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The Embodied Archive and the Metaphor of Compost: Persistence through change

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Abstract

This article focuses on the notion of the archive and the repertoire as first discussed by Diana Taylor (2003) and subsequently critiqued by Rebecca Schneider (2011) in relation to issues related to the preservation of dance. Attention is drawn to Schneider's assertion that the value of the archive lies in its possibility of an encounter with the living body and to the associated blurring of the division between the corporeal and the documentary to the extent that 'the split between archive and repertoire ... [becomes] the archive's own division' (Schneider 2011: 108). This collapse of a binary notion of the archive and the repertoire, in favour of one ascribing equal value to inscribed and embodied forms of knowledge transmissions, resonates with the principles underpinning the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003).

Reference will be made to *For Now* (2014), one of the sixteen 'chapters' around which *Table of Contents* (2014) – a solo dance piece in which Matthias Sperling selects and performs a number of fragments of past choreographic works from Siobhan Davies Dance repertoire – is constructed. The idea of past choreographic movement material acting as 'compost' that fertilizes current dance practices (Davies et al. 2014: 4) will be considered in relation to change as a constitutive element in dance preservation.

The concept of dance work identity, elaborated by Frédéric Pouillaude (2017), will be brought to bear on the discussion about the perceived oxymoron between continuity in dance preservation and change, or to paraphrase Schneider, an approach to saving not concerned with 'identity' (2011: 101). In this respect the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage will be discussed in relation to ethical issues concerning the perpetuation of derogatory, stereotyped or racist content in ballet.