

## Articulating Embedded Choreographies: Implicit knowledge as/and choreographic strategies

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As a contemporary choreographer, I have often reflected on my processes and attempted to articulate the choices, intuitions and applications that I use in the devising and crafting process. This fascination with the unspeakable lure toward certain choreographic choices and strategies provides a springboard to the proposed research. How do I begin to define something? By its physical properties or by the connotations and associations it inspires? Do we know what something is from what we have heard, seen, read or experienced?

This paper focuses on articulating these choices by engaging four interpretations of Michael Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge in the choreographic process. In this research, the philosophy of *personal knowledge* (Polanyi 1958) permeates multiple fields of study, including the *art* of choreography. Polanyi (1958) originally interpreted personal knowledge as a philosophy of knowledge management to explore the notions of *tacit knowledge* (understood or implied without being stated) and scientific practice's *explicit knowledge* (very specific, clear, or detailed knowledge systems). The only demand on the researcher is then to pay homage to the philosophical document through the philosophical present. CD Broad (1959:815) argues the basic requirement of philosophical theory is that "it shall do justice to all the facts characteristic of the region with which it deals [...] and that it shall neither ignore nor distort any of them".

This becomes vital to the research presented in this thesis as the focus is on contemporary choreographic processes through an interpretation of *a* history. The research engages a philosophy of tacit knowledge (*history*) and the historical interpretations of this philosophy in contemporary arts practice (*choreographic practice*). The choreographer then becomes a practising historian through their embodied choreographic body that creates intuitively through the process of making dance. All bodies can then be viewed as having histories and being histories. Gerda Lerner (1998: 199) argues that:

All human beings are practising historians [...] we stress different events as having been decisive at different times in our life history, and as we do so, we give those events new meanings [...] what we remember, what we stress as significant, and what we omit of our past defines our present.

Contemporary choreographers are constantly challenged and tasked with reimagining new interpretations and approaches to their choreographic craft. Doing research into the processes embedded in choreographic practice becomes vital as it forges renewed conversations and interrogations of the *art* of choreography. According to Friedman (2012:7), in South Africa "dance makers have been increasingly challenged to re-appraise how dance

has been traditionally composed". It can be argued that choreography is an embodied process that continuously shapes and reveals unique approaches determined by the choreographer through their interpretations of various historical, philosophical and contextual choreographic offerings. This paper seeks to articulate the seemingly un-articulate nature of tacit knowledge.

Using the four interpretations of tacit knowledge, as proposed by Harald Grimen (1991), this research aims to add to the growing field of artist-scholar choreographic research to archive the research and the embedded choreographic processes within my own work and creative processes. I applied Grimen's interpretations to explore new potentialities for contemporary choreographic strategies and the way in which the choreographer embodies these interpretations through the process of creating and crafting an embodied dance-based physical theatre work. I apply the four interpretations to my work, *LIFE a history of distance* (Snyman 2017).

Roberson (2015:99) suggests that "South African dance is constantly evolving, and [that]... traditional boundaries and distinctions [are] increasingly blurred", and that "'contemporary dance' [...] embraces a broadly fluid spectrum". The question that then arises is 'What *new* can be learned from history?'

The choreographer's body then becomes an historical document that intuitively engages with the research through the choreographic process. Language and the physical thus should collude in a present moment (a moment of being). In the exact moment of doing "our bodies are a manifestation of the lives we lead and the histories that we have paved" (Snyman and Lambert 2010:311). These embodied manifestations present themselves through the intuitive process of the creative research moment.

### **Biography:**

**Bailey Snyman** is an internationally recognised dance researcher, educator, performer and award-winning choreographer. He has lectured at numerous universities, worked with multiple schools and continues to offer creative dance workshops. Bailey has been Associate Artistic Director of Matchbox Theatre Collective since 2006 and is currently completing his PhD in Philosophy and Choreography at the University of the Witwatersrand.