

Re-aligning Dance Research for the 21st Century

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In my presentation I address directly how dance research might be re-aligned to ensure its sustainability in the immediate future. I hope I can offer some insights. Although they come from a non-Australian/New Zealand context, I hope they might still be useful. I do not offer a single model that might be followed anywhere else but raise some crucial questions that need to be addressed in developing a model of sustainability for dance research.

Context

This paper emerges from my experience over 24 years in a British university, which followed ten years of teaching and dancing and five years of further study for the degrees of MA and PhD. I have been primarily concerned with developing a full set of dance programmes including a three and four year undergraduate course *Dance and Culture* to an MA programme (successful graduates in the audience here) and leading to a major doctoral programme.

My own research since 1980 has focussed on an epistemology of the discipline and particularly in interpretative strategies in dance analysis. I have published four books and a fifth is in press. This latest is an intertextual analysis of the physical theatre work of Lloyd Newson (a famous Australian character). My paper is not about this but about the

larger issues of infrastructures to support dance in higher education and in dance research.

I became a Professor in 1992 and recently was awarded the title of Distinguished Professor. Only four such appointments were made at Surrey at that time, one each in Engineering, Physics, Linguistics and DANCE. Quite apart from any personal pleasure this might have given me, it has to be celebrated for dance. Surrey is in many ways a very traditional university, seen as having strengths in technologies, particularly in electronics research. We design, build and sell small communications satellites world wide - recently to China - the only university to do so.

Research fields at the doctoral level

Firstly, I want to deal with doctoral education. I place particular emphasis on this topic since without a sound and extensive research base the discipline will not grow or be respected in University contexts. It was a deliberate decision at Surrey that to grow the discipline you had to grow the people. Writing one's own books is of obvious value, but at least as much value is generated from facilitating others to achieve the highest levels of scholarship and thus to expand the scholarly population.

We have now graduated more than 30 PhD students who are teaching, doing research and making new work worldwide. This is by far the largest European output, and challenges the best of US practice. It has taken 22 years of focussed endeavour to deliver this.

In many supposedly more 'mature' disciplines, departments in each university might focus on a small range of the possible research in the field, e.g. 20th century history; 19th century music etc. In my view this would not have been helpful to the emerging strands of dance research if we had said we were only interested in students wanting to study dance history, or choreography etc. I felt a responsibility to the whole of the discipline and, while it is problematic, since no-one can grasp this entirely, it has been a welcomed and productive start for dance research in the sense that we have respond to a range of critical questioning in dance studies.

So, you may be interested in the areas of research for PhD students completing in 2003-04, for example. These are mature dancer/teacher/researchers. Vida Midgelow's *Reworking the Ballet: Refiguring the Body and Swan Lake* looked at choreographic praxis, context and politics in the re-workings of classic ballets. These works can be seen as 'unruly acts framed within the status quo of the canon and are positioned as examples of canonical counter-discourse'. Her analysis dealt with three radical reworkings, including one of her own, through feminist, post-feminist, and postcolonial perspectives to address questions of gender. Vida lectures at Northampton University College (UK).

Kisook Cho's thesis *A Theory and Practice of Choreography towards overcoming Eurocentrism in the case of South Korean Dance* addressed political ideologies dominant in South Korea in the twentieth century and the responses of dancers and choreographers in the development of an indigenous dance-theatre culture. Detailed and contextualised analysis revealed that notions of a singular anti-eurocentric style are misplaced and that the existing range of practices articulates a variety of interculturalist statements. Kisook lectures at Ewha Women's University in Seoul, Korea. She has long been a choreographer and political activist.

Unveiling the Dance. Arabic Dancing in an Urban English Landscape was the title of Jane Bacon's thesis. This ethnographic study analyses one dancing community in Northampton, England through the lens of dancing as reflexive and ritualised performative practice. In this case she studied participants in so-called 'Arabic dance' through participant-observer techniques and, using feminist anthropology, examined the complex range of notions operating. Jane leads the dance programme at Northampton University College.

Kai Lehtikainen, a lecturer from Finland, pursued studies in masculinity, discourse analysis, and social constructionism in the discourses of boys' dancing in Finland. His contexts included educational, professional training courses and choreographic events. Multiple and competing discourses were exposed and an intertextual analysis juxtaposed data from focus groups and interviews with observation of classes and analysis of choreography, and literature to construct his thesis *Stepping 'Queerly'. Discourses in Dance Education for Boys in Late 20th Century Finland*.

To be examined in 2004 are three further theses, one by Astrid Bernkopf, an Austrian dancer and teacher, on *Narrative Variants and Theatrical constants: towards a Dramaturgy of Romantic ballet* and one by an American former Balanchine student now living in Paris, Toni d'Amelio, on *Ghost Bodies in Contemporary French Dance practices 1980-2000*. The third, is Fiona Wilkie's study of Site-specific performance.

This diversity of dance research, although characteristic of an emerging discipline, can now be seen also to reflect its increasing maturity. In addition to the students mentioned above, others have come from Ghana, Morocco, Canada, New Zealand, Spain, Taiwan, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and of course, the UK to pursue issues relating to epistemology, education, feminism, history, politics, cultural studies, movement, choreographic and performance analysis, new choreography (including making new work), performer-spectator relationships, new media forms and digital dance, ritual, and critical studies in intertextuality.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but looked at from the perspective of 30 years there are reasons to be encouraged. When I embarked on my postgraduate career with an MA in dance in 1974-5 and then moved to the PhD I was the only full time dance research student in the UK.

Dance in the academic sector in the UK

The academic sector for Dance in the UK is now considerable and relatively stable. This is despite a long period of flux in higher education policy and funding, and ambivalence about the role of the arts in education. There is a closer relationship between artists, ‘training schools’ and the academic world. Most dancing schools now offer a degree in association with a university, recognising the currency of such an award. Likewise, academic dance studies have become sufficiently confident to acknowledge, indeed celebrate, practice within the university world. All dance degrees contain varying, but often substantial, amounts of dance practice and varying amounts of theory, often integrated into the studio situation.

Externally funded activity (by government, charitable and arts organisations) and artistic collaborations in research have also become an important factor and this is perhaps my first offering to the debate and leads into the conference topic. In the context of a highly theoretical education system these moves are significant.

The issue of sustainability

This conference has situated itself at the forefront of thinking worldwide in choosing the issue of ‘sustainability’ as its focus. In the UK, it is the political buzz-word of the moment, in this context initially applied to a strategy for science, engineering and technology which aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of the university research base. Although ‘sustainability’ has become a matter of global concern across many disciplines that are much more expensive than dance – the major sciences being the exemplar – the issues still resonate, and rather poignantly, for dance. Rebooting for what, is the question. Sustainability without ossification, the ideal.

The projected Government ten-year plan for 'science' is not limited to conventional notions of the ‘hard sciences’ but includes arts and humanities. While one might stand on principle and say ‘dance should not be studied as a science’ we should reflect that in mainland Europe this is how all subjects are regarded in the university context and there is much to be gained from this alliance with science since, crudely, this is where the money and prestige lie.

One of the major concerns in sustainability currently is the transfer of knowledge, particularly of innovation, between universities and industry. Unfortunately this is often framed solely in terms of business and commercial outcomes of science, but, as Crossick states (Chief Exec, AHRB, in Research Fortnight 7 April 2004), the arts and humanities also contribute to innovation and business.

Out-of-date views of where and how wealth is created are beginning to change. Richard Brown (Chief Exec Council for Industry and Higher Education, UK) argues that the recent, highly influential, Lambert Review of business-university collaboration, which is informing university funding, failed to recognise the significance of the creative industries such as media, fashion, music, performing arts, advertising, art and design and the wide range of users, of museums and galleries, the heritage sector and television. Again, we may not be comfortable with the notion of ‘industry’ if we adopt the modernist

high position, or even a postmodernist improvisational position, but we can adapt this idea to suit our own purposes.

The value of the arts and humanities

The economic impact of the creative and cultural industries in the UK has increasingly been recognised – for example these industries grew by 34% in England in the 1990s. They generate around £112.5 billion of revenue and employ 1.3 million people. It is one of the fastest growing business sectors in the SouthEast. Brown notes that in the Greater London Authority the creative industries sector is the third largest employer and the second biggest source of new jobs, it has added £21 billion annually to London's output and has grown much faster than other industries (The Times Higher June 4th 2004 p. 16).

At last then, we have started to construct measures for these things in order to demonstrate their value to society. Why should a government pay for something if values cannot be clearly identified (not necessary quantified, however!). The arts and humanities are beginning to use these arguments to attract government and other funding. Meanwhile we still have to deal with a position of historic under-funding for research in the arts and humanities in universities and very uneven practice worldwide. Only recently in the UK have we begun to have access to some of the huge funding streams for research that science and engineering have had. While scientists have a history of working with research councils and industry, and drawing funding for research from both sources, there are few 'creative industries' that have the funds or interest to match even the small amount of arts research activity. Until recently in the UK we did not have a research council for the arts and humanities while those for medicine, engineering and social sciences are of long-standing.

Of its many implications, recent arguments on sustainability concern the real costing of research. Funders, e.g. governments, through university funding, and research councils, in future will be expected to pay the full economic cost of the work they commission.

Relevance of sustainability to dance research

What has this to do with dance, you might ask, since very little funded research goes on anywhere, and even in universities rarely are the full costs covered. However, it is relevant since government through the funding councils HEFCE, and those for Wales and Scotland gives a proportion of each university's income for staff research (not just science staff). Competitive grant application to the Research Councils forms the second funding strand. Is this model similar to AUS/NZ? A rapidly developing third strand deals with business outcomes, and economic significance, of research.

Exploring the terms of sustainability reveals further implications for dance, it seems to me – estimating academic staff time to be spent on research projects and claiming the same rights as academics in other fields; identifying most costs e.g. of space and charging them to projects. Indeed the idea of sustainability is not restricted to research but is also relevant to teaching, administration, consultancy and other professional activities that academics undertake – planning conferences, preparing papers and attending conferences, the argument is that understanding the real costs is vital in order to manage university activity properly. This is as relevant for the individual as for the organisation – the constant complaint of having insufficient time to meet all the demands.

Outside the University sector, Arts Councils in the UK also claim a research profile by funding projects, which they often invite universities and independent researchers to bid for. I have done several of these in the past – but no more – there is no relationship between the funds available and the demands of the research. Arts organisations, which are often poorly funded themselves, are not in a position to pay for what they want in a way that recognises the skills and intellectual frameworks that the researcher possesses. There are nascent signs of collaboration between research funders and arts councils in the UK, which promise a change in this field but which also highlight different priorities.

Arts organisations

In fact it is not just research bodies and business organisations that see sustainability as an issue. Arts Council England, in the Southeast, for example, has also hitched its colours to the sustainability mast. If we want to see growth, they argue – more artists, more arts organisations, more audiences and events – then one of the keys is partnership.

Collaboration and partnership is not news to practitioners in the performing arts, it is one of our strengths, but we may not have capitalised on it in working together for common goals with other agencies outside the dance world i.e. local authorities, regional agencies, national government and commercial organisations.

As Hackett (ACSE News no 6 April 04) suggests as an example, developing the region's cultural centres in alliance with the SEEngland development Agency's area Investment Frameworks (a regionalisation of the government's planning programme) and the Deputy Prime Minister's Growth Area initiatives enables strategic decisions to be made which are 'consistent with what other – often larger and richer – partners are planning'. These bodies are specific to England, but no doubt have parallels in other countries.

Influencing those partners, and insisting on the recognition of the arts as essential to the lives and livelihoods of people in the region, is our contribution. John Prescott's action plan (Deputy Prime Minister, UK) is to deliver several new 'sustainable communities' and the Arts Council's challenge is to ensure that the arts benefit fully from these opportunities and that arts people are engaged in planning how these communities will work (Thames Gateway – Essex to North Kent; Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale; Ashford).

The Arts Council sees its role as sustaining this growth and encouraging future investment, by supporting the development of artists, creative practitioners and arts organisations, by funding new resources for artists, by arranging professional development opportunities, commissioning research and holding conferences.

Re-aligning dance research

On our rather smaller scale, the issues for dance however, are the same:

- how far research should be spread and how far concentrated in centres of excellence since the implications of full costing may be that there has to be less overall – not all universities may be able to do dance research. In the UK nearly half of chemistry departments are likely to close. There are good arguments for focussing dance research in fewer places to generate critical mass.
- universities fund staff salaries – staff are allocated research time. Whether this is best used solely for a model of research that is collaborative challenges individual scholarship. A strategic development plan is required.
- The potential of our ‘discoveries’, ‘innovations’ etc (the language of science) has to be translated into new ‘products’, processes, services and systems to be made available to others. The rather in-turned and private world of the artist and the arts researcher is unlikely to survive. We have to develop a public argument for the value of what we do.
- How dance research should be organised and funded needs discussion. What kinds of organisations are likely to be supportive? Do we need to develop new networks and organisations with the deliberate aim of generating funding?
- Which aspects should be funded at what level, i.e. what can be supported for all, locally; what should be provided regionally; what might national bodies do and how might we evolve an international framework?
- How should we deal with the tensions between supporting so-called basic research (usually within academic institutions), practising artists, and practical applications for the so-called ‘real world’; in our case the creative industries.
- Can research and practice sensibly be considered together – sustaining dance research and sustaining dance practice – or are they in some sense rather different, requiring different structures?
- Context is a key factor in rebooting dance research and practice: research develops in response to its context, both in the dancing context itself and in the

cultural and educational contexts of the time. It is unlikely and unhelpful to imagine that a universal model might emerge, rather that one designed specifically for this time and place will develop.

So as a brief background to my own context Dance Research in the UK has a history made up of several strands:

- the gentleman-scholar mode of nineteenth and early twentieth century history, largely of ballet;
- the emergence of a largely female, academic, scholarly population (albeit a very small one) during the 1960s to 1980 which focussed on developing the discipline in intellectually credible terms largely in relation to modern dance;
- the more recent opening of this discipline to research which addresses issues of practice as well as theory and which covers many subjects and methodologies.

It would be exceedingly arrogant and I cannot comment in much detail on the Australian/New Zealand context, except that this will be my third extended visit since 1990, and I claim one of the few complete collections of Writings on Dance but I can offer some lines to pursue that we have found vital in our own context.

Firstly within higher or tertiary education

- The establishment of a broad base of undergraduate study in dance, incorporating many forms and cultures and working both in practice and in theory. Recognising the importance of a global perspective and historical context. Focussing only on one dance form is not tenable. Studying only those Dance forms that were ‘new’ in the white western early twentieth century and which claimed to be context ‘free’ are not credible from the position we now adopt. A historical and global perspective is vital.
- The establishment of a postgraduate programme that offers both high level artistic development and sound research methodologies (the Master’s degree).
- Issues of theory and practice and their relationship need to be constantly debated. There is much hot air in this debate in the UK, much of which seems to me to be

misguided and much of it incomprehensible special pleading, which we do not need.

- The evolution of a doctoral programme of critical mass where a research culture can grow and which attracts established and visiting scholars to work with new scholars (scholars here taken to include both those working predominantly in theory and those working in practice).
- The development of a post-doctoral research community – still small but increasing rapidly in the UK, strongly supported by FIRT internationally. I held one of the early post-doctoral fellowships (Leeds 1980-82) funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation and then a second at Surrey (1982-88) funded by the Leverhulme Trust – both charitable foundations i.e. paying no overheads and certainly not full economic costs. We have had five such posts at Surrey each usually funded for 2-3 years.

Research Councils

It is difficult to over-estimate the impact of the Arts and Humanities Research Board in the UK. It was established in 1998 and imminently is to become a full research Council. Essentially after much lobbying, and the construction of detailed arguments, it has been accepted that research in our fields is of value to both the knowledge economy and to the creative industries. While the AHRB maintains a strong commitment to the individual researcher, and to traditional modes of research, there is also a growing interest in collaborative and interdisciplinary, sometimes cross-institutional, research.

There are a number of schemes supporting Research, but one, the AHRB Research Centres scheme, was set up specially to promote the objective of interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research. Only 17 of these had been set up at the point at which the Department of Dance Studies was awarded the only one in the performing arts. This grant is held in partnership with the School of Oriental and African Studies for its ethnomusicology strengths (London University) and Dance Studies at Roehampton, University of Surrey, for a 5-year project funded at £850K, for research in Cross-Cultural Music and Dance performance.

It is about performance, it is about performers and researchers working together to address research questions raised by performance and to seek a symbiosis between the performance concerns of ethnomusicology and musicology, and the analysis methods used in theatre and dance research. The centre invites Asian and African experts to work with its researchers. Two projects which we are particularly concerned with are, firstly, *New Directions in South Asian Dance: Post-colonial identity construction*, and *Transformations in African Music and Dance Performance*.

Under a different scheme, a bid to the Resource Enhancement scheme produced £300K for the National Resource Centre for Dance at UniS to archive and digitise some of its resources over a three year period starting 2002 thus making access on a world-wide basis feasible. The purpose of this scheme is obvious and much needed to generate a sound resource base for research.

The scheme for Fellowships in the Creative and Performing Arts, for active practitioner/researchers, has awarded two three-year grants in succession to Dance Studies allowing two major choreographers who previous had never been funded for sustained periods of research, Emilyn Claid and Rosemary Butcher, in turn to have a three year research period based in the university.

Interestingly two of Surrey's PhD graduates working in other institutions have also received these awards (Carol Brown – a NZ choreographer now at University of Surrey, Roehampton: and Sophie Lycouris, at Nottingham Trent University). A PhD is not inimical to good art practice, but supports and challenges it - these PhDs incorporated both high quality theory and practice.

The AHRB also funds master's level and doctoral studentships in a competitive scheme, allowing a small number of dance, music and drama students to undertake MA courses and PhD research with reasonable funding. This scheme is intensely competitive.

I was privileged in being invited to be a founder member of the Board representing Music, Dance and Drama. I also chaired the committee that recommended research awards in all these fields. It gave me insight into the working of research funding bodies but also into research in other arts and humanities disciplines which range from Archaeology via Philosophy and Theology, Languages and the Creative and Visual Arts, to History and to the Performing Arts. The creation of a specific interdisciplinary category was a significant recognition of new research fields.

Secondly at the national level:

- In the UK, as in the US, professional organisations have been helpful in discussing ideas both of research and of its place within the current climate: The Standing Conference on Dance in Higher Education, and the Society for Dance Research, both of which began in the early 1980s. Like CORD and SDHS they facilitate networking through annual conferences and publications and become lobbying organisations to governments.
- An increasing number of journals support and disseminate dance research, not all directly or only concerned with dance. Theatre, performance, gender, cultural studies and anthropological journals now take dance articles on a more regular basis.
- The co-ordination of arts support and research support bodies to develop arguments on the economic and social contribution that each makes to contemporary society needs to be enhanced i.e. a lobbying group but also a research function at the policy level.

Thirdly at the international level:

- Positioning dance research within a global context, recognising the specific opportunities (and threats) for each context is significant. US cultural dominance is a key factor for many of us. Opportunities in Europe (for the UK) and in the Pacific Rim (for Australia and New Zealand) may offer balance or contrast despite specific difficulties of language and culture.
- Developing programmes that facilitate interaction on a global scale for scholars

and postgraduate students might entail setting up an agency (or more than one).

- The issue of critical mass in areas where a low level of activity and a spread of population exists needs to be addressed.

The latter issue is in some ways the hardest to resolve in a field which is small, and where distances are great. A welcome for the diversity of dance scholarship, respect and tolerance for those working in different areas and different modes from one's own; trust and shared understanding of working practices, are not easily come by. Technology may help communication but it can also create problems. In key stages of development there is no substitute for bringing groups of people together to work on plans for development that will be convincing and attractive.

If I might venture a proposal for Australia and New Zealand it would be an integrated collaborative strategy for the evolution of dance research through meetings of leaders in institutions and organisations. These leaders would be charged with this brief. The result might be manifest in annual conferences and summer schools for postgraduate students as well as dance researchers.

Websites

"<http://www.ahrb.ac.uk>"

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