

Course C **The Dancing Image**

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Dance and moving pictures have had a long and fruitful relationship. Although the screen is not a substitute for live performance it offers the potential to disseminate dance far more widely. As a distinct medium, film and video offer technical possibilities and effects unachievable on stage. The dance world itself – exotic, glamorous and mysterious – is an alluring dramatic subject for movie makers, from *The Red Shoes* to more recent hits such as *The Turning Point* and *Black Swan*. The course will examine the evolution of dance on film and video and the ways they are used to entertain, inform and expand the potential of dance as an expressive art form.

Week 1: **Sept. 15 Moving Pictures**

Even before the arrival of sound, early filmmakers were drawn to dance: the body in motion. They saw it as a way to capture a record of something otherwise fleeting and evanescent. In this session we look at the beginnings of dance on film, its relationship to what was happening on the live stage and its flowering as a popular genre.

Week 2: **Sept. 22 Is it art?**

There are many misconceptions about dance on screen. Some purists think dance is diminished when transferred to the screen. Sometimes there's a snobbish attitude that "art dance" is too refined for popular mediums such as television and the movies. This session considers the false dichotomy drawn between "art" and "entertainment." We will discuss how some of the greatest choreographers have happily stepped from stage to screen and how dance on film and video has become an accepted alternative to live performance.

Week 3: **Sept. 29 Capturing the Moment**

From the nascent days of film and television, these technologies have played a major democratizing role in expanding the audience for dance and in generating an appetite for the art form. As film and video technology have advanced, it has become increasingly possible to deliver in a compelling way to much larger audiences dance originally conceived for the stage. As this session illustrates, modern technology has provided unprecedented access to what was once thought of as a remote and socially elite art form.

Week 4: **Oct. 6 Musical Theatre and the Big Screen**

Dance has always been an integral component of musical theatre. It did not take movie-makers long to discover the profitable potential of adapting popular stage musicals for the big screen or of creating film equivalents. Producers and directors realized that film offered staging possibilities unimaginable in live performance. The results were so impressive that in some cases the process has been reversed with theatre producers attempting to cash in on the popularity of a made-for-the-screen musical by adapting it for live stage performance.

Week 5: Oct. 13 The Dancing Image

Screen directors have for many years been intrigued by the possibility of using film and now, more commonly, video to explore a distinct genre of dance that is not a record or adaptation of something else but an art in itself.

The genre can embrace drama and narrative but also abstraction and overt experimentation. The results often challenge our notion of performance, our relationship to technology and our understanding of what defines this thing we call “dance.”

Week 6: Oct. 20 Dance as Film Drama

Screenwriters and directors are drawn to the dance world as a dramatic subject because of its perceived exoticism, glamour and beauty. As an elite physical art, the dance world also offers exciting elements of competition, the struggle to achieve. In this session, before moving on to specific examples, we'll look broadly at how the dance world is portrayed – and often misportrayed – and how it continues to fascinate movie makers and audiences.

Week 7: Oct. 27 The Backstage Story

Backstage stories of one sort or another have always appealed to audiences, and the ballet world is prime material. Director Herbert Ross's *The Turning Point*, a 1977 dramatic feature starring Anne Bancroft and Shirley MacLaine, taps into the genre while intertwining it with two other popular dramatic tropes – an intense rivalry between friends and a star-is-born story. The film coincided with an extraordinary popular blossoming of interest in dance, particularly ballet, and introduced ballet superstar Mikhail Baryshnikov to the big screen. Its success triggered more movies in a similar vein, sometimes cast against Cold War politics of the day.

Week 8: Nov. 3 A Controversial Mash-up: Black Swan

Director Darren Aronofsky's 2010 movie, *Black Swan*, was a huge global hit but remains controversial, especially among dance lovers who see it as a gross distortion of a ballet world they think they know and love. What is often overlooked is that *Black Swan* is less a dance movie in the conventional sense than a genre-mashing psychological thriller/horror movie about a mentally unhinged woman who happens to be a ballerina. It is not the first to take a dark look at the ballet world; and probably will not be the last.

Week 9: Nov. 10 Dance as Personal Salvation: Billy Elliot

In dramatic feature movies dance has frequently been used as an agent of, or metaphor for, personal growth, for liberation from a humdrum existence and the key to a life lived with passion. Director Stephen Daldry's *Billy Elliot* (2000) is a superb example, placing the story of a boy's dream to become a ballet dancer against the unlikely setting of a Thatcher-era, strike-riven mining town in Northern England. In this session we will examine what sets this movie apart from others of the genre.

Week 10: Nov. 17 Driven by Art: The Red Shoes

There's a reason why, for all its overblown melodrama, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948) remains a gilt-edged classic. Devoted fans often rate it as the best dance film ever. *The Red Shoes* reworks the old backstage intrigue movie trope, mixes it with a dash of star-is-born excitement and pits the complicated love that links its three main protagonists as a fable about the price the search for artistic perfection exacts.