Pace* allowed sufficient budget to hire an Avid, an early-industry non-

linear digital editing system. As I was not trained in this new technology, the post-production facility recommended the editor Simon Fildes, who had a background in digital music technology and performance. Fildes understood and was quickly able to embrace the concepts and approaches, such as looping and repetition of shots in relation to screendance, that I brought to him. The 'cut and paste' capabilities of digital editing made repeating identical clips quick and easy to alter. As a director/editor team, we pushed the boundaries of what had been seen before.

For the next 20 years this approach and collaboration was central to my practice. In the editing process, the screendance rushes are selected, discarded, cut, juxtaposed, repeated, copied and pasted. In *Making Video Dance*, I describe this as the "choreography of the edit suite" (McPherson, 2006 & 2018) and it is exemplified in many works from that period including *The Time It Takes* (2012), one of the films submitted with this thesis.

Increasingly, however, I began to feel a disconnect between the interactive spontaneity of the filming process that I engaged in and the highly manipulated montage editing. In improvised dance, "mistakes become openings for they cannot be crossed out" (Midgelow, 2019, p. 8), and in a live performance there is no going back. In contrast, in the editing of the films there were many choices being made, but these are no longer only in the moment of performance. Nor were they being made with the input of the people whose interactions contributed so significantly to the recorded material, i.e., the on-screen performers. Whilst as cinematographer/director, I would then review and select the rushes for editing, the dancers' input almost always stopped at the point at which filming ended. This imbalance did not sit well with my belief in democracy in the creative process and my wish to empower and give voice to the on-screen performers.

On reflection, I can see that at the time it was tricky for me to act on this unease and to initiate new ways of thinking about editing. The films Fildes and I were completing at the time were very successful in terms of being programmed and winning awards at the screendance festivals which, by the 2010s, were taking place regularly all over the world. The radical shake-up of the editing practice would have required us to radically reconsider the nature of our collaboration, which at the time seemed too

difficult to do. I can see now that this was very much tied up with our domestic situation, which depended on us having a deep familiarity with the process. As parents, it meant that we could be busy at different times, with me filming and selecting rushes, and Simon working the material in the edit suite, meaning that the other parent was available to look after our children. It was a situation that worked well for several years; however, from my perspective as an experimentally minded artist, it ultimately needed to shift. The opportunity to do this did not happen until the end of our relationship in 2014. I discuss the impact of this on the evolution of my practice in the following chapter.

Dogma Dance

By the mid-1990s and into the early 2000s, I was building a significant body of work and gaining experience as a director of broadcast programmes, and yet I felt isolated in my quest to unite dance and the moving image equally in the hybrid form of screendance. That said, I did find comradeship in two other young dance filmmakers, also living and working in London at the time. Litza Bixler and Deveril (no second name) were also educated in dance and film and video. We bonded through our shared frustration with the dominance of television production practices in the making of dance for the screen, and the resulting direction in which we saw our new artform heading. We wanted to challenge people to explore different approaches to making work and channelled this energy into the devising and launching of Dogma Dance in 1999.

The Dogma Dance manifesto was first made public through an early website and we publicised this through various email lists, which were the popular way of sharing information at the time. It read as follows:

> "YES to the development of dance technique for film – YES to a
> sharing of knowledge between dance and film – YES to the
> development of choreographic structure in film – YES to technology
> which aids rather than hinders – YES to human dancers – YES to the
> creation of a new genre – YES to safe dancers – YES to the
> encouragement of dance filmmakers – YES to a new hybrid form.

NO to unsafe dancers – NO to the primacy of equipment over human creativity – NO to the breakdown of choreographic structure – NO to purposeless hierarchies – NO to grossly unbalanced wages – NO to the dominance of film in Dance Film" (Bixler, Deveril and McPherson cited in Banes and Carroll, 2003, p. 173).

Through this call to arms, we wanted to encourage other makers to adopt the Dogma Dance rules when devising their work and, if they met all the criteria in a film and told us about it, they would receive Dogma Dance certification. We curated a series of public events that took place in East London, called "Under the Skin", at which we screened films that we felt represented the Dogma Dance ideology alongside those that were being awarded the certificate. (For the full manifesto and 12 rules, please see Appendix i of this thesis.)

When devising Dogma Dance, we were inspired by Dogma 95, the feature film manifesto of the mid-1990s, spearheaded by the Danish film director Lars von Trier. Dogma 95's call to "rethink cinema" (MacKenzie, 2003, p. 50) and their "Vows of Chastity" are echoed in Dogma Dance's proposal to re-imagine making screendance and our 12 Dogma Dance rules. Like Dogma 95, we sought to challenge what we saw as the dominance of production models driven by financial ambition (Geuens, 2001). For von Trier et al, this was dictated by the film studios and producers; for us, by production companies chasing big-budget broadcast television commissions. The children of the postmodern dance generation, Bixler, Deveril and I were also consciously referencing Yvonne Rainer's influential *No Manifesto* of 1965 and this drive towards a more phenomenological, non-narrative and less expressive treatment of dance performance (Banes, 1987).

Writer Sally Banes and her husband, film theorist Noel Carroll, came across Dogma Dance and wrote a chapter about our project for *Purity and Provocation* (Hjört and Mackenzie (eds.), 2003, pp. 173-182), a book on the Dogma 95 film movement. Based on interviews they did with Litza, Deveril and me, Banes and Carroll (2003) give a detailed account of the Dogma Dance manifesto and its aims, from the perspective of two esteemed and insightful scholars of film and dance. In their

chapter, they recognise the centrality of hybridity to our vision for a future of screendance and describe our definition of dance as being limited to "human performers doing movement that has been designed in advance, or that is improvised according to a set of rules intended to generate a dance" (Banes and Carroll, 2003, p. 176).

Banes and Carroll note how, in stating this, we move away from the perspectives of postmodern dance artists such as Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer's framing of dance as encompassing all or any pedestrian movement. With Dogma Dance, we are instead seeking authenticity through formal constraints and opportunities, such as the stipulations to use only one handheld camera, natural lighting, no special effects and to maintain a relationship between actuality sound and image. Banes and Carroll also highlight the Dogma Dance manifesto's insistence that "the dance film is structured in screen time and space and edited according to the rhythms dictated by the film rather than the continuity of the live choreography" (Banes and Carroll, 2003, p. 176) – i.e., the reconsidered space and time and montage that I wrote about in the introduction as being foundational to my practice and teaching. Banes and Carroll then, to my delight and honour, give a detailed written analysis of *East South East* (2000), a short film I directed, featuring improvising dance artists Jo Longo and Rick Nodine, which was filmed on location at East Street Market in London, and of which sadly there are no surviving copies.

Through Dogma Dance, we defined and shared our vision for screendance. In doing so, we wanted to help to create a community of artists who shared an engagement and enthusiasm for making dance for the screen. The Dogma Dance manifesto, its rules, the curated programmes and the certified films are also essentially pedagogical tools, which at the time galvanised a community and subsequent experimentation (Rosenberg, 2012).

Revisiting texts on Dogma 95 as part of the research for writing this thesis, it occurs to me now that the Danish filmmakers' vision is intertwined with my screendance practice in other ways too. In the following chapter, I expand on the centrality of improvisation to my evolving approach to making screendance. In an article published in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Jean-Pierre Geuens (2001, p. 198)

describes how Dogma 95 directors such as von Trier and Winterberg used the manifesto move away from conventions such as storyboards and rehearsal for camera, focusing instead on embracing "the instant" rather than "creating a work". They also eschewed filming multiple takes to provide coverage and instead filmed whole scenes in one shot, so that the actors did not have to repeat dialogue and actions. *Breaking the Waves* director of photography Robby Mueller describes how "(it) was the choice of the camera operator or me when to look where" (Mueller in Geuens, 2001, p. 200).

Of another Dogma 95 film, *Celebration*, cinematographer Anthony Dodd Mantle recalls: "The camerawork was improvised and I told the actors before we shot that they would never see me in the same place twice" (Dodd Mantle in Geuens, 2001, p. 198). For the Dogma 95, this stipulated approach was a way of ensuring that the films did not follow predetermined process, but rather responded to the configuration of action, actors and camera in the moment. The mise-en-scene directing that I devised as cinematographer/director, and which I describe in more detail in the following chapter, was the result of similar processes and goals.

In relation to my own evolving practice, I reflect now that Dogma Dance also provided me with deeper clarification of the fundamental concepts of my own creative practice, allowing me to build on themes and evolve the approaches that I describe in the next chapter of this thesis. Their expression in the form of a written manifesto and 12 rules informed how I would go on to articulate and share practice in my sole-authored book, *Making Video Dance – a step by step guide to creating dance for the screen* (McPherson, 2006 & 2018), of which I will write more in chapter four of this thesis. The process also demonstrates how I have used reflection on practice as an important tool for the onward development of screendance as an artform and a step towards the evolution of a pedagogy.

Chapter Three: Deepening the Practice: transgressions and iterations

In this third chapter, I describe how the foundational approaches of my practice are deepened, disrupted and extended in three of the films submitted with this thesis: *Force of Nature* (2012), *we record ourselves* (2016) and *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes* (2019). Supporting a fresh thinking on my practice, I draw on documentary theory as a way of understanding these outputs and the processes from which they result, most specifically as regards the triadic relationship between on-screen performers, cinematographer/director, and spectator. In doing so, I address one of the questions at the heart of this thesis: "what role can improvisation play in the democratisation of the screendance-making process?" Through engagement with the finished films, and with reference to the theories of Stella Bruzzi and Trinh T. Minh-ha as well as the films of Yvonne Rainer, I address another of the thesis questions: "What are the possible relationships between reality and fiction in screendance, and how is this evidenced in the published works?"

Force of Nature: stepping out from behind the camera

In early 2005, I was contacted by Kirstie Simson, one of the world's foremost improvising dance performers, whose work I was aware of but whom I had never met. Kirstie came to me because she sensed the need for a documentary about dance improvisation and the philosophy behind it, as there was very little recently filmed material in the public domain. Given my background in postmodern dance and use of improvisation in my screendance practice, I was thrilled to collaborate with Kirstie and to evolve the project with her and all the other artists we brought on board.

We began making *Force of Nature* by inviting 25 highly-regarded international improvisers – all of whom Kirstie had performed with or taught previously – to come to work with us at Casine Setarte, an idyllic outdoor studio set among olive groves in Puglia, southern Italy. Kirstie and I envisaged the purpose of this gathering as being to film footage of dancers improvising, but we had not discussed much beyond that

prior to the first day of filming. In our conversations now, Kirstie says that she had imagined that I would take a "documentation approach", filming from the side of the studio, with my camera on a tripod. She was very surprised when, as soon as the first improvisation began, I took my camera in my hand and moved, whilst filming, onto the floor among the dancers. In doing this, I was employing the embodied, improvised, engaged approach to filming dance that I describe in the previous chapter.

Immediately, I could see through my lens that the improvisational skills of the dancers that Kirstie had assembled far exceeded those I had filmed in previous projects. There was no need for any direction of their action through scores or interventions, beyond deciding when and where we were going to film. This correlates with what Kirstie talks about in the on-camera interview that I conducted with her in *Force of Nature*. Here she describes her preparation for live performance as follows:

> "I always walk out there knowing that I want to do the very best, the most extraordinary performance of my life… It puts me into this state of mind where I am fully alert. I have to be very relaxed, in order to be able to be receptive to what impulses are there and to working together with other people. I am very excited about the fact that there will be no other event like this one. I know what the time is of the performance is going to be, so in some sense that's a structure, but other than that, I like to really discover what this event is going to be" (McPherson, 2012, 2'15" - 3'09").

This level of openness, receptivity and ultimately freedom in the improvisation of my new collaborators – the subjects of my camera frame – coincided with my having reached a similar point in my filming practice. As I describe in chapter two, the scores that I had embodied over years of practice enabled me as cinematographer/director to freely move, frame and film in relation to the improvising dancers, negotiating and utilising states of knowing and unknowing (Foster, 2003).

Whilst a congruity existed between me as director/cinematographer and the dancers in terms of our enthusiasm for and experience in improvisation, this initial filming for *Force of Nature* did raise new questions and challenges. These were to do with a subtle difference in expectations around the intention of the filming and how that related to the process. At the outset, Kirstie and the other dancers understood my role to be to document their improvisations. They did not anticipate that I would intervene in any way. Whilst they incorporated and interacted with me and the camera as I filmed on the dance floor, other aspects of my intervention were more difficult for many of them to accept.

Nichols (2010) scrutinises the impact on the integrity of a documentary film's subject when they are asked to repeat something for the sake of the camera. When filming these early scenes for *Force of Nature,* I discovered that suggesting to a performer that they re-enact an improvised movement or sequence to allow me to film from 'a better angle' was problematic and rarely had good outcomes. It was as though, in the process of the dancers attempting to remember their way through what they had done, there was a loss of the "thinking in doing" aspect of the material (Midgelow, 2019, p. 8).

Similarly, the question arose of how much I, as the director/cinematographer of the film, should influence the look of the images. For some in the dance improvisation community, the choice to wear practice clothes rather than costume, or even to take little care with how they are dressed whilst performing, is inherent to their belief in the "everydayness" of the form and as such represents a political stance (Midgelow, 2019; Banes, 1987; Banes, 1995). Nevertheless, as I looked down the lens at the images unfolding, I felt compelled to point out to the on-screen performers that, framed and recorded by the camera, the ripped T-shirt and tatty tracksuit trousers would influence the viewers' interpretation of the scene. In discussions that took place between filming sessions, we acknowledged that the framing by my camera drew attention to details that might otherwise be overlooked. This relates to the idea of the screen as a democratic space in which no part of the two-dimensional rectangle has more influence than any other on the reading the images (McPherson, 2006; McPherson, 2018).

We also debated the ability of the camera (in my hands) to shape a journey through the spontaneous, complex, ever-evolving "in-the-moment" patterns – or narratives – created through their improvisations (Albright, 2003; Midgelow, 2019). In my screendance, the edited performance sections present 'screen choreography' that is unique to the film. It is a fusion of three layers: on one level, there are the interactions and stories of the dancers' improvised solos, duets and group interactions as they unfold in real space and time; on another level, my camera's perspective reveals other relationships, and shapes potential narratives through framing and movement of shots; and finally, the editing juxtaposes images that are largely 'out of sequence' as regards what happened in 'reality', suggesting new narrative progressions through the montaged images.

In terms of the evolution of my screendance practice, the most significant disruption occurred in the final filming for *Force of Nature*. This was of a live performance by Kirstie, Michael Schumacher, Kenzo Kasudo and Dai Jain, at the Universal Hall in Findhorn, Scotland, in June 2011. The main purpose of the performance was to provide an opportunity to film improvised dance in a theatrical setting and in front of a live audience. The resulting material forms the spine of the final edited film. The Universal Hall is a wood-panelled space with the audience on three sides of the performance area. I had decided that there would be two cameras positioned at different sides of the hexagonal stage area. One of these was to film a wide shot of the stage space and my camera, also on a tripod, would offer closer shots filmed on a longer lens, panning and tilting to follow the action.

As the hour of the performance drew nearer, I felt increasingly disturbed by the thought that my camera, which over the previous four years of filming *Force of Nature* had been roaming, often handheld, embodied and responsive, was now to be tethered to the spot on a tripod, with my physicality behind the camera largely absent. Shortly before the performance began, I asked the performers if they would be happy for me to join them on stage at some point. They agreed and we determined that we would first allow the audience time to settle into the four dancers' improvised interactions on stage. On a particular music cue, 11:15 minutes into the performance, I step into the space and film "from the heart of the action" (McPherson, 1998, p. 50).

From the perspective of the wide shot, which is included in the edited performance scenes in the film, it is apparent that, as soon as I step onto the stage area, the dancers – Michael, Kirstie, Kenzo and Dai Jain – incorporate me and my camera into their action. My being on stage alters what they are doing and the spectators at the live event, and of the film, see that. The inclusion of these self-reflexive images in the final edited film signals an understanding of the impossibility of an objective documentation of live performance, and thereby of the account of the improvised dance. As the recording of a live, onstage negotiation between filmmaker and reality, these scenes of our interaction are "at the heart, a performance" (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 49).

The live audience, and subsequently the viewers of the documentary, witness at different degrees of separation the spatial relationship between myself as filmer and the four dancers in a relatively conventional theatrical situation. What the live audience cannot see are the images that my camera is framing, although they might imagine them. I was told by some members of the live audience afterwards that watching the interaction between dancers and camera/cinematographer on stage added interest and energy to their experience. As they watched, in their minds' eye they visualised the different spatial perspectives and potential narratives suggested by the evolving improvised relationships between dancers, the camera and me.

My intervention also adds drama. There is a moment when, looking down the lens, I misjudge how close I am to Kenzo and as he is spun around by Michael, his arm stretched out to the side, Kenzo's hand hits the camera lens. On the film's actuality soundtrack, we hear a gasp from the audience and then, with lightning quick reactions, Michael takes me by the shoulders and guides me and the camera around and back into the action. With this sequence of events, my 22-year quest to break down the separation between on-screen dancers and behind the camera director (and thus the viewer) takes another leap forward as the on-screen performer (Michael) momentarily controls the image, gaining another layer of agency over the images that unfold. A period of chaos emerges, the next important stage of practice emerges, unpredicted and yet entirely according to the trajectory of the research as it unfolds (Haseman, 2006).

The scene that I describe above also recalls Jean Rouch's "cine-trance" in that, as David MacDougall (1998) describes it in *Transcultural Cinema*, "the film-maker becomes entranced by the spirit of the subject and a merging of filmmaker and subject ensues" (p. 113). A nuanced interpretation that I have retrospectively attributed to those moments is that the five of us on stage – the four dancers and myself as cinematographer/director – are entranced by the spirit of the moment, as generated by ourselves, the live audience, the camera and the (future and imagined) documentary viewers. It is a potent mix. The subtle distinction from MacDougall's examples is that in his, the "takeover" of the film by its subject is essentially a verbal one, in that their presence is asserted through talking and showing, whereas in *Force of Nature* the language of the takeover is non-verbal, improvised, performed movement.

The experience of the "cine-trance" also speaks to what improvisers in other disciplines refer to as "being in the zone" or, as Midgelow (2019) describes, "the mindfulness", which she suggests is the rooted in the improvisers' attitude to their performance environment, other improvisers and audience:

> "Such mindfulness is more broadly founded upon receptivity, when improvisors are enabled through being open and responsive to the interior and exterior world – to the ideas, sounds, actions and impressions both within and around us" (Midelgow, 2019, p. 9).

This state could also be what I conceptualise and have described earlier in this thesis, as in my published writing, as the "embodied scores". This is a skilled filming practice whereby familiarity with the camera, and confidence in the mise-en-scene and filming environment, converge with an understanding of how particular bodies move in space. The ability to shift between peripheral and focussed perception, through and around the lens and my own/the cinematographer's moving body, also contributes, supporting the practice of being "in the moment" as I move and frame the camera in relation to the improvising dancers, and the images that flow into the lens.

we record ourselves: challenging hierarchies

Rita Felski has observed that: "The questioning of self is frequently inspired by a personal crisis which acts as a catalyst" (cited in Fenner, 2012, p. 88). For me, such a catalytic moment arose from the end of my marriage to Simon Fildes when he moved away from our family home in the Highlands of Scotland. We had three young children together and a close working relationship that had lasted over 20 years, first as a director/editor team, then as co-directors of the production company Goat Media. This, then, was a massive personal crisis.

In the direct aftermath of the split, my responsibility for looking after the children in our remote cottage was paramount. The key to our survival would be, I believed, in my continuing to make new work and being able to reconnect with the individual director and artist that I had been. I remember an intense feeling of needing to prevent myself from disappearing. On our separation, Fildes was keen that we continue to collaborate on projects. There was not one bone in my body that wanted to do that, as I knew this would compromise my ability to re-find myself. As soon as I saw the end of it, I realised that what had started off as a highly experimental and generative collaboration between us had become fixed and stifling. This was partly because our work was successful, with many of the films we made as a director/editor team, and latterly as co-directors, being selected for international festivals and winning awards. The set-up as it had been, whereby I would direct the filming and he would edit, was also sustainable as it meant that we could juggle looking after our children at home, without the need for additional childcare. Through the forced ending of the situation, however, I realised that I needed to radically rethink everything – artistically and practically.

The opportunity for me to build on this impetus and to once again 'disrupt' the trajectory of my artistic practice came within the first year following our separation. In 2015, I was invited by Threshold Arts to make an artist's film, inspired by a residency at the new Margaret Morris Archive at the University of Edinburgh. Along with some additional funding that I received from Creative Scotland, the commission provided time, space and income for me to engage in new research that resulted in _we record ourselves_ (2016), the next of the film publications submitted with this thesis.

Margaret Morris (1891-1980) was a British dancer, choreographer and teacher, whose legacy lives on in her choreographic works, her physiotherapy and her system of movement training promoted through the world-wide Margaret Morris Movement. She spent much of her life in Scotland, with a studio in the West End of Glasgow, and creating pieces for her dance companies including the Celtic Ballet, which performed in Scotland and in London. Morris was a vibrant and integral part of the Scottish arts scene in the early to mid-twentieth century and was married to the Scottish Colourist painter, J.D. Fergusson. From her death in 1980 until the early twenty-first century, however, Morris's work was relatively overlooked, despite the best efforts of her supporters. In the mid-1990s, I researched and pitched, unsuccessfully, a documentary about Margaret Morris to the BBC.

Thirty-five years after her passing, the University of Edinburgh was given an archive of materials relating to Morris's work, which consisted of cardboard boxes full of notebooks, performance programmes, photographs, and pages of typed writings by Morris, which had been stored in the caravan of a Margaret Morris enthusiast. I was one of four Scottish-based filmmakers commissioned to create an original work inspired by this newly acquired archive. The remit was for a single-channel short film, as well as a multi-screen installation version, to be presented on the 22-screen "Wave" in the foyer of Perth Concert Hall.

The first stage of this new period of research was to consider the outcomes of my most recent practice and in particular the later films, on which Fildes and I had co-directing credits. Through my deep reflection on these films, as processes and as finished works, I was able to identify the aspects that were problematic for me and that I wanted to replace. To envision a new way of working, I drew up the following manifesto:

- There will be no hierarchy of roles, i.e., everyone involved in the production will perform, operate the cameras, and edit the work.
- There will be no repetition of shots or choreography in the visual and sonic edit.

- There are to be no mute dancers, i.e., the on-screen performers' voices are heard as part of the soundtrack, and we will also see them speaking. (McPherson, unpublished notes, 2015)

Having devised the manifesto, I continued by gathering physical and digital materials to use as visual and thematic source material for the new work. At the Margaret Morris archive at the University of Edinburgh, I explored the contents of some of the boxes and was particularly interested in Morris' notes. In these, she articulates her ideas about the difference between choreography and improvisation, and the importance of dance as an artform, an education and a therapy. The photos I took of Morris's type-written texts became some of the visual and sonic imagery that would be incorporated into *we record ourselves*. I also dug out the physical file for my un-made documentary, including printouts of the original written proposal and various correspondence with the BBC. In addition, there were some personal reflections, as well as some short fictional scenes, which I had written and printed out. Finally, there were still photos from the video shoots of some of the early video-dance works that I directed, in their original print form, which would provide a further layer of archival material to be incorporated into the process, and the final film material.

I invited three other screendance artists to collaborate on the project, each one with skills as improvising performers, as cinematographers, and editors: Simon Ellis is a research fellow and artist working with practices of choreography, filmmaking, and dance; Natalia Barua is a freelance performer, choreographer and screendance artist; and Owa Barua is a filmmaker specialising in screendance, with an openness to performing on screen. To support my need to be at home with the children, I set up two week-long 'residencies' for us at my cottage in the Scottish Highlands and found a space in which we could film. This was the disused classroom at the back of the Old Schoolhouse in our village, which has a wooden floor, and large windows looking out over the surrounding woods and into the sky. This space provided the perfect location, in that it had a light, airy character, yet was neutral and spacious. Once the four of us had gathered, we prepared for the improvised filming session by organising the space and the technology that we would use. We chose what we wanted to wear. We set ourselves a time frame for each session and dived into the process.

My fascination with reflexivity of form in screendance continues in *we record ourselves* with the four of us visibly handling the medium as performers/cinematographers. Attention is drawn to the materiality of the work through the choice to use various formats and different cameras to record the moving image material, including iPhones, a DSLR camera, a GoPro camera and a Compact VHS camera dating from the 1980s. The artistic research of *we record ourselves* takes the concept and practice of the embodied camera onto another level: all four cinematographers are also the subjects of the frame as we occupy the spaces in front of and behind the many cameras that are being used. Here the screendance medium is multi-layered: it incorporates the movement performance by the four of us; our on-screen use of various types of moving image cameras and audio recording devices; and the archival material in the form of written and read-out texts, photographic prints and film played on our mobile devices.

Filming for *we record ourselves* took place over six days, in two different work periods some months apart. This gave us the opportunity to collectively refine our process. After each improvised filming session, we audio recorded ourselves speaking aloud about what we had done in the Schoolroom. It was fascinating to hear that we sometimes remembered shots and other times remembered actions, either that we had filmed ourselves, or been filmed doing by one of the others. This sonic material became part of the soundtrack of the final edit of the single-channel film. These recollection sessions were also preparation for the next improvised filming session, as they informed our collective understanding of the material and the creative process, as it was evolving.

After a couple of days of filming in the second working period, we started to edit. True to the manifesto stipulation that there should be "no differentiation between roles", i.e., anyone who performs also films and edits (McPherson, 2018, p. 248), we were all involved in the postproduction. To the manifesto directive that there would be "no repetition of shots", we added another memory element to the process, in that we were only permitted to use footage that someone had mentioned when we were recalling what we had filmed. This proved frustrating in some instances, as when editing we were forced to scrub past some beautiful images, unable to use them as

no one had remembered them. In the final work, this process of selection creates a feeling of elliptic fragmentation, evoking the non-linear nature of how memories flow and circle.

To prevent any individual from dominating the edit, we collectively decided to allow each person a 30-minute-long session at the computer at a time. They would work with a section of material of their choice before the next editor took over. It often happened that one of us had not completed what we had planned before it was someone else's turn, perhaps shifting the structure in another direction. This was both frustrating and liberating, as there was the focus and the adrenaline rush of only having 30 minutes to work at a time, and yet at the same time one was relieved of the overall responsibility of every edit choice (McPherson, 2018).

In *we record ourselves*, the aim was to deconstruct and democratise the production process and to break down the usual imbalance of agency between who is in front of the camera and who is behind. It was possible for us to side-step the usual role-based hierarchies by having a clear intention for the work, and a process whereby this would be followed through. This was initiated by the artist's manifesto which arose from my personal crisis (Fenner, 2012). My collaborators drew on their own creative and professional skills to embrace these restrictions, and together we co-authored (MacDougall, 2020) the film and multi-screen versions of the work.

The final outcomes of the *we record ourselves* research were the short film and two different installation versions. Whilst the research and processes that led to these was highly experimental, they have merit as individual works of art and have been recognised internationally. The single-screen film *we record ourselves* has been programmed at festivals, cinemas and online screenings in Scotland, Ireland, the USA and Canada. As part of the original commission, the material was configured for the canvas of 22 display screens on the foyer mezzanine of Perth Concert Hall, Scotland, where it was experienced by the public for several months. In 2017, we won a competition for the material to be re-worked for the 10-metre-high MediaWall at Bath Spa University, as part of the Journal of Media Practice and MeCCSA Practice Network Annual Symposium. Simon Ellis and I took on more of the responsibility for completing and delivering the final works in their different forms,

although we were careful to consult with our collaborators Natalia and Owa on any artistic decisions.

The *we record ourselves* film and installations are the manifestation of an exploration of fluid, non-hierarchical approaches to production roles. In them, the multiple voices embodied in the four performers/cinematographers/editors, as well as the various archive materials, create a restless multiplicity of fragmented energy. This is emphasised and underscored by the extensive use of composite images, in which moving image material from the different sources plays simultaneously and separately in various configurations of the screen. In the installations, this fragmentation was dispersed across multiple screens, rather than within the same screen. The result is an experience in which space and time are not so much reconsidered, as completely exploded.

Observing the final single- and multi-channel versions of *we record ourselves* in the different public contexts and over time, I reflected on what this artistic research achieved. I was delighted with how experimental the process had been, and the way in which Natalia, Owa, Simon and I embraced and negotiated the collective creativity proposed in the manifesto. I was excited by how the work evokes perceptions of memory and archive through its process, materiality and completed outputs. I was fascinated by the juxtaposition of its multiple spaces and timeframe. That said, I also felt that its inherent multivocality results in the lack of an emotional focus, and the viewer is not particularly drawn into the action. There is a restless, unresolved arc to the work. I wanted to continue to dismantle on-screen/behind the camera hierarchy and to extend the potential for non-dialogue, body-based narrative, whilst maintaining the use of improvisation as the mode of filming. For the next phase of my artistic research, however, I wanted to find ways in which the intensity of the on-screen performance could be deepened. The opportunity to do this came with *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes*, a 14-minute single-screen dance film I made with Quebec choreographer Harold Rheaume in 2019.

Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes: fiction/reality continuum

Harold and I met in 1992, at the *Dance for the Camera* workshop at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada. The following year we were invited to take part in a joint residency at Le Groupe de la Place Royale in Ottawa. During this time, we made the short film *Mur Mur*, a 10-minute single-screen work. In 1997, Harold came to Glasgow and, together with Scottish writer Mariannne Carey and composer Haftor Medbøe, we collaborated on *Pictureshow*, a live video dance work which Harold performed and I filmed and directed. This was premiered in Glasgow, and also presented in Montreal. There followed a few years when Harold and I tried to raise money for another large-scale dance film project, before we both became busy with other work and lost touch. In 2015, I was invited to attend Cinedans Festival in Quebec City and there, after 18 years of separation, Harold and I met up. During this encounter, we decided to re-ignite our collaboration and we successfully applied for funding through the British Council/Canada Council's QC/UK Connections Scheme for a two-year cultural exchange project.

At the heart of this project was funding for Harold and me to create a new film together. As a solution to the limited budget, Harold and I agreed that we would collaborate by taking the roles of performer/cinematographer/director. This also fitted with Harold's wish to perform after many years as a choreographer, and my ongoing interest in dismantling the on-screen/behind the camera hierarchy. The starting point for our artistic research was to investigate how Harold and I could use the emotional intensity of our reuniting, as individuals and as artists, as the impulse for a series of filmed improvisations. We also wanted to explore the effect of space on our physical and emotional activity, in the form of expansive Highland spaces contrasting with the built landscape of the Canadian city.

Harold and I began filming for *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes* from the very first hour that we were together in the studio. We were keen to record the 'real-life' evolution of our relationship as we became reacquainted with each other. We used our iPhones to film each other improvising solo material and employed a cinematographer in Scotland and in Quebec for the improvisations in which Harold and I dance together. We filmed over 10 days in total, over several months, and in a series of different locations. I suggested environments in Scotland that I felt would provide contrasting contexts and atmospheres, and Harold did likewise in his home

city of Quebec. These included the Tramway in Glasgow, the Dava moor in the Scottish Highlands, by the sea in rural Moray, and in the historic centre of Old Quebec City.

We did not set any scores for our improvisations, and we also did not discuss any fictional scenarios. Each improvisation was filmed in its entirety, meaning that the rushes document our re-acquaintance and the deepening of our mutual understanding of the work that we were engaged with. Our preparation for filming did not include developing characters. We wore our own clothes, albeit they were chosen as 'costumes', taking care of the aesthetic as we would for any public appearance. Every action is improvised, and we did not repeat anything for the camera. The images used in the final edited film are selected from the very first to the very last session, with material taken from most other improvisations in between. There are very few shots that do not have one or both of us in them, and no other people appear. This is despite all the locations having traces of human activity: the interior and built environment; a track through the moor; the tree plantation.

> "Filmed in the evocative urban and rural landscapes of Scotland and Quebec, a man and a woman (perhaps the last on earth?) move through many nuanced versions of their relationship. Full of history, longing, and fragments of their stories, their journey is at times quite unworldly, unnerving and a touch frightening. Their interaction is emotionally charged, yet it is the absence of everything in between, things neither seen nor said, which brings power to this film" (Jay Lewin, 2019, by email).

This is the description written by Dance North director Karl Jay Lewin on first watching *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes* and sent to me in an email dated 20 April 2019. Through the filmed and edited images, the viewer witnesses our relationship, but are they watching Katrina and Harold, or characters that we are playing? When I watch the film, I notice myself in space and time interacting with Harold in multiple moments of separation and reconciliation. The question that I reflect on now is whether, as spectators, we are witnessing reality or fiction, or something in between.

In *New Documentary*, Stella Bruzzi offers an insight into how I might answer these questions, which lie at the heart of *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes* and of my long-term engagement with improvisation in my screendance-making practice. Bruzzi (2006, p. 6) quashes the persistent anxiety over "reality" and "fiction" in documentary film: she describes this quandary as having bugged documentary theorists and filmmakers in an unhelpful way for years, suggesting that the relationship is more straightforward:

> "A documentary will never be reality, nor will it erase or invalidate that reality by being representational. Furthermore, the spectator is not in need of signposts…to understand that documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation, and bias on the other."

I am excited by this image of "negotiation", as it suggests fluidity and equality in the process and depicts the work as a living, dynamic and continual discourse between on-screen performers, filmmaker, and spectators. In my reading, it further implies there is no one dominant force in the work, recalling the hybridity that has been my consistent aim in developing approaches to screendance. This thinking also recalls Becky Edmunds' hybrid approach to making screendance, in which "the viewer is encouraged to be aware of the gaps, and aware of my presence as the maker" (Edmunds, 2006, p. 8).

For Bruzzi (2006), performative documentary offers a way of replacing the form's stifling "pursuit of truth", resulting in films that seem spontaneous and genuine because they show the filmmaking process, and have at their centre the "interaction between performance and reality" (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 185). I see many similarities between what Bruzzi articulates here and the films that I have submitted with this thesis as examples of my own approach to practice. Whilst they might not look much like the work of the filmmakers that Bruzzi writes about, I nevertheless recognise a connection between her theories and a liminal space between reality and fiction that, for example, Harold and I inhabit in *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes*.

Trinh T. Minh-ha (2018) also challenges the idea of neutrality in any work, filmic or written, going perhaps further than Bruzzi by suggesting that documentary as such does not exist, in that "to use an image is to enter fiction" (Minh-ha, 2018, no page numbers). In *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes*, this fiction exists in a documented interaction between the on-screen subjects' actions, the camera's framing and movement, and mise-en-scene. Each location brings a different resonance. In addition, the quality of light, what we are wearing, how we are interacting and how this is framed further alters the characteristic and meaning of the material. The 'factual' aspect exists in the spontaneous improvised dance as it unfolds in real time in the camera frame.

There is also an aspect of these works that circles back to one of my earliest inspirations, that of Yvonne Rainer. In an article in *Senses of Cinema*, dance scholar Erin Brannigan analyses the relationship between narrative film impulses and choreographic strategies in Rainer's films. She draws attention to the "rewiring of the conventions of cinematic production", borne from the filmmaker's desire to be free of the "tyranny of narrative" (Brannigan, 2003, no page numbers). Yet perhaps it is this mash-up of narrative and the choreographic which allows Rainer a freedom to transgress formal constraints and to achieve experimental and nuanced forms of filmmaking? The filmmaker says of her own work:

> "For example, a series of events containing answers to when, where, why, whom, gives way to a series of images, or maybe a single image, which, in its obsessive repetitiveness or prolonged duration or rhythmic predictability or even stillness, becomes disengaged from story and enters this other realm, call it catalogue, demonstration, lyricism, poetry or pure research. The work now floats free of ultimate climax, pot of gold, pay-off, future truth, existing solely in the present. Or perhaps a work that starts out being meditative, concerned with resonance, mood… suddenly changes its density by appropriating elements of melodrama." (Rainer in Brannigan, 2004, no page numbers)

Similarly, in the screendance films submitted with this thesis, complex dance improvisation with defined mise-en-scene in the filmed material combine with

choreographic editing structures to situate the completed works in a place that hovers between fiction and reality. For me, this is where the intrigue and interest in making the work continues to reside. With it comes the potential for screendance to reveal hidden, unconscious interiorities of the performing body and to make these accessible through different filmmaking strategies. In this exploration, I owe many collaborators, and influencers, directly and indirectly, a great gratitude.

Recognising that the relationship between on-screen performer, camera and spectator exists in a space and time between fiction and reality in my films has been an important revelation for me during thesis research. It has opened new ways of understanding my processes as a director/cinematographer/dancer. This stemmed from an instinct, and has been formalised over time in my practice, my writing and my teaching. The desire to find this space reaches back to my early impulse to find 'my artform', albeit one that might not yet be invented (Kappenberg, 2012). I also see now that this intense, long-term and persistent engagement with screendance, and my experimentation with the form, has led ultimately to me finding my voice, through my body, on the screen.

In this chapter, I have described how the foundational approaches of my practice are deepened, disrupted and extended in three of the films submitted with this thesis: *Force of Nature* (2012), *we record ourselves* (2016) and *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes* (2019). I draw on recent documentary theory as a way of understanding these stages of my practice, most specifically as regards the triadic relationship between on-screen performers, cinematographer/director, and spectator.
In doing so, I have more deeply interrogated the potential of improvisation in the democratisation of the screendance-making process. Moreover, through reflection, I have explored the possible relationships between reality and fiction in screendance, and how this is evidenced in my published works.

Stepping out from behind the camera, shifting from a sense of embodiment into a visible body, has further altered my way of thinking and created the opportunity for new ideas to emerge. By experiencing my increasing visibility, I have found myself asking what stories might be held in my body. This questioning reached its most

personal iteration in the publication *Luise*, submitted as an online project catalogue along with this thesis, which I discuss in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Positioning the Practice: from personal to public

In this chapter, I address the final questions that are central to this thesis: "how can reflective writing and articulation of practice contribute to the evolution of a screendance practice – and how can this generative relationship continue to be shared, and potentially shape the field?"

To do so, I begin by describing the (re-)emergence of my individual voice in my most recent screendance work *Luise.* This highly personal project is submitted with the thesis as a short film and web page, published by Dance North, a stakeholder in the work. This online catalogue introduces the work through text, still images and a short edit of moving image material. In the *Luise* project, I build on the themes and approaches of my earlier works, as described in earlier chapters of this thesis. As a work in progress, it also points to the future evolution of my practice and its theoretical framework.

The focus of the chapter then shifts to the two editions of my sole-authored book *Making Video Dance: a step-by-step guide to creating dance for the screen,* published by Routledge in 2006 and 2018, and three articles published in *The International Journal of Screendance*. I describe how my ongoing reflection on – and articulation of – practice shaped these texts, and thus facilitate a transfer of knowledge between myself as an artist and educator and the flourishing field of screendance. I explore how this generative relationship can continue to be shared and potentially shape the field. I also situate these publications within the expanding scholarly discourse and publication around screendance and, in doing so, provide further context for current and future reflection, writing and practice.

Developing a solo voice: the *Luise* project

On completion of the film *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes*, about which I write in the previous chapter, I reflected on the consequence of having made my body the subject of my frame. I discovered that my stepping out from behind the camera, shifting from a *sense* of embodiment to a visible body, enabled new ideas to emerge.

By experiencing my increasing and tangible presence, I have found myself asking: what stories are in my body? What do I feel compelled to express? What new processes can I explore that come from my identity?

Most recently, these questions have combined with the desire to investigate what would happen if I were to work alone, after many years of investing my energy in different collaborative modes. The opportunity to engage with this new phase of research came about in 2019, through my appointment as an Associate Artist with Dance Base in Edinburgh and with Dance North in Moray. These two posts allowed me time to pause and to consider more deeply what I would do were I to pursue solo work.

The idea that persisted and came to the fore is by far the most personal work that I have embarked on thus far in my artistic journey: to take as my starting point the story of my maternal grandmother Luise. In February 1945, in the closing months of World War II, Luise fled the allied Russian army from Berlin to the West, where she and her two young daughters – my mother and my aunt – were taken in as refugees by a farmer's family. In 1946, Luise took her own life by walking into the North Sea. An abbreviated, fragmented version of this story has been told to me throughout my life and now, as a single mother with three children, I felt compelled – and finally ready – to find out more.

The research process started with my studying closely a selection of photos that remain of my grandmother, taken when she was aged between 18 months and a few years before her death at the age of 45. Most of these photos are still in the family's possession because my grandmother stuffed them into her coat pockets as they prepared to leave Berlin – they were able to take nothing else with them.

I set out to develop a new body of original screendance material based on what I observed in the photographs. This would be created through my performing for the camera a choreography of gestures, stances and imagined movements – forming a kind of 'embodied DNA' – that poses questions of identity, and of physical and emotional legacy. The idea builds on my ongoing interest in the fluid potential of the

empathetic camera and arises directly from making my body the subject of the screendance frame.

I made a successful application for individual artist funding from Creative Scotland and, over a series of residencies at Dance Base, began work on the *Luise* project. The first development stage included family and contextual research, mainly extensive conversations with my then 88-year-old mother, one of the very few living people who remember my grandmother. To support my intention to choreograph, perform and direct this new work myself, I employed Natalia Barua as a cameraperson with specialism in filming dance. I also brought on board the writer Tanya Ronder to work with me on the character and story development, as I was keen to evolve the narrative aspects of the project.

Movement creation began in the Dance Base studio. Here, in my own body, I assumed the position that Luise was in when a particular photograph was taken and felt myself into the moment, trying to sense the potential of the captured moment*.* There is something intriguing about the relationship of the still photograph and the narrative of a person's life, and how a moment in time might be expanded in many different directions. In a photo, we glimpse a fragment of a second and might wonder what happened in the few moments before and after that stilled moment. We might think about this moment having *depth,* as well as linearity, and ask: what was happening on different levels at that moment in time? How did the moment sound? What was the temperature? How did it smell? Who was around? How were they moving? Was it towards or away from that moment? Who was behind the camera? Who was out of frame?

In embodying Luise, as depicted in some of the photographs, I began to realise that in every image I have seen she is in relationship to someone else. Even in the photos where she is alone, there is someone behind the camera at whom she is smiling, or not. In most of the photos, she is with at least one other person, sometimes more. Luise seems always to be looking at the camera and therefore at the person behind it. In doing so, she draws our attention to the frame and invites us into her kinesphere. Might she also be looking at the people who will look at the photo and, in that way, looking at me, her granddaughter? Once again, I find myself

thinking about how the camara facilitates the negotiation between those in front of and those behind it.

From this studio-based practice, I developed a series of thematic movement motifs, based on a selection of photos. For filming, I chose the location of Tyninghame Bay in East Lothian, where there is a beach, stubble fields and a row of concrete, anti-tank blocks, placed there during World War II as a defence against invasion by the German military. Having explored a similar installation on Findhorn beach whilst in residency at Dance North in Moray in early 2020, I found these iconic landmarks to be an evocative and apt setting for the filming of the material.

Natalia and I spent a couple of bright and chilly days in late February 2020 filming the material. As well as the connection that I felt to my grandmother's physicality through performing these movements in that location and for the camera, during the time we spent there I also experienced a strong sense of foreboding. The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns were on the cusp of taking hold in Scotland. As I moved for the camera, I wondered if there were parallels with how Luise experienced the awful shadow of the Nazi era and of World War II intensifying over Europe.

Nearly three years on from this initial working time, the *Luise* project now feels more relevant than ever. It has become clear how the Covid-19 pandemic has given many of us our first direct experience of what it feels like when our lives are changed by external forces and the impact that this can have on mental health. People talk about a "mental health timebomb" (Manchester University Study, 2020). For many, that bomb has already gone off, and their loved ones are left grieving the consequences. In 2022, a new war came to Europe with the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine, which has dramatically and tragically forced over 5 million people to flee their homes and seek safety in neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 2022).

Luise has helped me to find my solo voice at the same time as it strives to give my grandmother a voice. The process has been a collaboration between the two of us, even though we never met. From the perspective of the body, I was once a part of her; from the perspective of epigenetics, she is now a part of me, and my daughters

too. As an artist, I explore ways of responding to her story, the images of her, by applying the practices that I have developed over my career. In many ways, it feels like my whole life has been leading to this moment. It is a personal, familial story, set against history, and drawing on the artistic research and processes that are my life's work. Moreover, *Luise* speaks, I believe, to what Nichols (1993, p. 188) describes as the potential of the documented moment:

> "… to bring the power of the universal of the mythical and fetishistic, down to the level of immediate experience and individual subjectivity. […] avoiding the power of disembodied knowledge and abstract conceptualisation in favour of the enabling power stemming from situated knowledge and the subjectivities of corporeal experience."

Passing on the practice: the place of writing

Devising and delivering opportunities for individuals to learn about practices and theories of screendance has been central to my creative activity from the early stages of my career. I taught my first 'video-dance' class in 1990, when I was a student at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art. As far as I am aware, this was the first screendance workshop to take place in Scotland and one of the earliest in the UK. In the intervening years, my engagement with education has led to influential contributions to the field: I have taught numerous in-person workshops, courses and classes, and I lead residencies and provide mentorship for students, artists and educators from all over the world. In 2015, I initiated and led, with Professor Douglas Rosenberg from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the first Symposium for Teachers of Screendance, which was attended by university faculty from the USA, Canada and the UK. Alongside my experimental practice, however, my biggest contribution to screendance education has been the publication of the two editions of *Making Video Dance – a step-by-step guide to creating dance for the screen*.

"I wrote this book because I could not find one like it" (McPherson, 2006, p. xxvii).

When I started to teach, there were very few published texts on the practice of screendance. As course material, I drew on a handful of photocopied articles about 'dance for television' from journals and magazines, and adapted resources from filmmaking textbooks. Over time, I became acutely aware of the need for a specific screendance workbook to support students' learning, and so I had the idea of writing a step-by-step guide aimed particularly at dancers and choreographers who want to make dance for the screen.

The wider story of published scholarly writing relating directly to screendance is, like the artform itself, one of ongoing expansion and generative and conscious intertextuality. Starting from a situation of scarcity, those writing and being published have necessarily referenced, added to and dialogued with each other, whilst also reaching in from and across other areas of specialism. Each new book that addresses the artform is eagerly embraced by the field. Initially few and far between, written screendance publications now appear with increasing regularity.

At the time when I entered the field, texts on the subject were scarce and difficult to discover. When it did exist, early writing about the practice and theories of dance and the moving image had often been generated by one-off curatorial events. In the early 1980s, chorographer and filmmaker Amy Greenfield edited a pamphlet entitled *FILMDANCE, 1890s-1983*, which accompanied a curatorial event with the same title. This precious publication offers a glimpse into the eclectic and experimental thinking and practices of a group of artist-filmmakers and philosophers around the "nature of filmdance" (Greenfield, 1983, p. 1-6 of the exhibition catalogue). The publication includes artists' statements by some of the key figures in performance and filmmaking of that era in the USA, including Ed Emshwiller, Shirley Clark, Carolee Schneemann, Hilary Harris and Yvonne Rainer. The reflexive texts are contextualised in longer pieces of writing by, for example, film archivist Robert A. Haller and dance theorist Roger Copeland, as well as Greenfield herself.

In response to the period of intense dance for television activity in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s, *Dance Theatre Journal* regularly featured articles and reviews relating to screendance. Likewise, providing accounts of "how dance and dancing have been represented on public television in Britain", the Arts Council of Great

Britain released *Parallel Lines – Media representations of dance* (Jordan and Allen, 1993, back cover). In this book edited by dance scholar Stephanie Jordan and film and media lecturer Dave Allen, and now out of print, some UK choreographers, directors, and executive producers, as well as writers and critics, relate their accounts of the collaborative histories and potential of dance and television from their unique and shared perspectives.

By the beginning of the 2000s, MA and PhD theses on subjects relating to screendance were being embarked on. Early on, these included Michele Fox, whose MA work was an early example of practice as research in the field. Sherril Dodds' *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art* (Routledge, 2006) grew out of her doctoral research into screendance and dance on television. Published in the same year as the first edition of my book *Making Video Dance*, the two were in some ways companion texts, approaching the topic of screendance from a theoretical/historic and a practical perspective respectively.

The interdisciplinarity of screendance has provided an essential springboard for much of the research and scholarly writing on the form and helped to shape the discourse around the artform. Erin Brannigan's *DanceFilm: choreography and the moving image* (Oxford University Press, 2011) intensely excavates the interrelationship between dance and film, from the early cinema through Hollywood musicals and music videos to contemporary experimental short dance films. Drawing on dance and film theory, Brannigan (2011, p.3) describes "cine-choreographic practices that are specific to the screendance form". Focused areas of research and expertise continue to give rise to exciting and important new texts. Recently, US interdisciplinary artist and scholar Cara Hagan has written *Screendance from Film to Festival: Celebration and Curatorial Practice* (McFarland & Co, 2022), in which she gives a lively and applied account of the evolution of screendance dissemination, most specifically through the lens of the evolving trends of festivals. This important book has immediately added to the ever-evolving spoken and published dialogue around the form.

Douglas Rosenberg's *Screendance – Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (Oxford University Press, 2012) situates the artform in the context of film, visual art and

modern and postmodern dance, and proposes a rigorous and applied theorising of the artform. More recently, Rosenberg also edited *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2016), a comprehensive curation of chapters by an "intergenerational cross-disciplinary group" (Rosenberg, 2016, p. 4), writing from a range of geographical, theoretical and artistic perspectives. Other important research has been published in Spanish, such as the series of monographs initiated by Agite y Sirva in Mexico, while the long-running International Video & Dance Festival in Brazil has produced a series of *Dança Em Foco* (Dance in Focus) publications in Portuguese.

In the introduction chapter to *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies*, Rosenberg (2016) notes the centrality of artists writing about their practices to the evolution of the form. These texts have often been presented at gatherings such as symposia, festivals and workshops, and hybrid versions of these. In February 2000, Rosenberg hosted the *Dance for the Camera Symposium* at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Reading through the transcribed presentations today, I see contributions from an intergenerational congregation, situated between the Film Dance generation (including Amy Greenberg, Doris Chase and Daniel Nagrin) and a newer generation, including Steve Jackman of The Video Place in London, Silvina Szperling, filmmaker and director of Videodanza in Argentina, and choreographers Victoria Marks and Laura Taler, to name a few. As such, the proceedings generated from this event, like others, represent an important step in the evolution of thinking about, articulating and shaping screendance. Rosenberg hosted further screendance symposia in 2006 and in 2022. These events similarly provided opportunities for researchers, scholars and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines to share discourse and dialogue about the emergent interdisciplinary form.

Envisioning Dance on Film and Video, a book and accompanying DVD published by Routledge in 2002, marked the culmination of the UCLA National Dance/Media Project which, spanning six years, "worked with a vast array of dance and media professionals to identify, develop and support outstanding work in film and video" (Mitoma, 2002, p. xi-xii).

With a shared aim of widening discourse and transferring knowledge, the

Opensource: Videodance symposia took a more informal but no less rigorous or generative approach, by encouraging collective dialogue and collaborative thinking over individual presentations. Taking place in Findhorn, Scotland, in 2006 and 2007, and co-produced by Simon Fildes, Karl Jay-Lewin and me, these events brought together artists, scholars, producers, curators and students to discuss and find futures for the art of screendance.

One of the impulses to come out of the *Opensource* events was the initiative to start a peer-reviewed journal publication. This was followed through in a successful bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for which I was co-investigator with Dr. Claudia Kappenberg (University of Brighton). We received a grant to establish the *Screendance Research Network* (2009 – 2012), which in turn enabled the founding of the *International Journal of Screen Dance*.

The collective aim of the journal, as articulated by the first co-editors Douglas Rosenberg and Claudia Kappenberg, was as follows:

> "The journal will engage in rigorous critique grounded in both pre-existing and yet to be articulated methodologies from the fields of dance, performance, visual art, cinema, and media arts, drawing on their practices, technologies, theories, and philosophies, to develop and expand the scholarly debates around the practice of screendance" (Kappenberg and Rosenberg, 2010, p.1).

This ideal from the envisioning of the research group, many from the *Opensource: Video Dance* cohort, the wider community and a longer discourse, has been shaped and shared across continents, decades, artforms and perspectives.

Developing a solo voice: reflective writing

Artists writing about their own practice often makes for the most compelling reading, contributing to deeper understanding of the specificity of an individual's work, as well as to the wider art form and context. As a young artist, I identified with a lineage of women directors, including Deren and Rainer, Greenfield and Shirley Clark, all of whom came from dance backgrounds to filmmaking. It was their words, as much as their films, that spoke to me. Their reflection on, and articulation of, their own

engagement with dance, performance and the moving image influenced the way that I approached my early practice. At the same time, their existence encouraged me to see the possibility of being a director as a young woman.

Making Video Dance is my articulation of the processes that lead to the conception and creation of single-screen works. My analyses of this publication, its contribution to my own development as an educator and artist as well as that of the field, is the focus of the final part of this chapter. However, firstly I will reflect on a different kind of writing. Over the past few years, I have found myself drawn towards writing as a method for investigating, articulating and communicating different ideas connected to screendance. I had the opportunity to develop my writing about body-based screen work in the three articles submitted with this thesis. These were published in different volumes of *The International Journal of Screendance* between 2016 and 2021.

Each article has a different intention: one as a review of a festival; the second a curation of works available online; the third a personal reflection on screendance at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst each article has a distinct focus and individual style, in retrospect I see that they share common themes, both with each other and with my embodied screendance practice: they question perceptions of space and time; they make connections between works from different contexts and eras; they suggest ways of thinking about the relationship between our bodies and technology; they draw from screen-based works on the periphery of screendance, and from the curation, writing and scholarly practice of other artists.

My writing style is very much inspired and influenced by the authors Rebecca Solnit and Olivia Laing. Their incisive, philosophical perspectives on art, society, nature and human behaviour weave webs of connection and understanding. Their writing is deeply personal and helpful in terms of trying to understand the world that we are living and creating in. Similarly, the approach that I take in the three journal articles comes from my personal perspective, and a desire to contextualise screendance within wider artistic ideas and philosophies. I take a curatorial approach to the writing; I draw attention to individual works that the reader might not be aware of and highlight their individual and collective relevance to contemporary life and societies.

Passing on the practice: *Making Video Dance*

The first edition of *Making Video Dance* was published by Routledge in 2006 and quickly became the core text for courses in universities and colleges internationally. It is also a popular resource for individual practitioners. The research and writing of the first edition of the book was made possible through my receiving a Creative Scotland Award of £25,000 in 2002. This was the first year of these awards, which were for individual artists to pursue a new direction in their practice. I was a new mother, and the money gave me time away from earning through television directing and allowed me to write. The fact that I could work at home, and in short sessions at any time of the day and night, suited having young babies much more than filming did. The book drew on my television directing, choreographic and screendance-making practices and I remember hardly pausing as the words flowed out of me. It was as though, through the writing, I was finding expression for the embodied knowledge that I had gained over the previous 15 years.

The biggest challenge in writing the first edition of *Making Video Dance* was to decide on the best structure for the text to support the reader's learning. Whilst I knew that I wanted to describe the screendance-making process from beginning to end, I was also aware that successful preparation for filming cannot happen without understanding the structure of the completed work. So, the first chapter includes an introduction to, for example, what I theorise as "reconsidered space and time" (McPherson, 2019, p. 17), the foundational approaches of the versatile camera point of view, and the continuity- montage editing, topics that I describe earlier in this thesis. For the first edition of the book, I interviewed key practitioners working in the field in the UK, including directors, choreographers, a cinematographer, a sound designer and an editor. These skilled creative practitioners offer an impression of their input to the process, and a snapshot of screendance activity in the UK at that time. Their words and perspectives are included in short quotes alongside the main body of the text of the first edition.

In response to sales, Routledge contacted me to suggest a second edition of *Making Video Dance* and I took the opportunity to rework the original manuscript. I had

noticed that the first edition no longer accurately reflected how my artistic practice, and the field in general, had evolved over the 10 years since it was published. This new revised and extended edition of *Making Video Dance* was released in 2019, bringing the content and methodologies outlined in it up to date. I decided to keep the book's overall structure intact and the title the same. Although the use of the term "video dance" does in some respects connect it to a time, or geographical location, (Rosenberg, 2006), I felt that it was important to keep the same book title to retain the identity and lineage between the different editions.

In the revised edition, I added sections about new technologies being used in screendance-making such as mobile phones for filming, and changes to post-production brought about by digital non-linear editing systems. I also developed sections on the use of improvisation, an aspect of my own practice which had evolved significantly over the time between the two editions, as I describe in earlier chapters of this thesis. I did not include the quotes from other practitioners in the second edition, as I felt that the field has expanded so much that to single out just a handful of practitioners would be imbalanced. Instead, in the second edition, I include reflections on the ideas and processes that directly reference films that I have directed, filmed and co-directed, including three of those submitted with this thesis: *The Time It Takes* (2012), *we record ourselves* (2016) and *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes* (2019). I could draw specifically on the films partly because they are now available for readers to view online, as well as through festivals and public screenings. On the publication of the first edition of *Making Video Dance*, Goat Media released a DVD collection called *Five Video Dances by Katrina McPherson*, which was sold as an accompaniment to the book. Seen in these contexts, and taken individually and collectively, the films take on a pedagogical role. According to Simon Ellis (2010, p. 131), they thus become "tools for the aspiring screendance artist to watch, learn and even imitate".

For the second edition, I rewrote most of the 90,000 words that are the text of *Making Video Dance.* On reflection at the time, I found the tone of the first edition too emphatic and that no longer felt true to how I wanted to share knowledge and encourage practice. In many ways, writing *Making Video Dance* was a similar process to that of writing this thesis. Both editions required me to think back on and

remember the decisions and processes that I went through in making works, as well as the context in which they happened. I then needed to consider the outcomes, and to communicate these observations and processes through words, in a way that is as meaningful and useful to others as possible. As I reflect now, I see the second edition of *Making Video Dance* as the sharing of a more personal vision of the development of a screendance practice. The field of screendance continues to evolve and therefore there is growing space for alternative versions and approaches to making dance for the screen.

The two editions of *Making Video Dance* have helped to shape screendance education. The book is used as the template for courses in universities and colleges, as well as a textbook for students and artists' self-directed learning. In her review of *Making Video Dance* (2nd edition) in *The International Journal of Screendance*, Robin Gee (2019, p. 197) writes:

> "The work thoroughly and cohesively provides makers and teachers
> of film avenues of further inquiry into this expanding genre. It
> continues to be the preeminent field-guide for makers of dance on
> film."

As regards its inclusion in the academe, screendance as a subject of study is in a significant place in 2022. The artform experienced an exponential growth through the wider availability of digital technologies in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. With the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, screendance was at the centre of an explosion of attention and activity. Choreographers and dance companies, faculty, and practitioners, who had previously worked almost exclusively in live dance and who may have been sceptical about dance on screen, were forced to consider the screen as a creative and legitimate space for making, sharing and learning. In terms of people wanting and needing to learn, screendance teachers like me found ourselves in high demand. During the 18 months between April 2020 and October 2021, I ran workshops for and/or mentored over 400 individuals from across the world.

The inclusion of screendance courses in university programmes has also increased greatly. This is particularly noticeable in the USA, where the growth can be evidenced by the American College Dance Association's (ACDA) annual competition, which in 2021 for the first time included a specific screendance strand. In April 2022, at the Screendance Symposium at the University of Wisconsin, the ACDA hosted a panel entitled "Confluence: Dance, Film and Future Landscapes: Examining the 'State of the Art' of Screendance through the lens of higher education". I was invited to participate in this discussion as a panel member, alongside key faculty members from several US institutions. There was little doubt among attendees and members of the ACDA, and the wider screendance community, that the ACDA's inclusion of screendance marked a significant point in the place of the artform in higher education.

As a result of this interest and activity, sales of *Making Video Dance* have doubled since the start of the global pandemic in 2020. Routledge have expressed their interest in a third edition, which I plan to write after finishing this thesis, drawing on the research and writing that I have done for it. There are also Spanish and Chinese translations of the book in progress. I am very happy that *Making Video Dance* continues to contribute to the recognition and evolution of screendance and am excited about where this will lead.

In this chapter, I have addressed the final questions that are central to this thesis: "how can reflective writing and articulation of practice contribute to the evolution of a screendance practice – and how can this generative relationship continue to be shared, and potentially shape the field?". I began by describing the (re-)emergence of my individual voice in my most recent screendance project *Luise*, which, as a work in progress, offers an indication of the future evolution of my practice and its theoretical framework. The focus of the chapter then shifted to the significance of critical and reflective writing on the evolution of the artform of screendance and the discourse around it. This is exemplified by the emergence of the *International Journal of Screendance*, among other publications, which is the context for the three articles submitted with this thesis. Finally, I address my sole-authored book *Making Video Dance: a step-by-step guide to creating dance for the screen,* published by Routledge in 2006 and 2019. I describe how my ongoing reflection on – and

articulation of – practice shaped these texts and thus facilitated a transfer of knowledge between myself as an artist and educator and the flourishing field of screendance.

Conclusion

"Really, the point of art for me was that I wanted to carry on talking and thinking with other people." (Sarah Lucas quoted in Laing, 2020, p. 160).

A key insight generated through the research and writing of this thesis is of an overarching theme of relationship. The most significant for me are the relationships that I have formed with other people, through my practice and publications as in my personal life. There is a circularity to this, as collaborations of different types are formed to facilitate artistic research. These evolve with and through the work, and new ideas and iterations of practice are borne out of them. Central to this is experiencing, thinking and talking together. The architecture of dissemination, through published films and writing, widens these conversations further.

Over the course of this thesis, and as I engaged with the questions that are central to it, I have described many types of relationship which I feel are significant and important to summarise here. In chapter one, I addressed the question: "How can interdisciplinary practice be shaped through different fields of influence?" by reflecting on my first encounters with art and dance, and early experiments in the emerging artform of video-dance. I described how my impulse to explore the screen as a site for creativity came from a desire to connect dance to a wider and more diverse audience than was evident in the context of live theatre. The principles of postmodern dance, of video art and of television-making intertwine through the evolution of my practice, and much of my artistic research has been about interrogating those relationships. The top-down production processes that I encountered in the television industry did not align with my desire for a democratic, collaborative approach to making work. Instead, I found alternative sites for experimentation, drawing on the professional relationships that I built up through my directing work to support this artistic research. Over time, these diverse and interdisciplinary experiences have converged in the publications and processes that are now central to my practice.

In chapter two, I responded to the question: "What different foundational approaches contribute to the evolution of experimental screendance?" I articulated my current relationship to the principles and methods of making, thinking and learning that are foundational to my approach to screendance. These included spatial and temporal concepts, the role of the camera, the use of improvisation, and montage editing. Connections were made, too, between my practice and that of Becky Edmunds and Lisa Nelson. In chapter two, I also introduced Dogma Dance, one of the screendance manifestos I have been involved in shaping. Manifestos express utopian vision. They also connect me to my roots in a socialist household, and to the belief that one's professional calling is not only about following personal ambition or interest, but also about contributing to community and knowledge sharing.

Chapter three is centred around three of the submitted publications and my recent filmic practice, as evidenced in the three films *Force of Nature*, *we record ourselves* and *Paysages Mixtes/Mixed Landscapes*. The chapter also addressed two of the thesis questions: "What role can improvisation play in the democratisation of the screendance-making process?" and "What are the possible relationships between reality and fiction in screendance?" Drawing on dance improvisation and documentary theory, I shed light on the processes that led up to the films and their finished forms. This involves new levels of engagement with the relationship between the on-screen performer, the cinematographer/director, and the spectator. Building on my understanding of the different intentionality between 'a film of a dance' and the experimental remit of screendance gave me a freedom to reject objectivity in the filming process, as did the use of improvisation. In this space, the relationship between reality and fiction also comes alive. The processes of research and reflection that I have undergone through writing this thesis have clarified that stance for me. I have come to realise that the screendance and the documentary films that I have directed are closer than I had previously thought. They all shift between reality and fiction, and I play in those spaces.

The online catalogue and film publication *Luise*, which I explored in the opening part of chapter four, navigates and responds to this site and signals the direction in which my creative practice is heading. My focus then shifts to the thesis' final question: "How can reflective writing and articulation of practice contribute to the evolution of a

screendance practice – and how can this generative relationship continue to be shared, and potentially shape the field?" A primary aim in writing my sole-authored book *Making Video Dance* was to empower performers, choreographers and dance artists through offering a step-by-step guide to the creation of dance for the screen. This text's place in the creation of a pedagogy, along the three journal articles, express a wider desire to contextualise screendance within diverse artistic ideas and philosophies. In chapter four, I further explored how these published writings have contributed to a generative relationship between practice, writing and teaching and potentially inform a deeper understanding of the creative possibilities of and discourses around screendance.

As regards the relationship between myself and the field of screendance, I conclude by reflecting on how much has changed in both of us. Rosenberg's web (2016) continues to grow and morph, the light of inspiration and motivation to explore, experiment with and learn about the creative possibilities of dance and the moving image shifting between different and expanding centres and sites of activity. In recent years, there has been an explosion of screendance activity in India, Taiwan and Indonesia for example. Each new centre brings an alternative perspective on the artform, which simultaneously builds on and renews it (Rosenberg, 2016). I acknowledge the narrowness of my own experiences in relation to the potential of other more diverse backgrounds and styles to shape and develop screendance into current and future generations. I hope that, through remaining inquisitive and open, I can continue to learn and expand my own practices and contribute further to the evolution of this artform that I still feel so passionately about.

The *Space of Time* thesis set out to explore how my interdisciplinary outputs have theorised, informed and contributed to a shaping of screendance. Through this, it illuminates the potential of making, writing and teaching as a model for developing a screendance practice. The evolution of my own practice arose from ongoing experimentation, reflection and *practice* in the literal sense of doing something regularly and consciously. It also supports my belief in the importance and relevance for people coming to screendance to have the opportunity to engage with the foundational concepts of the artform. Experiential learning about reconsidered space and time, shot vocabulary and grammar, camera movement, montage and continuity

editing, to name a few, embodies this knowledge through practice. With this comes the freedom to experiment, in the improvised moment and in the iteration of an idea, as in the larger context of the artform. I articulate and share this approach to learning in *Making Video Dance,* as I do in my day-to-day teaching and mentoring.

One of my earliest and most enduring questions to myself as a young person was 'how can I become an artist?'. Bolt draws on her reading of Judith Butler to suggest that "there is no artist that precedes the repetitive practice of art (and it is repetitive)" (Bolt, 2016, p. 135). I understand thereby, that my coming into being as a screendance artist happened in a shifting context, and through ongoing and continual experimental processes, relationships and reception to the work. Taking this forward, how might this observation be useful to others? It is essential to address and prioritise making opportunities to experience, learn and grow through art – and screendance – available and accessible to all different people and communities.

Building on this, the quest to formalise a screendance pedagogy in any rigid way might be as elusive, and even undesirable, as the wish to define and compartmentalise screendance as an artform. Instead, technologies and platforms evolve, society and contexts shift, individual and collective identities change, reality and fictions merge in different ways. A living screendance pedagogy is one which embraces this fluidity. It aims to prioritise and facilitate asking questions, looking, seeing, and being informed, challenging the status quo, the percolating of various experiences and diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Taken this way, the role of the educator and fellow artist is not to assess, judge or codify, but rather to form and nurture relationships and to communicate ideas, through the work itself, and through articulation, reflection, absorbing and sharing.

In the past six months, I have taken on the role of Course Leader of the MA Screendance at London Contemporary Dance School. Here my main remit will be to revise and develop the existing postgraduate course, which has run since 2018. I have been charged with embedding principles of accessibility into the structure and teaching of the programme, with the aim of making the course more appealing to a diverse range of students. I am very excited about this opportunity to develop the

course thus, as I am about the new relationships that will form in the process. It feels directly related to the research that I have done in the writing of this thesis and the conclusion that I have drawn from it.

So much has changed in the 18 months that I have worked on this thesis. At a global level, the climate catastrophe, the war in Ukraine, post-Covid and the cost-of-living crises are converging, putting us in a precarious relationship with the future. In my personal life, I have lost my father and my mentor Bob Lockyer, as well as my 90-year-old mother who passed away a month before my voce viva. The second of my three daughters has left home to go to university. So much happens, time is squashed, and energy spread so thinly. And yet my drive to experiment and explore and *connect* through creating art continues. I see myself continuing to develop the *Luise* project, drawing on the research and writing of this thesis. I am inspired by the new ideas that I have been introduced to through reconnecting with dance, improvisation and documentary theory and the discussions that have come out of that. I am excited to integrate these into my practice and teaching. What the wider context will be remains to be seen. I feel as if there are circles happening, going back to my educational roots with the job in London and moving forward into new collaborations, with all the ideas and conversations that will arise from them.

Appendix i

The Dogma Dance Manifesto

YES to the development of dance technique for film – YES to a sharing of knowledge between dance and film – YES to the development of choreographic structure in film – YES to technology which aids rather than hinders – YES to human dancers – YES to the creation of a new genre – YES to safe dancers – YES to the encouragement of dance filmmakers – YES to a new hybrid form.

NO to unsafe dancers – NO to the primacy of equipment over human creativity – NO to the breakdown of choreographic structure – NO to purposeless hierarchies – NO to grossly unbalanced wages – NO to the dominance of film in Dance Film.

To certify as a Dogma Dance film, the following rules must be adhered to:

1. The term 'dance film' will be used to describe the finished piece. A dance film is defined by its emphasis on the human body (still or in motion). In this context, dance refers to the actions of human beings only.
2. The movement context of the film should clearly display choreographic intent. It should not be mime, nor should it be purely pedestrian movement.
3. Only one camera should be used.
4. A movement phrase (whatever the length) should be filmed in one type of shot only, i.e., not 'covered' by several different angles or sizes of shot.
5. Film only on mini-DV.
6. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted. A moving camera is a dancing camera.
7. Only one lamp may be used. It can be any size. Other than that, use only natural light or artificial light that already exists in the location.
8. The camera, location or any other extraneous equipment should not impede the dancers' movement. In order for a film to be a certified Dogma Dance film,

the performing dancers should sign a written confirmation that they have felt this rule has been adhered to.

9. The dance film must be structured in screen time and space, i.e., it should be edited according to the rhythms dictated by the film rather than for continuity of the live choreography.

10. There must be no digitally created special effects, such as dissolves, created in camera or the edit. Changes of speed are allowed, but only if they have intent with the choreography and are not used to cover up poor dance/filmmaking.

11. The maximum length for a dance film should be 10 minutes, with at least 80% of this time being filled with bodies (or parts of bodies) in frame.

12. There must be a meaningful relationship between the soundtrack and the visual content of the dance film. It is not OK to cut to a music track (i.e., a dance film is not a pop promo) or slap on music afterwards.

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