

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Performing Memory Through Dance
Anthropological Perspectives

17-18 June 2021

International Online Conference
organized by
Susanne Franco and Franca Tamisari

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia - Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Dipartimento di Filosofia e Beni Culturali - Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage

Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici - Department of Humanities

In the frame of "Memory in Motion. Re-Membering Dance History"
(MNEMEDANCE)

DESCRIPTION

The conference *Performing Memory Through Dance. Anthropological Perspectives* aims to explore anthropology's contribution to dance studies by reflecting on the relationship between dance and memory as manifested in the dynamics of re-appropriation, re-signification and invention of the past. Considering dance and performance as central tools in the negotiation of power relations and as tactics of resistance and survival, with particular regard to colonial and postcolonial contexts, the additional objective of this conference is to investigate cultural and historic continuities and discontinuities. Dance, both as a social practice and performing art, involves embodied cognition, mobilizes kinesthetic empathy, and activates corporeal and sensorial memories. As a 'somatic way of knowing' and a distinctive 'somatic mode of attention', dance is also a way to communicate and establish a complex network of intersubjective and intercorporeal relationships. By dancing, we acquire and transmit knowledge; we express emotions and remember or create stories while producing long-lasting effects on the audience, which, in turn, transforms these experiences into personal memories. Likewise, anthropological studies have demonstrated how body movement does not *stand for* but *is* reality. Rituals and performances serve as key occasions for people to shape their cultural practices, preserve and transform traditions, (re)enact and (re)read their past combining history and memory. Through this lens, the conference is an opportunity to discuss the cultural knowledge gained through the ethnographer's observation and participation in dance events and practices, as well as in ethnographic writing, which is in itself an act of remembering challenged by the task of capturing movement into words. The conference's ultimate goal is to share different perspectives on the complex interplay between dance, individual experiences, and collective memories (shared, reinvented, rejected), and to reflect on the active role of mnemonic processes and transmission strategies in dance as a modality to negotiate the past.

SCHEDULE

17 June 14.00–18.00 CEST

DANIELA HAHN (Universität Zürich)
'Notes from Memory', Revisited

CHIARA MINESTRELLI (London College of Communication, UAL)
"Breaking" My Way Into The Field: Dancing As A Decolonising Practice

PETRA TJITSKE KALSHOVEN (University of Manchester)
Taxidermic Animation: A Choreography Negotiating Life And Death

CRISTIANA NATALI (Università degli studi di Bologna)
Choreographic Choices And Identities Of The Tamil Diaspora In An Encounter Between Bharata Natyam And Contemporary Dance

18 June 14.00–18.00 CEST

FRANCA TAMISARI (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)
Dancing With And For Others. Fieldwork From A “Performative Perspective”

CLAIRE VIONNET (Independent Researcher)
Sensitive Knowledge Through An Auto-Ethnography Of Contact Improvisation

KATYA WESOLOWSKI (Duke University)
Memories We Wear: Writing Dance As Ethnographic Memoir

ELIZABETH WATERHOUSE (Universität Bern)
The Movement ‘Showerhead’. A Reconstructive Ethnography Of William Forsythe’s Duo Project

ABSTRACTS

DANIELA HAHN

‘Notes from Memory’, Revisited

Among other works, Sally Ann Ness’ ‘Dance in the Field. Notes from Memory’, first published in the anthology *Corporealities. Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power* (Foster, 1995), can be interpreted as indicative of a major conceptual shift in the ethnographic study of dance. Since its onset, the anthropology of dance has mainly been focused on ‘eliciting the place of dance in human life’ (Kurath, 1960) through functionalist, structuralist, phenomenological, linguistic and comparative approaches. By taking Sally Ann Ness’ work as a starting point, my presentation seeks to take a closer look at the discursive constellation of the early and mid-1990s which led to a new understanding of dance anthropology as performed ethnography—a performative approach grounded in the investigation of encounters between sensing and moving bodies in the field.

CHIARA MINESTRELLI

“Breaking” My Way Into The Field: Dancing As A Decolonising Practice

Taking advantage of my fieldwork experience with Indigenous Hip Hop artists in Australia from 2010 until 2014, in this paper I will reflect on the dancing body as praxis and a spontaneous, ethnographic methodology with decolonising potential. Primarily, I will be looking at the ways in which my own breakdancing (or b-girling) practices in the field can be conceptualised not only as ‘somatic ways of knowing’ but also as somatic ways of gaining trust, forming alliances and renegotiating one’s position in the field, namely being an insider/outsider. Thus, the knowledge acquired through performance is both embodied, through the act of dancing, and embedded into a decolonial ethos that aims to generate spaces of and for encounters and “sincere” (Jackson, 2010) dialogue. Furthermore, I will also consider positionality and subjectivity as important categories in trying to understand the significance of the body as it enters the ‘cypher’, the ‘dancing circle’ (Bailey, 2021). It is, in fact, in this moment that the dancer holds the transformative power to transcend some of the limitations imposed by verbal communication, thus generating a framework for conceptualising the dancing body as a locus of knowledge and a decolonising methodology.

PETRA TJITSKE KALSHOVEN

Taxidermic Animation: A Choreography Negotiating Life And Death

Drawing on my ethnography of contemporary taxidermy in Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands, and my own awkward attempts at this craft, I will discuss intercorporeal connections that occur between taxidermists and their mounts (Kalshoven, 2018). Enacting memories of the living creatures that they study to perfect their craft, when creating a mount, taxidermists perform a solo dance that negotiates an ambivalent space between life and death. The taxidermist’s memories of the living bird, combined with his/her imagining of how the dead bird would move if it had still been animated by life, are mimicked on the taxidermist’s own body and projected onto the flaccid skin. Through movements and gestures aimed at what I have called “morphological approximation”, bird taxidermists seek to breathe life into (literally, they *animate*) dead skins by performing a choreography that plays on similarities between human and bird bodies. At work in these contexts of making, I argue, is what Carlo Ginzburg understands by conjectural knowledge, an elusive way of knowing going beyond the application of rules. Choreographies of morphological approximation, acting out awareness of similarities between bodies, speak in unexpected ways to humans’ being-in-the-world with other animals. Similar intuitions of affinity between human and animal bodies are expressed in other encounters where boundaries between life and death are crossed, in particular in practices of hunting, which I will present as a comparative case.

CRISTIANA NATALI

Choreographic Choices And Identities Of The Tamil Diaspora In An Encounter Between Bharata Natyam And Contemporary Dance

Among the native Tamils of Sri Lanka as well as those of the diaspora, *Bharata Natyam* is considered a fundamental medium for passing what is known as the "Tamil cultural identity" down to the new generations. *Bharata Natyam* allows the young to learn about myths and religious rituals through the embodiment of the choreographic repertoire. Furthermore, thanks to the introduction of new *mudras*, this dance form is also used to stage as well as to know about the conflict that saw the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) opposing the government of Sri Lanka (1983–2009). In January 2017, the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism promoted a series of initiatives for involving the "second generation" of migrants in an "intercultural dialogue". The Italian contemporary choreographer Simona Bertozzi proposed a project that involved Sharmini Kavithasan, a Tamil dance teacher of *Bharata Natyam*, and sixteen girls and young women from the cultural association Unione dei Tamil d'Italia (Union of Tamils of Italy). The project culminated in a 40-minute choreographic work that fused contemporary dance with *Bharata Natyam*, and was presented on stage and in public spaces. As a project adviser, I was able to analyze the ways in which Sharmini Kavithasan drew choreographic elements from classical *Bharata Natyam*, *Kuttu* (a dance form of the eastern areas of Sri Lanka) and the dance repertoire that is associated with the civil war in order to include them in the final choreographic work. By using these dance forms, Sharmini Kavithasan proposed her own vision of staging the Tamil social memory in all its complexity, involving performers and spectators alike.

FRANCA TAMISARI

Dancing With And For Others. Fieldwork From A “Performative Perspective”

Drawing on my research in Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia, I show how Indigenous dance embodies statements about being-in-the-world and being-with-others. From a performance perspective based on participation, I explore the sensuous and affective nature of intercorporeality in relation to the transmission of knowledge and the political negotiations both in the community and in the diplomatic encounters and exchanges with non-indigenous visitors and institutions. Dancing with and for others in the context of Indigenous performances and in fieldwork is thus a modality of co-presence and co-presencing, an encounter that opens the way up to an ever-deepening engagement with others.

CLAIRE VIONNET

Sensitive Knowledge Through An Auto-ethnography Of Contact Improvisation

Drawing on fieldwork on contact improvisation in Montreal, I will emphasise the sensitive knowledge we can gain from ethnographic methodologies. Based on an excerpt of my ethnographic account, I will highlight the benefits of auto-ethnography. As a social phenomenon, auto-ethnography allows the creation of a space to explore the conventions/taboo regulating touch and the redefinition of intimate boundaries that are shaped under circumstances of narrow proximity. In this research, auto-ethnography discloses aspects of the mindful body, such as the interrelatedness between touch, weight, intention and emotions. Fieldwork experience, by leaving a sensitive memory in the anthropologist's body, shapes academic writing. Regarding this latter premise, I will show how it gains affect and sensoriality.

KATYA WESOLOWSKI

Memories We Wear: Writing Dance As Ethnographic Memoir

Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart suggests that 'the authority to narrate comes from having been somehow marked by events, in mind if not in body' (1996). For me, and many scholar-dancers, events *have* been marked on the body. My thirty-year engagement with Afro-Brazilian capoeira has left physical marks—the worn memories of my practice—that I see and feel: a thin, curved scar on my big toe is the sign of a necessary surgery after years of barefoot play; a torn MCL from an air-born kick still makes my knee ache from time to time; and a bump just above my ankle from a sweep has been with me for twenty-five years. These wearable memories are the visible signs of an embodied practice that demands deep intercorporeal engagement with others. For me, as an anthropologist and capoeirista, this engagement has stretched well beyond the *roda*, or ring in which capoeira—a dynamic combat game that fuses dance, fight, acrobatics, music and ritual—is played. Drawing on my research and writing about capoeira across geographic locations—Brazil, Angola, the United States and Europe—this presentation explores what it means to write at the crux of memoir and ethnography. How do we tap into and transcribe the sensorial memories of being-with-others in motion? And how, in writing about ourselves do we stay accountable to the social memories of an embodied practice with a deep and at times troubling past, and to others with whom we share the practice?

ELIZABETH WATERHOUSE

The Movement 'showerhead'. A Reconstructive Ethnography Of William Forsythe's Duo Project

Is it possible to write "close" to dance—when this dance is a choreographed duet? The *Duo* project by choreographer William Forsythe began in 1996 with dancers of the Ballett Frankfurt and continued in various iterations until 2018 with almost 150 performances with 11 dancers. In my dissertation, I developed a reconstructive ethnography of this duet, which considered the perspectives of the dancers. My central questions were: What can

we learn about Forsythe's choreography through a 'practice turn' (Schatzki et al., 2006), exploring the dancers' activities and memories? Also, how can I as a dance scholar and former Forsythe-dancer, enact this research and write about this embodied knowledge? My approach drew strongly from anthropological ethnographic methods and participant observation; this involved dancing with the artists in a studio, interviews both sitting and in movement, and video elicitation. In this paper, I will focus on one example of how I documented, interpreted and inscribed the dancers' embodied experiences of dancing *Duo*, by examining 'showerhead'—a motion of *Duo* that became a microcosm in my research. I will give insight into how I reconstructed this specific movement and what this demonstrated: namely an *individual-collective* practice. Through this discussion, I will argue that we view choreographic movements, like 'showerhead', as relational achievements based upon an ensemble's history of practice.

BIOS

SUSANNE FRANCO is Associate Professor at Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, where she teaches Dance and Performance Art History and Contemporary Theatre, and Research Associate at CTCL (Centre transdisciplinaire d'épistémologie de la littérature et des arts vivants). She is the Principal Investigator of the international research project (SPIN) *Memory in Motion: Re-Membering Dance History* (2019–2022) and she coordinates the Ca' Foscari Unit for the international research project *Dancing Museums: The Democracy of Beings* (2018–2021, EACEA, Creative Europe). She has published numerous essays on modern and contemporary dance and research methodology and has directed the book series *Dance For Word* and *Dance Forward. Interviste sulla coreografia contemporanea* (2004–2011). She is the author of *Martha Graham* (2003), *Frédéric Flamand* (2004) and the editor of *Ausdruckstanz: il corpo, la danza e la critica* (special issue of *Biblioteca Teatrale*, 2006). She co-edited with Marina Nordera *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research* (2007), *Ricordanze. Memoria in movimento e coreografie della storia* (2010) and together they are also co-editing *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Memory* (forthcoming). With Gabriella Giannachi she edited *Moving Spaces. Enacting Dance, Performance, and the Digital in the Museum* (forthcoming), and with Cristina Baldacci *On Reenactment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools* (forthcoming). As a curator, she collaborates with Fondazione Querini Stampalia (Venice), Foundation Pinault-Palazzo Grassi (Venice), Lavanderia a Vapore (Turin). Together with Roberto Casarotto, she was in charge of the dance events for the Hangar Biccocca (Milan, 2009–2011).

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DANIELA HAHN is a cultural theorist and dance scholar whose research is dedicated to the interferences of art and science, movement research as well as the relationship between dance and anthropology. Her current discourse-historical research project deals with the history of dance ethnography since the 1940s. Since May 2018, she is the coordinator and postdoctoral Research Associate of the interdisciplinary research project

The Power of Wonder at Universität Zürich. Recent publications include: 'Correspondences. Field, Body, and Material in Contemporary Movement Practices' in *Tanz der Dinge/Things that Dance* (Birringer & Fenger, 2019); *Expanded Writing. Bewegung Schreiben Zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft* (2019) written together with Christina Ciupke, Juliane Laitzsch, Sophia New and Isa Wortelkamp.

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CHIARA MINESTRELLI is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Media at the London College of Communication (UAL) and Course Leader of the BA (HONS) Contemporary Media Cultures. Her monograph, *Australian Indigenous Hip Hop: The Politics of Culture, Identity, and Spirituality* (Routledge, 2018) is an ethnographic study that investigates the discursive and performative strategies employed by Australian Indigenous artists to make sense of the world through various platforms. In 2018/19, she was awarded the Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund (LCC), which allowed her to organise a series of workshops, called *Sonic Futures*, that combined popular music, critical pedagogies, critical theory and notions of sustainability to explore questions around identity, the environment, and social issues. In 2020, she was awarded the LCC Research Fund to organise a series of workshops called *Decolonising the Arts: Challenges and Possibilities*, which saw the participation of Indigenous artists from around the world.

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CRISTIANA NATALI teaches Cultural Anthropology, Anthropology of South Asia and Methodologies of Ethnographic Research at Università degli studi di Bologna. She carried out fieldwork in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) controlled areas in Sri Lanka between 2002 and 2006 and she has been working with the Tamil diaspora, particularly in Italy, since 2000. Her main research interests concern the anthropology of dance and mortuary rituals. Among her publications: *Sabbia Sugli dèi. Pratiche Commemorative tra le Tigri Tamil (Sri Lanka)* (CLUEB, 2020); 'Modalità di Collaborazione e Ruolo Pubblico dell'Antropologia in una Consulenza di Ambito Coreutico' (*Antropologia Pubblica*, 2019); 'Il Bharata Natyam: l'Addomesticamento di una Tradizione' (*Antropologia e Teatro*, 2012); *Percorsi di Antropologia Della Danza* (Milan, 2009).

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FRANCA TAMISARI teaches Cultural Anthropology at Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. She has also lectured at the University of Sydney and The University of Queensland (1996–2004). She has been conducting ethnographic research in North Australia and she has published nationally and internationally on Indigenous cosmology and politics, ritual and performance, art, bicultural education, the politics of representation and the history of colonial and postcolonial relations in Australia. Among her publications are: *La Danza dello Squalo. Relazionalità e Performance in una Comunità Yolngu della Terra di Arnhem* (CLEUP, 2018); *La Sfida dell'Arte Indigena Australiana. Tradizione, Innovazione e Contemporaneità* co-edited with F. Di Blasio (Jaca Book, 2007).

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PETRA TJITSKE KALSHOVEN is a social anthropologist at the University of Manchester and the author of *Crafting “the Indian”: Knowledge, Desire, and Play in Indianist Reenactment* (Berghahn Books, 2012). Drawing on a background that combines the Humanities and Social Sciences (M.A. Classical Languages and Cultures, Leiden University; Ph.D. Cultural Anthropology, McGill University), she explores skilled manifestations of human curiosity, simulation, play, and rhetoric as these find expression in different practices ranging from re-enactment, museum practice, taxidermy, and hunting to nuclear decommissioning. Currently immersed in an ethnographic project around the UK’s nuclear industry in North West England and its quest for environmental remediation, she pursues her interest in human expertise and the persuasive ways in which people engage specific materials and landscapes in shaping uncertain futures.

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CLAIRE VIONNET studied Social Sciences at the University of Lausanne. She wrote a PhD thesis on the creation of gestures in contemporary dance, combining Anthropology and Dance Studies. Her current postdoctoral research explores the phenomenon of intimacy in contact improvisation and contemporary dance (multi-sited ethnography: Montreal, Paris, Dakar). As a dancer, she also works creatively with dance communities. Inspired by her cooperation with the research teams lead by Tim Ingold and Erin Manning, she attempts to articulate practice and theory, reuniting art, society and Anthropology.

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ELIZABETH WATERHOUSE is a dancer and postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Theatre Studies at Universität Bern where she is part of the research project *Auto_Bio_Graphy as Performance* funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Her research as a dance scholar focuses on choreographic practices and aesthetics, ethnographic and oral history methodology, as well as digital techniques for research and documentation of dance practices. Waterhouse’s viewpoint makes use of her methodological competencies across practices in the arts, the humanities and the natural sciences. Her education comprises a B.A. in Physics from Harvard University, an M.F.A. in dance practice from The Ohio State University and a Ph.D. in Dance Studies from Universität Bern/HKB. As a performer, she danced from 2004–2012 in Ballett Frankfurt/The Forsythe Company. Since that time, she has continued to dance and develop artistic research projects.

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KATYA WESOLOWSKI is a Lecturing Fellow in Cultural Anthropology and Dance at Duke University and has been on faculty at the Venice International University. As an anthropologist and dancer, Katya is interested in the interrelationship between bodies,

cultural practices, politics and ethnographic writing. Her research explores the expressive culture of the African diaspora with a focus on Brazil and Angola. Her monograph, *Playing Capoeira: A Memoir in Motion* (under contract with University Press of Florida) is an auto-ethnography of her thirty-year experience as a practitioner and researcher of Afro-Brazilian capoeira. She has published in the *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* and *Latin American Perspectives* and she has forthcoming chapters in the *Oxford Handbook of Black Dance Studies* and the *Oxford Handbook of Dance and Memory*.

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