

PROPOSAL CONTEXT:

The Beyond Text programme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK has provided a unique opportunity to apply for funding to research the relevance of non-text based materials in today's digital culture. The programme recognises that communication is more rapid and often more transitory than ever before; and that performances, sounds, images and objects circulate swiftly on a global scale only to be replaced by even newer versions. The aim of the programme is to stimulate a collaborative, multi-disciplinary research community to work on questions arising from this. The following proposal for a series of three workshops (Oct-2008, Jan-2009 and Apr-2009) has been funded in the first call for proposals for this scheme. More information can found at: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/>

WORKSHOPS PROPOSAL:

Choreographic Objects: traces and artifacts of physical intelligence

RATIONALE AND RESEARCH CONTEXT:

The focus of these workshops will be four unique interdisciplinary research projects initiated by contemporary choreographers Wayne McGregor, Siobhan Davies, William Forsythe and Emio Greco | PC (Pieter C. Scholten).¹ These choreographers are internationally recognised for their contribution to the field of dance, each having produced a rich body of artistic work. In addition to live performances for an audience, this work includes new approaches to physical training and performance, innovative creative processes and expanded parameters for interdisciplinary artistic research. In recent years, these choreographers and their associated organisations have independently begun to explore the potential of interactive digital media and related technologies to document, represent, transmit and disseminate these aspects of their artistic practice. The varieties of information-rich resources they have created (including on-line interactive scores, digital dance archives, choreographic software agents and real-time training simulations) will constitute the choreographic objects that this project investigates in collaboration with the choreographers themselves.²

Choreography gains its primary cultural value from the performance of dance, which an audience experiences as a live time-based artwork. The socio-cultural value of contemporary dance is largely evaluated on the strength of this transitory event. To date, recordings of any aspect of dance creation or performance have been perceived to be of less value, due to their inherent 'lack' of living presence.³ This lends an inherent tension to any project that aims to produce valuable cultural objects, rich in choreographic or dance information that exist outside the process of live performance. However the choreographers are committed to the vision that the future of dance requires such cultural objects to be created in order to further the understanding and evolution of dance as an art form. Their shared vision includes a new set of claims for dance and dance making as 'knowledge producing' and thus valuable across a wider range of contexts than previously imagined. These claims have been tested, to a degree, in encounters with experts from other disciplines including architecture, social anthropology and the cognitive sciences, which have prompted the choreographers and others to ask the question 'what is it that dancers 'know' and how might this knowledge be captured and made a resource for researchers in other fields, as well as for further dance making?'^{4 & 5} The emergence of this current conception of dance in relation to 'knowledge' also raises new questions -- what does being recognised as 'knowledge producing' do to dance making and what kinds of ancillary objects might count as knowledge for other disciplines?

To date these questions have not been systematically explored. In the framework of Choreographic Objects, we will bring these four research projects together in the same investigative context for the first time, in order to engage theories of knowledge production and knowledge transfer with a group of established social science researchers. These researchers - James Leach (Principle Investigator, University of Aberdeen), Tim Ingold and Matt Ratto⁶ - specialise in how knowledge is acquired and transmitted as a social process, how knowledge comes to be embodied in transactable forms (objects in circulation), and how those very objects participate in the further creation of cultural value. Several currently influential

approaches in the social sciences focus upon ways in which objects 'participate' in social processes. These theoretical developments give particular purchase in interdisciplinary situations where created objects are the focus for collaboration. For example, the concept of a 'boundary object' as a material form that facilitates exchange between differently situated actors has recently gained currency. Do choreographic objects constitute 'boundary objects' which allow value from one sphere of cultural production to be transformed and drawn into other contexts and disciplines (architecture, cognitive science etc.)? There is potentially a rich dialogue to be had between these newer 'object-oriented' social theories, and the theories and perspectives on performance, practice, materiality, and community that have developed in previous dialogues between the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

Leach, Ingold and Ratto will work closely with dance researchers Sarah Whatley (Co-Investigator, ceMAP, Coventry University) and Scott deLahunta⁷ to combine expertise in phenomenological and dance research approaches to movement and inscription; in the generation, circulation, and transmission of value through transacted objects; and in interdisciplinary and cross-context knowledge exchanges. In dialogue with the choreographers and/ or members of their research teams, they will bring this expertise to bear on the following core questions: What kinds of objects are emerging? How do they embed and extend the 'knowledge' produced by contemporary choreographers? How are they used and received, and what might be done to facilitate more value transfer between sectors and disciplines through their production?

As focussed events with a consistent group of between ten and fifteen key participants, the workshops will explore the kinds of 'knowledge' that are being embedded in choreographic objects and how the processes of making them and the forms they assume affect the understanding they can carry and the information they can communicate. Because all of these projects involve the documentation, analysis and representation of various aspects of dance making and emphasize different forms of notation, scoring and description: the contents of our workshops fit most closely to the Beyond Text themes of **Making and Unmaking** and **Mediations**. The results emerging from the first two workshops, on making and dissemination, will be brought to bear in the third on the constitution of future choreographic objects. The workshops thus have a forward-looking orientation, laying the foundations for longer-term research.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

- To establish the first systematic study bringing these leading projects into contact with social scientists and theories of knowledge production.
- To organise an opportunity for the four choreographers and members of their interdisciplinary research teams to exchange and share information on choreographic objects.
- To review and evaluate the variety of 'choreographic objects' that have been and are being created, to probe the motivations and methods behind their creation and catalogue what information they are intended to carry and transmit.
- To develop a shared theoretical framework to test artistic/choreographic claims to knowledge production and their relationship to the concept of 'boundary object'.
- To explore how interactive digital media might augment 'knowing' rather than substitute for the thing itself (the dance).
- To enrich the processes of creating and disseminating 'choreographic objects', tracing their cross-boundary reception and assimilation.

TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES:

First session (University of Aberdeen, 7-9 November 08) Making and Design: The choreographers and/ or members of their research teams will present the 'choreographic objects' they are in the process of creating and describe what information (or knowledge) these objects are meant to make available.

Second session (Coventry University, 27 February – 1 March 09) Translation, Transmission and Exchange: The choreographers and/ or members of their research teams will present the dissemination pathways along which these objects are intended to travel including what audiences they are intended to reach and how access is facilitated; for discussion and critical engagement from social science perspectives.

Third session (Sadler's Wells London, 24-26 April 09) Additions and Future Research: We will review and summarize what reflections, innovations and modifications might increase the value and richness of the choreographic resources for the interdisciplinary audience/readership for which they are intended. This will include a public seminar at Sadlers Wells Theatre. We will also plan further developments of collaborative research on choreographic objects by the core team (and others) based on these findings.

DISSEMINATION:

The final workshop supported by Random Dance in April 09 in London will include a public seminar at Sadlers Wells. Social scientists and dance scholars/ researchers plan to publish articles arising from their input to the workshops separately and together (e.g. in *Journal of Performance Research*, *Leonardo*, *Anthropology Today*). Each choreographic project has an international program of performance and demonstration in which scholarship and analysis drawn from the workshops might be presented. To extend the project beyond the lifespan of the award period, it may be possible to apply for industry support or a small grant application under the Beyond Text programme. A report on the outcomes of each workshop and summary of the conclusions of the series, including new directions for research, will be made available.

PROJECT PARTNERS:

- Art Research, Theory and Innovation group, Amsterdam School for the Arts, NL
- Wayne McGregor|Random Dance
- Intel, People and Practices Research

REFERENCES:

- ¹ Wayne McGregor|Random Dance (<http://www.randomdance.org>); Siobhan Davies Dance (<http://www.siobhandavies.com/>); The Forsythe Company (<http://www.theforsythecompany.de>); Emio Greco | PC (<http://www.emiogreco.nl>)
- ² W. McGregor: "ENTITY" a multi-year interdisciplinary research project designing autonomous choreographic software agents to augment the creative process in the rehearsal studio; S. Davies: Multi-year AHRC funded project to construct an on-line digital dance archive of Davies' work combining traditional and experimental process-based and interdisciplinary approaches; W.Forsythe: Aiming to stimulate new ways of reading dance, an interdisciplinary team at Ohio State University is developing on-line interactive score based on the choreography titled "One Flat Thing, reproduced"; Emio Greco|PC: long-term interdisciplinary research into methods of notation and transmission of their work including the recent creation of an interactive simulation of their workshop "Double Skin/Double Mind".
- ³ Recent academic theory has challenged a number of these traditional views about performance documentation, but the argument here is that this has had a limited effect on the professional creative practice.
- ⁴ For example: *Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye* by William Forsythe (cd-rom and booklet: Ostfildern, DE: Hatje Cantz Verlag, June 2000) has been influential in architecture contexts; *Choreography and Cognition* (ACE/ AHRC pilot artist-in-residence programme 2004 <http://www.choreocog.net>) brought dancers, social and cognitive scientists together in a shared research project; *Capturing Intention: documentation, analysis and notation research based on the work of Emio Greco | PC*. (book, film documentary, interactive dvd-rom and installation) Amsterdam: Emio Greco | PC and Amsterdam School of the Arts. October 2007.
- ⁵ deLahunta, Scott and Norah Zuniga Shaw. "Constructing Memory: creation of the choreographic resource". in: *Performance Research, Digital Resources Issue*. Eds. Ric Allsopp and Scott deLahunta. Vol 11, No 4. 2007 pp. 53-62.
- ⁶ James Leach (Principle Investigator, University of Aberdeen) knowledge production and exchange, intellectual property, creativity; Matt Ratto (HUMllab, SE) critical and performance theory, digitally mediated communities. See: Open Objects Initiative: <http://criticalmaking.com/openobjects/>; Tim Ingold (Aberdeen) perception of environment: art, architecture and anthropology
- ⁷ Sarah Whatley (Co-Investigator, ceMAP, Coventry University) dance studies, dance archives, movement analysis research; Scott deLahunta (ARTI/AHK, NL and Dartington College of Arts, UK) dance documentation, notation and creation research.