

PoP MOVES Conference 2018: Memory, Migration and Movement

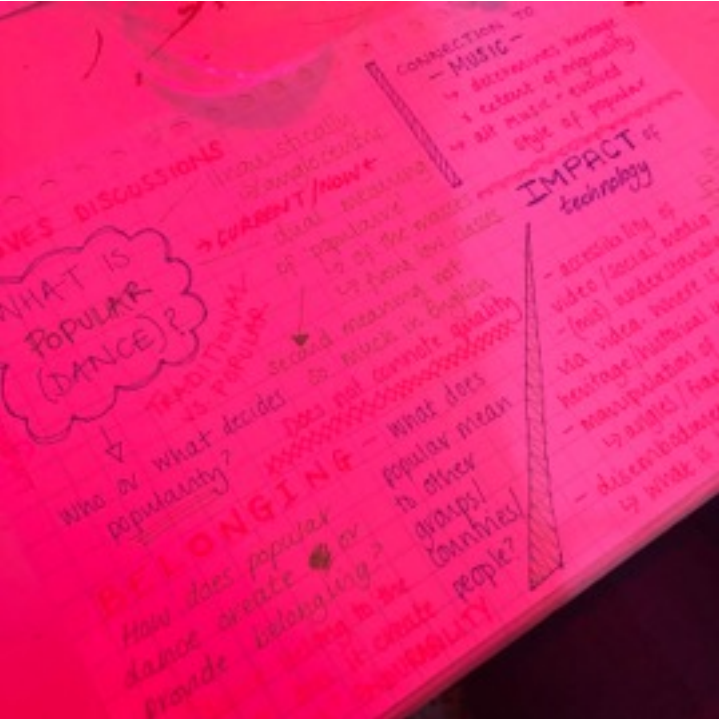
On 7th December 2018 I caught a Eurostar to Paris in preparation for attending 'Memory, Migration, Movement' the 11th Annual PoP MOVES conference. After a pleasant afternoon of tourist behaviour exploring popular sites of the city (in the torrential rain and fierce some wind) I began preparations for the conference, which would begin the following morning. Located at the Université Paris Nanterre, the conference was promoted as a 'plunge in to the field of Popular Dance studies' (PoPMOVES, 2018, [online]), which was also to launch the Francophone node of PoP MOVES. The bilingual emphasised for the weekend was clear from the opening welcome from organisers, Clare Parfitt and Laura Steil, first shared in English and then in French.

In one of the opening panel presentation sessions, the focus was on dance movement from popular music videos, albeit with a slight time difference; Justin Bieber's 'Sorry' video was released in 2015 and Michael Jackson's 'Smooth Criminal' came out in 1987. In 'Dis/orienting place, space and spectatorship: Parris Goebel's *Polyswagg* and the politics of YouTube encounters', Elena Benthaus presented her exploration of spectatorial disorientation as a way of inhabiting space and asking, who is allowed to be seen and how? While Benthaus focused on dis/orientation as a concept for exploring adopted, adapted and reworked dance styles, Elizabeth June Bergman presented this as re-membling, noting the focus on innovation within tradition through her paper, 'Remembering and forgetting: *Smooth Criminal*'s cultural histories, global circulations, and counter-memories'. By presenting the remnants that remain once a dance style or movement or setting has been reworked as 'counter-memories', Bergman explored where power is held or reclaimed by artists. These presentations highlighted key themes that ran throughout the conference concerning re/mis/appropriation of movement, styles and purpose for dance.

The task of organising a conference and managing the accepted papers has always fascinated me. I marvel at the decision-making process of arranging panels and grouping presentations. On more that one occasion I have attended a conference and, after reading the panel paper titles, wondered how these presentations would work together. And yet, I am continually amazed at the subtly complementary or intriguingly contrasting thematic links that emerge between the thoughts and research that is shared. The same could have been said for the second session of the day held in the Amphithéâtre, where I presented my paper 'Re-constructing, re-creating, re-imagining: Exploring the use of popular dance films as a site for dance and disability interventions' after Diana Popescu presented on 'Dancing the traumatic past away: The performativity of dance for survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants'. At first look, these might not obviously sit together, but the subsequent discussion session highlighted cross-paper themes regarding the role and complexity of curation, participant agency and the notion of 'choice' for marginalised or trauma-experienced dancers.

After a tasty lunch and time to network, we entered the afternoon sessions, with presentations ranging from explorations of movement in French films, cultural identity through reggaeton and memorialization in post-genocide Rwanda. The final session of the day really embodied the crossing borders intention of the conference, with video presentations and interactive lecture demonstrations, allowing those who were unable to travel, physically, to Paris an opportunity to present their work digitally. The interdisciplinary focus of the conference was evident through the visiting delegates, who came from a wide range of disciplinary areas such as Francophone Studies, Holocaust Studies, History and Religion, triggering curious questioning and engaging discussions that unpacked papers beyond dance. The plenary session on Saturday was held in the Arènes de Nanterre, a circus tent space housed on the university site and home to a working circus company. The panel of invited plenary guests discoursed a number of questions posed by Clare Parfitt, but really drew upon the discussions had within the sessions from the day and ideas surveyed through the presentations that were given. The discussion was so fruitful that time seemed to expand and we continued until nearly an hour over the scheduled end of session, but with opportunities to share thoughts with such a varied group of peers being rare, no one seemed to mind!

The Sunday sessions of activity began with ‘curated conversations’ at La Colonie, near to Gare du Nord, where small groups were gathered and offered questions to investigate and feed back to all attendees. With such a mix of nationalities, focus in our group was situated on definitions and the variety in connotations across languages, especially concerning the characterisation of popular dance. We shared experiences and examined their significance, attempting to expand our knowledge of topics raised throughout the conference but to also exchange stories. This was followed by a round-table conversation with a panel of popular dance artists discussing crossing perspectives. While the event continued (with a DJ set planned for later in the evening at La Colonie) I had a train to catch, but the journey was filled with reflective thinking and writing, unpacking all that I’d heard, discussed and learnt from the weekend.



The weekend seemed to greatly signify an important and exciting time for PoP MOVES and for popular dance activity/research. Many thanks to Clare and Laura for their organisation, Université Paris Nanterre for their hospitality as well as all the support institutions, organisation and individuals for helping this event to take place. Please do explore discussions and topic areas presented at the conference by searching for the #PoPMovesParis hashtag on Twitter.

Notes from discussions at La Colonie

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