

Scott deLahunta in conversation with ICKamsterdam

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## dis·sem·i·na·tion

**Dissemination** is a term used in the context of the *Accademia Mobile* as meaning distribution, circulation; as “scattering the acquired information like seeds”. It is already apparent from the previous chapters that the scattering of *the knowledge that is dance* (and – it might be added – the continually ensuing new questions) that EG | PC and its liaisons have gathered over the last decennium or so, does not stay limited to one closed group of interested parties. It is, indeed, a primary task of ICKamsterdam to take great care that this knowledge is dispersed throughout the international dance field and beyond, to be pondered by others, to be taken a step further.

The questions that should be addressed first of all here, are: what forms of choreographic and dance knowledge are constituted through the development of the *Accademia Mobile* activities, and how can these be exchanged and increased in value through circulation and **dissemination**?

The term **dissemination** in itself can be rather broadly interpreted: it might as well cover all activities that are undertaken within the *Accademia Mobile*. All of these, in fact, imply the dispersion of knowledge, be it in the form of the *DS/DM* workshops, or the **exchange** programmes that have been discussed in the previous chapters. Here, however, we use this term for specific tools that are not studio or classroom driven. What, then, are these tools?

First of all, in the **research** projects *Capturing Intention* and *Inside Movement Knowledge* the results have been put on paper: articles have been written, websites have taken shape, books have been published and distributed. Dance knowledge and **research** outcomes have found their way to theatre bookshops, international dance websites, and, more importantly, to educational institutions (Universities, Academies), which have by now included them in their teaching curricula.

Then, there are those tangible tools for **dissemination** that make use of new technologies: the interactive DVD-rom around *Capturing Intention*, the *DS/DM* documentary; the *DS/DM Interactive Installation*; the newly developed *Dance Resources Flightcase*. The use of new media and interactive environments as part of the **dissemination** strategy is significant, since these attempts in themselves represent a search for innovation and better representation of the dynamic nature of dance.

Moreover, there are the intangible, but nonetheless essential tools, like seminars, symposiums, salon discussions and lectures, which provide opportunities to open up the information to other fields, to new audiences. All of these are platforms where ICKamsterdam can inform and be informed in return.

But then another question arises: who, actually, is interested in sharing this information? And, more importantly: whose interest may build upon the results, may be inspired by them to take on the challenge for a new **research** project, another teaching format, a new publication?

Forming functional networks around a specific topic, a publication, a **research** project, is done with great care. For ICKamsterdam, finding the right partners for e.g. the intensive **exchange** programmes takes time. It is not merely a question of a temporary alliance, but of

building a circle in which knowledge can circulate and then spiral out to other spheres. The choice for Emio Greco | PC to be *artists-in-residence* at the Theaterschool, Amsterdam for a year (2005/2006), has been an extremely fruitful one in that respect – it has, indeed, led to new alliances, new questions, new **research** partners and an ever broadening network. It has triggered ongoing international discussions around notions of contemporary dance making, **transfer**, repertoire and reconstruction.

## **CASE**

*The dissemination of new ideas requires a context that is receptive to them; and the recognition of a 'community of practice' sharing a similar vision for dance is essential to the research goals of ICKamsterdam and Accademia Mobile. Enter the: **International Associates Network**.*

The *Inside Movement Knowledge* (IMK) research project started out with a core of five partners. In the course of this two-year project, other organisations have joined their ranks as Associate Partners for the purpose of feedback and dissemination both nationally and internationally. The International Dance Festival *Springdance* facilitates public conferences for *IMK* enabling the sharing of ideas with professionals and interested members of the general public. *IRCAM* (Paris), through the *Real-Time Musical Interactions Research Team*, connects *IMK* to a unique research community and contributes to the international impact and communication of the research results.

The 'community of practice' however, is best exemplified through the *International Associates Network* comprised of research groups based in Europe and North America stimulated by artist-triggered questions to explore new methods for the documentation and transmission of contemporary choreographic and dance knowledge. This 'community of practice' was first recognised in the context of another project, initiated by arts researcher Scott deLahunta, social anthropologist James Leach (Aberdeen University) and Sarah Whatley (Director of Centre for Media Arts & Performance, Coventry University). They organised a series of three workshops entitled *Choreographic objects: traces and artefacts of physical intelligence* which centred on the output of four research teams working in collaboration with choreographers William Forsythe, Siobhan Davies, Wayne McGregor and Emio Greco | PC.

*Choreographic Objects* referred to the variety of resources, such as the *Capturing Intention* DS/DM Installation, book and DVD-Rom, which these teams have been creating to bring choreographic ideas and processes into newly productive exchanges with general audiences and other specialist knowledge areas. Now, in the context of the *International Associate Network*, a fifth member has been added to this unique community. That is the collaboration between Portuguese choreographer Rui Horta and Carla Fernandes of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa on the *Transmedia Knowledge Base for Contemporary Dance*.

## **Q & A**

**Scott deLahunta – researcher writer, consultant. Currently Research Fellow with the Art Theory and Research and Art Practice and Development Research Group, Amsterdam School for the Arts.**

**For the IMK research project in particular, a lot of attention has been given to circulation and dissemination. In what sense do you think this has added to the project?**

Firstly, it is worth noting that IMK has received support from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science under the heading of the Regional Attention and Action for Knowledge

circulation scheme. This means that in a sense we, as a practice-based arts research project are 'commissioned' by the government to research new methods of knowledge transfer specifically in and out of the University of Applied Sciences (HBO sector). Given that transmission and transfer was a key objective of The Notation Research project to start with (in 2004) it is logical that we would take this as an interesting and serious challenge. We also had a longstanding relationship with a HBO through the Art Practice and Development Research Group, Amsterdam School of the Arts who could coordinate the project. The challenge here is to discover what does it mean to circulate the "knowledge that is dance" not only within the professional dance field, but also to research groups just alongside and even outside of the field. There are many hidden questions here that we are dealing with, not least of which once the 'knowledge of dance' is articulated for whom does that knowledge become useful? This requires us to look at some of the power knowledge relationships Michel Foucault was famously writing about. This provides us a great opportunity to work directly and strategically on shifting territories of understanding around and through dance.

### **How did this approach differ from that in the first research phase of *Capturing Intention*?**

We sometimes get our research phases confused so to clarify, *Capturing Intention* refers to the 1.5 years that started with a multidisciplinary group organised by Bertha coming together to create the Double Skin/ Double Mind interactive installation that was launched along with a book, documentary film and interactive DVD-Rom. So *Capturing Intention* was about making something. In fact it was about making a "choreographic object" something we didn't call it at the time. When we launched the installation at the Dutch Dance Days in October 2007, that's when we suddenly understood we didn't know what it meant "out in the world". Here was this thing that others certainly appreciated, but it also triggered dozens of questions. These questions continued to come when we took the Installation to the German Dance Education Biennale in early 2008. *Inside Movement Knowledge* is the direct result of taking this situation seriously and establishing with all the partners a clear research context within which to allow these questions to be more fully explored.

### **In what way does the organization of IMK relate to the different international networks of artists involved with similar questions? How do these projects inform the creative process?**

Well, interestingly enough IMK is advanced in the sense that its 'choreographic object', as I have just mentioned, has been circulating around in the world already picking up questions and generating discussion and debate around it. These other projects of Forsythe, Davies, McGregor and their research teams are either just newly "launched" or still in the process of creating resources. In a sense, they are just now confronting the same type of questions and developing strategies to respond to them. How and under what conditions any of these projects feed back into the creative process of the artists is one of the fundamental questions they all have to consider. And the responses vary with each project. However, there is a natural tension here because if other disciplines are involved, they will have a need for different research outcomes. Now, the starting question might be the same, but the way it is dealt with and in what format the results are finally best communicated and to whom – this process may start to move away from the artistic starting point. Perhaps then one has parallel processes for a while that appear to be doing different things, but remain in close proximity.

**The way in which IMK has built different networks is regarded as an entirely new and unique approach to research. Is that indeed so, or do you find that this is a development that is now detectable throughout the field of performing arts research?**

Actually networks like this are not at all new and unique, you find research networks everywhere. However, research networks established from within artistic organisations responding specifically to artistic questions may be different to those normally established in academic or scientific circles.

**What other comparable networks do you see?**

Well, I have already said the network that interests me is the one that responds to this growing community of practice around the creation of choreographic objects. The relative high profile of these particular artists and what the research groups working on the projects are achieving seems unusual and therefore in the moment I see no other comparable networks. But the point is that this network momentarily draws attention to a set of shared impulses and implies a type of exchange organised somehow directly between dance artists for the purpose of developing the field. How the network really functions is a matter of planning and organisation. If in the end it doesn't prove to be interesting any more, then some other formation of relations can be developed.

**You are part of a number of these networks what is it that you find relevant and why are these networks important for you as a researcher?**

My comment on this is related to what I last said – networks are only interesting for the quality of relationships that they support. My colleagues and I look for very high quality relations with people based on trust, mutual interest, intelligence and curiosity, shared commitment to the ideas and artistic practice, etc. In the moment, the only 'network' that interests me is the one we have been discussing. However, through the *IMK* project we are starting to think about other networks. We have started to explore the possibility of "linking" MA level performing arts (dance) teaching programs where these new choreographic objects can be explored for their potential to stimulate interesting MA level learning. This is a direct result of our partnership with Maaïke Bleeker at the University of Utrecht. That may become a network of some sort. Another might emerge from the partnership with Gaby Wijers and the Netherlands Media Art Institute looking at the cultural preservation of contemporary dance. We have to see...

**What tools that have come into being with the development of the *Accademia Mobile* and its research projects do you believe are most valid for dissemination. Why?**

That's not easy to answer, but let's say that in part the research point is to explore a variety of mediated transmission possibilities that communicate sophisticated 'dance ideas' in the absence of the body. This helps us understand what 'dance ideas' are better, that's the whole point actually. So any tools that are developed with this core idea in mind are valid for dissemination in my opinion. But the term "tools" contains a lot of essential information. Alternative modes of analysis, classification methods, notational devices, descriptions, theory and forms of measurement are all in the background of these tools; and all should be disseminated along with them. It's like saying: "okay here's the tool. And here is how we designed it, here is what we try to use it for and here are our questions about it that are yet to be answered. Now let's try to work with it and discuss it... and see what we can learn." That is exactly what the DS/DM installation design team is doing in the context of *IMK* with teachers and students of the AHK Dance Department.

**The publications that have evolved in time, *Company in the School, Capturing Intention*, what do they reflect of this importance? How have they contributed to spreading the *knowledge that is dance*?**

Good question and hard to say exactly, if not impossible. Knowledge that is dance has no “citation index” like scholarly and scientific fields. So that’s interesting because how would one really track the spreading of knowledge that is dance (again ‘in the absence of the body’). I need to think about that question some more; but obviously part of the challenge is how does one spread “knowledge” when the actual constitution of that knowledge is still under investigation.

**ICKamsterdam is currently investigating other research lines, like the *Dance Dramaturgy* project that focuses on issues of *Dance and Music*. Do you think that a similar approach to networking can or should be taken in order to circulate its findings?**

Maybe, it depends. What has been important for the ‘choreographic objects’ project and this recognition of this ‘community of practice’ (and the formal establishing of the *International Associates Network*) is, so far, an acknowledged set of similar impulses and questions, and the possibility of sharing research approaches. I think for any project looking for this connection makes for a productive form of self reflection – identifying those other groups pursuing similar deep questions. But maybe if the network can’t be built on this basis there is another way to think about the circulation of findings.