EDITORIAL

SIMON ELLIS
Coventry University

LEE MILLER
Edge Hill University

Opposite sides of something

Simon

Choreographic Practices (*CHOR*) started in 2010 as a space for artist-scholars working with and through choreography to publish aspects of their practice-research. It more or less follows the conventions of a traditional academic journal: it has an editorial team and board, there is blind peer-review, the journal exists behind a paywall and hard copies are hosted at academic libraries or down-loadable through the labyrinth of publishing payment schemes. These conventions, to a greater or lesser extent, shape what is published.

CHOR is distinct from, for example, the *Journal of Artistic Research* (*JAR*)[1] that began in 2011 and that is entirely open access, exists solely online, and publishes what it calls *expositions* that are 'exposing practice as research' (Schwab 2019: 161). These expositions are closer to being *artistic artefacts* than *CHOR* in how they present research, but are constrained in other ways: by platform (the

expositions are very difficult to navigate, say, on a tablet or smartphone), and by the ways in which images, moving images, audio and text are able to be designed and delivered online. Although these expositions are starkly different from materials published in *CHOR*, they are remarkably alike to each other in the same way that articles published in *CHOR* (or any other more conventional scholarly journals) are alike to each other. Where they both are weakest is not about how they are presented but rather because they reflect a persistent problem in artistic research – the problem of creating context and dialogue.

The practice-research theoretician Henk Borgdorff suggests that it is 'fruitful' (2006: 8) in artistic research to distinguish between object, process and context: *Object* is the work of art, *process* is the making of art and *context* is the art world. He makes a point about assessment in practice-research:

> Especially in the assessing (and funding) of research in the arts, it makes quite some difference whether one exclusively examines the results in the form of concrete art objects, or whether one also looks at the documentation of the process that has led to those results or at the context which is partially constitutive of the meaning of both the object and the process.
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> (Borgdorff 2006: 9)

It is probably a useful thing – while doing any form of practice-research – to consider the balance of Borgdorff's simple distinctions between object, process and context. The problem is that practice-research has by and large suffered from a systemic problem in understanding and building on context.

In traditional performance studies and dance scholarship the role of writers and theoreticians is to generate context for artistic works they have seen and are thinking about. Such scholars are bridge-builders between artists and their artistic work and the circulation of ideas and understandings in the academic community. Creating, describing or ascribing contexts is, more or less, their function and academics and artists both benefit from this strange ecosystem.

For artist-scholars the work of articulating context rests on our own shoulders. That without this work, we are missing what is *the* fundamental characteristic and function of any research: to use publication processes to create dialogues with other research and researchers. In other words, unless we are finding ways for our artistic-scholarly practices to *be with* the thinking, ideas, practices and outcomes of other artistic-scholars, then we are failing in our responsibility as researchers.

Borgdorff's thinking from 2006 is that context 'stands for the "art world": the public reception, the cultural and historical environment, the industry etc.' (2006: 8–9). The most common historical form of creating context in artistic research has been for artist-scholars to build theoretical contexts for their artistic practices. You will be aware of the regular suspects: Deleuze and Guattari, and Rancière, with Barad making a late charge for top spot. This is a curious and seductive phenomenon – that as

an artist finding my way in the academy I might seek to solidify (or justify or validate) my artistic practice by framing it in broadly theoretical terms. The theory-practice debate goes back a long way in practice-research (see for instance Thomson 2003), way before we in the United Kingdom replaced the *-led* with an *-as* and then dropped the *as* altogether. Fashion, turn to the left. Dance with me – don't dance with me, no. Beep-beep (Bowie 1980). But I digress. For the most part such theoretical justifications are not dialogic; they are not trading zones between practitioners and disciplines. Those theoreticians like Deleuze and Rancière are not engaged in practice-research – its possibilities, limitations, questions and futures.

All research is always in danger of creating a boundary between itself and its community of practice. A boundary is a particular kind of edge. It is relatively inert, akin to an 'eight-lane highway isolating parts of the city from each other' (Sennett 2012: 79). Rather, what all research demands between publications is more akin to a border – a 'more active edge' like a 'mixed-use street at the edge between two communities' (Sennett 2012: 79). For the sociologist Sennett, a border is a place where people, ideas and materials intermingle, a place in which it is not possible to be isolated from others. It is a messy and active place of exchange, crossover and cross-fertilization.

The historian and philosopher of science Peter Galison applied the metaphor of trading zones to collaborations in science and technology (Galison cited in Garbolino 2013: 81). He wrote that '[t]wo groups can agree on rules of exchange even if they ascribe utterly different significance to the objects being exchanged; they may even disagree on the meaning of the exchange process itself' (Galison 1997: 783). For science philosopher Paolo Garbolino, Galison's insight is useful when we think about research communities of practice: 'Knowledge moves across boundaries and coordination around specific problems and sites is possible even where there are not globally shared meanings' (Garbolino 2013: 81).

The contexts we consider most vital to the development of artistic practices are those that trade ideas and actions openly and directly. They are contexts that we are explicitly responsible for as artists-scholars; contexts in which we seek networks of understanding, and explicitly trade across often messy boundaries or zones of activity.

Perhaps it is inevitable that in a relatively new field of practice (practice-research) in a relatively young discipline (dance studies) that we want to carve out spaces for ourselves, to give our artistic work some standing, to say 'I am here, this is my space'. However, if we continue to do this we are failing our community of practice, and indeed communities with which we might trade. I suggest that unless each of us is taking responsibility for articulating the nature and specifics of our community of practice, and the ideas, understandings and practices most intriguing or provocative in those communities of practice, then we are not really engaged in research. We are more likely pressing towards a type of *mesearch* (Rees 2019) that itself tends towards solipsism.

In 1945 the (neo-liberal) economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek wrote a seminal essay called 'The use of knowledge in society'. In it he compared centralized planning of economic systems with decentralized planning of competitive systems. Hayek suggested that the balance of these two systems depends on 'the relative importance of the different kinds of knowledge' (1945: 521) and access to these knowledge forms. What was clear is it is far too easy for centralized systems to underestimate 'the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place' (Hayek 1945: 521) – knowledge that is localized and fleeting. Crucially, Hayek understood that 'local information is often something that local agents would prefer to use for their own purposes' (Harford 2012: n.pag.). Here lies the tension of any scholarly journal. In many respects it is an attempt to centralize understanding or knowledge. That choreographic scholars and artists might read *CHOR* as a kind of hub of choreographic thinking and artistic-scholarly practices. At the same time, it ought to be a place that attempts to gather localized and fleeting understandings within which conversations with other practices are constructed and accumulated. Such accumulation of understanding is fundamentally distinct from singular bubbles of artistic-scholarship that fail to trade with other practitioners and communities of practice.

What if we opened the way we understand our research far beyond normative and finite boundaries of participation, temporality and audience?

Lee

On the same day that I read Simon's first draft of this editorial, I am watching and rewatching the first minute and 40 seconds of Tosh Basco's (fka Boychild) '1,000 caresses' (2018). On each watch, I am struck by the eloquence of this hand, how it stands in for a body, for a face. It moves towards and away from the camera. I feel a frisson as the crook of an elbow slides into the frame. It feels exposing, unintended. But of course, it's not. It's a moment of choreography designed to let me see something previously hidden. The wave, playful and silly, the backbend that isn't a backbend because this is not a body, but an arm. Nevertheless, to me it has become a backbend. As the hand drops below the frame I feel a sense of loss, because I know that when the hand reappears, something will change. There will be a development of the motif. I know this because I know how performance works. I know how performance works because I am an expert.

Inevitably, at one minute and 45 seconds, the second hand appears. The solo is now a duet, and my heart sinks a little. Perhaps this is because that one hand could be anything, could be a face, could be a body, could be a city. But two hands? This pairing? They compete as they complete. Maybe my disappointment is framed here by the conversation I had with Kate Marsh, published in this issue. We spoke at length about the ideal body in dance, and how bodies are so often othered if they

don't conform to the idealized form of the form. Maybe it was that conversation that informed my disappointment, but I suspect that as much as anything it is just the editor in me, looking for a way to tidy my thoughts and tie things together.

Then the two hands meet; they touch, tickle and play. But rather than enjoy the exchange, my brain completes the image. I track down the forearm, and I begin to imagine the bicep, the tricep, the shoulder. I imagine the scapula, sliding over the ribs in the upper back, bridging the space between the arm and the spine. I am plunging in now, along the spine, surfing as the iliac crests, and then diving in again. I am imagining the iliopsoas and its work to stabilize, to support bipedal locomotion, another bridge from spine to thigh. Now I have lost Tosh Basco, I am too deep inside my own interiority. What am I doing here? What is my role here? That is not my hand, and those are not my arms, and yet I find myself compelled to write about them.

I find myself asking this, due in part to Simon's assertion above that in traditional approaches to dance scholarship, a writer builds bridges between an artist and the ideas of the academy. Perhaps I need to go back to go on.

In a different part of our lives, Simon and I work together on another ongoing project. That project is *Midlifing* (2020), a podcast in which we talk about our lives, and our friendship. We spend a few hours each week talking and recording the conversations we have. There is no purpose, it is not *about* anything. In these conversations we disagree. Not loudly, not angrily, but we often find ourselves on opposite sides of a topic, trying our best to understand the perspective of the other. It is his evocation of the bridge that makes me wonder if in this conjoined editorial, we are perhaps on opposite sides of something. Much like Basco's hands, we compete and complete. In a gentle way, I think we might be doing the same thing here in this editorial. And deep in my humoral self, I feel an old anxiety spike, expertness, completion and the ideal. These are all the things that sit on one side of the bridge.

How long does it take to cross a bridge? A day, a week, a year? What about 21 years? That's how long Simon has been an artist finding his way in the academy. I find myself wondering at what point he will feel as though he has found his way, and hoping that he never does. Because although the bridge speaks to both the border and the boundary, it is a thing entirely of itself. If Simon never leaves the bridge, or better yet, if he slides Troll-like beneath its span, he will find himself in the edge-lands of Marion Shoard. Although Shoard is writing about those real places between, the 'peculiar landscape [that] is only the latest version of an interfacial rim that has always separated settlements from the countryside to a greater or lesser extent' (2002: 117), it is perhaps a conceptual territory in which I hope these conversations can reside.

Or put another way, I think I am less interested in Simon's sharing across borders, which however open, will always assume a them and an us, than I am in living under the bridge. I worry

that in trying to untangle the problems of how we talk–write about practice, we run the risk of taking a side: expert or amateur; academic or artist; audience or performer.

Which takes me back to those hands, those arms that are not mine. And yet I feel compelled to write about them.

In Volume 12.1 of *CHOR* we welcome the writing and thinking of Nevarez Encinias, Michael J. Love, Kirsi Heimonen, Tua Helve, Kate Marsh and Casey Avant.

In 'On self-extraction' Nevarez Encinias imagines flamenco choreography and performance as an artisanal craft. Nevarez wrote the materials under lockdown conditions in New Mexico and questions the seductive nature of *self-expression* in choreographic and performance practices.

Michael J. Love's contribution – '*Mix(tap)ing*: A method for sampling the past to envision the future' – digs into the politics of race in tap dancing. Love describes and presents his Black and queer choreographic practice of mixing and sampling as a means to express freedom and possibility.

Kirsi Heimonen, 'Walking in a cage: Attuning to atmospheric intensities through corporeality' explores the artistic act of walking inside a chicken wire cage within the grounds of a former mental health facility in Helsinki. This week-long incursion into the space served to evoke memories and connect communities.

Tua Helve, 'Time, being, discourse: Elements of professional friendship in the collaboration between a costume designer and a choreographer', stays in Finland to interrogate the collaboration between costume designer Karoliina Koiso-Kanttila and choreographer Carl Knif. Central to their work and Helve's writing is the concept of 'friendship'.

Co-editor Lee Miller shares a conversation with the remarkable Kate Marsh: 'Objects of curiosity'. Among other things, they discuss how the gaze often carries with it an expectation of what should be seen.

Casey Avant reviews *Corporeal Politics: Dancing East Asia* by Katherine Mezur and Emily Wilcox. She notes the strong relationship between dance and identity in the book, and how it draws attention to familiar issues of power and agency facing East Asian artists today.

Finally, we would like to thank our editorial assistant team – Amanda Hamp, Josh Slater and Brianna Figueroa – for their beautiful and careful work on Volume 12.1. Sadly, Amanda has decided it's time to move on from *CHOR*. A huge thank you Amanda for your insight, integrity and rigour. We can also now welcome Rachael Davies to the team. Rachael is a curator, researcher and writer living in London, and is currently an M4C Ph.D. candidate at the Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE) at Coventry University in collaboration with Chisenhale Dance Space, London.

Andiamo!

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Contributor details

Simon Ellis

 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8061-3568

Lee Miller

 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6804-3427