

Editor's Note

In this first issue of 2018, the first and fourth articles focus on issues that arise from a consideration of different types of archival materials in relation to dance: commencing with the more traditional notion of an archive held in a university or library collection such as the Columbia Center for Oral History at Columbia University (L'Hotellier), and closing with a consideration of the recent digitized, visual era of “artist driven archives,” which not only enable wider access to dance works but can also be viewed as integral to the choreographer's creative process (Candelario). In between these archival bookends, we have an examination of the ways in which the medium of screendance can produce certain heightened aesthetic effects, compared with a live performance (Lim), followed by an exploration of the use of movement notation as a motor for generating creative, listening practice, as opposed following the rules laid down in a score, which in turn can lead to fixity (Gardner).

“The Bennington Summer School of the Dance Oral History Project 1978–79,” directed by Martha Hill, was conceived of as a book project that was never published for many reasons. This oral history archive has been researched by many dance scholars over the years to confirm or debunk the idea of the “Big Four” American modern dance story of the 1930s, or to point to absences of one kind or another. However, in this first article, Sanja L'Hotellier states that her interest in this much researched archive lies elsewhere. Rather, she seeks to examine the oral history interviews from the perspective of the dancers, and particularly the “physical education teachers” experiences of the Bennington Summer School, whereupon their feelings of being “in” or “out” compared with those of the dancers and choreographers, their sense perceptions, passions, and their positive and negative and “dissident voices,” are brought to life. L'Hotellier achieves this through a careful micro-level examination of the interviews, to reveal a yet uncovered “history of sensibilities,” as proposed by the French historian Alain Corbin, who invites oral historians to listen to and engage with the voices of the past, so as to be open to finding a different history or, indeed, histories. Ethically and methodologically, this approach requires of the researcher a high degree of openness and “humility” to let the dancers' and teachers' voices lead the way, rather than staying within a predetermined, well-trodden, oral history path. L'Hotellier's theoretical, thematic, methodological framing and analysis also draw on the work of French scholars, such as Arlette Farge's concern with researcher responsibility, Isabelle Launay's and Boris Charmatz's work with “micro societies,” and Laurence Louppe's concern with the incorporation of oral history materials in dance studies.

In the second article, “An Enhanced Otherworldliness: Thierry De Mey's Screendance, based on William Forsythe's *One Flat Thing, reproduced*,” Wesley Lim sets out to demonstrate the various ways that De Mey's filmic technique and aesthetic can be seen to capture and indeed heighten the “otherworldliness” evidenced in Forsythe's “main” dance work. Lim's use of the term “main” is deliberate in this instance to emphasize that there is no singular, original live dance, as Forsythe “allows the dancers to perform structured improvisations.” In his discussion of Forsythe's movement aesthetic, Lim notes that scholars such as Gabrielle Brandstetter have analyzed how Forsythe “disfigures ballet vocabulary” via the technique of “disfocus.” Lim analyzes Forsythe's movement aesthetic and “oeuvre,” by drawing attention to, for example, the generation of a sense of

alienation and otherworldliness, the “disfiguring” of ballet technique, and his debt to romantic ballet as exemplified in several of his productions, including *One Flat Thing, reproduced*. Thereafter, Lim analyzes De Mey’s filmic techniques in terms of their aesthetic effects and his “oeuvre,” such as his use of closeups or sound for example, and the five extra scenes created for the screen-dance in question, to evidence what Lim argues is the heightened otherworldliness in De Mey’s *One Flat Thing, reproduced*.

In the penultimate article, “Noa Eshkol and the Idea of a Chamber Music,” Sally Gardner notes that Eshkol’s contribution to the history of modern dance has been largely overlooked in dance studies, particularly in English. Eshkol is probably more known for the Eshkol-Wachmann Notation System, which she created with the architect and former student, Avraham Wachmann, and that she “applied and tested on her dance group” (Davis 1973, 32). Gardner considers that the time is right to give “serious consideration” to Eshkol’s “contribution to the broader historical field of modern dance.” Eshkol placed emphasis on the importance of the dancer as a key “participant” in the dance-making that was generated from an abstract, “objective” Eshkol-Wachmann movement score, rather like the role of the musician, creating music from the notes of a score. Gardner argues that the underlying conception of Eshkol’s movement notation is the equivalent of Western musical notation, unlike for example, Labanotation, which Eshkol considered was “literary” in character. As Gardner notes, it was not incidental that Eshkol named her dance group that she established in 1954 as the Chamber Dance Group. Like early chamber music, Eshkol’s dance compositions were designed for small audiences, but above all they were for the performers themselves, with the dancers becoming, in effect, “their own first audiences.” Gardner considers in some detail the relationship of Eshkol’s compositions to that of chamber music. For example, she draws on Theodor Adorno’s analysis of chamber music, in which he maintains there is no distinction between the player and the listener. Gardner argues that this is also the case between dancer and audience in Eshkol’s compositions.

The final article by Rosemary Candelario, “Choreographing American Dance Archives: Artist-Driven Archival Projects by Eiko & Komo, Bebe Miller Company, and Jennifer Monson,” begins by comparing and contrasting what Candelario terms “typical archival collections” and the recent emergence of digital “artist driven archives.” These three projects or case studies form the basis of the analysis of what is “becoming a growing trend among established American choreographers.” Unlike the traditional archival collection, artist-driven archives, as Candelario explains, may be described as “still being in active use” by those who developed them. Thus, they are not fixed in a given time frame, but rather, can be in “active use” by those who generated them in the first instance. As Candelario points out, rather than hosting the “preservation of a collection of materials,” as is the case with traditional archives, artist-driven archives are envisaged as speaking to or tracing the artists’ body of work, not as a fixed entity, but as an ongoing continuum of former, present, and future possibilities, while at the same time holding a space for “artworks in their own right.” In so doing, Candelario suggests that artists are “active” agents in the archival process, through which they can decide the how and why of their own practice. However, I might put a spoke in the wheel by enquiring if artists are indeed always the best persons to do just that, given the closeness to the subject/object at hand, as there is a body of literature that shows that intentionality may not be all that it is presumed to be? Nonetheless, as Candelario shows by her interviews with the choreographers in question, and the analysis of how they set about generating their own respective archives, along with their experiences of using the archive for “further creation” of work, the archive is not a “set of static objects to be preserved.” Candelario also suggests that despite the benefits of creating new work and increased audience circulation, there is a potential downside to treating artist driven archives under the banner of “archive” in general, “which can come at the cost of looming obsolescence.”

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Work Cited

Davis, Martha. 1975. *Towards Understanding the Intrinsic in Body Movement*. New York: Arno Press.

