

Dance Engaging Science

By Grete Götze

Held in tandem with other 'Motion Bank' activities, 'Dance Engaging Science' is a series of workshops that brings experts from various disciplines together to develop new forms of collaborative research in the area of dance.

At today's discussion, Scott deLahunta explains that the goal of 'Dance Engaging Science' has been to survey the current state of interdisciplinary dance-science research and, following that, lay the foundations for further interdisciplinary research. In contrast to dance studies, which carry out research on dance, the specialists participating in Dance Engaging Science use dance to test their own theories. Some of the specialists have come to Düsseldorf to describe their experiences; they include theater studies professor Maaïke Bleeker from the Netherlands, philosopher Alva Noë from the United States, architect Michael Steinbusch from Germany and Forsythe dramaturge Freya Vass-Rhee.

What becomes clear is that the Dance Engaging Science meetings have raised multiple questions that still await answers. A number of them are articulated by Noë: What is awareness? What is perception? What is presence? Dance, he says, offers the possibility of investigating these issues. Noë explains that he became aware of 'Dance Engaging Science' through neuroscience. His theory is that consciousness is not anchored in the brain but in each individual's relationship to time and space, and an astonishing commonality shared by the two disciplines is the idea that knowledge about dance is not stored in one specific location, but is defined by moving through time and space. "My theories are old news in dance research," he says with a laugh.

Vass-Rhee tells of a video artist that she asked to participate but who got scared and declined, saying he didn't want to know how art works since that is how you break its spell. Steinbusch explains that he tried to identify the structural similarities between dance and architecture. He found that the basis of architecture is making distinctions, such as between left and right or inside and out, and that making such distinctions is the main element dance and architecture have in common – both are combined disciplines. Bleeker says that she is developing a website that will have interviews with workshop participants. She found it beneficial, she says, to reflect on the relationship between research and dance, adding, however, that it is becoming more difficult to get financial support for projects that do not offer a predetermined outcome. In response, deLahunta assures her that exactly such projects are the ones needing support. "We need to make our experiences available as soon as possible, without putting ourselves under pressure to present results," the Motion Bank project leader says in conclusion.

