

One of the fundamental tasks for a dance filmmaker is to recognise the crucial differences between making work for stage and making work for screen. Screen space is flat. Live space is three dimensional. The Cubist artist Picasso working on a flat canvas allowed us to see what is behind, round the corner, out of sight, painting what cannot be logically seen. So the camera can, like Picasso, look at the subject from many different perspectives and allow the audience to see beyond the surface.

Screen dance is a time-based medium. Watching television we are able to switch channels whenever we choose. When we go to the theatre we cannot make it stop, we can only leave if we do not like what we see. When we go to a gallery we can make active choices about how long we spend with any exhibit, or where we stand or sit to view it, whether it is a film or a static work. When we go to the cinema we sit in one place and we expect to be engaged and entertained and both time and belief are suspended. Sustaining audience attention differs for the live stage space and screen space. Live choreography often unfolds slowly revealing the concept and choreographic ideas. We can be happy to watch a live body often doing very little or even minimal gestures for a very long time, however, this does not work so well for the screen. Our attention needs to be grasped immediately, visually, aurally, kinetically or through an intriguing vocabulary or aesthetic. Being part of a visual culture we expect a quicker fix. Understanding time is key to screen dance.

Sitting in a theatre and watching dance, the live performer will always be the same size regardless of where we sit, but we the audience do have some choices. We can view the entire stage space, concentrate on one dancer or focus on something incidental; seems obvious really. Watching screen dance we are viewing the director's choice of what we see. We might experience the dancer or subject in microscopic detail or see a macro close up or extreme long shot, thus, the size of the subject changes. Framing is something to consider when making screen dance

Scale also requires consideration when we view screen dance. For example, it can be watched on a television monitor, projected to large-scale cinema size, shown on a laptop computer or remote devices such as a mobile telephone. The effect on the viewer will be different in each case and may require a different treatment of the material. Some artists make screen dance only to be viewed online, some prefer the site to be in a gallery. There are some screen artists who like to project their work briefly and outside on walls, or on temporary sites. Consideration to scale and location is relevant to the kind of screen dance you wish to make.

Here are some questions to consider:

- a. What is the difference between live space and screen space? Consider this question from the point of view of framing, location, time.

- b. What is the difference between the live body and the screen body? Consider this question from the point of view of gesture and a whole-body dance language, as is used for live dance and screen dance.

- c. What is the difference between choreography for live stage and screen? Consider this question from the point of view of the subject matter for screen dance and live work.

- d. Consider the differences between choreography for the camera and choreography for the live stage with particular reference to entrance and exit.

- e. What are the differences and implications on an audience when watching live work and screen work from the point of view of scale?



Liz asks

1. **Observational exercise:** watch Alison Murray's *Horseplay*. Adopt an active attitude to watching this film i.e. do not sink into a passive place. Remain alert. Ask yourself questions as issues arise. Observe the camera movements. Count the number of edits over one minute. Note where the camera is placed in relationship to the body. Consider how time is used. Be aware of the framing of the space. Consciously note the framing of the body. Is it clipped or fragmented? Is it a long shot, a mid shot, a close up, a micro close up?

2. **Visual exercise:** create your own aperture using a piece of paper and make observations on framing and perspective. Close one eye and look through the aperture and note how the world can be composed. Move the paper at different distances from your eye and note how your world can be seen.

3. **Physical exercise:** work in pairs, one person improvises movement and the other observes through the paper aperture. Experiment with framing the whole body, part of the body, close-ups, passing through the frame. Take a moment to note how you personally like to frame movement. What appeals to you? Define your personal aesthetic. It will help when you make your own work.

Horseplay, choreographed and directed by Alison Murray

Alison Murray is influenced from the popularist end of the cultural spectrum. She finds the commercial territory of pop promos often more groundbreaking than 'so called' high art. In choreographing *Horseplay*, Alison Murray said:

"I wanted to explore the dynamics of female playfulness and wanted the camera really to be part of that. So I ended up using a minicam strapped to a boom pole so that it could go in and out and all around the dancers. I really choreographed a lot of the material based around the location and that particular camera." (Murray, A. in Dodds, S. *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media for Hollywood to Experimental Art*, 2001).

She says: "I think people make the mistake of thinking that if they film something with an uninvolved camera, with natural lighting, that it's going to seem very real. But as soon as you frame something within the screen it's no longer real anyway and viewers bring a different set of expectations to the screen." (Murray, A. in Dodds, S. *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media for Hollywood to Experimental Art*, 2001).

4. Analyse *Horseplay* and consider live and screen issues. Note how many different actions, characters, choreographic ideas, gestures, locations, props take place within the time frame of this film. Consider the relationship of the camera to the action and observe how we are able to take in a 360-degree location.

Note and discuss in pairs the way the camera frames the bodies, the space and the action to reveal a fast paced energy, a sense of present, a reality and presence in the work. You could draw some of these moments on a storyboard. Discuss in groups how this work has the energy of *liveness* within a screen dance. *Liveness* in this context means the live presence, engaging with an audience rather than being removed or distanced by the screen.



Justine asks

1. **Observational exercise:** create a worksheet that you could give to a partner to help them collect information, such as; the use of time; the types of framing (both of the space and the body); shot sizes; the number of edits. Then complete Liz's question 1.
2. **Visual exercise:** create your own aperture using a piece of paper and make observations on framing and perspective. Try walking around your environment picking out things, places and movement that you could capture on film while looking through the aperture.
3. Analyse *Horseplay* and consider live and screen issues. Note how many different actions, characters, choreographic ideas, gestures, locations, props, take place within the time of this film. Make a list of what you have seen and compare with a partner; did you discover the same things? You could draw certain moments that stood out for you on a storyboard.