

This is Not Not My Dance

Re-documentation and Ghostly Matters of Choreography

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Vive les fantômes! (Derrida in Ghost Dance, McMullen, 1983)

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Abstract

This is Not Not My Dance is a practice-based research project that advances processes of choreographic re-enactment through a method of choreographic re-documentation. I propose a means of re-documenting choreography to make it a digital resource for new creation.

This thesis presents a renegotiation of notions of performance and documentation, emphasises aspects of alteration in processes of preservation, and re-evaluates ideas of exclusive ownership rights of dance works. Lepecki's claim that choreography is an inconclusive ghostly matter - derived from Derrida's philosophical use of the terms ghostly and haunting, together with Schneider's notion of cross-temporality - theoretically support an understanding of choreography constituted by a process of re-documentation. In addition, the thesis introduces an online dance archive for documented performance, Swedance (Engdahl, 2009²). The website is accompanied with an alternative copyright license whereby re-documentation projects are carried out legitimately. The writing delineates the creative process, performance and video recording of my three solo dance pieces, *Transformation of Walking* in 2011 (Engdahl, 2011), *This is Not a Performance* (Engdahl, 2012¹, Engdahl, 2012², Engdahl, 2012³) and *Guest Dance Done Again* (Engdahl, 2012¹⁶) in 2012. The recordings have been transferred to USB to accompany this thesis. Reflection on these dance pieces demonstrates how my practice method evolves throughout the project to become an embodied process of re-documentation using phenomenological description, performance of a score and video documentation.

By developing means to digitally re-document and to present the work via Swedance, this research forges a new direction for processes of dance re-enactment that invites re-enactors to make their works available to be transformed yet again by other dance makers.

Preface

I am aware of my bodily sensations and an interaction between me, the space, the video camera, props and occasional sounds and music. In this moment of dancing I am filled with sensory stimuli presented to me and I do not at any moment reflect on the initial source of my movements and dynamics. There is no sense of trace, no awareness of the video documents I started out with in my process. What I am conscious of is the traces I generate in this space at this moment - jumping, falling, turning, laughing and applauding. While performing I am not aware of these actions as traces. They are 'set' in my body. I am present with the choreography I perform.

This performance, and my sense of presence with it, would not exist without a haunting, reiterative composition by which the choreography has been generated.

Introduction

This practice-led research project is a study of a choreographic method of re-documentation that is based on a creative means of preservation. It is an exploration of choreography generated by a reiterative and altering creative process. I adopt a role of researcher/practitioner in creative processes where I work with solo performance. The practical outcomes are three solo dance pieces presented in the format of documentation. The first two, *Transformation of Walking* (Engdahl, 2011), and *This is Not a Performance* (Engdahl, 2012¹, Engdahl, 2012², Engdahl, 2012³), I performed solely for a video camera. I recorded *Transformation of Walking* on 25th May in 2011 and linked it to Swedance (Engdahl, 2009²) on 7th June. I recorded *This is Not a Performance* on 18th April in 2012 and linked it to Swedance on 25th April. *Guest Dance Done Again* (Engdahl, 2012¹⁶) was presented live in a dance studio at University College Falmouth on 4th December 2012 and linked to Swedance 17th April 2013. These digital documents have been transferred to the USB drive accompanying this thesis.

My hypothesis is that a method of choreographic re-documentation advances methods of re-enactment. My research methodology consists of renegotiating ideas of performance and documentation, and a relationship between them, in order to propose a choreographic method that includes both of them. In scholarly as well as artistic contexts of dance and performance practice, the term performance is often defined in an oppositional relation to that of

documentation. Performance is described in terms of vanishing and erasure, while documentation is a means of impeding performance's asserted inherent tendency to disappear. This research is a study of performance as document and of how re-documentation can be employed as a means to document and, perhaps paradoxically, create choreography. It is also a study of documents *as* performances. Permeating my research is an exploration of how various means of documentation influence the choreographic compositions they preserve.

Addressing the enquiry

Throughout my studies of choreography and my professional career as a choreographer I have continuously returned to methods of re-creation. For instance, I created a written dance score by translating visual content from films in a research project during my MA-studies (Engdahl, 2008). And, in my production *Same Same With Difference* from 2009 I asked two fellow dance artists to re-enact each others' choreographies (Engdahl, 2009¹). This research project is an opportunity for me to explore creative processes of preservation while closely considering their affects and outcomes. Because my research project concerns creative means of preserving dance performance works, my methodology consists of studying seven different processes of dance preservation: re-enactment, re-documentation, reconstruction, dance notation, video recording, momentary writing and phenomenological description. I aim to explore how they correspond to ideas of performance and

documentation. In addition, two means of making dance documents available, via the Dance Notation Bureau and through web 2.0 technologies, are investigated. I discuss these specific processes of documentation and presentation confirming their diversity of objectives and methods in the context of dance preservation.

This thesis presents a path beginning with a discussion about methods of re-enactment that, via questions of ownership rights and practice-based processes of documentation, culminates in a proposal for a method of choreographic re-documentation.

When I arrive at University College Falmouth in October 2009 (at that time Dartington College of Arts) I establish the website Swedance (Engdahl, 2009²) to function as a platform for my research project¹. I begin my study with an exploration of methods of choreographic re-enactment, via the use of a sharing platform on the Internet, with an aim to develop a new method of making choreography for performance. I construct Swedance to test methods of choreographic re-enactment. The website also provides a location where the MPhil project's documented material is stored as well as a site through which I carry out fieldwork². A reason for specifically employing web 2.0 technologies to establish the Swedance platform is due to the creative practices, such as the ability to remix and provide user-generated content, that was fostered by these technologies. These creative practices are a means to create digital artworks by re-organising pre-existing documents found

online into collages. They resonate with my research interests concerning the means to create by re-creating. After establishing the website I contact friends, fellow professionals and dance scholars, asking them to join the social network site. At the time of writing Swedance has 425 members, mainly young dance practitioners and dance students from Sweden and UK, although in all from 28 countries.

After setting up the website I start to explore a contextual framework of re-enactment processes. In forming my critical standpoint for this study, I incorporate a post-structuralist perspective on re-enactment as well as on performance and documentation (see the two following sections in this chapter). Initially, my aim is to re-enact, not to re-document. My first step to propose a method of re-enactment is an attempt to re-enact a screen dance that was linked to Swedance by Jeannette Ginslov (Ginslov, 2009). It results in the re-document *Transformation of Walking* (Engdahl, 2011). I describe the contextual framework of re-enactment and my first step towards a proposition of method in *Section One* of this thesis. In this thesis I explain my trajectory from re-enactment in *Section One* to re-documentation in *Section Two*. With my insights from that process I start studying alternative documentation processes and sketch a distinction between projects of re-enactment and re-documentation. In order to prevent the risk of my proposed re-documentation method being illegal due to exclusive ownership rights of documented dance works I explore the alternative ownership licenses proposed by the project *Creative Commons* (Lessig, 2001). I also continue the

practical part of my research by developing my proposed re-documentation method by re-documenting Louise Ahl's documented performance *This is not a Dance* (Ahl, 2010¹, Ahl, 2010², Ahl, 2010³). The outcome of that process is my re-documents *This is Not a Performance* (Engdahl, 2012¹, Engdahl, 2012², Engdahl, 2012³). After evaluating that creative process from a post-structuralist perspective I bring the insights with me into my third, and for this research project's final, step towards a proposition of a practice method. This part of the submission is a re-documentation of the six documented dance performances *Party project for party people* (Battistich and Lengley, 2010), *I believe I can see the future* (Brutmann, et al., 2009), *Whatever you want* (Berger Myhre, 2010), *Wall Dance* (Adhana and Hansegård, 2010), *Skid Marks* (Fundaminsky, 2008) and *Invited Guests* (Gala, 2012). The resulting re-document is *Guest Dance Done Again* (Engdahl, 2012¹⁶) produced after a re-documentation process consisting of remix, phenomenological description, live performance and video documentation.

My process of developing my conceptual framework has consisted of enduring, critical and caring discussions with my tutors, reflections back on my MA-studies, a seemingly endless search through archives with enthusiastic assistance of librarians, alert responses of countless administrators, interesting conversations with scholars via email, and a sharing of records by members of Swedance. The documents I have employed throughout my research period (a vast majority of which I accessed via the Internet) are academic as well as artistic texts, programme notes, video recordings of

performances, lectures and interviews, photographs, and email correspondences.

Key contributors

Through this research process I have come to position my MPhil project within discourses that emphasise writing of, and artistic practices of, choreography, performance, re-enactment, documentation, ownership, reiteration, performativity and web 2.0. Rebecca Schneider's publication, *Performing Remains* (Schneider, 2011), has great relevance for this research. I have returned to Schneider's conceptual toolbox many times. She presents ways to understand arts-based performance practice as acts of documentation and documents as accessed in modes of performance. Her writing is a rigorous investigation of re-enactment processes and of how documents of performance events are encountered live by recipients. This becomes a way to think about notions of performance and documentation that I take on in a development of my choreographic method. It becomes a means to consider performance in relation to preservation. In addition, Schneider provides a description of re-enactment as a method to compose artworks in reiteration, a description that I use throughout my thesis. Schneider and the dance and performance scholar André Lepecki (2004, 2006, 2010, 2012¹ and 2012²) make use of Jacques Derrida's understanding of temporality (1967, 1988 and 1993) to discuss re-enactment. Derrida's writing introduces a philosophical way to understand acts of communication as constituted by repeating

difference. I have adopted Schneider's and Lepecki's reading of Derrida's philosophy in an attempt to unpick my project of re-documentation. Lepecki's Derridean suggestion of choreography as ghostly matter returns throughout the thesis. He suggests that by making choreography re-appear through methods of re-enactment it is revealed as a ghost that marks a relation to that which is no longer and not yet. I employ Lepecki's writing to distinguish the main characteristics of choreography when it is re-documented. By proposing a method of reiterating documented choreography signed by another choreographer, issues of ownership rights come into play. In terms of understanding effects that a method of re-documentation has on issues of ownership, Lepecki (2006 and 2010) and dance artists Jérôme Bel (1998) and Martin Nachbar (2008) have been important. Lepecki's exploration into how methods of re-enactment relate to a role of a choreographer as protector over *the* afterlife of a choreographic work reverberates in my re-documentation project where I question a structure of exclusive ownership of dance works. Other contributing key theories in this conceptual framework (not all are mentioned in this introduction) are Philip Auslander's ideas of performance and documentation (1999 and 2006) and Lawrence Lessig's study of how web 2.0 technologies reflect an idea of documents as resources for new creation and how they influence issues of ownership (2001, 2006 and 2008). The choreographers Merce Cunningham (2001) and William Forsythe (2010), who have explored methods of documenting their works, provide illustrations of

how other choreographers consider notions of documentation and performance.

This research expands arts-based performance practices that investigate methods of re-enactment by proposing a method of re-documentation. My research methodology is defined and disciplined by the fields of choreography, performance studies and post-structuralist philosophy through which the contributing scholars and practitioners have operated. Throughout this research project, I have used my embodied self as a research tool and a performance maker, as the one who studies, discovers, creates and records. The outcomes that support my hypothesis are this written thesis, three re-documented solos and the website Swedance.

Structure of chapters

Apart from this introduction and the conclusion at the end, there are six chapters structured in two broad sections. Each of the two broad sections is built on a similar structure. They begin with a contextual review, with an aim of setting a scene, and end with a description of one of my research practices. The initial section, titled *Performance as Document – Re-enactment*, consists of two chapters. It offers an extensive contextual review of a method to preserve choreographic works by means of re-enactment, and describes my research practice of re-enacting a performance. Initially, in chapter 1, I trace an emergence of an idea of performance as a means of re-appearance, while referring particularly to performance scholars Schneider (2011), Phelan

(1993), Lepecki (2006) and philosopher Derrida (1988 and 1997 [1967]). I continue by employing key theorists and practitioners in the fields of philosophy, performance and dance studies, specifically Schneider (2011), Lepecki (2006, 2010 and 2012²), Derrida (1988 and 1993), Bel (1998) and Nachbar (2008). These contributors provide a description of re-enactment I abide by throughout the thesis. A re-enactment is a creative method of preservation by means of live performance. It involves a process of altering past performance works by repeating them that reveals the works as inconclusive. In this chapter I also explore how projects of re-enactment, by being creative practices that repeat artworks signed by other authors, are confronted with issues of ownership. After setting the scene, I end the first section of the thesis, chapter 2, by describing my first research practice from 2011, *Transformation of Walking* (Engdahl, 2011). This second chapter of the thesis begins with a description of my attempt to re-enact the screen dance *Walk one* by Ginslov found on Swedance (Ginslov, 2009). This is followed by a presentation of insights gained from the process. By bringing the scholars Schneider (2011), Lepecki (2010), and Auslander (2006) with me, these insights are closely considered in order to inform the next research practice. The second section, titled *Documents as Performance – Towards Re-documentation*, consists of four chapters. This section describes a shift from a method of re-enactment to that of re-documentation. I return to the key scholars introduced in section one, although approaching them from other perspectives. To outline a distinction between projects of re-enactment and

re-documentation, I investigate how documents can be understood as performance. In chapter 3, I re-connect with, and build on, Schneider's (2011) and Lepecki's (2012²) claim that documents can be regarded as performances in that they constantly re-appear in a live encounter with viewers and re-enactors, and Lepecki's suggestion of dance notation as a conservative means of preservation (2006 and 2012¹). I study projects of Cunningham (2001) and Forsythe (2010), who suggest alternative preservation processes aligned with a notion of documents as performance. They propose documents of their choreographies as resources for new creation. Chapter 4 examines web 2.0 technologies and an alternative copyright license *Creative Commons* (Creativecommons.org, n.d). *Creative Commons* licenses make it possible for documented performances to become legally re-documented again by other dance makers. This chapter also explores an alternative archiving process used by the performing arts archive Arnolfini (Clarke and Warren, 2009). I bring the chapter to an end by suggesting Swedance as a framework whereby re-documentation projects are carried out legitimately. Chapter 5 is a detailed survey of my second research practice, the re-documentation process of making *This is Not a Performance*, from early 2012. It is a re-documentation of Ahl's *This is not a Dance* from 2010 (Ahl, 2010¹, Ahl, 2010², Ahl, 2010³). The conceptual framework outlined throughout the thesis re-appears in this chapter as a constant shadow that continuously brings me back into my argumentation. I begin chapter 5 by describing what emerged from the research practice, *Transformation of Walking* from 2011, that I take with me

into my second practice. That is followed by a detailed explanation of all stages of the creative process, from my choice of documents that I was about to re-document, to the finished product in form of three digital videos linked to Swedance. In order to analyse my resulting video documents I return to the contextual reviews outlined in the previous chapters. This reading offers me a conceptual framework to explore ghostly matters of re-documents. Lastly I present insights of my creative process and scrutinise them to supply my next research practice. The closing chapter of this section, chapter 6, consists of an overview and reflection of my most previous practice. It describes the making process and presentation of the re-document *Guest Dance Done Again* (Engdahl, 2012¹⁶) conducted in the end of 2012 and beginning of this year. I build on the insights from the creative process of *This is Not a Performance* (Engdahl, 2012¹, Engdahl, 2012², Engdahl, 2012³). The chapter provides a description of my working process, starting from making a remix, to the creation of a written score by means of phenomenological description, to the performance of that score together with a video recording. It ends by indicating my aspiration to keep this re-documentation method alive by uploading it to Swedance.

Notes for Introduction

1To create *Swedance* (Engdahl, 2009²) I employ one kind of web 2.0 technology, provided by an online service company called Ning (Ning.com, n.d.). This company offers an online platform anyone can use to create a social network. The reason for choosing to work with the service Ning came out of two separate discussions with my 2nd supervisor Jason Whittaker and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee. They presented this company as one of few which offer, at that time in 2009, a range of services suitable for social networking. Ning allows me to create my own network of contacts and resources (it provides a space for sharing videos, blogs, photographs and upcoming events, online chats, and a possibility to create groups). In 2009 it was a free service. 15th April 2010 the company announced that it no longer would provide free service, and from August 2010 I started paying for the service. The first few months I paid it privately, then it was paid by University College Falmouth. The service currently costs £16/month. Today there are numerous companies available (free or for charge) that offer a similar range of services (e.g. Grou.ps, SocialGO and Spruz).

I choose the title *Swedance* for three reasons. First, it is a conceptual development of a project called *We Dance* that was conducted by Luis Miguel Felix during the program Ex.e.r.ce 08 in 2008. Felix was in this project concerned with notions of reiteration of choreographic material via web 2.0 technologies. Second, it is a reference to the notion of *Sweding* from the

context of film production, presented by Michel Gondry in the movie *Be Kind Rewind* from 2008. *Sweding* points to an idea of creative amateur reproduction of film. Third, I, along with the initial document used in the research process, originate from Sweden.

²The fieldwork was a questionnaire of four questions I sent out to the members of Swedance asking them to explain their ethical stance on issues of ownership. I contacted members who I knew were active dance artists (or who gave that information in their profile information on the website). I also contacted a few dance artists I had worked with that were not members, and two that I had gained contact with during my MPhil studies. In my role as the creator of the social network website I can access each member's email address (when signing up they have to provide their email addresses). As the members more often check their regular email accounts than enter Swedance I decided to send my questions to their regular emails.