

Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices
Issue 11.1 *Wright-ing the Somatic: Narrating the bodily*

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Editorial

This special issue emerged from the two-day *Symposium Wright-ing the Somatic: dancing & writing Professional Practice* that we curated at Middlesex University in August 2016 <https://vimeo.com/274485377> . This symposium was the first in a trilogy we have subsequently curated (*Narrating the Somatic: gathering voices, sharing practices* <https://vimeo.com/274482762> in Feb 2018, and the forthcoming *Queering the Somatic: interrupting the narrative* in November 2019). The Symposiums have been clustered around an interest in how we move through, between, and across the communication of dance practices in order to share our processes for, and understanding of, the moving body. The Symposiums respond to calls to find resonant ways to share the embodied/emplaced perspectives and knowing(s) that the somatic practice of dance gives to artist-scholars as they engage with dance, become dance, or witness dancing.

During the symposium, we (the scholar-artists and practitioners of dance and somatic studies attending) explored how we understand that somatic experience underpins meaning making. We also came to feel the importance of giving attention to how this *bodily* understanding is captured, storied, shared and articulated as knowledge, without disrupting its *felt* corporeal origins. This special issue, *Wright-ing the Somatic: Narrating the bodily*, responds to the importance of this attention. The journal explores the ways that we afford for the somatic in our communication of dance. There is a gravity to this task because the affordances we use to describe some 'thing' will also always effect understanding of that 'thing', thus how we communicate dance also prescribes what dance can be seen as and what it can become. It has been important to us that we hear from and encourage people who identify as artists, scholars and as well as those who straddle these spaces as artist-scholars. Thus, the symposiums and this subsequent issue, *Symposium Wright-ing the Somatic: narrating the bodily* offers contributions from a range of voices from across experiences and at different stages in their practices.

In order to acknowledge the complexities of communicating the full empirical experience of somatic awareness we offered contributors parallel modes of articulating their work through the use of image and film. Therefore, alongside this written special issue some contributors have also offered videos that accompany their paper. These are indicated in the body of their papers as web-links.

We have curated a collection of papers and films that together discuss aspects of communicating the somatic knowing of dance and documenting that inquiry. Following John Dewey, we are considering communication as an act of sharing that involves a partnership of understanding.

'The heart of language is not 'expression of something antecedent,...It is communication; the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners' (Dewey, 1958p. 179)

We suggest the somatic knowing of dance challenges us to enter into communication across and through the skin of the material body to the wider human lived-experience of the partnership of being. In this special issue, we have curated papers that explore how we tell the tale of our movement craft (the wright-ing of dance), our embodied experiences and share our practices: how we narrate the bodily.

Inspired by Margret Whitehead's discussion of 'Physical Literacy' (2010) as physical competencies developed through the somatic-knowing of being in *reflective*, and *transactional* in environment, we contrarily (because of its dualist overtones) use the metaphor of 'literacy' to provide a framework to explore narrating the bodily. We have theorised literacy as a network of *reading*, *comprehension*, and *writing*. These become three thematic entry points across this special issue. Together the contributors address the web of communication between the felt of movement and the sharing of that knowledge/experience.

Reading the bodily: this entry point collects around ideas of how the bodily 'reads' understands environment. We ask if you sense your bodily 'differently' then do you sense the world differently? This is asking how the somatic reading of the world changes the world's ontology. We are interested here in the possibilities that the sensing bodily of knowing has to show us new ways of engaging with the world. In this section Haike Stollbrock Trujilo discusses new ways to experience the world through the sensing of the fascia body. She discusses the role of fascia as an integrated wholeness of bodily experience and how this recreates the world through which it moves. Stephanie Scheubeck suggests that sharing the unique sensory narrative of the individual offers new approaches in dance. She begins this exploration by theorising her own experience of having synaesthesia and the unique way this informs her creative practice. Her paper underlines how communicating our own reading of the somatic-of-being offers understanding towards the complexities and possibilities for interactions with each other. Using the notion of embodiment/emplacement, Adesola Akinleye explores the importance of young people developing a sense of the somatic-reading of the world-around from an early age. She suggests that live dance performances for young audiences acknowledges and legitimises for them the notion that there is a physical literacy or engagement with world (in the same way written books introduces them to an ethereal world).

Comprehension of the flesh – narrating on and with the bodily: this entry point collects around the actualisation of somatic comprehension and how we document that this comprehension happens. Carol-Marie Webster explores how the bodily of dance expresses a comprehension of the lived-experience of the flesh at individual, cultural, and social levels through an understanding of the somatic sensation of movement. Drawing on a dance artist from Jamaica, Webster underlines how a somatic understanding of movement is ever present in how we communicate dance. For instance, her use of Jamaican Patois in the paper illustrates how even spoken language itself is rhythmical and cannot be separated from the embodied experience of movement it comes from. Sandra Parker questions how the dancer and choreographer document the dance. She is particularly interested in what is valued in the documentation. She asks if attention to the somatic-comprehension of what

the material flesh of the body feels like to do the dance is sacrificed in order to capture the aesthetic of watching the dance. This is a tension between comprehending what is felt, and comprehending what is observed. She is particularly interested in what the felt can offer and recall in choreographic processes. While Bronwyn Preece explores how identifying specific somatic practices reveals the experiences of comprehension of the flesh in relation to its environment. She draws on Butoh, as a somatic practice, through which she experiences a comprehension of bodily self-in-environment.

Writing the bodily narratives of the Somatic: this entry point collects around the fragility of movement in the face of the way it is communicated. This raises questions about how the writing of the somatic changes or affects its nature. Throughout the issue we value developing 'an' understanding of the somatic in terms of reflection on how it is written or referred to. How the stories we construct for the felt-sense impact on the narrative of being-in-dance. Jennifer Leigh writes about the narratives of the somatic she creates in order to teach dance to her students. She wonders if these narratives pave the singular path of her own bodily experiences or if they model methods for her students to develop a somatic narrative for their own bodily understanding of dance. Gemma Collard-Stokes suggests that how we recall the 'suchness' (essence) of dancing or watching a dance affects how it is constituted. Therefore, when we write about dance we affect what dance can be. Collard-Stokes suggests that in writing of the suchness (essence) of a thing allows us to re-create and change the memory of it. She considers how the sensorial action of writing, marking on the page, informs the movement it describes.

Across the papers offered in this special issue of the Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices are haunting questions that ask us to consider the porosity of time and space that recounting somatic experiences heightens. For us again and again we return to a sense that, as curators, artists and scholars, we are a part of the 21st Century project to repair the rifts caused by dualism, imperialism, colonialism and return to the calm complexity of difference, sensation and response that challenges binary logic. A binary logic of still certainty that the somatic of movement denies. As we discuss and share our practices we acknowledge the need to articulate beyond words and also within them. As dance artists and scholars, we can contribute to stories of alternative and parallel ways of understanding of what it is to be in the world.

References

Dewey, J. (1958). *Experience and nature*. New York,: Dover Publications.

Whitehead, M. (2010). *Physical literacy : throughout the lifecourse* (1st ed.). London: Routledge.