

**DANCER-RESEARCHERS INTERPRETING THEMSELVES: MOVING
TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY "ART" DANCE**

ABSTRACT

It was in 1984 with a single reading of Kealiinohomoku's seminal text on ballet's ethnicity (1969/70) that I was drawn irresistibly into the field of dance anthropology. This new "cultural framework" for my practice as a postmodern dancer precipitated a vital shift in perception. This panel be thought of as a continuation of ideas that were set into motion in Kealiinohomoku's essay. While reviewing the literature for my recent doctoral research, through meetings at CORD conferences, and most recently from within the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Pratiques Corporelles Université Blaise Pascal de Clermont-Ferrand, I have unearthed a growing group of dance researchers from various corners of the world (so far Brazil, Taiwan, USA, England, France and New Zealand) who are also contemporary "art" dance insiders choosing to study "their own kind."

We are grounding our research in theories of cultural anthropology and ethnographic methods (among others) as we move into fieldwork among artistic colleagues, and within the familiar ground of our own dance worlds.

What kinds of understandings are emerging about the nature and function of these kinds of Euro-American rooted dances as "we" study "ourselves"? How are we situating ourselves in the field, as we negotiate etic (dance insider) and emic (dance researcher) positions and experience being insider ethnographers? What insights, approaches, frameworks and models are emerging for the study of a dance form that has an extensive history of criticism and analysis over the 20th century, a tradition of re-invention and "new creations," for which researchers' bodies and minds are repositories of knowledge about the practice?

**Moderator: Dena Davida
Karen Barbour, Anne Cazemajou, Nadege Tardieu, Joelle Vellet, Emily Wright**

ROUNDTABLE CONTRIBUTION

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Mihi

Naku te rourou, nau te rourou, ka ora te tangata. Kia ora koutou. Ko Karen taku ingoa. No Waikato ki Aotearoa ahau. Greetings everyone. I am Karen Barbour, from The University of Waikato in New Zealand. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this roundtable discussion with my colleagues, and I know that with the insights we each bring we will all have much food for thought.

Introduction

I have enjoyed responding to the questions Dena has posed to us. I want to begin by talking about some of the insights that have emerged for me in my dance research and practice as this will lead into answering the questions, even if a little obliquely.

So, one of the most important things that has emerged for me through my research is a way that I can articulate **how** I know through dancing. I had long felt that something more could be articulated about dancerly ways of knowing - those lived, tacit experiences that have and continue to shape my understanding of the world through movement, right from conception and on throughout my life. This is an epistemological strategy I have called embodied ways of knowing. I argue that embodied knowledge develops from experiencing knowledge as constructed, as contextual and as embodied. In using an embodied strategy for knowing, we can experience ourselves as already embodying knowledge and also as being able to create knowledge. This means that we must value our own experiential ways of knowing, such as dancing or playing the violin, and that we can work towards reconciling knowledge gained from experiences, from intuition, and received from other sources, in a personally meaningful way as we live out our lives (Barbour, 2002; Belenky et al., 1986; Stinson, 1985). In this way, knowledges can be woven together with passion, lived experience and embodied individuality that foregrounds our gender, culture, age, environmental, historical, social and political context.

So in this sense, embodied knowledge arises in the lived experience of combining different ideas through experimentation - something we dancers do in choreographing! Using an embodied strategy for knowing means that we creatively search for and judge potential new combinations and juxtapositions of familiar and perhaps seemingly unrelated knowledges and experiences (Gardner & Dempster, 1990; Eisner, 2002; Fraser, 2004). Einstein (1953) called this 'combinatory play.' We do need some insight and intelligence to accommodate our internal representations in relation to our experiences in the world (Stinson, 1985), and to understand a wide range of existing knowledge from which we might perceive gaps and subsequently create new knowledges (Fraser, 2004) So, redefining problems, considering recurring themes, recognising patterns and relationships to see things anew, are all part of embodied ways of knowing and this requires new questions, new methods of research, new ways of representation, and no small measure of flexibility (Eisner, 2002; Fraser, 2004). For those of us using embodied knowing, living alternative knowledges to dominant knowledges creates challenges and tensions that we continually have to resolve throughout our lives. As creative people, we are often required to deal with tensions and to tolerate ambiguity (Fraser, 2004). It may be that resolutions do not necessarily come through rationalisation, or through intuition, but through embodying and actually living out the possibilities. In living out the possibilities, we experience and evaluate knowledge, sometimes discarding knowledge that is not relevant or liveable in our lives. In this sense, embodied ways of knowing foreground knowing as creatively living in the world.

I think this locates me as part of what Deidre Sklar (2000) identified as a kinesthetic trajectory in ethnographic dance studies. I have been actively involved in this project of seeking a deeper understanding of movement itself as a way of knowing.

I heard yesterday in the words of experienced dance researchers Joann Keali'i inohomoku and Allegra Fuller Snyder, Deidre and others, a recognition that some of the knowledges and methodologies received from traditional anthropology have, when embodied, turned out to be irrelevant or highly questionable. And that over time actual lived experiences in specific communities have offered more meaningful methods of investigation. I think that these researchers have shown us that lived experience in dancing, and in researching and writing, is absolutely integral.

Within the work of so-called 'new' ethnography, it is certainly clear to me that dance researchers need to be engaged in an embodied way, which means dancing and living as a member of the community and all that this entails. In this way, I believe we dancers value the rich, research understandings that embodied knowing offers.

But I think that we can go a little further, acknowledging as Joann Keali'i inohomoku did yesterday in her keynote that the emic approach is ethical and justifiable, but also very carefully considering the questions about whose interests are served by research. I suspect that many of us would agree that much etic dance research has only served to further the white Western project of colonialism, and may actually be an illusion. Here I reference Linda Tuhiwai Smith's wonderful work in her 1999 book called 'Decolonizing methodologies. Research and indigenous peoples'. She stated clearly that "The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that offends the deepest sense of our humanity" (Smith, 1999, p. 1). Not only do Linda's writings have a major impact on my understanding of 'research' and what I do not do in my research, but reading her book continually brings my own positioning as a Pakeha (white New Zealander) and a feminist into sharp relief, to remind me that I should always ask myself - 'how would I feel if someone were to research me and my family like this?'

So back to going a little further, I now want to suggest, that perhaps the emic perspective may never really be accessible to some one who is not part of the community being researched. Maybe 'fieldwork' will never be enough? Perhaps it is not until you actually do become a member of a community, living, working and dancing over a significant period of time on a day to day basis, that you can research ethically? Are you prepared for this level of engagement and participation with a community? Will you wait to see if you do have the blessing of the elders to research together with them? Or will you go on to serve your own interests as a researcher, and potentially stand in the way of community members retaining control of their dances and their knowledge? These are thorny questions, scratchy even to pose. I'm not going to answer them for everyone, but I can share with you my own answers.

I feel that the answer to these questions for me, is that the best I can ethically do is to research my own experiences and those of my own community peers. So, I am an insider researcher and I really do value my embodied knowing. I think as dancers we can contribute to new knowledge about dance. And, as Allegra Fuller Synder suggested yesterday in her keynote address, we can use our embodied ways of knowing to contribute to knowledge generation in the wider world 'think global act local' (and my green politics are now revealed).

I've spoken about my research revealing an articulation of embodied ways of knowing that has helped me live creatively in the world. I choose, as those of you who were at my presentation yesterday will know, to represent my research a range of ways, preferring to write in an embodied way, expressing research through personal experience narratives or what some call autoethnography. I chose this to deliberately draw attention to the constructed, contextual and embodied nature of my research. I believe too quoting Deidre Sklar now, that "words remain permeable to their somatic reverberations" and that as an insider to the community I study, our conversations and relationships have been and continue to be embodied (Sklar, 2000) and so should my representations be. I consult my own embodiment for understandings and search for visceral-ness in words as I do in dancing. My hope is that I can inspire you engage kinesthetically and empathetically with my experiences, so that you can 'walk in my shoes' through my research, rather than having to research me! I'm by no means interested in arguing that this is 'the' way, or even a radical new way to undertake research. But these methods of researching are based on my own embodied ways of knowing, and they work for me in my context.

In more recent on-going work, I've been researching collaboratively in performance improvisation, and in choreographing, often working across artistic mediums and cultures. I have come to appreciate that our work together is often more about the growth and self-development of each individual, and the nurturing of community and relationships between us, than it is about creating a performance product. It may be that what brings us together initially is a passion for performing, but underneath is a much more important love and a respect for each other as unique human beings with diverse experiences. As a consequence, the process of creating performances and the expression of experience often become the focus, rather than the product.

Finally, in the midst of new ethnography, feminisms, globalization, postmodernism, paradigm shifts, turning points, multiple and shifting selves, and a proliferation of terminology, I self-define as being simultaneously, a dancer, feminist, teacher, social scientist, writer, researcher, ethnographer, performer, autoethnographer, choreographer, and who knows quite what else in the future. May this dance continue.

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