

EDITORIAL

Dance Documentation and the Ethics of Embodied Knowledge

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The claim that performance disappears has motivated extensive work in recording, notation, and archiving. Documentation can preserve choreographic structures, support restaging, provide evidence of overlooked artists, and make research possible across time and distance. It can also encourage the assumption that a recording contains the performance in a stable form.

A camera selects position, duration, frame, focus, and sound. Notation depends on a system that makes some features easier to record than others. Motion capture translates bodies into data points structured by hardware and software. An interview creates a retrospective account shaped by questions and context. Documentation is therefore interpretation. Reason's analysis of live-performance documentation emphasizes the relationship among disappearance, representation, and audience expectations. Ethical practice begins by admitting that records are partial.

Choreographic authorship is frequently assigned to a single creator even when performers develop timing, movement material, spatial choices, and relational knowledge during rehearsal. Documentation can intensify this imbalance by making dancers visible while leaving their intellectual contribution unnamed.

Projects should record contributor roles and invite performers to describe how material developed. Credit may distinguish choreography, performance, improvisational development, rehearsal direction, dramaturgy, cultural consultation, and technical capture. These categories will vary, but the principle is consistent: the body in the image is not merely an instrument through which someone else's knowledge passes.

Foster's work on kinesthetic relation-

ships and Lepecki's account of the body as archive both challenge the separation of dance knowledge from embodied practice. Documentation should accordingly preserve accounts of sensation, attention, effort, and decision, not only external shape.

Consent obtained for recording a performance may not cover training a recognition system, creating commercial educational products, editing a dancer into a different context, or making footage permanently downloadable. Archives should separate permission to record, preserve, provide research access, publish, and license reuse.

Participants need understandable information about storage, security, access, duration, and withdrawal. Complete withdrawal may become impossible after lawful publication or distribution; this limitation should be stated before recording. Where a record contains several performers, one person's withdrawal may affect others. Governance procedures should address such conflicts rather than promise absolute control that cannot be delivered.

Traditional, ceremonial, or community-based dance may involve collective authority beyond individual performers. Public performance does not necessarily authorize decontextualized reuse. Archives should consult appropriate custodians and allow layered or time-limited access.

A video without metadata can become misleadingly authoritative. Useful context includes date, venue, event, camera position, version, cast, rehearsal stage, music and rights information, production conditions, and statements about what the record does not show. If a work changes across performances, the archive should resist presenting one version as

definitive unless the creators explicitly designate it.

Process materials can reveal development but may also expose vulnerable experimentation or interpersonal conflict. Deposits should allow embargoes and differentiated access. Preserving everything is not automatically ethical; selection should balance future research value with the conditions under which materials were created.

An archive serves dance when records return to practice. Workshops, annotated restagings, conversations with original participants, accessible interfaces, and support for embodied research can connect documentation with learning. Bench's work on dance and digital cultures shows that circulation can create new modes of participation while reorganizing movement and identity. Archives should study these afterlives rather than assume preservation is complete when files are stored.

Restaging should acknowledge difference. Bodies, training, spaces, and cultural contexts change. A responsible reconstruction can document where it follows a record, where it relies on memory, and where new interpretation enters. Fidelity is strongest when it is transparent about invention.

Dance documentation cannot defeat disappearance, nor should that be its measure of success. It can preserve traces rich enough to support future questions while respecting the people and relationships from which those traces emerge. Consent, contributor credit, contextual metadata, layered access, and visible interpretation turn documentation from capture into stewardship. Dance remains embodied knowledge even when its records become digital.