

Dear Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund

Please find my Project Report enclosed. My project ran from 10<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2012. Please accept my apologies for the delay in sending this report. I travelled to California and Philadelphia in order to attend two conferences and undertake practical research with choreographer Colette Brandenburg. I achieved my aims of expanding my theoretical and practical knowledge, having an opportunity to network with other scholars, and exploring ways to work collaboratively on choreography from different continents. My PhD research and professional development has been greatly enhanced, and I am already preparing a paper to submit to the American Society of Aesthetics meeting in 2013, hopefully continuing to develop my involvement in philosophical aesthetics.

The outcomes of the practical research I undertook are ongoing. We are continuing to develop ideas for a digital project and have some rough material that we will continue to develop from our prospective geographical bases.

I have enclosed a copy of the paper I presented at the Graduate Conference in Aesthetics. My aim here was to raise interest in dance as an art-form which poses many interesting questions. I was invited to present a commentary on a paper about music, but drew comparisons with dance. Many people reacted positively to my paper and were very interested in the nature of dance, therefore highlighting the successful fulfilment of one of my goals.

All in all, it was an incredibly rewarding trip and I am highly grateful to the Fund for the opportunity. I would recommend to other applicants that they use the opportunity to develop as many areas of interest and meet as many people as possible. This was my approach and it proved very enriching and inspiring. The achievements of the project are still being developed both choreographically and theoretically, and I am continuing to discover ways of interweaving theory and practice.

Thanks again for the opportunity.

All the best,

Hetty

## **REPORT**

From: Hetty Blades

This trip allowed me to gain valuable experience in academic and practice-based contexts. I was able to expand my theoretical knowledge, greatly enhancing my current PhD research, as well as work creatively.

The first conference I attended on this trip was the American Society of Aesthetics Pacific Division Meeting. This entailed three days of presentations on various topics relating to philosophical aesthetics. There was a small number of dance-specific papers presented at the conference, inspiring a multitude of questions and avenues for further research. It was also a great opportunity to learn more about the fundamental questions in aesthetics and an opportunity to develop my understanding of how dance relates philosophically to other art forms.

I was fortunate enough to meet many leading theorists in dance, including David Davies and Graham McFee. The work of these two scholars has had vast impact on my past and current research. I was able to develop my theories further through talking to people working in similar fields and listening to the ideas of others. Although dance is often under-represented in philosophical circles, there were five or six dance scholars attending the conference, giving us an opportunity to share ideas, and raise dance-specific issues in broader philosophical discussion. The connections I made with other academics and the knowledge I gained from the conference will be of great benefit in the future.

I then travelled to LA, where I worked with Colette Brandenburg for one week. The focus of the week was to develop a digital project, which we could continue to work on collaboratively, from our respective continents. We spent a lot of time discussing the many ways of using the Internet and digital technology in creative practice. These discussions were very useful for my PhD, as well as our joint practice. My research is concerned with the impact of digital technology on dance ontology. Discussing these issues in an artistic, as opposed to academic context was very informative.

As well as continuing to develop some of the work we created for The Federation last year, we played with the idea of developing a contemporary dance performance app for an iPhone. We wanted to use random information to dictate movement content. We used the weather forecast as the stimulus for generating a daily dance sequence, experienced through your phone or computer. We worked with another dancer on a series of rule-based improvisations, based on components such as location, time of day and weather conditions. We filmed these experiments and worked with different ways of structuring the footage, which fed back into new 'live' sequences

This research raised many questions about the nature of performance in the digital age. Particularly we are concerned with thinking more about how movement material can be generated using different techniques, and employing technology in creation, as well as for documentation. This project is ongoing, and we are continuing to experiment with structuring the improvisation footage in different ways, against random criteria. This period of development was enriching creatively, but also allowed me to marry some of the philosophical ideas from the conference with

choreographic process. Furthermore, the practical experience of creation raised further philosophical questions, informing my research enormously.

It was interesting to re-work some of our performance work from last year. The nature of this performance was reliant upon shared space with the audience (a traditionally 'live' context). Watching these on film helped me to understand the way in which documentation is crucial to the ongoing identity of a work. If the choreographic concept is not translatable through recording (as was the case with some of our work), the nature and need for documentation is called into question. This helped us to think about meaningful documentation, and the relevance of live performance in the digital sphere. Hence our decision to work on a highly digitalised concept (the iPhone app).

The last part of my trip was the Graduate Conference in Aesthetics in Philadelphia. I was invited to present a commentary at this conference. This was the first time I had spoken at a conference. It was a nerve-wracking but enormously important experience. The focus of this meeting was also philosophical aesthetics. However, I was the only dance scholar there. The paper I was commenting on was by Andrea Baldini and concerned the role of silence in music composition. I took the opportunity to draw comparisons with the role of stillness in dance. This generated a good response from other attendees. I was able to have many conversations about the philosophical nature of dance with people who had not considered the art form previously. I feel that this was an important experience for me, but also significant for raising the profile of dance scholarship in philosophical and academic circles. Because it was a graduate conference, I feel that it was particularly important for me to attend, as I was able to engage with people who are working in similar areas, and whose work will probably interact with mine throughout my career.

On a personal level, this conference was also important as it gave me my first experience of presenting in a non-institutional context. Coming from a dance background, with no formal training in philosophy, it was very important to me that I was able to articulate my ideas appropriately within such a heavily theoretical context. The way in which my commentary was received has really helped me to develop confidence in my research, and presentational skills. In fact, I am already due to present at another conference this week.

This trip had very clear aims, which I met successfully. It was important to me that I had the opportunity to bridge my theory and practice. Although I am now concentrating on my PhD research, all of my thoughts and analysis is informed by my training and performance history. We cannot separate dance scholarship from the practice of dance making.

As a dance theorist I am particularly passionate about the unique and significant philosophical issues raised by the form. Therefore, the opportunity to discuss this

with people already in the field, and demonstrating to those who are not, was invaluable. The choreographic outcomes and research experience are continuing to be of benefit to my work, making it a highly successful trip, and one that would not have been possible without the support of the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund.

Hetty Blades