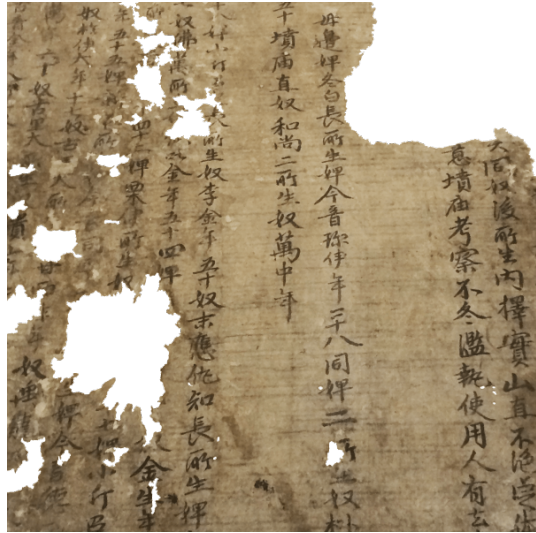


Traces and Documents

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— Historical document, at Jangseogak Archives, non-euclidean photography, 23-10-2014

A trace is an artefact that allows the existence of tangible communicating, acting signs from past experiences into the future. They construct our historical sediments, identity, and cultures through a concrete selection of memories. Dance traces have existed as part of human legacies since prehistoric times to nowadays. Throughout history different mediums have revealed dance as a tangible art form: cave paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, notations, pictures, films, CD and DVD-ROMs, software, websites, and apps. Still, the most important trace is the one written in the body. Dancers collect in their body memories from their experiences, and bodies are the main source for safeguarding of dance, passing throughout generations an incredible heritage.

A trace and a document are not the same. The main difference between a trace and a document could be in the intentional implication of the person producing it. From its etymology a document is defined as a written testimony of an event. Nowadays, a document is an extract of an event transferred throughout a different media (not only written) rather than the original event, and the former is aiming towards safeguarding the latter. A trace is a left over, that probably was part of the past act and useful within it to achieve its means. A trace is what a running antelope leaves behind, but his path and urge for running can be a document. However, it was not intended to re-enact the event under different time and spatial circumstances.

Documenting constitutes an intended communicative act, where the process of selection, re-enactment, preservation and dissemination of both message and medium comes together. In dance teaching practice, many traces are produced throughout the process of teaching, not all of them constitute a document. It all depends on the intention of the person creating them. It is for this reason that questions around the need, purpose, format, and user are important when dealing with the practice of documentation:

Why?
What?
How?
For whom?

Documenting is a creative act that needs preparation and care: an act where the reflection upon individual acts turns itself into constructive content. In being a dance teacher, most of the steps are realized to become a documentarian where analysis, self-reflection, and making synthesis are essential. From my personal experience – as dancer, researcher, and teacher – I am in constant exchange of my capabilities of reflection, choice making, creativity, and synthesis. It is a matter of being clear of what to use within each context and being aware of the aims I wish to achieve. For this, I need to dig deeply within my own practice and understand my own principles, heritage, interest, and wishes. Then I need to define what is the documentation for and have a clear idea to whom I want to address. Slowly the document starts to appear and take shape: I imagine its shape, its format, and keep thinking again and again – trying, testing, creating, and translating my bodily experiences into other media.

Teaching demands a great time of preparation, reflection, and sinking information. Within the creation process of a dance class, workshop, session, coaching etc... many actions take place. Interestingly, those actions leave traces: sometimes they are traces of events, sometimes they are intended documents, sometimes they are a result of an encounter of both intention and accident. In anyway, such traces and documents can be used to allow others to gain access and knowledge to what dance teaching implies. When documenting dance teaching, in most cases, documents are continuously circulating from teacher to student and student to teacher. These are documents created from and for the field, which means that their usability is essential for dance practitioners, and that the perspective of the teacher is considered as knowledge.

The body of the teacher is the first document, created through kinetic and oral transmission, where the embodied knowledge becomes accessible through its own actions. Besides the body, other documents emerge from the practice of dance teaching. Drawing, writing, filming, recording, and drafting are actions that find a place within the dance studio as companion of the practice. They are reflections, creations, resources, notations, and scores that help the process of teaching in varied ways. How to navigate through the creation of such documents, gathering traces, and reflecting upon one's own practice are still questions in need of some explanation and suggestion in order to inspire teachers within the adventure of self documenting.