IMAGERY, DANCE AND CREATIVITY.

Modern choreography has developed a wide variety of techniques for generating novel and original movement sequences, and for arranging them into pieces of dance. Pilot research conducted with Random Dance and the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance has explored the role of mental imagery within creative movement generation at several different levels of explanation. These have included: the neural basis of imagery, and the use of mental representations by expert dancers as they create or think about movement; the cognitive level of strategic recruitment of different modalities of imagery according to variations in task requirements; the social level of distributed creativity through the selection and imitation of key group members as exemplars; and at a sociocultural level through the use of imagery as a communicative device to explain the choreographic intentions or process to audiences and other practitioners.

Scott deLahunta¹,²,³ & Philip Barnard²

Coventry University¹ / R-Research² / The Forsythe Company³

Choreographic Thinking Tools

How might we develop new ways of augmenting movement creativity in dance? Can we better connect intellect, imagination and the physical body and enrich their relationship? The dance field is already rich in choreographic expertise that is constantly seeking new means of movement related innovation. Can a scientific understanding of the organisation of the mind provide clues and ideas that can be put into practice in this field? This presentation will outline some of the challenges that need to be addressed and specific illustrations of current studio practices and tasks. The illustrations will focus on research on the use of multiple forms of imagery in movement creation being explored in R-Research (the research arm of Wayne McGregor | Random Dance).

Scott deLahunta has worked as writer, researcher and organiser on a range of international projects bringing performing arts with a focus on choreography into conjunction with other disciplines and practices. He is currently Senior Research Fellow Coventry University/ R-Research Director, Wayne McGregor|Random Dance and Project Leader Motion Bank/ The Forsythe Company.
http://www.sdela.dds.nl

Philip Barnard worked at the Medical Research Council's Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit (formerly the Applied Psychology IUnit) in Cambridge from 1972 to 2011. Over the course of his career, he has carried out research on how memory, attention, language, body states and emotion work together in the normal healthy, human mind. He is committed to seeing the types of basic cognitive theory developed in scientific laboratories put to good use in the real world. His theoretical model of the architecture of the human mind has been applied to the problems of designing 'easy to use' everyday technologies and computer interfaces. He has applied the same theory to help understand and treat emotional disorders like depression, as well using it to account for the way in which human mental and emotional skills have developed over the long-term course of evolution. Dance shares
with these other areas of interest an intricate blending of intellectual, communicative, physical and emotional skills. Since 2003, Philip has been collaborating with Wayne McGregor | Random Dance on interdisciplinary research projects with the aim of developing productive synergies between choreographic processes and our knowledge of cognitive neuroscience.

Emma Redding & Tony Thatcher

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London

'Shizengaku: a work in progress'

The aim of this presentation is to share a choreographic process which involves the use of imagery predominately involving touch and score (painting). We will show an excerpt of the piece in process 'Shizengaku' from the triptych by painter Shuji Okada. Examples of some of the methods employed will be demonstrated through a short rehearsal practice after the showing.

The working process consider the space before the three paintings, the choreography opening up ways where (to paraphrase Healey and Enns*), viewing becomes a dynamic and on-going construction allowing for the dancing and the painting to be seen momentarily. Images are short-lived, movement / dance, detailed and brief, yet at times still. The choreographic effect lies somewhere between looking at the paintings whilst being aware of movement and relationship before it. As dancers, the practice has been to experience oneself as (cylindrical) surfaces upon which to write and hold movement rather than to depict either kinetic or energetic representations.

* ‘Perception and Painting: A Search for Effective, Engaging Visualizations’
Christopher G. Healey and James T. Enns

Jon May

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In the dancer’s mind

Creation is not spontaneous: it is an interaction of the mind and the world. Understanding the process by which we originate, select, reject and elaborate our ideas is central to an analysis of creativity. Creation in dance is especially challenging due to its multisensory nature. I will present data from two exploratory studies in which we tried to find out what dancers were thinking about while they were creating movement phrases in the dance studio. We used an ecological momentary assessment procedure to investigate the effect of giving the dancers tasks that focussed on different levels of mental representation, and compared experienced professional dancers and less experienced postgraduate students.
Jon May is Professor of Psychology at Plymouth University. After completing a PhD in which he applied cognitive psychology to the analysis of ‘flexible thinking’, he has focussed on researching the role of mental representations in emotion, the design of computer interfaces, clinical disorders, addiction, and motivation.