

No. 30

**'Introduction: The Body has to be Clear and the Words have to be Right'**

in *Capturing Intention: documentation, analysis and notation research based on the work of Emio Greco* | PC. ed. S. deLahunta. Amsterdam: Emio Greco | PC and Amsterdam School of the Arts. October 2007. pp. 4-9.

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The *Capturing Intention* book I edited and wrote this 'Introduction' for was planned in early 2006 as an outcome of the second phase of the 'Notation Research Project' with Amsterdam-based dance company Emio Greco | PC.<sup>1</sup> The second phase of research was based on the 'Double Skin/Double Mind; workshop and along with the book, the outcomes included an Interactive Installation, film documentary and interactive dvd-rom. That research is still ongoing in the context of 'Inside Movement Knowledge' a two-year (2008-2010) collaborative, interdisciplinary research project into new methods for the documentation, transmission and preservation of contemporary choreographic and dance knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This project is also one of the four compared in the publication on Choreographic Resources No. 27.

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<sup>1</sup> Company website: <http://www.ickamsterdam.nl/> (accessed 7 May 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Documentation site: <http://insidemovementknowledge.net/> (accessed 7 May 2010).





Bodies

Traces

Sources

Theory

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## Introduction

# The body has to be clear and the words have to be right

From the moment they locked themselves away in a studio for two months in 1995 with ‘the ambition to come out of that space with a proposal’, the entanglement of body and words has been a constant thread running through the artistic collaboration of Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten. The proposal they came out with was named the “language of the flesh”, and it gave rise to a basic structure that consisted of seven directions they later linked with the *Seven Necessities*, the manifesto in which they described the “credo about their artistic choices”.<sup>1</sup> Language, structures, flesh and the dialectics inherent in their own unique collaboration quickly gave rise to another body.<sup>2</sup> A growing body of work, a collection of choreographies, materialized: first a trilogy *Fra Cervello e Movimento* (1996-1999) then the still ongoing *Double Points* series (1998-). In the middle of this: an invitation to conduct a coaching project for the Internationale Tanzwochen Wien for which they created *Double Skin/Double Mind (DS/DM)*. Avoiding the ideas of technique and training per se, Greco and Scholten used this as an opportunity to analyze and explore their creation process, as is described in ‘The moment to question... Double Skin/Double Mind’.

And if the entanglement of body and words is one constant thread, the other must be that, for Greco and Scholten, the dual paths of creation and research are continuously feeding each other in an unusually tight recursive process. And impressively, whether by necessity or design, they have refused to allow this creation/research process to remain theirs alone. For while they continued taking on new creative challenges, they and their organization, Emio Greco I PC (EG I PC), expanded their research initiatives beyond the simultaneously evolving and constant *DS/DM* workshop, to include the *Dance & Discourse* Salons, inaugurated in January 2003, and the *Notation Research Project* – as first announced by Bertha Bermúdez in the context of the Salon held on 5 Octo-

ber 2004, a meeting dedicated to the discussion of *repertoire and archive*.

This book, entitled *Capturing Intention*, is one of the latest outcomes to emerge from the *Notation Research Project*. The title explicitly points toward the basic question that is driving the research: what notation system can capture inner intention as well as the outer shape of gestures and phrases? The content of this book contains the traces of a number of encounters and working processes, all circling around this basic question (if not circling then running in parallel with overlaps), that began in preparatory stages in 2004. This was followed by a *first phase* in 2005 that included a *DS/DM* documentary film project (see

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accompanying DVD-ROM) and a period as *artists-in-residence* exploring the concept of *transfer* within the educational context of the Theatre School, Amsterdam continuing through to 2006.<sup>3</sup> The core material of this book and the other DVD-ROM is a result of the *second phase* of research that began in April 2006 under the heading: *Dance and Media: A Multi-disciplinary Research Project on New Ways of Dance Notation/Documentation and Re-creation*.<sup>4</sup>

It is the *multi-disciplinary research* approach that defines this second phase of the research project: its energies and directions (sometimes convergent and sometimes not); its multiple foci and points of departure; its overlapping but separate fields of terminologies and expertise. For the aim of this second phase was to bring specific perspectives from different disciplines to bear on various properties of dance and movement in relation to the *Notation Research Project*. And to do this as collaborative research vis-à-vis a series of events and meetings leading to the development of prototype tools and approaches (See Time Line).

As Marijke Hoogenboom describes in her essay at the close of the book: “the interdisciplinary project team, which has been constituted for the purpose of taking up this second phase of research, takes as its departure point the assumption that the complex nature of dance cannot be adequately represented with a single technology”.<sup>5</sup> In other words (and there are many instances throughout this book of the same ideas being described in different terms), we, the research team, decided that the basic question, “what notation system can capture inner intention as well as the outer shape of gestures and phrases?”, could be best answered through organised encounters between different specialist perspectives.

In this book, you are invited to enter into these encounters with individuals who are specialists in dance notation systems (Marion Bastien, Eliane Mirzabekiantz and Bertha Bermúdez via her recent studies), cinematography and film making (Maite Bermúdez), computer based motion tracking and gesture analysis (Frédéric Bevilacqua), interactive design to enhance understanding of dance (Chris Ziegler) and the scientific study of the brain's perception of movement (Corinne Jola). Additionally, we have included the perspective of other individuals working in the more academic areas of culture studies and

philosophy (Maaïke Bleeker, Susan Melrose, Franz Anton Cramer) that were not directly involved in the second phase encounters. However, we do intend to involve these areas more in the *third phase* of this research and their contributions here help to broaden the space for thinking about the implications of the *Notation Research Project*.

#### **Notation Research-in-Progress**

On 5 April 2005, Bertha Bermúdez and I met in De Balie café in Amsterdam for her to describe the *Notation Research Project* to me. My short summation of our talk included the following item in a longer list of seven points:

“Point #5 Normally passing these dances onto others is done through instruction with the body and words. To do this *the body has to be clear and the words have to be right.*”

Bertha Bermúdez, at that time starting her study of existing notation systems, was about to meet with Benesh specialist Eliane Mirzabekiantz in Paris and was also planning to introduce the idea of making a documentary of the *DS/DM* workshop to the filmmaker Maite Bermúdez. Further elaboration on these encounters can be found in the essays of Eliane Mirzabekiantz and Maite Bermúdez.

The planning and making of the *DS/DM* documentary provided a major impetus to the *Notation Research Project*. Here was a core set of material where this entanglement of language, structures and flesh might be analyzed to a useful purpose not only for Greco and Scholten, who at the time felt the need to “understand the logic of the workshop and its structure better”, but also to give the second phase of the project a concrete ‘boundary object’ to work with by providing a set of nameable components and describable elements.<sup>6</sup> For the interdisciplinary team this material was to prove invaluable, and you will find components and elements such as *Breathing, Jumping, Expanding* and *Reducing* appearing throughout this book and accompanying DVD-ROMs. It is essential to understand that these principle components (there are a total of seven) are always part of the preparation for creating and performing. Through doing *DS/DM*, the intention behind/inside of each movement is brought to a high degree of concentration and the conditions for the appearance of new making ideas are established. It is to the exploring and exploiting of *DS/DM*,

with the aim to 'capture' this concentrated intention, that the rest of the second phase of research has been devoted.

The encounters for the second phase began officially in Amsterdam with a Salon held in April 2006 in the context of the *Anatomical Theatre Revisited* symposium organized by Maaïke Bleeker.<sup>7</sup> Following this, all members of the interdisciplinary team met for the first time at a two-day symposium in early July 2006 during Cinedans in Amsterdam; here they were invited to present their current research and to start to exchange approaches. The working meetings and events that took place after this symposium can be traced along the Time Line. As mentioned earlier you are invited, here in this publication, to enter into these through reading the individual essays and through viewing the accompanying DVD-ROMs.

However, we also leave things open-ended as a manifestation of the in-progress nature of the current research. For the basic question about notating intention that we started from has been our catalyst, our ingredient stimulating a wealth of ideas, rich insights and new representations as you see contained in this publication. We have not thus far discovered *the* system, method of documentation, analysis or notation that gives any one answer to our question, but one might reflect that arguably this was not the point to begin with. In Scholten's words, "It is in the attempt to do this process and to speak about it... it is not to capture intention, but to try". At the same time, a discovery in its purest form is not known before it appears; and we may yet come across something of singular importance. We can only establish the best conditions for this to happen. And perhaps to try harder following Greco's proposal: "I think the responsibility is more with us, not so much the various systems being used. (...) And we have to be clearer, how can they capture something if we don't really describe that moment".

#### **The Wider Context**

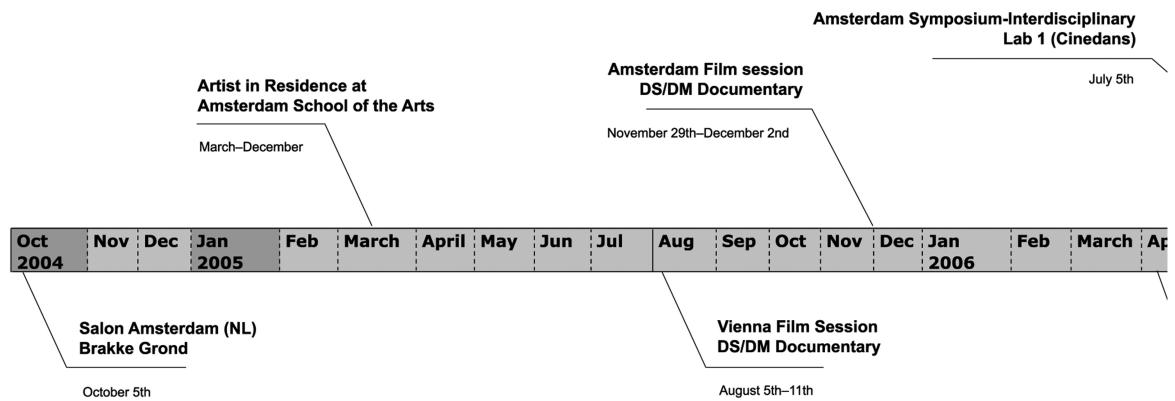
By attempting to discover adequate notations and descriptions for new movement expression, in addition to the context of the creation/research work of EG I PC, the notation project enters into two other contexts, historical and contemporary. The aspiration to notate movement seems a basic human and cultural urge as evidenced by constant endeavor through several centuries. This continuous invention is revealed in part by a list of approximately eighty

documented dance and movement notation systems, in which movement analysis is at least implicit, that dates back to the mid-1600s and includes the Laban and Benesh systems invented in the early half of the 20th century.<sup>8</sup> Sciences and technologies emerging in the 1800s brought new instruments and methods of analysis to bear on the topic of movement research and in the 1900s the anthropological study of movement, and systems invented to further that study, sought to understand human gesture within its social and cultural context.<sup>9</sup> The science of computer graphics picked up and contributed to these threads of movement research through the development of digital technology not only for furthering scientific study (e.g. in the field of biomechanics), but also for the creation of animated characters to populate new media spaces from the cinema to 3D virtual environments.<sup>10</sup>

This extreme *précis* of the past few hundred years lends support to an initiative like the *Notation Research Project* that aims to bring different disciplines from arts, technology and sciences together not only to pursue the specific research goals of the project, but to further understanding of human movement in all its creative complexity. But this understanding should not come at a cost to the arts – the main research agenda here is an artistic one and it should remain so. But for this it's important to seek a clarification of the relation of dance to other 'knowledge domains'.<sup>11</sup> Dance is obviously a site of knowledge based on the existence of a community that has agreed to learn and advance this largely through the production of art-making processes and performances.<sup>12</sup> But dance's status as a 'domain' is largely evaluated on the strength of its contribution as 'art' to the public sphere. This evaluation is not always useful for understanding the full nature of what dancing and dance making contains, and here is where exchanges with other non-art disciplines and practices can be productive. There are two essays in this book that explore this idea: one is the essay by Corinne Jola. From her perspective as a cognitive neuroscientist, Jola offers a valuable condensed glance at a very different set of descriptions of movement intention grounded in the culture of science with an aim to bring these into a generative relationship to the driving artistic aims of the project. The other is a re-published essay titled 'Sharing Questions of Movement' in which I sketch out some possible territory of productive cross-domain research involving dance and choreography.



## Notation Research Project Time Line



There are a handful of other contemporary choreographers also actively engaged in these issues related to knowledge production and the implications for arts creation/research, among them Wayne McGregor, Siobhan Davies and William Forsythe.<sup>13</sup> As with EG I PC, they do this not only through making dances for an audience, events conforming to the conventions of the field, but through innovating new and ‘unconventional’ types of traces and artefacts of the dance creation process. Through exploring fresh approaches to documenting, analyzing and an/notating their creative work, they deepen their own understanding while simultaneously stimulating the attention of others who may utilize these traces as resources in their own research. All are working with interdisciplinary teams from both art and non-art disciplines to investigate these possibilities.

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### The future: archive and re-creation

The *Notation Research Project* has had the benefit of support from some key organisations and the concerted and concentrated efforts of all involved. And the aim is to continue with the next phase developed in part from the second phase results and to include *archival* and *re-creation* work. The plan is to do this together with building a new consortium of institutional partners and individual researchers based in the Netherlands. In the meantime, for EG I PC the *Dance & Discourse* Salons have now been integrated into a new creative and education unit inside the organization, the *Accademia Mobile*, which is now in operation. Additionally, there are ambitions to establish a major international choreographic research centre in Amsterdam where a wide range of different disciplines can continue to interact.



- 1 Quotes from email communication with Pieter C. Scholten 14.07.07.
- 2 See: 'The wake-up calls of Emilio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten'. Interview by Gabriel Smeets on the making of the trilogy *Fra Cervello e Movimento – Bianco, Rosso and Extra Dry* (Amsterdam 2004). Available [www.emiogreco.nl](http://www.emiogreco.nl) (accessed 16.07.07)
- 3 The Theatre School residency spawned two additional publications: *Company in the School*. Eds. Jeroen Fabius and Ingrid van Schijndel. Research group Art Practice and Development & Emilio Greco I PC. 2007; *Transfer*. Eds. Marijke Hoogenboom, Pol Eggermont and Nienke Rooijackers. Amsterdam School of the Arts. 2007.
- 4 The term 'media' as the plural of medium is used here to refer broadly to a variety of methods and technologies for recording, storing, representing and transmitting; in this way it makes reference to both digital and analog formats, old and new technologies.

- 5 See in this book: Marijke Hoogenboom. 'Conditions for Research'. p. 80.
- 6 The notion of the 'boundary object' can be found in anthropological and other areas understood as something that can foster cooperation and communication among the diverse members of heterogeneous working groups.
- 7 See in this book: Maaïke Bleeker. 'Questions of Movement and Meaning' (framing statement for symposium). p. 16.
- 8 See: Anne Hutchinson Guest. *Choreo-Graphics: A Comparison of Dance Notation Systems from the Fifteenth Century to the Present*. Gordon and Breach Science Publishers S. A., 1989.
- 9 For a look at early development in movement sciences see: Scott deLahunta. 'The Human Walking Apparatus: a technological episteme'. in: *Interagir: avec les technologies numériques: Nouvelles de Danse*. No. 52. 2004. pp. 36-49.
- 10 For a similar thesis see page 9 of Laurence Louppe's 'Imperfections in Paper'. in Louppe, ed. *Traces of Dance: Draw-*

- ings and Notations of Choreographers*. Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1994. pp. 11-33.
- 11 The concept of 'knowledge domain' is not commonly used in reference to the arts; its use here points towards future discussions.
  - 12 There is a useful concept in the social sciences referred to as 'communities of practice' in which the concept of knowledge is disassembled into its function in the creation and sustaining of the practice-based relations of a particular community or field. One of the foremost theorists of this concept is Etienne Wenger [www.ewenger.com](http://www.ewenger.com) (accessed 16.07.07).
  - 13 For some description of these other projects and the concept of the choreographic resource see: Scott deLahunta and Norah Zuniga Shaw. 'Constructing Memory: Creation of the Choreographic Resource'. in: *Digital Resources: Performance Research*. Eds. Ric Allsopp and Scott deLahunta. Vol 11, No 4. pp. 53-62.