

Dance, Archives, Disability and Ablebodiedness

Thinking about archives, dance, disability and able-bodied-ness, raises several questions to be explored in terms of narrative, language and equality.

Themes explored at the event included:

- How can we develop a vocabulary to talk about disability, dance and archives?
- How can we use it as a tool to make disability dance visible in the archive in a way that is not focussed on able-bodiedness?
- What can archives do to start to explore these pressing and timely questions?
- What might artists need to consider when thinking about offering work to archives?
- Who has the power to decide which archives, traces, documents of (disability) dance will be preserved for the future in a professional, sustainable way?

Key takeaways:

- This is not about re-inventing vocabulary but looking at specific vocabulary within minority communities and rethinking mainstream vocabulary using the lens of the intersections between dance and disability.
- Who gets the power to use those words? The heritage sector builds its catalogues – there are controlled vocabularies, definitive records, authorised heritage discourse, etc. but there must be an awareness that the discourse is dynamic and not fixed and archivists and catalogues need to find technological ways to deal with this dynamism and provide opportunities for everyone to engage with that.
- Using tech of annotation and crowdsourcing, collecting audience annotations, can be useful, but it seems that we need something ‘in-between’ where we can keep descriptions close to communities and help communities to self-institutionalise and have procedures to get conceptual agreements, develop instruments to steer democratic discussions on how things should be named/‘labelled’. These discussions will be contentious, dynamic and open to evolution, so we need platforms that capture the process of discussion as well as the results. Being open to fluidity not fixity.
- How to archive ‘marginal’ practices?
- Gatekeeping: dependency on gatekeepers within the sector for being accepted and visible – how to counteract this?
- Is there then a need for a counter-archive? Strategies of counter-archiving: as a process, as tactics that can disrupt labels.
- The ‘in between’ strategy – should we think of the archive as a progression of a building of knowledge that we lock and store away, or more as a process of rethinking, as an ‘in-between’ space? What can that in-between space be? Might it be a curated space for annotation? If so, who has the power to curate this space? This is as a dynamic, moving, and potentially ‘messy’ space that resists and invites labelling at the same time.
- How might we think about sustainability in terms of ‘in-betweenness’? How can counter-archival, bottom-up strategies from communities and more top-down, counter-archival strategies from institutions meet in the middle – so even if community (a problematic notion) is dispersed, the archive can be sustained?
- Artist involvement: How aware are today's artists of the importance of preserving the content they generate as part of the creative process and for the future?
- What are the ethical considerations of all this when archival content is a body not an object?
- An associated Padlet collating collective thinking from this event is available here: <https://padlet.com/ab4928/egax4fr7coog55b2>

Video: <https://youtu.be/4oHT4JFVZb8>