The Choreographic Forum is a new initiative of the Society for Dance Research aiming to support an exchange of thoughts on current dance and choreography. Dr Efrosini Protopapa and Lise Uytterhoeven, who are curating it in its current pilot year, set it up as a series of roundtable discussions, during which a diverse group of dance researchers reflect on a performance they have watched together in a theatre or elsewhere in London. There are four meetings per year, and each session begins with two short statements by two invited speakers who then lead the discussion. The Choreographic Forum therefore addresses a need we strongly felt in the current field of dance research for people coming together to think on performance and become more articulate about contemporary dance practices we engage with as audiences today. It also in this sense attempts to create bridges between scholars, students, artists and everyone in-between, and to encourage us all to discover new discourses that will enable us to reflect on what we see, how we approach contemporary work and what it does to us as spectators.

The first two sessions felt lively and rich, and we take this opportunity to thank all those who helped us organise them and all who took part. Our inaugural session was hosted by The Place on 2 March 2011, where we discussed The Forsythe Company’s work *I don’t believe in outer space*, choreographed by William Forsythe and presented at Sadler’s Wells in February 2011. The discussion was led by invited speakers Dr Helena Hammond and Tamara Tomic-Vajagic. Our second session took place at the Siobhan Davies Studios on 14 April 2011 and was organised in collaboration with Independent Dance. This session, led by Frank Bock and Dr Martin Hargreaves, focused on two experimental works by emerging artists Mihaela Dancs and Jarkko Partanen respectively. These were presented as part of What Next, a peer exchange project with international and UK dance artists leading up to the What Now festival in April 2011.

Whereas the first session examined work that we had viewed collectively a week prior to the discussion, the second one followed immediately after the showing and therefore also included the artists themselves who were present at the discussion; in fact, the choreographers and dancers noticed how useful the forum had been, even if, or perhaps precisely because, it was not aimed specifically at giving them feedback on their work, but was structured as a platform for people to think through what they had experienced. We are very pleased that both these sessions attracted a wide and diverse audience, including: students in dance and other art forms, a few of whom noted that they had rarely seen contemporary dance, or been invited to discuss choreography; practitio-
Choreographic Forum con’t from p.1

ners, including dancers who had worked with the choreographers whose work we discussed; the artists themselves who had made and performed the work, in the case of the second forum; but, also, producers, curators and venue programmers interested in different formats of exchange between practitioners and scholars. A format was adopted in both sessions, whereby, following introductory statements by the invited speakers, we noted the areas of discussion that interested participants, and broke into groups who would then pursue different lines of thought in more detail. These groups were flexible, so that there was some shift in the space as well, and people could join different groups throughout the session, benefiting from and contributing to a number of conversations. Although it would be impossible to capture all the topics discussed within a short text such as this one, we offer here some of the questions and issues that emerged, which will most certainly recur and inform our future conversations too.

Session I – Inaugural

In their introductory statements Hammond and Tomic-Vajagic introduced some key ideas through which they proposed to approach William Forsythe’s work, including: the notion of avant-gardism, and the question of how one questions form, or works with form to deconstruct it and renew it; practices of improvisation and a process-like aesthetic that seems to be quite common nowadays in contemporary dance; and, the question of how choreographic identity is formulated particularly through long-term collaborative processes.

One of the topics that participants pursued further was the link between the improvisational qualities of the work and its aesthetic which seemed to be one of revealing process. The suggestion was made that in Forsythe’s works we witness the process/performance as an extension of the process that has taken place in the studio. A question was also raised about the use of Laban’s principles in the way Forsythe’s company uses structured improvisation. Tomic-Vajagic noted that, even though some of the principles the company uses could be associated to Laban (e.g. movement initiation from various isolated parts of the body, sequential versus successive or simultaneous structuring of movement, etc.), the dancers do not train in or learn any Laban system as such, but are introduced to some ideas and methods through Forsythe himself.

Interesting questions were also raised around the issue of the choreographic identity of the piece, particularly given the significant role of the dancers in all of the Forsythe Company’s pieces. Several participants found it interesting that Forsythe has worked with the same dancers for a very long time, and that the ensemble now appears quite mature as a group. The notion of translation came up, and particularly a task Forsythe calls ‘double translation’, where he teaches a movement phrase to a dancer, who then takes the phrase and ‘translates it’ by performing it, for example, in reverse, or initiating from a different body part, etc. They then teach it to another dancer, who will then perform it in the work, so that the movement’s ‘origin’ constantly shifts.

Finally, many participants who had attended a pre-performance talk with Forsythe also noted how that affected their reception of the piece. For example, Forsythe discussed his interest in YouTube, and some participants felt that the innate structure of the YouTube medium seemed to emerge as a compositional tool in the work, through its patchwork-like structure, its layered dances, when the dancers performed very different material alongside one another, sharing the performance space. Further on, the group discussed the concept of dramaturgy and how the order of the various sections of the piece, as well as the transitions (or lack of smoothness in the transitions) between the various sections of the piece allowed for a particular dramaturgical logic to emerge, which seems to be quite recognisable today in many larger-scale contemporary dancer works.

Session II

Bock and Hargreaves chose to open the forum with a discussion between them, through which they shared some of the thoughts that had emerged as they watched the two solo works by Dans and Partanen. The main starting points for discussion they proposed were: the notion of solo works presenting multiple selves, or parts of selves, and the presentation of (one)self in a documentary way; the citational as a way to organise experience and to connect the personal to an audience; the invitation to spectators to give time to a performance, and to let it work on them with and through time.

The notion of self-representation as a ‘documentary style’ interested a great majority of participants, who then pursued this further by discussing methods of working with (auto)biography. It was noted that fiction too enters (auto)biographical work, even in cases where we feel that the material presented has a feeling of authenticity, in the sense of something ‘lived and real’. In fact, it was proposed that self comes into being precisely through performance, and that artists often ‘find themselves’ through their encounter with the audience; that is, through their work, through their meeting with the other.

The strategy of drawing from popular culture as a way of using shared imagery or shared languages to arrive at an understanding of self was discussed particularly in relation to modes of spectators. The observation was made that shared culture can also offer a very

continues on p. 9
The 33rd Society of Dance History Scholars Conference was hosted by the University of Surrey in collaboration with The Place from 8 to 11 July 2010. With its central theme of ‘Dance & Spectacle’, the conference sought to establish critical perspectives on the high visibility of dancing bodies in the various media of the globalised world. This four-day event offered delegates from around the world a vast range of papers, keynotes, working group sessions, award ceremonies and performances.

After the opening reception on Thursday evening, the delegates made their way to the Guildford Cathedral hill, where Kate Lawrence performed her site-specific, vertical dance choreography Descent of the Angel. Lawrence made her way down the side of the Cathedral’s towering façade. Suspended by the pelvis swinging from side to side, the pendulum motion allowed for leaps and extensions which left spectators dazzled as the force of gravity worked in unusual ways.

Friday night there was the street performance of Cascade by Motionhouse Dance Theatre outside the Electric Theatre in Guildford on the bank of the river Wey. Commissioned especially for the occasion, Cascade showed a diverse group of dancers negotiating the tilted rooftop surfaces of a semi-submerged house underfoot. The acrobatic partnering in this work stood out as being particularly spectacular. On Saturday The Place hosted four performances throughout the day and evening, including Angela Woodhouse and Caroline Broadhead’s 24ct and Bob n Lee’s That Infra-Thing performed by Dogshelf Fictional Theatre Company.

Friday’s keynote session was chaired by Melissa Blanco-Borelli and explored a number of theorisations of the concept of ‘Black Beauty’. Working at the interstices of gender and race theory, Shirley Ann Tate from the University of Leeds discussed the beautification practice of ‘browning’ by British women of Jamaican descent as affirmation of beauty’s performativity. Thomas DeFranz from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology evaluated beauty as an aesthetic paradigm for the analysis of concert dance in the Africanist ‘grain’, advancing this concept introduced by Barthes. From both these keynotes, it could be suggested that what is at issue is a decolonisation of spectatorship when dealing with ‘Black Beauty’. Saturday at The Place, Kate Lawrence led the keynote session on ‘Outdoor Spectacle: the Dancing of Sites’. Kevin Finnan, founder of Motionhouse Dance Theatre, and Eddie Nixon, Director of Theatre and Artist Development at The Place, engaged in a lively debate about performance which takes place in public, outdoor spaces. ‘Site-responsive’ was introduced as a more appropriate alternative to the term ‘site-specific’. Importantly, the temporality of outdoor performance was highlighted as opposed to the more obvious critical focus on the spatial relationship of the performing body with its surroundings. Furthermore, outdoor performance was considered capable of reaching wider, more diverse, yet sometimes involuntary, audiences compared to performance which is made for conventional theatre spaces, and this was seen as bringing new challenges to the choreographer’s craft.

The papers that were presented throughout the conference were organised in panel session headed Visuality, Identity, Mass, Popular, Ideology, and History. Much dance still negotiates the critiques of spectacle made in the 1960s by Yvonne Rainer in her ‘No Manifesto’ and Guy Debord in his The Society of the Spectacle. Hence, some of the papers were provocingly grouped together under the panel titles ‘“No” to Spectacle’ and ‘“Yes” to Spectacle’. The emphasis on visuality when considering dance spectacle was simultaneously challenged by sessions which privileged aurality in performance. The theme of dance and spectacle also allowed for the dissemination of recent research findings on the role of kinaesthetic empathy in the perception of dance as part of the AHRC-funded ‘Watching Dance’ project.

Overall, the SDHS Dance & Spectacle conference was an ideal opportunity for researchers from around the world to meet and share their work and ideas. It also offered an opportunity for members of the SDR Executive Committee and the SDHS Board of Directors to start a dialogue and explore ways in which we might collaborate in the future. In a lunchtime meeting on Thursday 8 July, we compared the amount of members and the geographical spread of both societies, as well as our usual funding sources. A concern shared by the two societies is to increase postgraduate student participation. Both societies are committed to fostering dance research through a range of events and publications, and hence it would be opportune to continue the dialogue between us to think of ways in which we might serve the membership jointly.
This February, Roehampton University’s Dance Department hosted the one-day conference Thinking Through Dance: The Philosophy of Dance Performance and Practices. The conference was supported by the British Society of Aesthetics, the Society for Dance Research, the Royal Institute of Philosophy and American Airlines. Scholars from several different countries and continents were joined by delegates from universities across the UK. The conference explored the philosophical questions raised by and in dance, acknowledging that dance as grounds for philosophical inquiry has been a relatively under-theorised subject in the history of aesthetics. By creating dialogue between different philosophical traditions, the conference examined a range of topics including dance and embodiment, dance meaning and artistic intention, expressivity and the dancing body, representation in dance, the ontology of dance, authentic performance and dance at the intersection of analytic and continental philosophy. The conference was successful in both its organisation and content and also in creating a pleasant atmosphere; from the morning coffee and biscuits to the presentations and ensuing conversations throughout the day, to the closing reception in the evening, it provided an enjoyable and stimulating environment.

The conference opened with the keynote presentation by Graham McFee, who addressed questions concerning the relationship between choreographer and performer. Is the dancer an artist in his/her own right or merely an executor? How do we define these areas and how do we make value judgements? The presentation provoked a lot of discussion around ideas of authorship and authority, status and power-relations in dance. In the age of postmodernism these issues still seemed to be topics for debate. The second keynote presentation was given by Noel Carroll. His presentation focused on the symbiotic relationship between music and dance.

In addition to the keynote presentations, the conference was organised into three parallel running sessions in the morning and three in the afternoon. Each of the sessions included the presentation of papers by three speakers on a specific theme.

The morning session on the theme Dance and / as Philosophy started with Janet Lansdale (University of Surrey) arguing that elements from both analytic and continental philosophy affect the spectator’s response in a rational and emotional, cultural and personal manner. Kristin Boyce (Stanford) followed with her presentation through which she aimed at clarifying the conditions upon which ‘dance is understood not simply as material for philosophical reflection...but rather as the medium of such reflection.’ Efrosini Protopapa’s (University of Surrey) presentation complemented this presentation, suggesting that, by investigating the operation of philosophical inquiry within the practice of choreography, we might be able to gain new understandings as to ‘how dance thinks’ and to ‘potentially re-imagine philosophical thinking as choreography’. The session on Minds, Brains and Dancing Bodies included presentations by Jonathan Owen Clark (Trinity Laban), Jane Carr (Lincoln) and Inma Alvarez (Open University). Clark, using both recent analytic and European philosophy, discussed the body-mind problem from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as from the perspective of developments in the physical sciences (i.e. neuroscience). In the paper that followed, Carr examined Paul Crowthers’ concept on ‘ontological reciprocity’ and Deidre Sklar’s ‘consideration of the difference between bodily memory and memory of the body’ to explore how dancers’ accounts of their experience of performance can shed light into how western theatre dance is understood and appreciated. Alvarez examined the ‘impact of the expressive relevance of the presence of the human body’ to our perception of dance, asking whether the natural and the artistic body are distinguishable in performance and whether it is at all possible in our experience with dance to escape from the presence of the human body.

The third morning session was on the theme Dance, Space, Time with presentations by Susanne Ravn (Odense), Elisabeth Van Dam (Ghent) and Lorraine Nicholas (Roehampton University). Ravn explored how dancer’s differing descriptions of how a space is sensed can ‘highlight spatial dimensions of perceptual processes.’ Van Dam, drawing from Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetics, considered time and space as...
Gertrud: Collaborating with the Past

By Simon Ellis

Gertrud: Collaborating with the past was prepared for a presentation to the Society for Dance Research in December 2010. It represents some initial ideas about collaboration and collaborative research that I've been asked to develop for a book project called Between Us edited by Joanne ‘Bob’ Whalley and Lee Miller. Although not intended for the page, by leaving it in its original form, I hope to evoke the poetics of the presentation – Simon Ellis, June 2011

Gertrud: Collaborating with the Past

And yet they, who are long gone, are in us, as predisposition, as burden upon our destiny, as blood that pulsates, and as gesture that rises up out of the depths of time.

– Rainer Maria Rilke ‘Letters to a Young Poet’ (Rilke 1993)

I am an invisible one of the days gone by.

My name is Gertrud Bodenwieser and I was born in Vienna in 1890.

I was a dancer–choreographer.

In my life there was no repetition; nothing of the past survived, nothing came back.

I am watching you. I am your audience.

This is my conversation with you.

It is a fiction.

A chance to imprint the lost on your dancing.

To smile at your mistakes ...

And frown at your ambition.

I have no body, but I have better possessions than myself.

– Ellis (script from Gertrud 2008)

About 10 years ago, as part of some research and thinking I was doing about memory, documentation and improvisation in dance, I was reading the German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’ (Benjamin 1968).

I liked how Benjamin’s essay – first published in 1936 – seemed to be acquiring information or ‘content’ as artists, cultural theorists, and filmmakers were questioning (and often embracing) the rise of digital technologies – technologies that seemed to undermine ideas about originality, remembering and memory that Benjamin was addressing way back then.

Nearly 25 years ago I met and started training with a woman called Shona Dunlop-MacTavish who lived – as she does now – in Dunedin in the south of the South Island of New Zealand. Shona, who has been described as “the mother of modern dance in New Zealand” (unknown < http://www.longacre.co.nz/authors/mactavish.html>), introduced me to the work of Gertrud Bodenwieser, the Austrian expressionist choreographer who Shona danced for in the 1930s.

Bodenwieser was an important European choreographer, but soon after the Anschluß of Austria into Nazi Germany in 1938 she was forced to leave Vienna with her predominantly Jewish company. Bodenwieser ended up in Sydney, where she became a significant figure in the development of modern dance both in Australia and New Zealand.

Gertrud continues on p. 6, 7 & 8
In many respects this forced migration from Vienna to Sydney (via South America) erased much of her history and significance in European dance history. The idea of erasure, of forgetting, was a critical concern for me within the performance project Gertrud (Ellis 2008).

In 2003 I started thinking about ‘choreographing’ an imagined conversation between Bodenwieser and her contemporary Walter Benjamin. This was, in particular, because one of Bodenwieser’s most famous works – Demon Machine (Bodenwieser 1924) – commented on the destructive power of the machine. It didn’t seem a huge leap to imagine that they’d met, and then to wonder what they might have said to each other.

Five years later, as I was thinking about submitting an application to the Place Prize 2008, the conversation in my mind had shifted from an imagined one between Bodenwieser and Benjamin to a simple conceit: What if Bodenwieser and I were to collaborate through time?

In the Guardian (8 March 2008), Sean O’Brien wrote of the “loss of liberty” experienced when the past is closed down, and how “the present becomes the measure of all things” (O’Brien 2008 < http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/mar/08/featuresreviews.guardianreview1>). In contemporary consumer capitalism, there is no history; it is a culture of forgetting.

I wondered how Bodenwieser (through imagined words) might be brought back to life in Gertrud to reveal the impact of this extraordinary forgetting. A remembering of her might underline by stark contrast a choreographic world in which my performed physical and psychological state was as restless and alone as can be imagined within a culture without a past.

What would she say? Would I listen? And how would I dance?

Research/Practice as Research

And so I began researching. I wanted to know more about Bodenwieser, her time, her tastes, her eccentricities.

I read (once again) Shona Dunlop-MacTavish’s biography of Bodenwieser, An Ecstasy of Purpose (MacTavish 1987). I had long conversations on the phone with Shona, testing her memory, enjoying her extraordinary warmth and vim. I worked through the archive of one of Bodenwieser’s dancers, Hilary Napier – reading her class notes, and trying to get a taste of her experiences and understanding.

I enjoyed being a choreographer concerned with a particular history, but without the responsibility of getting it right.

At the same time, this dialogue with authenticity, through BBC-like translations in the sound design (it ended up being a remarkable channeling of Bodenwieser’s tone and authoritativeness through Shona’s vocal recording) remained – and remains – important.

If, as Norman Denzin says, “true stories are stories that are believed in” (Denzin 1989 p.25), then I wondered to what extent this fiction – as in something made not something false – might make it possible to question the noisy absence of the choreographer.

In the time leading up to the beginning of rehearsals, I travelled to Vienna to meet with one of Bodenwieser’s original dancers, Magda Hoyos.

Ever the imposter, I had the technical equipment of a historian, but none of the skills. I was keen to hear Magda’s memory of Bodenwieser, the things she used to say, and what Magda’s physical experience of Bodenwieser’s work and processes was like.

This research process resembled what I understand the traditional role of the dramaturge to be: to dig around the various strands of a performance work so that it might be suitably contextualised by scenography, history and understanding. And as much as I enjoyed it during the development of Gertrud, I don’t believe this process to be particularly unusual or special in contemporary choreographic practices.

So, if that is dramaturgical research, then what is this thing called practice-as-research, and is it at all useful to professional choreographer-dancers?
I teach a module at Roehampton University called Dance Practice as Research and late in 2010 I asked the students to each write a definition suitable for their grandparents to comprehend.

This is my attempt although because I am now devoid of grandparents I wasn’t able to test it: “Research is a way of finding out things about the world. Dance Practice-as-Research involves dancers and choreographers reflecting on their work in the studio to create new ideas. It produces different outcomes that are often a mix of writing, dancing, and video” (Ellis 2010 < http://dpar-autumn2010.posterous.com/definitions>).

The critical aspect is that the research process is built into practice and that by reflectively engaging with what it is that we as dancers and choreographers do in the studio, we might develop understandings or awareness that strengthen or embolden our grasp of studio-based materials, actions and processes.

This may mean that there is only a tenuous relationship between the research itself and how a performance work either ends up looking or being like, or what it is about. In other words, I might be making a work that is ostensibly about memory, disappearance and solitude, but my practice as research concerns may have nothing to do with any of those things.

This presents a problem if the research is being developed for a degree course where it is better for the integrity of the research that the outcomes reflect or are appropriate to the questions or concerns within the studio. But, in a project like Gertrud – unattached (mostly) to the Academy, then perhaps only certain aspects of the project integrate (or might be considered as being) practice-as-research.

For example, during the development of Gertrud, my research through practice was built on considering and understanding presence of mind whilst dancing. During that time I had an email from a dancing colleague Christian Burns. He’d been looking at some of the video material on the Gertrud research-process blog and made this comment:

I really like the constant sense of searching. In the brief video clips this is really apparent. A sort of ‘asking motion’. I have been into this idea in my own practice lately of a ‘thinking motion’ state.

– Burns (2009 < http://skellis.net/gertrud/blog/?action=view&url=asking-motion>)

This term ‘asking motion’ strongly resonates with my cognitive-physical experience of dancing. Sometimes I feel like dancing is built on a basic sensation that I then keep asking questions of, searching for ways to add to it, interrupt it, and flesh it out. In Gertrud I was happy to allow the ‘asking’ to be manifest in my expression(s), and in the broader brush strokes of the shapes my body was making in space. It was as if the asking became the central concern of the activity, and perhaps even acted as a method of remaining present.

I find the focus afforded by identifying research concerns whilst in the studio to be unquestionably advantageous to my choreographic practice. Not only does it prevent the potential for meandering (which is rather common in a solo practice), but also by directing my attention it helps me apply various types of ‘gaze’ to sensation, experience and action.

I understand the act of dancing to be about the fine-tuning of sensation, and this holds wherever the dancing is occurring – onstage, in the street, in the studio. By continually investigating and emphasising the nature of sensation in relation to thought as a dancer-choreographer, my practice as research sits within a long history of corporeal questioning in dance – from (for example) the kinespheric experiments of Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark-Smith, to Deborah Hay’s choreographic koans, and to somatic practices so prevalent in current dance training.

Collaboration

At the Victorian College of the Arts conservatoire in Melbourne, students used to describe how overexposed they felt to what they called the ‘dreaded C word’: collaboration. However – and I’m thinking of more conventional collaboration here – collaboration alone is not in itself worthwhile (Roche 2006). My approach to collaboration is the desire that it will generate the ideal conditions for contradictions to emerge,
which can be responded to (or simply left alone) in the development of an aesthetic outcome.

But what does this have to do with making and performing Gertrud?

My initial understanding of Gertrud was that it would be – as much as is possible – a solo project. In my pitch to The Place for the commission, I wrote that:

Gertrud will be, however, a fundamentally solo project. For many years I have been exploring the ways in which deeply collaborative processes can expand the possibilities of creative work; in how my role as ‘choreographer’ can be pushed into the background of a group’s commitment to new work. But, in Gertrud, I will be responsible for the entire project. Instead of being an experiment in egotism, this kind of directorial solitude—although more than a little frightening—will provide strong internal logic for the work. It will also serve as an invaluable ‘marker’ of the degree to which I now trust my voice as an experienced artist. So, in Gertrud, I will build & perform the physical material, record and mix the sound environment, light the action, write the text and develop the videographic and animated components of the work (Ellis 2008).

Yes, a great idea (or, at least, an idea) in principle but The Place wasn’t so keen on me not having a lighting designer, and I became pretty keen pretty quickly to occasionally have another set of eyes in the studio. I asked lighting designer Helen Cain, and rehearsal assistant Amy Howard to be involved, and the final part of this presentation is tempered by acknowledging just how important their roles were in the development of Gertrud.

But, I wonder to what extent it’s plausible to discuss Bodenwieser’s part in Gertrud as being collaborative? Is anything gained by such a proposition? In other words, what might I now understand about the nature of collaboration, based on an imagined dialogue with a long-dead expressionist choreographer?

[The sense of the sublime] arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the beholder’s reflection upon it; not from the sensuous impression, but from the imaginative reflex.

— Coleridge (Coleridge 1897 p.345)

Normally, I engage with collaborative processes for two key reasons: firstly, as a means of undermining the conventional status of the choreographer or director as the person to whom a work belongs, and, secondly, as a means of generating argument, tension and exchange. In this way, a creative project becomes a place where things can go wrong, a place for play, complexity, and for allowing differences to surface.

As I went further and further into my historical research of Bodenwieser’s interests, idiosyncrasies, and manner, I started to generate a large number of texts or scripts that sounded like commentary: a disembodied voice calling from beyond the grave to temper my ambition, push my physical actions, and wrestle with various perspectives on the nature of 21st Century contemporary dance.

Is this any different from the internal dialogues that choreographers generally experience … that critical voice – yapping away – constantly questioning the worth and quality of the materials and the ideas?

As Gertrud’s voice evolved – through historical research, and through the words I wrote – it was as if I was able to displace the usual tone and quality of my critical eye, and attempt to replace it with the eyes of an other. This woman I know (and was creating) as Gertrud, what would she say, what would she think of this? Would it make sense to her? Would she even bother turning up?

It was as if Gertrud’s presence in Gertrud gave my consciousness license to say anything about what it saw, heard or felt. The gloves were off, and my sense of liberation from the complacencies and conventions of my artistic ego was strong indeed.

References


`receptacle for the manifold of the dancer`. Lastly, Nicholas, using Collinwood’s Kantian theory on the a priori imagination, proposed that ‘there are layers of historical imagination beyond the interference of data from sources’ and connected features of imagination to dance history research.

In the afternoon session on Bodies, Persons and Dance Action Raf Geenens (Leuven, Belgium) delivered a critique of David Michael Levin’s concept of dance as abstract movements and bodies, arguing that we do not perceive bodies and movements when watching dance, but that, first of all, we perceive persons and actions. Julia Beauquel’s (Nancy, France) presentation evolved around the idea of natural expressiveness of human movement as central to dance as an art form. In opposition, the notion of style, she argued, tended to minimise, through overestimation, the importance of the nature of the human body and the meaning of dance. Ruth Pethybridge (Falmouth) presented themes from her practice-based PhD research on Choreographing Community through Cross-Generational Dance Performance, advocating for the widening of participation and of definitions of practice to include performers of all ages beyond the distinction of so-called ‘Community Dance’.

Meanwhile, in the session on Dance Ontology and Identity Anna Pakes (Roehampton University) questioned the plausibility of Platonism in dance ontology and the implications and consequences of conceiving a dance work as an abstract object. Renée Conroy (Purdue) took this point further and made a case for works of dance art as abstract individuals as opposed to abstract objects. Her presentation was concerned with the subject of dancework identity and asked the question of what conditions must be satisfied in order for two distinct dance performances to be instances of the same work of dance art. She argued that danceworks are both ephemeral as well as in a state of constant flux, for they are repeatedly set on new dancers who are preparing to perform them under unique conditions. Geraldine Morris’s (Roehampton University) work on interpretation and intention in ballet proposed strategies for interpreting the dance movement of a specific choreographer, in this case Frederick Ashton, recognising that multiple interpretations of the same ballet are acceptable but, equally, that the range is not infinite.

In the third afternoon session on Meaning, Dance and Art, Henrietta Bannerman (London Contemporary Dance School) examined the case of representation in dance and in verbal language, including a discussion of the symbolic. She concluded her presentation by asking whether dance can ever remain neutral or abstract or avoid representation. Using Merce Cunningham’s and Hofesh Shechter’s works as examples, she argued that dance either refers to something beyond the world of dance – Cunningham – or they relate to a broader domain of social and political issues – Shechter. Nigel Stewart’s (Lancaster University) presentation was concerned with dance and the event, specifically looking at John Jasperse’s Giant Empty which demonstrates, when read in terms of identity politics, how corporeal techniques and modernist stage technologies contribute to the spectacle of gender and sexual difference. Catherine Botha (University of Johannesburg) examined the relationship between art and dance focusing specifically on the writings of Nietzsche and Badiou. She questioned Nietzsche’s assertion to see dance as ‘art’s metaphor’ and, based on a reading of Badiou’s writings on dance, she examined the implications of his claims regarding its status as non-art. Many of the presentations enticed discussions that lasted long after the end of the event.

The conference was a success in creating dialogue amongst academics and dance artists and in enabling dance and philosophy to ask questions of and about each other. The organising team at Roehampton University, lead by Anna Pakes and Bonnie Rowell, deserves considerable recognition for making this conference a success.

We hope that the discussions stimulated by this conference are continued.
The Recent Development in the Executive Committee

By Helen Julia Minors

Dear members,

I should start by thanking the many of you who voted in this year’s election: we had the largest turn out since my time with the society which was a positive outcome to the process (45%, including a good number of international returns). It is vital to engage our membership and include your thoughts, ideas and desires for your society. As you will be aware over the last year we have been making many plans and have fostered a stable executive committee incorporating both old (and safe) hands and new enthusiastic faces to enliven the society in this technologically advancing age.

After a number of years chairing our society, and successfully completing new contracts with Edinburgh University Press, negotiating the membership management transfer from SDR to EUP and arranging a number of events, Jane Pritchard has chosen to step aside as chair. We, as the executive committee, are all thankful for her work over the years and more thankful because we will not be losing her support and guidance as she has agreed to stay on as vice chair. Our new chair, Vicki Thoms, comes well prepared for the role. Acting as vice chair for two years (having taken over from Helen Thomas), Vicki led our work over summer 2010 in responding to the Arts and Humanities Research Council request for subject associations to feedback on the forthcoming research excellence framework task which is implemented in Higher Education Institutions. The executive committee supported candidates for election to subject panels and we are delighted to note that with Vicki’s managerial leadership our candidate was indeed elected as the chair of the subject panel. Vicki looks forward to working with us all and developing the society in these changing times, which has involved much negotiation as the society has become a strong national voice for our discipline.

In other news, our Events leader for many years, Helena Hammond, has stepped down. We thank her for supporting so many events, working in collaboration with many ex. comm. members over the years in promoting and hosting conferences, workshops and talks. Her enthusiasm and efforts were greatly received (having shared the responsibility of 5 conferences, Helena and I are sending a strong personal thank you). In her place Lise Uytterhoeven and Efrosini Protopapa, both members of the committee, have agreed to take over this role in partnership. They have many ideas planned, and as you will have seen from recent emails, their first event is well under way.

Many of you will be aware, via emails from Lise and I or via the website, that we are in the progress of creating a new website, which will be launched imminently. Jo Morgan, our webmaster over the last year (taking over form Toby Bennett), has developed a new site which will include a member’s forum, events pages as well as an archive of previous events. I know many of you were concerned that the publications on the old site would disappear, and I thank you for your emails on this. I can confirm that Jo will be transferring all these to the new site. The outlook is to continue to work on events and consider disseminating the work online via peer reviewed, edited online publications (to date we have two conference proceedings present). If you have not received your membership username and passport please do contact our membership secretary Lise Uytterhoeven [Lise.Uytterhoeven@london-studio-centre.co.uk].

Anyone who has an email address but has not shared it with us, please contact Lise,
Lise.Uytterhoeven@london-studio-centre.co.uk.

We will not distribute our email list to any other organisation and will only send you SDR related materials on events, publications and society business.
Developments in the Executive Committee con’t from p. 10

This brings me to the newsletter which had a style update about a year ago. Vicki Thoms has been editing the newsletter for a number of years, successfully including conference reports and sharing interesting details of dance activities in the UK. This publication is a real bonus to members who pay less than subscription to the journal and yet gain both the journal and the newsletter. We are all grateful for Vicki’s time and effort on this and can now fully support her decision to pass this role onto someone new, as she transfers to lead us as chair of the society. Antje Hildebrandt, PhD candidate in the dance department at the University of Wolverhampton and member of the society, will be taking over as the new editor from July 2011.

The society may have the above positive changes but there is consistency. Richard Ralph continues as our honorary editor of the journal and is successfully developing high quality volumes year on year. Francis Yeoh remains as our treasurer doing a formidable task in organising our accounts and ensuring we are legally well placed. Familiar faces remain on the committee: Stacey Prickett, Helena Thomas, Stephanie Jordan, Helena Hammond, Tess Buckland, Henrietta Bannerman and Geraldine Morris. These are joined by new faces, following our recent election. Sherrill Dodds and Chih-Chieh (Mia) Liu joins our committee, along with our administrative secretary in waiting, Janis Daly.

This brings me to myself. I have been the administrative secretary for almost five years. In this role I’ve supported over 10 events, been directly involved in short-listing speakers, chairing, even hosting 4 events at my own institution. Moreover I’ve edited (collaboratively) the two conference proceedings, liaised with the charity commission and the various councils and institutions which consult us on subject related decisions, including the Arts and Humanities Research Council, as well as taking minutes for meetings and preparing all voting materials. Updating the web became a standard part of the role, until our decision to transfer the site to our new host which is now imminent, at which stage this has been suspended until the new site is launched. The role has been enjoyable, and a treat has been housing the SDR archive which Jane Pritchard and I have re-visited each year to refine, update and order. However with increasing work pressures (having just moved jobs and home) and a more demanding role within the current climate with increased requests for information from external bodies (including no less than 20 emails from TV companies requesting interviews from committee members or contacts with dance companies – including one TV producer interviewing me on my thoughts about music-dance connections) the role has grown exponentially. As such I am delighted to welcome Janis who is our administrative secretary in waiting. We will be transferring roles progressively throughout the year. Janis will be able to dedicate more time to this role and develop it in conjunction with our new chair and new events leaders. Nonetheless, I intend to stay on the committee in my term and support Janis. Both Jane and I will be supporting SDR in a continued fashion ensuring we support any successors. Janis’s first AGM and my last therefore shall be at the end of this year (2011), where I shall support Janis in her full assumption of this role. I am sure we are delighted to have such an enthusiastic person to continue the work Peter Bassett so capability and thoroughly began at the outset of the society. At this point I should again thank Peter who has been a source of knowledge and support for me thought my two terms of election (each amounting to three years, Dec 2006 to Dec 2009, Dec 2009 until Dec 2012). As such I will be on the committee until the end of 2012 and hope to stand for election again in a different capacity.

Finally, I would like to thank Helen Thomas and Linn Finn at the London College of Fashion for liaising with me and allowing us to use their venue for monthly meetings, the last AGM and for their continued support.

I look forward to seeing you at the forthcoming events which will be advertised on the newly launched website, via the newsletter and via emails to our distribution list (remember, members get discounted entry on all events).

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
The Society for Dance Research

Choreographic Forum

Open to students, researchers, artists and practitioners

The Choreographic Forum is a new initiative aiming to support an exchange of thoughts on current dance and choreography. It is set up as a series of roundtable discussions, during which we reflect on a performance that we have watched together, in a theatre or elsewhere in London. We meet four times a year, and each session begins with two short statements by two invited speakers who then lead the discussion.

Session III:

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui: TeZukA

Joint viewing:

Wednesday 7 September 2011, 7:30pm
Sadler’s Wells Theatre, Rosebery Ave, London EC1R 4TN

Discussion forum:

wk 12 September 2011 [exact date, time&venue tbc]

Invited speaker: Karthika Nair [tbc] - writer & poet [more to be added shortly]

Free for SDR members

£7 full price / £5 concessions (students)

[SDR membership costs £30 / £26 concessions]

To sign up for our session, to be included in our email list, and/or for more information about the reduced group price tickets you can purchase for Weds 7 September, email: sdr.choreographic.forum@gmail.com

Participants in the Choreographic Forum can get 20% off* stalls seats for TeZukA at Sadler’s Wells on Wednesday 7 September. To book, please call 0844 412 4300 and quote “Choreographic Forum offer”. Please let us know if you have any suggestions about future performances you would be interested in watching and discussing.

The 2011 series is curated by Efrosini Protopapa & Lise Uytterhoeven.

*Subject to allocation availability. Not available online, retrospectively or in conjunction with any other offer. £2.20 transaction fee applies.