



Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Fund Report : USA

Kerry Nicholls : February 2015

Please find enclosed my report of my time spent in the USA in February 2015.

This professional development trip was initiated as a vital opportunity for me to assess my current working practice, to rejuvenate my established pedagogic and mentoring methods with new knowledge, and to analyse the creative decisions of international artists and organisations.

My trip had two strands and lasted for four weeks. I split my time between the Juilliard School at the Lincoln Center in New York, and shadowing Liz Lerman in Washington DC within various settings. It was a full and intense period of teaching, networking, observing, assessing, digesting new information, attending performances and workshops, and reflection.

As I packed my bags, reports of blizzards in the US circulated and I landed in JFK to heavy snow, and below freezing temperatures. However, I had spectacular dance adventures planned and I was determined that the snow was not going to stunt this profitable opportunity.

I started my research at The Juilliard School. I met with a warm, efficient welcome and a tour of the beautiful facilities. I loved how the music, drama and dance departments were in such vibrant overlapping proximity. As I walked through the corridors I heard orchestral works being rehearsed next door to a dance studio, and drama students reciting text in the corridor. I observed the students taking classical ballet classes and subsequently had the joy of working with the seniors. These twenty seven talented dancers were open, physically curious and enthusiastic to access my work. These workshops aided my research and enabled me to see first-hand how they processed my approaches, and the differences between their work and those in European training institutions that I have experienced. The faculty were affable, and hospitable in giving time to discuss curriculum and their work with the students. I also had the opportunity to lead a seminar on career enhancement for their graduating year and we talked candidly about their training and personal futures. It was enlightening and beneficial to speak with them outside of a studio-setting and collate feedback. I had a long and enjoyable dinner with Larry Rhodes - the Director of the Dance Division at Juilliard - to discuss his school philosophy, training ethos and vision. This meaningful conversation became a prominent accent in my trip. I also had the opportunity of a long discussion with the Director of the Dance Department at Harvard University to compare and contrast with my collected knowledge. Alongside these events in New York, I taught open class at two independent studios so as to get a sense of the professional freelance sector, and was given a mini-tour around the fabulous BAM venue (Brooklyn Academy of Music) by a couple of members of their programming department.

My American adventure continued with an intensive exchange with Liz Lerman in Baltimore and Washington. After first being introduced to Liz's 'Critical Response Process' six years ago, I knew that an intensive period of dialogue and reciprocation would inspire and fuel my current mentoring work. I stayed with Liz in the attic of her beautiful house and we allocated time to dream artistically together, as well as work within more formal studio environments. I shadowed her work at the University of Maryland, Creative Alliance in Baltimore and at Temple Micah in Washington DC. Liz is such a multi-faceted artist - her work is wide-reaching and spreads across many venues, settings and disciplines - that no one day was the same. She was so accommodating and generous with her time and wisdom, and travelling in her car from venue to venue became an enlightening meeting of artistic heartbeats. I had my notebook poised at all times!

Liz worked with a powerful visual artist, Paul Rucker and led his 45-strong audience through a modified 'Critical Response' workshop so that Paul could gain deeper feedback on his current installation. Liz co-led a workshop for music students at the University of Maryland who were exploring the notion of improvisation – both physical and musical. I sat in on her initial devising meetings for Liz's new digital on-line toolbox. Attending performances together in Baltimore provided a sense of the breadth of work being performed in the region – and having the opportunity to dissect each performance with Liz was fascinating. Another highlight of my trip was witnessing - and participating - as Liz led a congregational interactive service in a synagogue in Washington DC. This was fantastic insight into community work delivered with expert sensitivity and empathy whilst also pushing traditional perimeters.

Personally, I relish the opportunity to learn and do this through four core elements: experience, enquiry, creation and reflection. I have been able to make time for all of these elements throughout this trip, which is why it has been so rewarding. This commitment to collaborative situations as well as challenging my own independent learning have allowed a high level of engagement at all times. It has provided a reassurance about the chosen ethics that frame my work – and clarifies why I deliver in the way that I do. This has boosted my self-esteem and promoted more professional independence, which will undoubtedly inject a fresh artistic courage. The trip has increased my visibility as an international educator and has provided me with new international networks and partnerships – not forgetting the valuable and alternative artistic links across art forms. These broader routes of curiosity will be fascinating to pursue.

To summarise: as is always great with these periods of assessment and research, I am left with more questions to investigate. These numerous, rich and demanding environments have made me learn in a rapid way, and have refreshed my creative thinking – about my own work but also globally within training and art itself.

I want to thank you all at LUTSF for enabling this space for me to interrogate past processes and advance personal new artistic territories. It has provided much motivation and will undeniably have great impact on my work back in the UK. I am looking forward to understanding more about my trip as my future work unfolds.