

Publishing Choreographic Ideas

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Postprint deposited in [Curve](#) February 2016

Original citation:

deLahunta, S. (2014) 'Publishing Choreographic Ideas' in Tanz & Archiv: Heft 5 Mobile Notate (pp: 14-21). Munchen: Epodium Verlag. ISBN: 978-3-940388-28-5

<http://www.epodium.de/shop/tanz-archiv/>

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This is a draft version (October 2012 so the list of materials at the end is not up to date) of an essay published in slightly different final forms in:

Tanz & Archive: ForschungsReisen, Heft 5: Mobile Notate. epodium Verlag: München. pp. 14-21. 2014.

SHARE: Handbook for Artistic Research Education. eds. Mick Wilson & Schelte van Ruiten. ELIA: Amsterdam. pp. 170-177. 2013.

pARTnering documentation: approaching dance, heritage, culture. 3rd Dance Education Biennale 2012 Frankfurt am Main. eds. Edith Boxberger & Gabriele Wittmann. epodium Verlag: München. pp. 18-25. 2013.

Synchronous Objects: Degrees of Unison. Ed. Zuniga-Shaw, Norah. Design by Peter Kwok Chan. Westerville, OH: Robin Enterprises Company. pp. 236-243. 2013

Publishing Choreographic Ideas: Discourse from Practice (by Scott deLahunta)

Let's start with the idea of a space for new knowledge coming from the embodied practice of dance and the process of dance creation, but then realise this is a space with no literature yet. Or there was no literature, as there now appears to be a growing collection of materials that is starting to define this space for new knowledge. These materials come published in different formats that include books, various book and DVD combinations and Internet websites. These publications are recognised as having been authored or co-authored by and with leading choreographers in the dance field. These publications are not artworks, but are developed with the aim of furthering understanding of choreographic ideas and processes and bringing these into newly productive relations with both general audiences and other specialist practices.¹

Each publication project – from solo to collaboratively authored – has kept a close connection to the motivating questions and concerns of the individual artists, drawing on and amplifying elements of their 'signature practices'.² Collectively these publications show evidence of a novel domain of context and reference, one that explores non-linguistic forms of description and collateral knowledge relations drawn together by dance. This does not mean that dance artists have not written and published before about their practice, and in inventive ways; but there are features of the current cultural context that are unique. It is this and the surge of related projects³, which makes it possible to imagine that these are the beginnings of a new literature for a new knowledge space, the emergence of an intrinsic discourse coming from dance practice.⁴

¹ A list of recent projects would include websites: Siobhan Davies Replay, Synchronous Objects for One Flat Thing, reproduced, *What's the Score?* Oral Site; book/ dvd: *Whatever Dance Toolbox* BADco, *Material for the Spine* Steve Paxton, *Improvisation Technologies* William Forsythe, *A Choreographer's Score* Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, *Capturing Intention* Emio Greco/ PC; books/ scores: *A Choreographers Handbook* Jonathan Burrows, *STREB: How to Become an Extreme Action Hero* Elizabeth Streb, *My Body, the Buddhist & Lamb at the Altar* Deborah Hay, *A Choreographic Mind* Susan Rethorst, *Are We Here Yet?* Meg Stuart, *Hiking the Horizontal* Liz Lerman, *Caught Falling* Nancy Stark Smith, *Schreibstuck & FUNKTIONEN tool box* Thomas Lehmen, *Everybody's Performance Scores*, *Rire Laugh Lachen* Antonia Baehr.

² The concept of 'signature practices' is taken from the writings of Susan Melrose. See: 'Confessions of an Uneasy Expert Spectator' nr. 13. <http://www.sfmelrose.org.uk/> (accessed 11.09.2012)

³ In addition to the list in **Footnote 1** new publication projects are underway: Motion Bank on-line scores with Deborah Hay, Jonathan Burrows, Thomas Hauert, Bebe Miller; Transmedia Knowledge Base for Performing Arts with Rui Horta; Choreographic Thinking Tools with Wayne McGregor|Random Dance.

⁴ The concept of a new form of dance literature has been introduced before in: deLahunta, S., Groves, R., Zuniga Shaw, N. "Talking About Scores: William Forsythe's vision for a new form of dance 'literature'", in *Knowledge in Motion*, eds: Sabine Gehm, Pirkko Husemann & Katharina von Wilcke, London & New Brunswick: Transaction, 2007, pp. 91-100. deLahunta and Zuniga Shaw published two background articles in the journal of *Performance Research* (2006 & 2008) (download here: <http://www.sdela.dds.nl/choreoresourcespdf/> accessed 20.09.2012) on four projects using digital media to publish choreographic ideas; In 2008-2009, an interdisciplinary research network funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK *Choreographic Objects: traces and artefacts of physical intelligence*, brought these

The contents of this new literature are the results in various media (text, diagrams, drawings, still and moving image, graphic visualisations, interactive software applications, etc.) of artists asking questions about dance's relationship to itself, to its audiences and to fields outside of dance. Some are interested to communicate insights into their choreographic process or into creative process more generally, others to offer a self-determined analysis of selected artworks or lay open an enquiry into the 'body's mind'. Some work to expose the essentials of an improvisation technique or share scores (as information objects) or systems devised for making and organising materials. Revealing what may not be visible in the work itself and exploring new forms of documenting and transmitting dance are often cited as priorities. A dialogue or interview format is commonly used drawing insights out through questions, and other authors may be invited to provide context. In both cases, the individuals involved are clearly 'close to the work'.⁵ A place and time of making is always at least implicitly present. A recent important contribution features an extensive research into and documentation of the accumulation of experience embodied in the expert teacher of dance.⁶ The scale, in terms of time, organisation and funding, of each project varies greatly. Together these contents represent a contemporary plurality of approaches, techniques, languages, concepts and methodologies coming from dance practitioners for whom sensation and movement are often (not always) associated with expert practice – derived from training in 'dance technique' (see Footnote 6). For these choreographers there is a kind of 'raw material' in their own and/ or their dancers' somatic history, practiced intuition, skilled habits and trained or untrained movement patterns.⁷

As a cumulative poetics,⁸ this growing collection needs a context to be recognised and acknowledged as a coherent body of ideas with value outside of the networks of cultural and academic production within which signature artistic practices are already acknowledged through recognition of their artwork. Outside of these networks dance *normally* lacks legitimacy in the grand scheme of what we consider to be knowledge in 21st contemporary society with its association with verbal language, 'alphabeticism'⁹, logic and rational thought. But there are movements in three areas that may provide a reference space for this new discourse coming from dance practice.

The **first movement** is the development of artistic or practice-based research that can be described as a debate, traceable in European contexts to developments in the early to mid-

same four projects together for the first time in the same investigative context

(<http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/choreographicobjects/index.php> accessed 13.09.2012).

⁵ Individuals working closely with the choreographers to publish their ideas include: Bertha Bermúdez, Nik Haffner, Bojana Cvejic and Jeroen Peeters. What distinguishes these individuals from others who have contributed significantly is a history of working inside of close to the creative process, for examples as performers and/ or dramaturgs.

⁶ Diehl I., Lampert F. (2011), *Dance Techniques 2010 - Tanzplan Deutschland*, Berlin. Henschel Verlag in der Seemann Henschel GmbH & Co. KG, Leipzig.

⁷ The 'publication of choreographic ideas' described in this essay assumes choreography-dance-movement to be fundamentally connected; while acknowledging the importance of critical developments from within the dance field of the past decade as scholars, makers and curators have been questioning assumptions and exploring the implications of separating or bracketing [choreography] from [dance] and [dance] from [movement].

⁸ This is in reference to Laurence Louppe's *Poetics of Contemporary Dance* recently translated to English by Sally Gardner (Alton, UK: Dance Books 2010). Louppe's book was first published in 1994 calling then for a discourse that better addresses perceptions 'awakened' by dance.

⁹ Brian Rotman posits 'alphabeticism' as an "entire logic of representation" that has contributed to a rift between language and the body. In *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts and Distributed Human Being*. Durham and London: Duke University Press: 2008.

1990s, playing itself out largely in the context of higher education, both in the area of University-based humanities studies and in the professional schools of the arts.¹⁰ The key issue is one of placing artistic research practices – as different from artistic practices – on an equal footing with other forms of academic research. This is opposed and embraced in various measures – some arguing that the arts are unique and should not be integrated into an academic research agenda, although exchanges between arts and academic disciplines are encouraged.¹¹ Others arguing that artistic research practices engage in and develop an understanding of the world in culturally important ways and deserve the same status as other modes of engagement – they say it is the academic research agenda that needs to adapt.¹²

The discussion in the frame of professional arts (dance) practice is often found rubbing up against this edifice of education, where the struggle over what constitutes research is most directly experienced. The literature emerging from dance practice addressed in this essay are not artworks; but they have the aim of bringing choreographic ideas and processes into newly productive relations with other specialist practices. It is at this intersection that the debate about artistic research in the academy might be *superimposed* on this emerging discourse from dance. What is unclear is what happens to artistic practice if and when artistic research achieves the acknowledgement it may seek.¹³ Could this result in a devaluation of artistic practice by placing too high an emphasis on legibility before reading itself changes? This is a question of crucial importance to continue posing, for as with any discourse seeking legitimacy for what is done by its researchers, qualifications and protocols for evaluating new modes of understanding also begin to define and act to control those modes (see Footnote 12). Nevertheless, at this time the debates about artistic and practice-based research are interesting contexts to pursue critical questions about the general nature of these artist-led dance publication projects, and offers an institutional framework which may be useful.

Second movement: In more or less the same time frame as the debate about artistic research practice in higher education, advances in digital technologies have been changing the material form of literature to include a wider range of media and media-related operations. This has given rise to an expanding definition of literacy also marked by debates in which the traditional notion of discourse as speech-related reading and writing comes up against a new discursive space facilitated by machine and software-based information processing.¹⁴ Importantly, these developments extend to the wider socio-cultural environment, and the concept of digital literacy goes well beyond the domain of art practice and artistic research. *However* expanding the definition of a literature's material basis fits very well with the publishing of choreographic ideas

¹⁰ For an overview and in-depth analysis of these developments see Henk Borgdorff's excellent book *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. Leiden University Press, 2012, p. 2 & p. 9.

¹¹ For an 'exchange' model see the Graduate School for the Arts and Sciences at the Berlin University of the Arts (<http://gs.udk-berlin.de/en> accessed 13.09.2012)

¹² Adaptation means amongst other things determining criteria for evaluating arts research. For an overview of how institutions across Europe are working such issues the SHARE network is a useful place to start (<http://www.sharenetwork.eu/> accessed 13.09.2012)

¹³ It is interesting to note the 2012 thirteenth edition of doCUMENTA was "dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory." (<http://d13.documenta.de/#welcome/> accessed 16.09.2012)

¹⁴ References: *Writing Machines & How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, N. Katherine Hayles (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); *Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich (London: MIT Press, 2001); *Software Studies: a Lexicon*. Matthew Fuller, ed. (London: MIT Press, 2008).

using computer-based tools, as several choreographers have done so far.¹⁵ These digital tools are being used to document, analyse and notate the complex spatial-corporeal-temporal relationships involved in dance making and performance such that they can be rendered visible, accessible and comprehensible to a reader – whose *activity* of reading itself is now changing to embrace/ engage this new material form of literature.¹⁶

Embracing this wider range of effectively inscription-like things that digitally and uniquely render aspects of dance accessible (where it may not have been before) makes it possible to look again at types of non-digital dance drawing, scoring and notating as potential encodings of information that might, re-examined in this new research context, reveal hidden layers of practice and thinking.¹⁷ And beyond what digital technologies can materially *co-produce* as a new form of literature, interesting associations emerge with the digital media artistic community who embrace open processes and methods, tool building, networking and data sharing and the variable-relational in art works as a core part of their creative practice.¹⁸ In the framework built around the design of these digital dance renderings (scores or objects), the resistance dance has had to its own documentation is transformed by a *transductive* transfer to 'data'. In the expert hands of the collaborating digital artist, dance data materialises a newly formed kinetic idea; one in which the unique patterns of a choreographic 'signature practice' can not only be studied by other researchers within the context of this emerging discourse, but can also give rise to multiple variations as new digital objects or artworks.¹⁹

Third movement: Popular imagination has the tendency, either directly or indirectly, to relegate physical practice like dance or sports to the territory of the purely intuitive and organic, a non-verbal, and therefore (according to aforementioned assumptions about knowledge) non-intellectual form of communication or expression. A physical intelligence, even when acknowledged, is assumed to express itself most wholly when 'thinking' – as interference – is well out of the way, reinforcing the view that mind and body are somehow separate parts of *experience*.²⁰ A similar reinforcement can be discovered in specialist scholarly-scientific practices. Humanities academics often work in analytic-critical traditions that fix bodies – dancing and others – into a matrix of histories, politics, identities and signs. This perspective sees the body as culturally constructed and tends to leave out knowledge or understanding that

¹⁵ See [websites & book/ dvd Footnote 1](#). A unique research documentation website by Nik Haffner and Bernd Lintermann can be included in this list: <http://www.timelapses.de/>

¹⁶ For reading & writing rethought as embodied experience see Maaïke Bleeker on the concept of 'Corporeal Literacy' in 'Passages in Post-Modern Theory: Mapping the Apparatus', *Parallax*, 14:1, p. 65. 2008.

¹⁷ Choreographers' drawing-notating in practice is/ are normally considered contextually constrained and fairly inscrutable (i.e. it works well in situ, make no sense outside of the studio) and notation systems, e.g. Laban, are not widely used (written or read). For very different but related accounts on these materials see: Louppe, L. (ed.), *Traces of Dance: Drawings and Notations of Choreographers*. (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1994); deLahunta, S. "The Choreographic Resource: technologies for understanding dance". In: *Chapbook 1: newDANCEmedia. Contact Quarterly*. 35:2, Summer 2010. pp. 18-27

¹⁸ variable-relational here draws a link between the concepts of 'variable media' and 'relational aesthetics' both familiar discourses in the context of media arts practices.

¹⁹ See Mark Franko on the potential for the "body to be its own medium" that connects to the concept of 'dance data' in "Writing For The Body: Notation, Reconstruction, and Reinvention in Dance". *Common Knowledge* 17:2 2011.

²⁰ See **Footnote 1** ref. to Stephen Jay Gould's "The Brain of Brawn" New York Times 25 June 2000, in: deLahunta, S. "Traces of Physical Intelligence". In: *Gestalt der Bewegung*. Editor: Annett Zinsmeister. Publisher JOVIS verlag. 2011. pp. 94-113.

is achieved through moving, sensing and feeling.²¹ Many working in the biological, psychological and neurological science disciplines have fully embraced the idea of embodied intelligence, but humanities and social science scholars often see the approaches of these fields as too reductive for intellectual collaboration. Perhaps not surprising when some philosophers of mind still hold the view that consciousness might be eventually explained in neuronal terms.²² As a focus of study, human experience seems to have the tendency to highlight disconnections across a wide range of disciplinary discourses.

This radically generalised summary of specialist scholarly-scientific perspectives on the relation between mind and body is set up as a backdrop against which the publication of choreographic ideas might find an *interdisciplinary* context for their further study by specialists in other domains. As the most integrative of all practices, dance involves a complex set of cognitive, emotional and embodied sensory and sense-making modalities and expresses these in rich social and cultural settings. This presents an opportunity for anyone making a serious scientific or scholarly enquiry into the nature of human experience. For this reason, a number of interdisciplinary thinkers from anthropology, philosophy, cognitive science and cultural studies have directly engaged choreographers and dancers in collaborative studies. There is a need within these efforts to establish future protocols for research in which dance itself plays a greater constitutive role, and this process is underway.²³ It is difficult to know if assumptions of the popular imagination will change regarding dance, but it is very possible to speculate that the emerging discourse from dance practice described in this essay so far may have a role to play here for other specialist practices; providing a significant and useful body of literature for *experience* researchers who may in turn contribute to it.

This completes the ‘movements in three areas’ that may provide a reference space for this new discourse coming from dance practice. What we can’t know yet is how the meta-structures of a coherent reference space of ideas, the standards and indices that enable connections and discoverable relationships within an emerging discourse community, will work with this new literature and its material forms. This is an issue for artistic research practices more generally, how to stabilize an emerging new knowledge community (the artistic research community) through linkages and connections; enabling one set of ideas to encounter another.²⁴ Digitally mediated operations, codes and structures will play an increasing role in these relationships;

²¹ Attributed to the subtitle of and drawing on the Introduction to Brian Massumi’s seminal *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Sensation and Affect*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. That Introduction can be accessed here: <http://www.brianmassumi.com/textes/Introduction.pdf> (accessed 16.09.2012).

²² On **embracing embodied intelligence**: *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Shaun Gallagher (Oxford University Press; 2005); ‘Thinking with the Body’, David Kirsh (in (eds) S. Ohlsson R. Catrambone, *Proceedings of the 32nd Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*. Austin, TX: Cognitive Science Society. 2010. Pp 2864-2869.); *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition*, Robbins, P. and Aydede, M. eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). on **lack of collaboration**: *Echo Objects: The Cognitive Work of Images*, Barbara Maria Stafford (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007); *The Debated Mind: Evolutionary Psychology versus Ethnography*, Harvey Whitehouse (Oxford: Berg, 2001); on **persistent views still held**: *Action in Perception & Out of Our Heads*, Alva Noë (MIT Press, 2004; Hill and Wang & FSG, 2009).

²³ The Dance Engaging Science Interdisciplinary Research Workshops are a series of meetings organised in the frame of Motion Bank with the support of the Volkswagen Foundation with the aim of laying “the foundations for future interdisciplinary research in which dance itself plays a greater constitutive role”. <http://motionbank.org/en/research-2/> (accessed 14.09.2012)

²⁴ For an example initiative: The Journal for Artistic Research, an online peer-reviewed journal for the identification, publication and dissemination of artistic research from all arts disciplines. <http://jar-online.net/> (accessed 14.09.2012)

these are already enabling new forms of peer review and open access to ideas. The transmission and migration of ideas carried by the skills, habits and patterns of (danced) movement always have connections to cultural and social contexts and are traceable as such.²⁵ But these current efforts by artists to publish movement ideas – to render what might otherwise remain not visible as explicit traces (structures, relationships, models), transferable, scalable and applicable in other contexts and under other conditions – offers new forms of dance to engage with; through new forms of engagement.

Recent and new publication projects (websites accessed 20.09.2012):

- Siobhan Davies Replay* (<http://www.siobhandaviesreplay.com/>)
Synchronous Objects for One Flat Thing, reproduced (<http://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/>)
What's the Score? Oral Site (<http://sarma.be/oralsite/pages/Index/>)
Whatever Dance Toolbox BADco. in collaboration with Daniel Turing (Zagreb: BADco., 2011)
Material for the Spine: A Movement Study Steve Paxton (Brussels: Contredanse, 2008)
Improvisation Technologies: a Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye William Forsythe (ZKM, Karlsruhe & Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012)
A Choreographer's Score Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker & Bojana Cvejic (Rosas, Brussels & Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2012)
Capturing Intention: documentation, analysis and notation research based on the work of Emio Greco | PC. (Amsterdam: Emio Greco | PC and Amsterdam School of the Arts, 2007)
A Choreographers Handbook Jonathan Burrows (London: Routledge, 2010)
STREB: How to Become an Extreme Action Hero Elizabeth Streb (New York: The Feminist Press, 2010)
Lamb at the Altar & My Body, the Buddhist Deborah Hay (Duke University Press, 1994; Wesleyan University Press, 2000)
A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings Susan Rethorst (Theatre Academy Helsinki. Department of Dance, 2012)
Are We Here Yet? Meg Stuart (Edited by Jeroen Peeters, Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2010)
Hiking the Horizontal: Field Notes from a Choreographer Liz Lerman (Wesleyan University Press, 2011)
Caught Falling: The confluence of Contact Improvisation, Nancy Stark Smith, and other moving ideas Nancy Stark Smith & David Koteen (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2008)
Schreibstuck & FUNKTIONEN tool box Thomas Lehmen (Berlin, 2002 & 2004)
Everybody's Performance Scores (<http://www.everybodystoolbox.net/>, 2010)
Rire Laugh Lachen Antonia Baehr (Editions: Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers / L'OEil d'Or / make up productions, 2008)
- The Forsythe Company/ Motion Bank* Deborah Hay, Jonathan Burrows, Thomas Hauert, Bebe Miller (<http://www.theforsythecompany.com/> > motion bank)
Transmedia Knowledge Base for Performing Arts Rui Horta (<http://tkb.fcsh.unl.pt/knowledge-base>)
Choreographic Thinking Tools Wayne McGregor|Random Dance (http://www.randomdance.org/r_research/)

²⁵ deLahunta, S. & Hoerster, E., "Rethinking Tools: based on interviews collected during MODE05". *Reverse Engineering Education: in dance, choreography and the performing arts*. b_books verlag: Berlin. 2007, pp. 88-95.

Scott deLahunta works as a writer, researcher and organiser on a range of international projects bringing performing arts with a focus on choreography into conjunction with other disciplines and practices. He is currently a Senior Research Fellow at Coventry University, Research Director with Wayne McGregor|Random Dance and Project Leader of the Motion Bank Project of The Forsythe Company.