

A horizontal navigation: between remembering and forgetting, between knowledge and life - Report on keynote by Dr Efrosini Protopapa

It has been over a month since I attended SDR's Dance in the Age of Forgetfulness conference, and I can feel that time has already started to shape my memory of what I experienced over the three days in Egham. Peripheral details have ebbed away, and my memory of the conference has been sifted and shaped, like a pebble that has been smoothed over time by the tide. Therefore, in this report I will try to offer an essence of the experience; a snapshot of sense-data, images and captions, which have been compacted and embedded through the multi-layering of time. Please accept my jar of keynote pickle to compliment the other no-doubt delicious titbits that form this newsletter.

Through the process of writing this report I hope to re-cover, re-view, re-member some of the finer details of Dr Efrosini Protopapa's keynote. I'm sure the process will help to unearth information that has since been forgotten, but my mapping will no doubt leave gaps.

I have to admit, I have cheated a little bit. In order to avoid too much of a bare-bones account, this report has been bolstered by information gathered some weeks after the event. I became aware that what I remembered had particular relevance for me and my own personal canon, names that I had heard of, things that made me laugh, works or performances that I had seen previously. So, this report in some way resembles the gentle balance between knowledge and life as Efrosini's title suggests, but in a bid to offer a more complete account I have added footnotes for further information, including things that I had forgotten.

As we enter the theatre space, the floor strewn with blank pieces of A4 paper, we are invited to arrange ourselves around the edges. Efrosini welcomes us, encouraging us to move as we feel comfortable. She steps onto a page reading 'START', throws a stone and moves to the piece of paper that it lands on. On picking up the paper, she reads from the other side, replaces it and promptly leaves the room¹.

¹ TASK

Exit the room and enter again. Start where you left off.

On her return, she uncovers a second piece of paper, and begins to read aloud. Nietzsche is quoted². The lecture progresses in this way, as Efrosini chooses pieces of paper at random (it seems) and proceeds to read from most of them. She begins to lay parts of her body across the paper, negotiating the pieces as if they are stepping-stones. This journey seems to leave traces within her body, through her own personal timeline; traces of what has been before, what is yet to come. She is performing a kind of two-way archaeological process; a simultaneous self-archiving and rediscovery within each layer of lived experience. Every re-remembering forms a new link to the present, a new map which is enmeshed through horizontal time and experience. It becomes apparent that she has done this before, as she shows us an image of herself, doing this before³.

Trio A⁴ makes an appearance as the last dance that she learnt⁵; a ripple of recognition and familiarity sweeps the space. There's Adrian Heathfield, Aby Warburg⁶ and Efrosini's collaborations with Siobhan Davies and Susanna Recchia. Lying flat on her stomach, she admits that she forgot her costume of 'ordinary clothes' and thus had to wear a different set of 'ordinary clothes'⁷.

At this point the 'game' has become apparent, however without most of the audience being able to read the other side of the paper, we really have no idea what is going to come next! A piece of paper is ripped, rolled, pinned to her hair⁸ and remains in place until the lecture draws to a close.

Efrosini's key note was followed by a response from Dr Susanne Foellmer, who describes the lecture as a form of 'choreo-reading'; the word 'choreography' being derived from the Greek word for noting down. She speaks of a 'dialectic relation' of the interplay between remembering and forgetting, and of letting the 'images migrate'. I can imagine the images as they forge their own passage through time as

² QUOTE

As it turns out there are quite a few Nietzsche quotes written on the papers that could have been chosen. Each one a variation on the theme that time exerts its cyclical force on memory and forgetfulness in such a way that identifying the present moment is a near impossibility. Throughout many lifetimes, the multiple dialogues between remembering and forgetting are inescapably intertwined and reliant on one another.

³ IMAGE of Efrosini doing it before.

⁴ IMAGE of Trio A credits

⁵ ASK A QUESTION

⁶ IMAGE from Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas. His research involved collecting the recurrence of images and symbolic gestures in western civilization through the passage of time.

⁷ MAKE A CONFESSION.

⁸ TASK

Change something in your appearance.

new objects, relating to and referencing the original time and space from which they were derived, but continually existing and regenerating endlessly through history's time-warp. Picking her way through this minefield of 'past interferences' Efrosini gives us a sense of the awkwardness of trying to embody the present moment. In performing this constantly evolving history, moments appear and disappear, and immediately cease to exist as they once were.

I am left with a resounding sense of the elasticity and boundlessness of time and memory, and I am considering whether the traces which remain when knowledge slips through the net of forgetting are gathered elsewhere. Having popped the airtight lid of this delicious keynote condiment, I am sure there is more to discover in its syrupy depths. Over time perhaps they will rise to the surface, or maybe the traces will line the jar for future culinary creations.

Siân Goldby