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| **Dance Film** |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Dance film describes works of film combining choreographic and cinematic practices, encompassing a range of genres from Hollywood musical dance sequences, to choreographed fight scenes, to montages of mechanical movement in avant-garde film. The term describes works of choreography produced in conjunction with the camera, resulting in hybrid, cross-disciplinary works that can only exist in cinema. Dance Film is also referred to as Dance on Film, or the more comprehensive term Screendance, which encompasses all screen forms including video, animation, and digital media. |
| Dance film describes works of film combining choreographic and cinematic practices, encompassing a range of genres from Hollywood musical dance sequences, to choreographed fight scenes, to montages of mechanical movement in avant-garde film. The term describes works of choreography produced in conjunction with the camera, resulting in hybrid, cross-disciplinary works that can only exist in cinema. Dance Film is also referred to as Dance on Film, or the more comprehensive term Screendance, which encompasses all screen forms including video, animation, and digital media.  Early cinema’s fascination with capturing movement on film led to collaborations between filmmakers and dancers. It is difficult, then, to separate the history of film from modern dance, and the two are often considered inextricably intertwined. Dance on film began in 1894, when Thomas Edison recorded Ruth St. Denis’s outdoor performance of a skirt dance with his Kinetoscope. Developed by American modern dance pioneer Loie Fuller, The Serpentine Dance became a popular film subject, as it capitalized on the medium’s ability to capture movement and light. Edison filmed Broadway dancer Annabelle Whitford performing the dance in 1894, while the Lumière brothers captured Fuller’s version in 1896. Scenes of dance were also featured in many of early cinema’s most notable films. Georges Méliès utilized twelve corps dancers and a soloist  in *The Magic Lantern* (1903), Edwin Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)features square dancing and clog dancing, and dancers from Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn’s modern dance company Denishawn appear in D.W. Griffith’s 1916 epic *Intolerance.*  Link: Video File  Figure Lumière Brothers – *Serpentine Dance* (1896)  <http://www.ubu.com/dance/lumieres_danse-serpentine.html>  Link: Video File  Figure Fernand Léger – *Ballet Mécanique* (1924)  <http://www.ubu.com/film/leger.html>  In the first half of the 20th century, avant-garde filmmakers experimented with techniques that created choreographies through montage. A key example is Fernand Léger’s *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), which rhythmically juxtaposes images of everyday and mechanical objects, women in motion, and close-ups of lips, teeth, eyes, and faces to compose a choreography comprised of both bodies and things. A sequence of the film where a pair of mannequin legs are made to dance through a series of quick jump cuts demonstrates that dance film is not limited to the choreography of human bodies. In *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945), American experimental filmmaker Maya Deren used montage and her signature technique of cutting on action to expand the spatial and temporal possibilities of dance. Her technique allowed dancer Talley Beatty to perform inhuman feats: leaps that suspend in mid-air, and steps that move his body from inside a forest to inside a room, producing a space and time not possible in live stage performance. Deren viewed dance film as a collaborative effort understood as a duet between the camera and the dancer.  Link: Video File  Figure Maya Deren – *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (1945)  <http://www.ubu.com/dance/deren_study-in-choreography.html>  Dance films utilize a variety of cinematic techniques ranging from intricate sequences of montage to a single take in front of a static camera. *Hand Movie* (1966), a work by postmodern choreographer and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer, utilizes the minimalist technique of performing before a camera. The film features the isolated, tiny dances of Rainer’s right hand against a plain, static background. |
| Further reading:  (Brannigan)  (Brooks)  (Carroll)  (Deren and Mcpherson)  (Dodds)  (Mitoma)  (Rosenberg) |