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Choreographic Resources: agents, archives, scores and installations

Scott deLahunta and Norah Zuniga Shaw (May 2008)

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In the Digital Resources issue of *Performance Research* (Winter 2006), we introduced the concept of the 'choreographic resource' as a way of framing four research projects involving the choreographers Siobhan Davies, Emio Greco|PC, Wayne McGregor and William Forsythe.¹ These artists are perhaps best known for their contribution to the field of dance through their artistic productions. However, the focus of the research projects we wrote about was not on artistic production per se, but on emergent complementarities between choreographic ideas and processes and their mediation through and in relation to other practices. We want to provide a brief update on the developments over the last two years, particularly where to access some of the results.

Entity: agents and augmentation (Wayne McGregor | Random Dance)

Wayne McGregor's enquiry into 'physical thinking' has brought him into close contact with specialists in a number of fields such as artificial intelligence, cognitive science, robotics, biology/ cardiology, neurophysiology, interface research and digital arts. These interdisciplinary exchanges often provide some type of inspiration, directly or indirectly, for his making process, sometimes associated with a particular artwork sometimes not.² Under certain conditions, the exchanges evolve into genuinely collaborative research.³ The current research project, ENTITY, involves different modes of interdisciplinary exchange focusing on two related lines of enquiry: (1) to develop adaptive software agents that can generate unique solutions to choreographic problems; and (2) to continue to work towards establishing principles of choreographic and physical thinking. The aim of this combined research is to augment creativity through an increased understanding of the intelligence systems involved. This research will continue through Spring 2010 to culminate in the creation of a new work and include an intensive three-week collaborative research in early 2009 with the Interactive Cognition Lab, University of California San Diego. The UCSD project aims to study the coordination of choreographic thought and action between choreographer and dancers in the rehearsal studio. The organization and facilitation of these interdisciplinary exchanges and collaborative research has recently been consolidated under the R-Research section of the company.⁴

Digital Dance Archive: metadata and learning spaces (Siobhan Davies Dance Online)

In 2006, the Centre for Media Arts and Performance, Coventry University in collaboration with Siobhan Davies Dance received support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council to create an 'online fully searchable digital archive' for the collected works of the company. The goal was not to simply produce a catalogue of work, but through the 'process of digitization (...) to develop imaginative and creative approaches to the concept of an archive'.⁵ Starting in January 2007, the project research team concentrated on a number of basic technological and methodological issues. This has involved choosing the optimal system for digital asset management, researching the digitization process and copyright issues, carrying out a survey of potential community usage, devising the metadata standard for the archive and making decisions about the scope and range of

¹ Scott deLahunta and Norah Zuniga Shaw. 'Constructing Memories: Creation of the choreographic resource'. *Performance Research* 11(4), pp. 53-62.

² For example: *Choreography and Cognition (2002-2004)*: <http://www.choreocog.net> was organized in connection to the making of *AtaXia*; *Of the Heart (2004-2005)* <http://www.oftheheart.org/> in conjunction with the creation of *Amu*.

³ See: 'Augmenting Choreography: using insights from Cognitive Science'. co-authors: Scott deLahunta, Phil Barnard, Wayne McGregor. in: *Choreography in Contexts: Critical Perspectives on Choreographic Practice*. eds. Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut. Routledge: London. (upcoming 2008).

⁴ To follow project developments and access more detailed information about collaborators visit: <http://www.randomdance.org>

⁵ For more information see 'Digital Archive' on: <http://www.siobhandavies.com>.

materials to include.⁶ Nearly finished with this basic work, the research team has begun to generate materials from new artworks and processes and to develop user-based interface scenarios with the designers. Upcoming developments under consideration include a 'learning space' where the visitor can gain insight into Davies' choreographic principles to help them be better 'readers' of the archive's resources.⁷ Siobhan Davies Dance Online will have its public launch in June 2009.⁸

One state to another: One Flat Thing, transduced (William Forsythe)

In a recently published essay titled 'Choreographic Objects', William Forsythe poses the following question about choreographic ideas: 'Could it be conceivable that the ideas now seen as bound to a sentient expression are indeed able to exist in another durable, intelligible state?'⁹ Rephrased as 'how?' can choreographic ideas be expressed other than through the body, this became one of the central questions underpinning the development of Synchronous Objects, a series of online interactive animations based on his ensemble choreography *One Flat Thing, reproduced*. Since 2006 and involving an extensive period of ongoing research, the collaborative and interdisciplinary team from The Ohio State University's Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design (ACCAD) and the Department of Dance have built a large body of data that has made this transduction not only imaginable but also possible. At this rare level of granularity, the data is a detailed accounting of every structurally significant choreographic system in the dance as informed by direct accounts from Forsythe and his dancers and analysis of the video mastershot of the dance.¹⁰ The data and animations reveal deep structure and make possible a new level of generative relations with other disciplines such as philosophy, architecture and geography. All of these resources will be made publicly accessible on the web and in a series of launch events (symposia, installations, workshops) beginning in April 2009.¹¹

Inside Movement Knowledge: the notation research project (Emio Greco|PC)

In October 2007, the Notation Research Project of Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten (EG|PC), led by former company performer Bertha Bermudez, concluded the interdisciplinary research phase described in the original 'choreographic resources' essay. The outcomes include the publication (*Capturing Intention*) comprising an edited book of essays, a documentary and interactive DVD-Rom and a large-scale interactive installation based on EG|PC's *Double Skin/ Double Mind* workshop. The title of the publication points toward one of the project's basic research questions: 'what notation system can capture inner intention as well as the outer shape of gestures and phrases?' The book includes written contributions from specialists in dance notation, cinematography, computer based gesture analysis, interactive media design, and cognition research as well as perspectives from dance and cultural studies and philosophy.¹² The interactive installation has been invited to different events including the Tanzplan Dance Education Biennale and the Springdance International Dance Festival both in early 2008. Some of the research questions it provokes relate to concerns about embodiment, learning and play, and the role of metaphor in connection to body state. The next phase of research will involve a two-year collaboration under the heading of 'inside movement knowledge' with a consortium of institutional partners in the Netherlands to further develop the interactive installation and start work on a *creative process documentation model*.¹³

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⁶ For a detailed report of the research and developments to date see: Sarah Whatley, Paul Allender, Ross Varney. 'Digitizing Siobhan Davies Dance'. *Body Space Technology*. vol7: no2. (<http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0702/cover.html>)

⁷ Additionally, there is an interdisciplinary research application pending that aims to develop new models for archiving dance materials based on a convergence of different types of movement analysis (from the choreological to the biomechanical).

⁸ To follow project developments visit: <http://www.siobhandavies.com/>.

⁹ Forsythe, William. 'Choreographic Objects'. in: *William Forsythe: Suspense*. (catalogue from exhibition at Ursula Blicke Stiftung, Kraichtal May 17- June 29, 2008). Zürich: JRP/Ringier. 2008. pp. 5-7

¹⁰ shot in April 2006 in Frankfurt, DE expressly for the score development project

¹¹ Watch for updates on the following sites: The Forsythe Company (<http://www.theforsythecompany.de/>); The Ohio State University's Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design (<http://accad.osu.edu/>) and the Department of Dance (<http://www.dance.osu.edu/>)

¹² Copies of (*Capturing Intention*) can be obtained from various international bookstores or from: <http://www.emiogreco.nl>.

¹³ Details can be found on: <http://www.emiogreco.nl>.