

Report from CAiRO Summer School
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As an event curated for arts practitioners and artists-scholars, seeking to engage with methods of documenting and preserving arts data in the performing arts, much attention was paid at the CAiRO Summer school to the problems and limits of capturing ephemeral and transient art objects. As a PhD student currently engaged in practice-led research many topics of discussion in lectures and beyond, spoke to fields of reflection and quite practical issues I am encountering at this moment of time. In the following, rather than producing a summary of talks and activities, I shall present some thoughts inspired this event.

Accuracy – Many discussions amongst participants centred on how to accurately document performance practice. I have chosen this term, rather than authenticity or truthfulness, to avoid the implicit problems these terms produce in contemporary critical debate. Any form of document produced to re-present a live performance, be it textual, visual, audio-visual or of another form, always creates gaps, lets one element of performance recede in order for others to be highlighted. This is to a large extent a problem of translation, as the documentation of performance virtually always entails a translation between media: from one medium (performance) to another (text, film, image). This process might then accurately be termed inter-medial translation.

I suggest we might win a lot by beginning to consciously think of documentation as an instance of translation and turn to the field of Translation Studies to gain new insights into the relation between the original and the document it produces. Following Walter Benjamin's famous essay *The Task of the Translator* we might begin to accept that "no translations would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for accurate likeness of the original" and that "in its afterlife the original undergoes a change". While this might not be the place to enter a full discussion of the relationship between

documentation and translation, I do believe that a fruitful and mutually beneficial discussion could be established between these two areas, proving a link beyond mere similarity or metaphorical likeness.

Creativity – As artist-scholars, many participants seemed greatly seduced during fieldwork activities to conceptualise forms of documentation which began to approximate artworks in themselves. This led to some heated debates on the subject, posing the question: How much creativity should be allowed in creating documentation? I believe the only answer that might have satisfied the participants of these debates would be linked to the document's purpose. A document that strives to appear neutral, I consciously write appear as all inter-medial translation will silence some aspects of a performance, might be nearly void of creative curation, while a document that seeks to re-produce the experiential qualities of a work of art might take on the form of an entirely new art piece (although here again, some aspects of the aesthetic experience will be privileged above others). Especially for PhD researchers, whose performance work needs to be assessed by an external examiner who might not always be present at the time of performance, and who might wish to maximise the impact of their research beyond the written component, more artistic or experience-based forms of documentation might be of great use.

Evidencing – Both for PhD students and post-docs seeking funding, methods of evidencing critical thought processes present in the actual performance and the creation process is of high priority. While the written component of a practice-led PhD is typically the main space to make the critical thinking behind and within a performance transparent, I wonder what methods of documentation might capture this to support the final text. For research purposes the final, specific form of a performance might often not be of as great importance as the strategies and structures underlying the performance. A method of documentation that is appropriate to making structures transparent in the never quite tidy and stringent realm of live performance, that is able to identify staging principles and semiotic processes in the posteriority of a performance and its development, and can finally be

used to inform and support the written component of the research output, is of vital importance to the success of a practice-led research project, I suggest.

Processes – Live performance and written research outcomes are both endpoints of processes, they entail initial ideas, sometimes originating from gut instinct, reflections and alterations, abandoned paths and sudden re-orientations. In a practice-led PhD these two paths run alongside each other, informing each other and then parting ways again. For my own research, at least, the documentation of the process (practical and theoretical), its impact on the final performances and the traces it leaves afterwards will be central to the overall research project. Therefore, following the CAiRO Summer School, it has now become my task to devise a form of documentation that is suited to unpacking processes of thought and creation, primarily.