

Dance in the Age of Forgetfulness Plenary Summary

On the final day of the Dance in the Age of Forgetfulness conference a plenary session was held as an opportunity for delegates and presenters to share their observations, experiences, contemplations, considerations and responses to the three days shared at Royal Holloway. This report is a summary of the plenary topics and discussion.

Firstly, it was acknowledged that there had been much dialogue regarding the process of remembering the past and how to negotiate that remembering in the current age of forgetfulness. The process of tracing dance history was a popular topic area over the conference, from studying dance history through literature to engaging HE students in dance history study and from re-enactments of historical dance works to examining dance works within the context of certain historical landscapes. Someone raised a concern regarding what gets remembered from dance history and what, seemingly, gets forgotten. There was a significant emphasis throughout the conference on ballet and classical dance, but also presentations on American modern dance, London concert dance, Lindy Hop, Romanian modern dance and African dance influences. However, it was indicated the dance style focus for scholars could possibly be widened and encouraged researchers to interrogate the past to look beyond what is communally remembered by the collective dance community.

In addition to *what* is remembered, there was clear emphasise and discussion throughout the conference concerning *who* does the remembering. Not only remembering, but also who decides what is forgotten from both the dance canon and from social and political history. Each one of us is responsible for acknowledging our privilege, position, priorities, heritage and history in order to best understand what our role might be in shaping the future. In order to effect change, there is a need to learn from the mistakes of the past and create the space and environment for change to take place. Similarly, the notion of individual compared to collective experience was examined, with how these memories should be handled and commemorated being discussed widely during the conference.

A significant point during the plenary discussion was regarding the use of language throughout the conference and the reoccurrence of the 're-' prefix. One delegate shared a list of all the words beginning with 're' they had heard mentioned throughout the three days and it was substantial. Re-create, re-enact, re-imagine, re-vise, re-frame, re-stage, re-hearse - to name only a few. It was suggested that this raises both challenges and opportunities. There may be limitations placed on an event described as a re-event, that it is rooted in the past and made anew, contrasted with something new. Therefore, it was suggested that a way to combat this approach to critique is to be present, with indications of the past. This had been a feature of a number of presentations, emphasising a need to attend to the current but featuring traces of the past. One suggestion was to slow down. With various pressures of life and demands on time, energy and

priorities, it was suggested that by focusing more on the present we might have a better sense of how we have arrived at each moment, acknowledging the past but attending to the present and the subsequent future.

Performing as a way to remember, or to not forget, was also brought up as being meaningful from the conference. This encompasses performing historical or social events, emotions or attempting to preserve a specific moment in time. Not only is dance a form of commemoration that can reflect elements of the past but the dance itself can serve as a form of documentation. This 'document' might then be revisited in the future as a trace of what has gone before or what once was. Documentation of dance work was another point raised during the plenary session. It was acknowledged that there had been a number of discussions regarding the issue of ownership of dance, copyright for choreographers and notation as a form of preservation, with a need for greater understanding regarding the formality and legality of ownership in order to preserve or share work.

If you would like to contribute your thoughts regarding the plenary event, or have any other reflections on the Dance in the Age of Forgetfulness conference that you would like to share, then please email them to newslettereditor@sdr-uk.org.

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