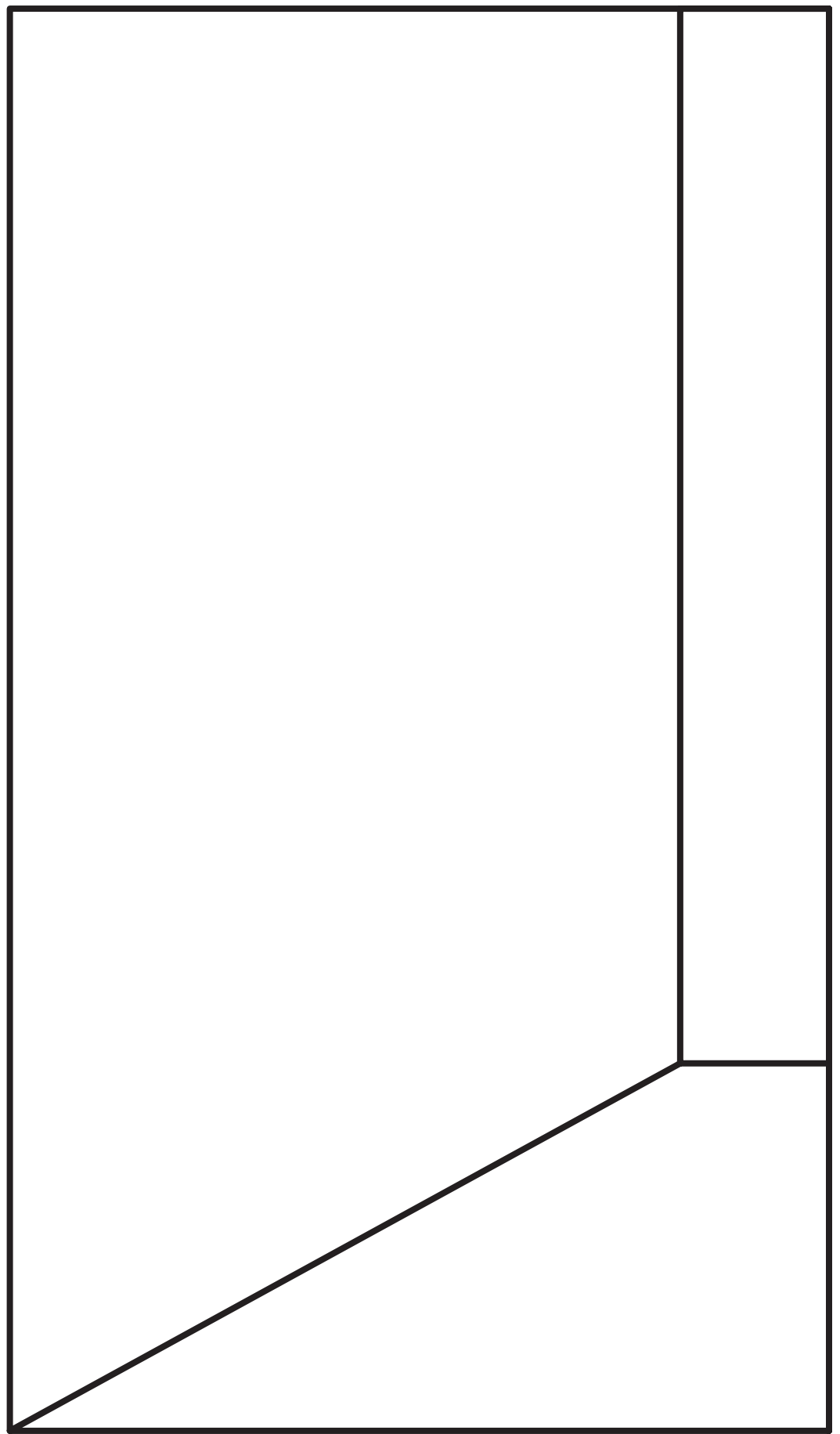
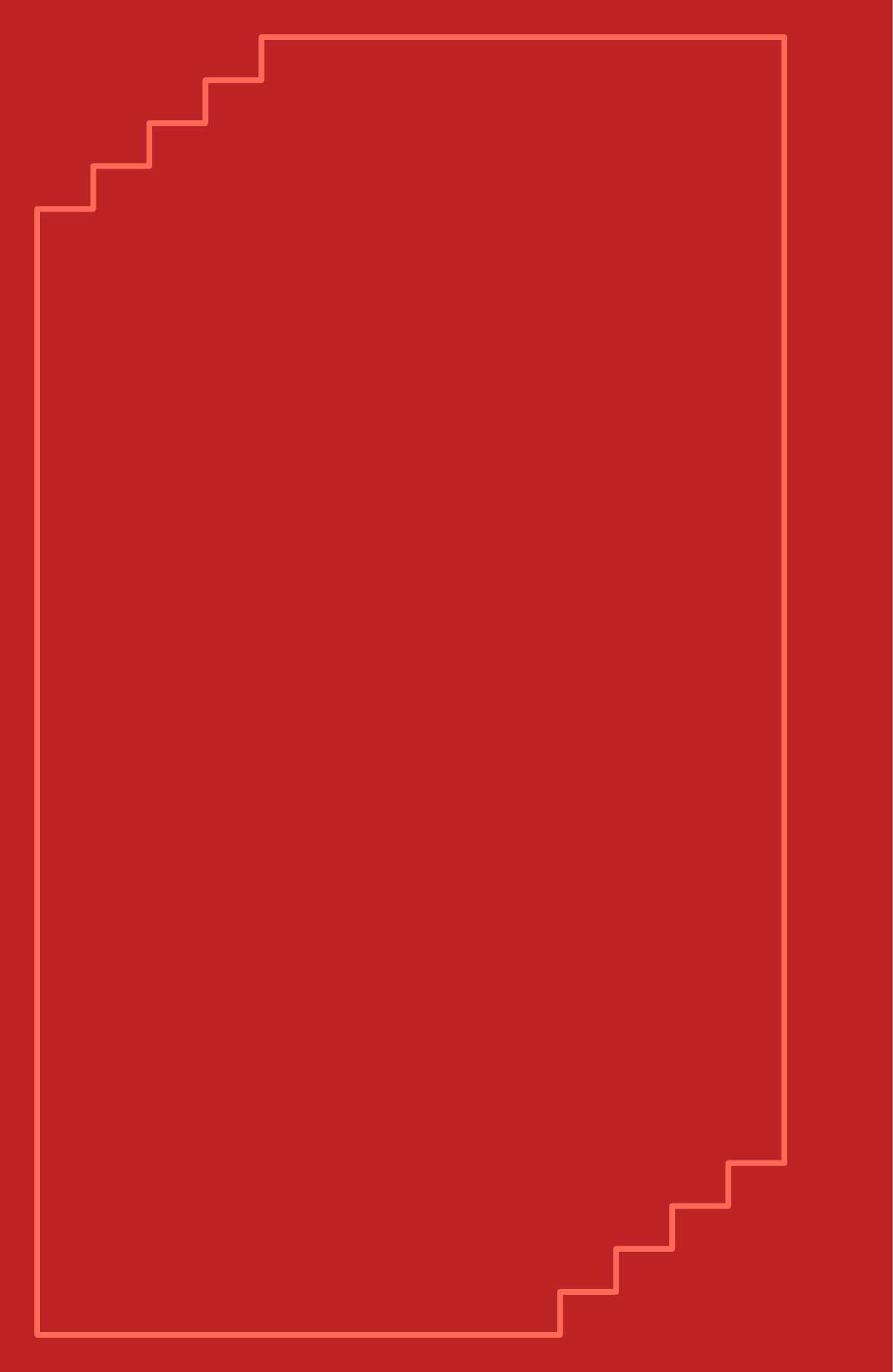




openings

Perspectives on Choreographic Toolkits
and Documentation in Dance







openings

Perspectives on Choreographic Toolkits
and Documentation in Dance

under the direction of Lise Gagnon
translated by Vanessa Nicolai

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- ^ *Boîte chorégraphique Bagne*
- ^ *Boîte chorégraphique Cartes postales de Chimère*
- ^ *Boîte chorégraphique Les Choses dernières*
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Original idea and coordination

Lise Gagnon

Graphic design and layout

Émilie Allard

Translation, editing and revision

Vanessa Nicolai

Proofreading

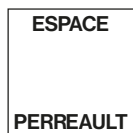
Ariane Dessaulles

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preface

Amy Bowring

For anyone who has chosen to work in the sphere of history, to chronicle human stories, to safeguard the past so it is available in the future, there are all kinds of challenges—from finding lost “records” or “accounts” to ensuring that adequate resources exist to secure the longevity of those recovered histories. But is there a field of human activity more difficult to document and preserve than dance? Dance is considered intangible cultural heritage: the truest artifact, the dance itself, leaves no analogue representation of itself. It is a physical act that happens in a moment of time and space and then is gone, existing only in the viewer’s memory and the dancer’s body. Like other forms of intangible cultural heritage, dance has traditionally been passed on from person to person, or in this case dancer to dancer, through oral and physical transmission. And like a child’s game of broken telephone, pieces of information can be missed, forgotten, misinterpreted or passed on incorrectly.

Systems have been developed in more recent human history to try and record dance such as Thoinot Arbeau’s *Orchésographie*, the Beauchamp-Feuillet notation system, Rudolph Laban’s Labanotation, or Joan and Rudolph Laban’s Benesh notation. In Canada, 19th-century dancing master John Freeman Davis published a manual with many diagrams to pass along his variations on popular social dances such as lancers and waltzes. Royal Winnipeg Ballet co-founder Gweneth Lloyd left behind dozens of notebooks with musical counts in one column and ballet steps written in another, accompanied by a page of stage diagrams indicating the direction and patterns of movements. In the 1970s, choreographer Jennifer Mascall accumulated a series of dance scores by different Canadian and American choreographers to demonstrate the variety of personal notations that exist in dance. These documents were painstakingly assembled into hinged, handmade cardboard and fabric cases, each fastened with a button.



In the 1980s, when ballet and modern dance history in Canada was receiving attention from the world of dance scholarship and the dance community itself, Lawrence and Miriam Adams launched the largest dance reconstruction project to have been carried out in Canada. Over a dozen works from the late 1940s and early 1950s were reconstructed using the original choreographers (except for one who was deceased) and dancers, along with a team of rehearsal directors, notators, videographers, composers and a new generation of professional dancers. Research material on each work was gathered, including photographs, film clips, playbills, press clippings, musical scores and more. Labanotation and Benesh notation were used to create scores, and the works were recorded on videotape. This accumulated material would lead to the founding of Dance Collection Danse in 1986.

But still, the problem of recording dance remained elusive. Notation scores require specialists to be interpreted. The dancer could not simply read the score as a musician would; a professional notator was needed to understand it and orally and physically pass along the knowledge of the dance. Video on magnetic tape can be inadequate, depending on quality and longevity. Camera angles, lighting and other technical issues can limit the ability of a future generation to see all aspects of the movement, and the quality of the tape used can lead to erosion within a decade or two, making the recording unviewable. Attempts to consign knowledge continued with projects such as Peggy Baker’s *Choreographer’s Trust* where six of her solos were passed along to a dozen individual dancers (two dancers for each choreographic work). A journal writer, notator and videographer were hired to record the process. Booklets with DVDs were produced to take a dancer through the rehearsal process step by step, with insights provided by Baker and excerpts from the journal writing. Danny Grossman also engaged in a multi-year process of archiving his work through video and documentation such as clippings, programs, promotional materials and photographs. The video and photography included detailed sections to demonstrate certain movements,

with some in slow motion or deconstructed to be taught. Costumes were deposited at Dance Collection Danse to be used as models for rebuilding costumes in the future.

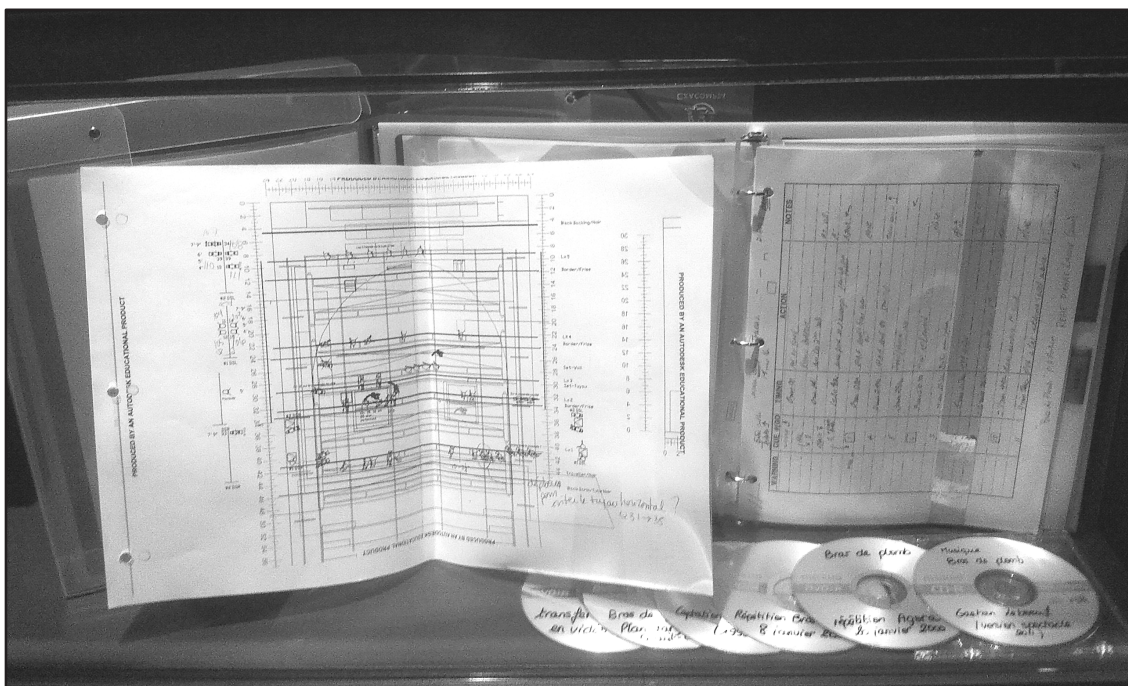
And, of course, there are the *boîtes chorégraphiques*, the choreographic toolkits developed by the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault (now Espace Perreault). The toolkits are very much in line with the thinking and processes of Baker and Grossman. They include as many pieces as possible to transfer the work from one body to the next. In this translation of the original publication, *Ouvrir la boîte*, produced by Espace Perreault, you will find in-depth discussions not only around the toolkits, but also around the whole process of passing on choreographic works. These essays and dialogues question the philosophical and logistical issues around preserving and remounting choreography. There are questions of how to do the process differently, of benefits and shortcomings, of the best time in the creative process to record the work. Should documentation happen simultaneously with creation? Or, as in *cinéma vérité*, does the mere presence of the documentarian change the nature of the work? Danièle Desnoyers queries at what point the documentation process supersedes the creative process: when documentation is idealized, is there a danger that it will become more important than the choreographic work?

Ginelle Chagnon, rehearsal director and ideas person behind the choreographic toolkits, comments that a toolkit is like an assembly of several layers of memories and components of a work. As with all memory, it will always be incomplete. But as Espace Perreault director Lise Gagnon submits, the culture of documentation should not be thought of as existing for recovery and reconstruction only; the documentation is full in itself and brings together meaning, history and points of view. These conversations and investigations are powerful and thoughtful, as the writers ponder the conditions, philosophical implications and mechanisms for preserving our danced artifacts. The perfect way to record dance seems as elusive as the moment of movement itself.

^

the choreographic toolkits

Lise Gagnon



Detail from *Boîte chorégraphique Bras de plomb*, documenting the work *Bras de plomb*, by Paul-André Fortier, as part of the *Corps rebelles/Rebel Bodies* exhibition. Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City, March 11, 2015 to April 3, 2016. Photo: Julie-Anne Côté.

birth of the choreographic toolkits

In 2011, the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault (FJPP)¹ developed its first choreographic toolkit, aimed at documenting and preserving a choreographic work. This tool was designed by Ginelle Chagnon—Jean-Pierre Perreault’s former rehearsal director—and several major choreographers in Quebec’s contemporary dance milieu, including Paul-André Fortier.

Originally, the toolkit created by Ginelle Chagnon included annotations (which she calls the script), a description of the makeup and costumes, a copy of the program and lighting plans, video recordings of rehearsals and shows, excerpts from critical reviews, and so on. The script—the core of the toolkit—was structured as follows: hundreds of wide shots and close-ups of the choreography, dividing the piece into distinct sequences, timed to the second.

In addition to these choreographic notes, the toolkit included a detailed description of the movements shown in the photos, along with instructions for lighting, music, costumes and staging (movement downstage, upstage, stage right or stage left). Ginelle Chagnon also drew choreographic diagrams explaining the dancers’ movements in space. All of these documents were gathered in a box or kit—hence the name “choreographic toolkit.”

A choreographic toolkit offers a glimpse of the paths taken during the creation, production and presentation of a work, thus facilitating understanding, transmission and recreation. It brings together all the meaningful elements required to reconstruct a choreography and ensure its transmission to future generations. At least, that was our intention when we embarked on the adventure of creating a digital collection!

^

¹ On November 25, 2021, the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault (FJPP) was renamed Espace Perreault Choreographic Transmission.

embarking on the digital collection project

In 2015, in collaboration with Agora de la danse and Circuit-Est, as part of their pilot project *Transmission et diffusion du répertoire chorégraphique contemporain*, the FJPP completed its first three choreographic toolkits, documenting the works *Bras de plomb* (1993) by Paul-André Fortier, *Duos pour corps et instruments* (2003) by Danièle Desnoyers, and *Cartes postales de Chimère* (1995) by Louise Bédard. Just when we were planning to create two new toolkits documenting the works *Bagne* (1993) by Jeff Hall and Pierre-Paul Savoie, and *Les Choses dernières* (1994) by Lucie Grégoire, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec launched a new program to digitize artistic and literary content.

To promote and share dance expertise, with the agreement of the choreographers involved in these recreations, the FJPP submitted a grant application to complete a digital collection of choreographic toolkits, which would not only document these remarkable works in Quebec's choreographic repertoire, but would also allow us to transmit and promote them. We plan to upload extensive excerpts from the toolkits to our website.

Our grant application was successful and we were able to start creating a digital collection of toolkits. What had appeared to be a relatively simple task soon became far more time-consuming and complex than we had anticipated.










Neither the choreographers nor the members of the FJPP team had imagined how much time, imagination, research and tireless dedication would be required—both on the part of the dance companies involved in the process and the Fondation. Putting together a digital choreographic toolkit destined to become a public document (as opposed to assembling a set of private archival documents in a box) was no mean feat! We had unwittingly taken on an enormous task requiring several months of work for each toolkit.

Just to design a digital collection of choreographic toolkits meant working closely with editor and reviser Romy Snauwaert. Inspired by the toolkits created by Ginelle Chagnon, we together decided on a structure for the digital versions. Various individuals involved in the process of recreating the works—choreographers, rehearsal directors and dancers—wrote choreographic notations and drew diagrams. We took screen shots of videos, assembled a variety of documents, and digitized all press clippings. The reviser reread all the texts, asked for clarifications, proposed modifications, and ensured that all of the documents in the toolkit were consistent. It required incredible dedication on her part, and on the part of everyone who participated in the production of each toolkit.

We also worked extensively with graphic designer Anne-Laure Jean to create a graphic template that would be flexible enough to allow the choreographers to adapt the notations section to the unique qualities of each work documented. The last thing we wanted was to “box in” the works.

For *Bras de plomb*, by Paul-André Fortier, and for *Duos pour corps et instruments*, by Danièle Desnoyers, the wide-angle and close-up shots, the description and cues written by Ginelle Chagnon were, at the time, sufficient to describe the unfolding of the work.

For *Les Choses dernières*, choreographer Lucie Grégoire wanted to add a column titled “Intentions, states, means,” because the description of movements alone was not sufficient to convey what appeared in the image. For Lucie, the intention that initiates and underlies a movement, and the ways of reaching an imagined state are just as important as the gesture itself.











| PLAN LARGE | PLAN RAPPROCHÉ | DESCRIPTION | INTENTIONS / ÉTATS / MOYENS | REPÈRES |
|---|---|--|---|---|
|  | | Se placer dans la position de départ, dans le noir, pendant que l'extrait de Paul Auster se fait entendre. Se mettre debout dos au public, à la limite avant du tapis de scène côté jardin, près des coulisses. La position est verticale. | Section des allers-retours. <i>Ne pas transformer cette verticalité en se penchant vers l'avant pour se préparer à la marche rapide. L'important est d'être autour de son axe central pour pouvoir s'ancrer dans le sol. Dans l'immobilité, avoir la sensation de marcher déjà depuis longtemps.</i> | Entrer sur scène, lorsque le noir est complet, sur la phrase : « <i>Nothing lasts, you see...</i> » |
|  |  | Commencer les marches rapides, dès le départ de la musique, dans le noir. Les marches sont effectuées en ligne droite, vers l'arrière-scène, parallèlement aux coulisses. Débuter dos au public, à partir de la limite avant du tapis de scène, côté jardin, près des coulisses jusqu'au milieu de cette « allée ». | <i>La lumière apparaît après une dizaine de pas dans le noir sur cette première ligne.</i> <i>La nuque est longue et les bras ne se balancent pas. Les pas marchés ne sont pas trop larges et sont réguliers. Ils doivent garder le même niveau (pas de rebond) et ne doivent pas être martelés par le talon.</i> | Début des marches : Piste 1-0-00 |
|  |  | Lors du premier aller vers l'arrière-scène, exécuter avec rapidité un demi-tour sur place de façon à faire face au public sur cette même ligne. | <i>Le demi-tour part soudainement de la marche sans préparation ni arrêt. Il est activé par le dos, les bras restent près du tronc. L'action ne provoque aucun changement de niveau.</i> | |
|  |  | À partir de ce pivot autour de son axe, poursuivre la marche rapide en reculant jusqu'à la limite du tapis à l'arrière-scène et repartir en avançant à la limite avant du tapis de scène en prenant imperceptiblement une autre ligne vers le côté cour. | <i>Le regard porte au loin légèrement vers le haut (et non devant), en diagonale. Ne pas trop lever le menton en avançant de façon à garder la force dans le regard.</i> | |
|  |  | Continuer les allers-retours en marche rapide face au public pendant un minimum de 9 allers-retours. La durée de cette première séquence des marches est importante : la marche doit être assez longue pour que le spectateur pense qu'il n'y aura que des marches pendant cette section et qu'il soit ainsi surpris par le premier mouvement. | <i>L'idée est de ne pas compter les allers-retours pour avoir la bonne durée, mais de prendre repère sur la sensation d'être en action depuis un assez long moment. Se placer à bonne distance des coulisses côté jardin afin que le mouvement du bras D (à venir) ne soit pas trop proche des coulisses côté jardin.</i> | |

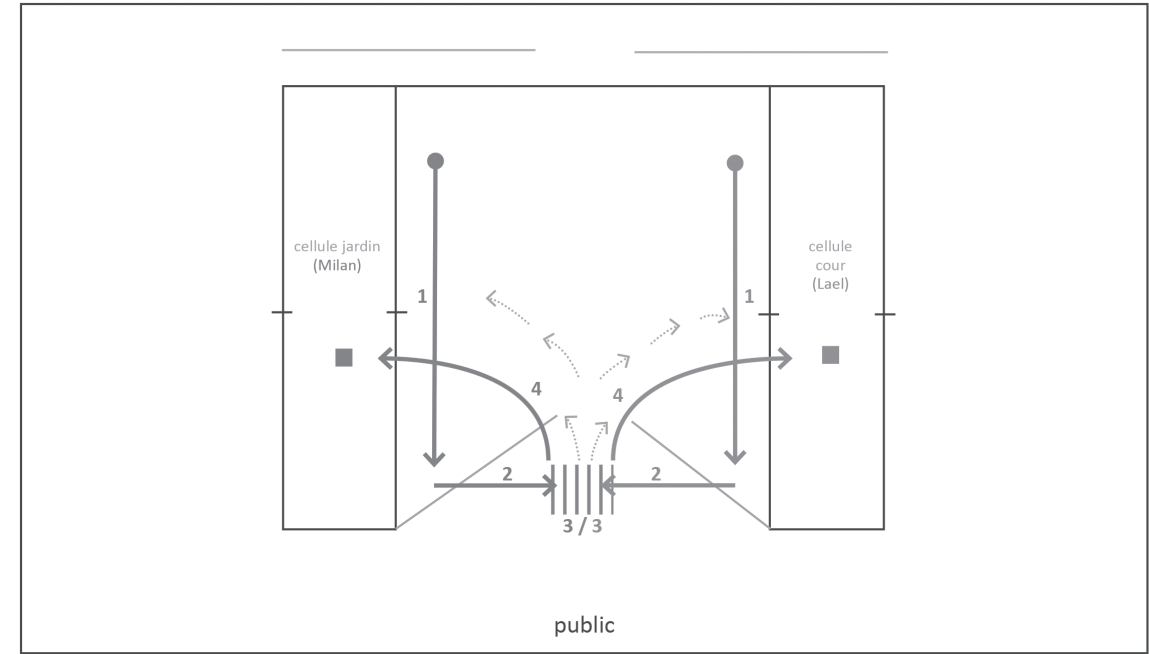
Excerpt from *Boîte chorégraphique Les Choses dernières*, documenting the work *Les Choses dernières*, by Lucie Grégoire. Writing: Isabelle Poirier and Lucie Grégoire. Photos and screenshots of the video recording by Paulo Castro-Lopes: Ariane Dessaulles. © Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault, 2018

For the choreographic notations accompanying *Cartes postales de Chimère*, Louise Bédard added an “Instructions” column in which she described the work with extreme precision.

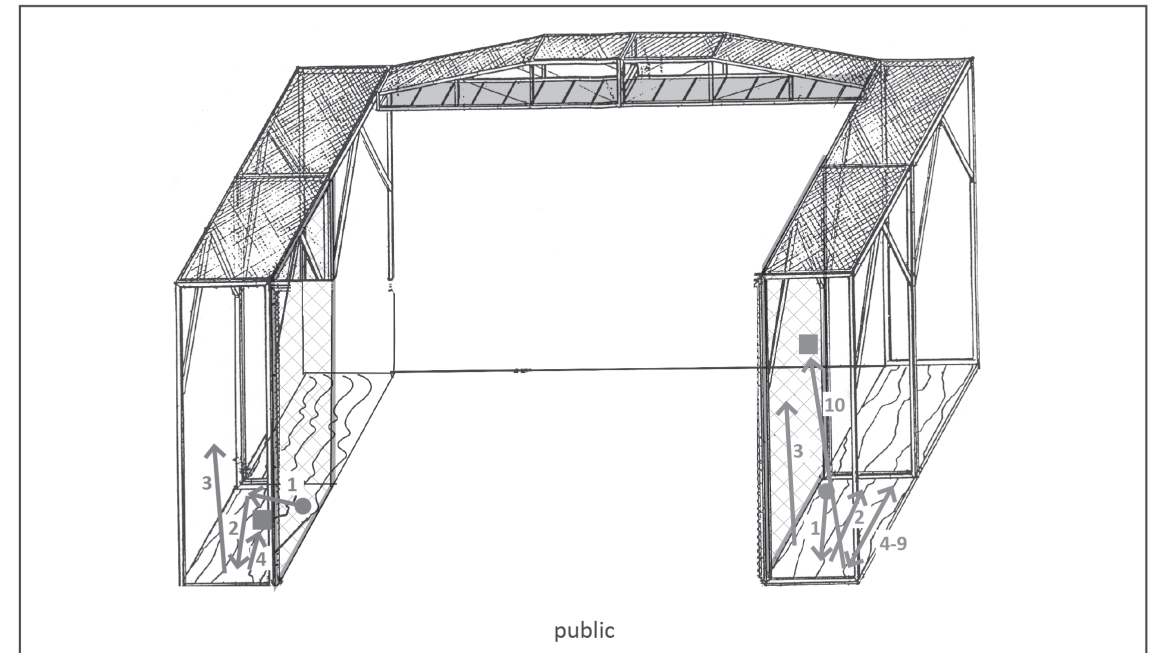
Finally, for *Bagne*, the choreographer Pierre-Paul Savoie, who wrote the choreographic notes, agreed to show a single, distant shot, accompanied by a description of both dancers’ movements and cues. However, the choreographic diagram section was extremely complex and detailed, since the dancers move vertically in the space.

^

| PLAN LARGE | PLAN RAPPROCHÉ | DESCRIPTION | DIRECTIVES | REPÈRES |
|--|---|--|--|---|
|  |  | Courir vers le côté cour M#7 pour détourner vers la D en coupant avec la jambe D derrière, et faire face au côté cour M#5. Développer la jambe D derrière en arabesque en ouvrant les bras sur les côtés, et regarder vers le public M#6. Suspendre la position. Faire 2 sauts temps levé sur la jambe G vers le fond C#4. | <i>Fluidité des bras lors des sauts.</i> | |
|  |  | Tourner vers la G sur la jambe D avec la G en attitude derrière en levant les bras (non rigides) en 5°. Retour avec un petit moment de flottement pour lancer la jambe D en battement à la seconde avec les bras qui montent. | | 1 ^{er} tour en attitude aux environs de : Piste 3-04:13 |
|  |  | Moment de suspension au retour. Refaire la séquence : attitude, suspension, battement et suspension 2 autres fois. | | |
|  |  | Se placer face au M#6 en coupant derrière avec la jambe D. Développer à la seconde la jambe D en penchant le tronc vers la G. Les bras sont en haut vers la D et les mains donnent des petits accents vers le bas. La jambe G est en ouverture sur ½ pointe et repousse le sol pour se déplacer. | <i>On nomme ce mouvement « Le Lac des cygnes ».</i> <i>Mains relâchées.</i> | Début du « Lac des cygnes ». Piste 3-04:25 |
|  |  | Détourner la position par la G pour terminer face au M#8. | | |



SCÈNE 3 (suite). Après le dernier affrontement, les protagonistes se dirigent chacun vers une porte et reculent jusqu’à leur cellule respective (14 min 6 s).



SCÈNE 4. Les cellules (14 min 9 s). Lael débute ses aller-retours au fond. (4) et finit en avant (9).

| | | |
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Excerpt from *Boîte chorégraphique Duos pour corps et instruments*, documenting the work *Duos pour corps et instruments*, by Danièle Desnoyers.
© Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault, 2016

Expanding on the prototype for the original toolkit, we added a number of elements that seemed essential in the context of public dissemination, including:

- ^ a description of the work;
- ^ a word from the choreographer;
- ^ the choreographer's bio;
- ^ excerpts from the choreographer's and dancers' personal notebooks;
- ^ a comprehensive press review, requiring detailed research, digitization and editing.

In contrast to the original toolkit, which contained only excerpts from critical reviews, this new version provided access to all articles written about the work. However, since we planned on selling the toolkits, we could not include the articles in the kit itself; rather we provided a link to a dedicated web page. By sharing the full press kits, free of charge, along with critical reviews, we hope to encourage research on each documented work.

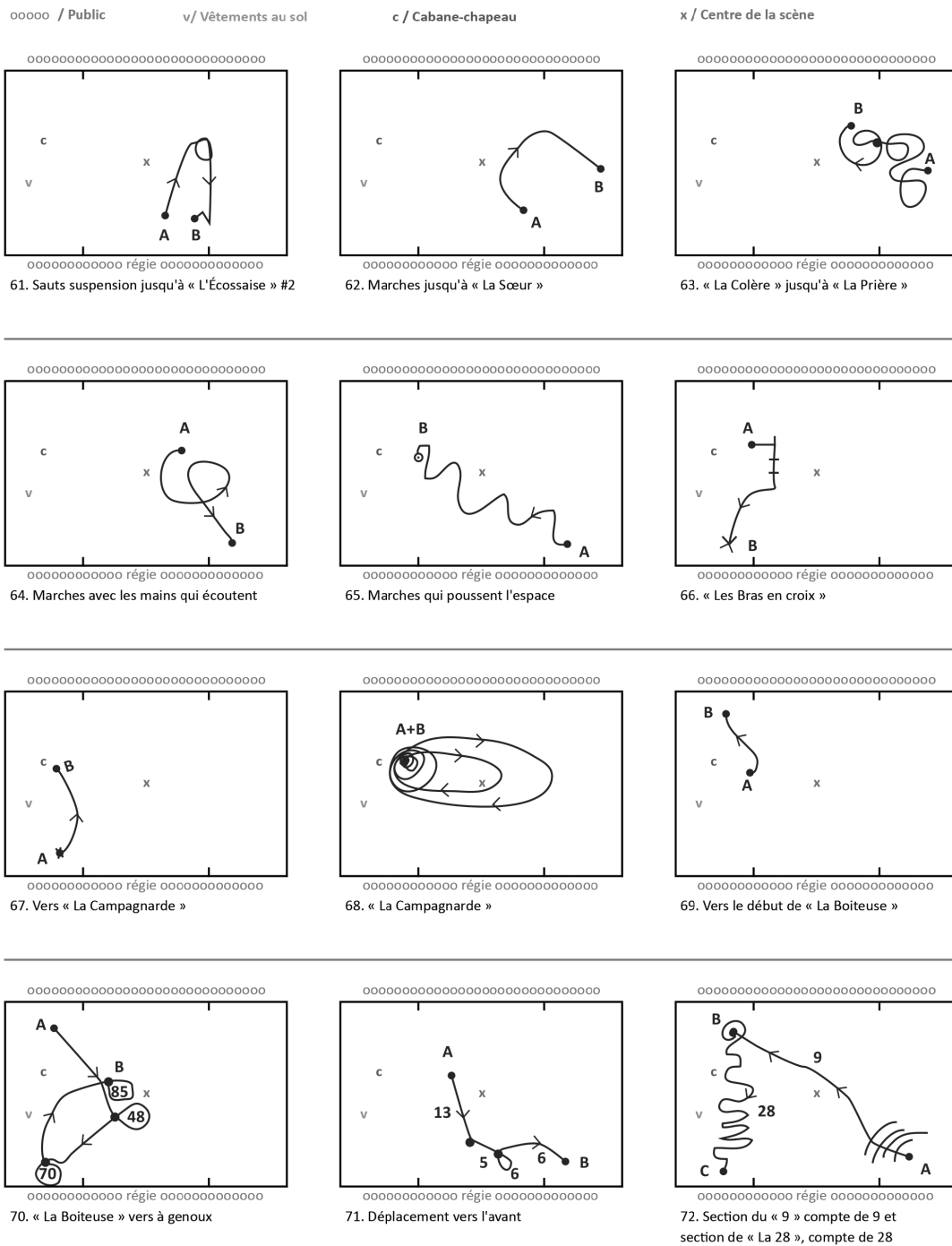
Furthermore, to allow for a better understanding of the work and the choreographers' artistic approach, following Ginelle Chagnon's example, we conducted interviews; recorded rehearsals documenting the transmission of the work by the choreographers and dancers involved in the recreation; included all available video recordings of the original work; and filmed the final recreated work.

THE ISSUE OF COPYRIGHT

Since we wanted to sell the choreographic toolkits and planned to share excerpts from them on our website, we had to consider the question of copyright. A choreographic toolkit contains documents that we did not create (soundtracks, lighting plans) and that we do not own (images of dancers in the photos and in videos of the work).

We therefore prepared agreements (a *sine qua non* condition for uploading these documents to our website) so that all the collaborators—from makeup artists to stage designers, sound composers and dancers—could authorize us to use their documentation and images. This required ongoing work with a legal expert to draw up standard contracts (permission agreements for the fixation, recording and use of audiovisual, iconographic and sound material) that could be adjusted to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

Each collaborator was given assurances that the toolkits were not a commercial endeavour and would in no way confer the right to use or recreate the work, in whole or in part. This condition is clearly stipulated in both the toolkit and sales contract: only the choreographers and their beneficiaries may grant the right to recreate the work.



WHY CREATE CHOREOGRAPHIC TOOLKITS, AND FOR WHOM?

“All of my works are ephemeral. They come to life at a specific moment, but their existence is very short-lived. I would like for *Cartes postales de Chimère* to stay alive.” This is what choreographer Louise Bédard told us when we approached her with the idea for a choreographic toolkit. For her, the toolkit is a bulwark against oblivion, a legacy to hand down to future generations.

Creating choreographic toolkits gives the documented works a certain legitimacy. This project also revealed the relationship between the FJPP and our choreographic heritage. The toolkits document works that have been remounted and that the FJPP considers to be important.

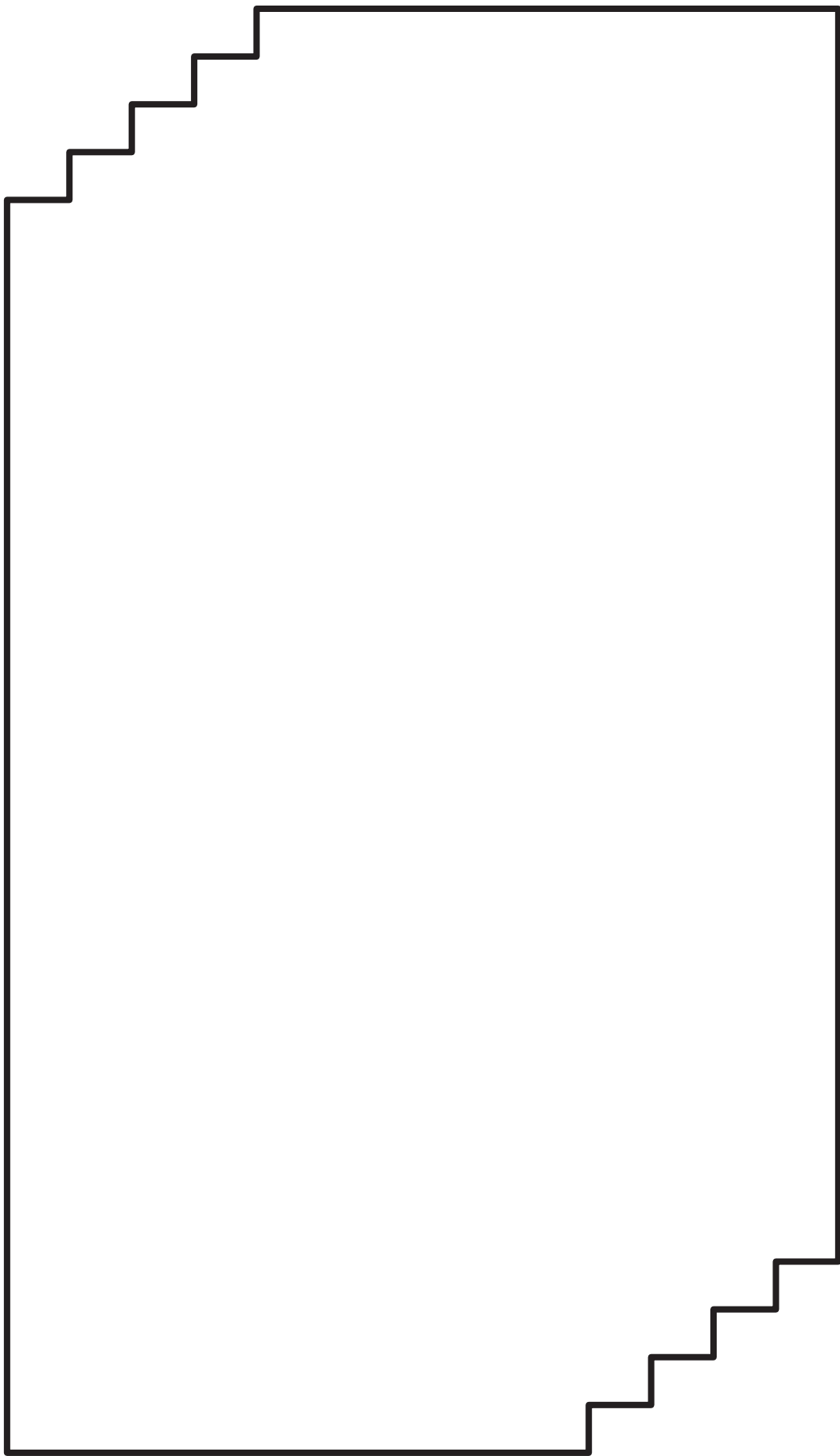
To date, the toolkits have only documented a certain form of dance—so-called contemporary dance works created by white choreographers of a certain generation (those aged 50 and over at the time of the remount). We are very conscious of this bias.

While working on the toolkits, we also realized that the notations in the form chosen for the first five toolkits would be inappropriate for works based on improvisation, or for more open or hybrid works. For these types of choreographies, other forms of notation such as scores or scripts would be more suitable, which would mean rethinking the design of the toolkits.

We found ourselves coming back to the same questions: Why do we want to document a work? Who is our target audience? What viewpoint do we want (or have we chosen) during the documentation process? Although we had already created five choreographic toolkits, which were well received and of which we were proud, we had to consider these important points.

We had to take the time to deconstruct the process of creating the toolkits, to question it. This is what gave rise to the discussions and reflections that follow

^



conversation



Those who took part in the conversation:

Ginelle Chagnon
Lise Gagnon
Lucie Grégoire
Kim Henry
Anne-Laure Jean
Brigitte Kerhervé
Catherine Lavoie-Marcus
Nasim Lootij
Sophie Michaud
Josée Plamondon
Isabelle Poirier
Romy Snauwaert

The conversation included the following statements (taken from the Espace Perreault website and indicated by the following graphic symbols [+]¹ et [+]²):

[+]¹ Lucie Grégoire, excerpts from the round table discussion “Création, récréation : en deça, au-delà et autour des boîtes chorégraphiques” during the focus day event *Between Traces and Writing*, held by the FJPP on May 16, 2018.

[+]² Isabelle Poirier and Sophie Michaud, excerpts from the interview “Isabelle Poirier : sur les chemins de la transmission,” conducted by Sophie Michaud on May 1, 2018.

Statements gathered by Lise Gagnon
Video recording by Frédérique Rivest
Images chosen by Émilie Allard

why create choreographic toolkits, and for whom?



Isabelle The first time I worked on a toolkit, on *Boîte chorégraphique Cartes postales de Chimère*, Ginelle really guided me. The meeting with Ginelle was really important for me to learn the process. Yes, I'd danced Louise [Bédard]'s solo, but to describe the work, I needed a format. How to describe a choreography? How to approach this toolkit? I needed some kind of format [she grabs hold of a book], otherwise it would have been . . . [she holds her breath and pulls a face]. Once I knew *how to do it*, there were all kinds of problems around incorporating photos: which ones to keep and exclude? Dancers are very visual. We can't just communicate through writing.

[+]² For Louise, it was really important that the toolkit include all descriptive elements: everything in her work is closely configured. In the 70-minute piece, there are just 16 seconds of improvisation. It's an example of very tight, precise choreographic writing. It was extremely important for Louise that each detail be documented.

In the case of this work, the descriptive format proposed by Ginelle worked, but for *Les Choses dernières*, by Lucie [Grégoire], I didn't know how to bring the description of movements together with the images, because the demands of Lucie's choreographic writing were very different from those of Louise's writing. For *Boîte chorégraphique Les Choses dernières*, we had to add the intentions, states and means whereby Lucie arrived at each movement.

Sophie [+]² Each work calls for its own mode of transmission.

Isabelle [+]² Exactly. And I think we have to pay attention to these differences, because a memory is created in all kinds of ways, but it's especially created out of what is important to the choreographer. My role was to find how to transmit all of those dimensions.

[+]² It was a big job. I remember spending time with Louise. We looked at everything together and gave each other feedback. Was it clear? Was it sufficient? What about the music? Did the diagrams show movement in space? Did we choose the right names for the sections? The documentation process leads you to understand the work differently. It's like diving into a book. I dove right in: it became a form of writing that was no longer in my body. I had to distance myself from it and put it on paper. It was a very different kind of work [from dance], but just as exciting.

ensuring a work's longevity: who documents it?



For me that's key: being able to create a format for each choreographer—a format that can move, that's not too rigid. The strategies used to preserve a work are determined by the choreographic language itself. These different languages have their requirements that vary from one work to another. You have to be flexible. You have to think about how to define all of the parameters of a choreography so you can reveal its core and effectively transmit it to future dancers in such a way that they grasp the essence of the work. At the same time, the format created by Ginelle gives you a structure, otherwise you'd be lost. It's like having a frame or a large tree diagram. Then you have to figure out the choreographer's needs.

Another big question is who are we doing this for? That question speaks to the very *raison d'être* of these toolkits.

General agreement.

Isabelle Are we documenting these works for choreographers? For academics? For someone who wants to remount the work or discover other languages, perhaps?

Ginelle A toolkit can be valuable for many individuals, not just dance specialists. There is something important in terms of the work's traces that we mustn't neglect. The toolkit can target members of the general public who want to access dance archives and draw inspiration from them.

Isabelle I think that is the big question.



Sophie Concern about a work's longevity is multi-faceted. There are artists who base their approach on the idea of the work's ephemerality and evanescence, and there are others who don't have the opportunity to reflect on it, because they don't have the time or resources. It's above all a question of time, when you look at the day-to-day reality of dance artists in Quebec. Most of them can't reach [the documentation stage]; they don't have the necessary conditions to produce memory documents.

Catherine Yes, what I see is a desire to think methodically about the question of conservation, either by seeing it in terms of "preservation" or, on the contrary, by celebrating the ephemeral quality of dance. I think it's interesting to see that this conceptual positioning is now part of the creative process itself. Sometimes you can use the archives as creative material. But you need the resources to do so.

Isabelle It's also about knowing what to note down and keep, so it doesn't get lost. As a teacher, I see more and more "micro-remounts," if you will. You come to class with small parts of works. What are my teaching methods? It could be beneficial, to be truly in agreement with the creator, to have access to a basic micro-memory, instead of things being only in our personal memory. I always try to remember that, because more and more, we're teaching works that we've danced. My memory is mine: the corrections I received for my body.

We have to raise awareness. Not just in small groups, but across the community. We're creating a shared memory. A lot of these memories are created in the studio when there's no one around. I see [documentation and transmission] as a responsibility. But we can't do everything: overseeing these first stages, naming them. As a milieu, we have a shared experience and an ever-growing shared memory. How can we ensure its survival in the long term?



Catherine Lavoie-Marcus

Ginelle Chagnon

Sophie It requires a willingness. When, in their process or approach, do artists state this willingness: "This time, I'm going to work on traces" or "I'll make a trace and question the nature of that trace at the same time"?

Isabelle I don't think it can happen during the creative process.

Brigitte It could negatively impact the creative process.

Isabelle [The idea of documentation] is present when you remount a work. It's more and more possible now, since more and more works are being remounted. During the creative process, we're so much in our heads. But perhaps it's possible when we're doing remounts.

Ginelle I'm not sure I agree that a remount is the best time to create a notation for a work. I don't think it's up to the choreographer to do it either. As an author, the choreographer needs an editor to look at the work. It's important to have another, neutral perspective. It's that person's responsibility to take the work in hand.

Isabelle, you work alongside the choreographer and communicate what is inside their work. At the end of the day, you'll extract a small part that you'll teach. Often the rehearsal director is in the best position to start the documentation process.

I think we need to get the dance community interested in documentation, but it's not everyone's responsibility to carry it out.

Isabelle Since I've danced both Louise and Lucie's works, I felt able to describe them. I always needed the creators to validate things, but I had a lived experience that was really in my flesh, which meant I could understand them from within the writing.

Ginelle I never danced Fortier's works. The choreographer is the carrier, the initiator, the instigator of the work. The rehearsal director is the first spectator in the world to see the whole piece. He or she waits for it to evolve, to understand how it works and so on. The dancers are the incarnation. Each person has a different viewpoint. You can even include the critics who talk about the work, the comments made by the audience as they leave the performance venue. These multiple voices allow us to better understand the work, especially if you put it in a historical context—the context in which it was created.

Sophie I think these concerns are connected to how we were trained. Since the 1970s, we've only looked forward, embracing an avant-gardism that doesn't include the reconstruction of works. We thought that reconstruction belonged to the past, to the ballet tradition we wanted to distance ourselves from. There was a rupture. Now, suddenly, we're saying there's a potentiality. What do we do with it? For me, the basic question is, "How do we come to dance?" What do we, as mature artists, share as knowledge? How can we interest young people, spark a curiosity that will be theirs, not ours? We're mistaken if we think we can leave them our current concerns. We have to sow a new seed that will become theirs.

Brigitte Aren't some creators against that idea?

Isabelle Perhaps it's too demanding.

Sophie That's why I come back to the question of willingness. You really embody that willingness, Ginelle, and it's truly admirable, but not everyone sees the process that way. Even if we play similar roles, I position myself differently. My energy, the way I guide is different. Who can embody that willingness? Is it a dancer? There are dancers who have impressive notebooks and who do sketches, who have references. Or is it the dramaturg, the rehearsal director? Who is it?

It takes a willingness. What kind of willingness? We also have to reach administrators, because if documentation isn't included in their budget, it won't happen. We also need to raise awareness at the administrative level.

Nasim I'd like to add something. There first has to be a willingness on the part of the choreographer to document their work. Or to have the work documented by a notation expert, because there are experts who can read notation and recreate and transmit the work. There are several notation systems that track movements in great detail. So the presence of the choreographer or creator isn't as necessary for a remount. There are experts in choreographic writing. It's the responsibility of choreographers to note their creations, to allow their works to be transmitted for centuries to come. In 200 years, other experts will have the responsibility to teach dancers and then dancers will perhaps transmit the work orally to other dancers. In France, you have the Carnets Bagouet, documents that are a bit like the choreographic toolkits. But instead of including descriptions and images, they use notation. They include everything around the work: the music, its history. They're comprehensive documents, with images and descriptions so that dancers who can't necessarily read the notation system can still access the work. And then there's the notation system for precision, for the experts and researchers who know how to read it.

Lise Many choreographic works aren't based on the precision of gestures. We can't describe all choreographies movement by movement, like we did with the toolkits, and we wouldn't want to either.

Nasim We think that Laban's system of notation and other systems are super precise and that we have to write all of the movements, but it's not true, we have a certain freedom. You have extreme precision and the option of being free. You can use signs to indicate things, or you can add words. So it's really open. It's up to the choreographer to specify how much precision they want, and it's up to the notation practitioner to capture that as faithfully as possible.

Sophie In an ideal world, we would have access to all methods of codification, recording and transmission. It's a problem in the dance milieu and a culture problem. In other dance cultures and other places, tradition counts more.

Lise We need to develop a culture of documentation, not necessarily just for a remount.



Sophie Michaud

Nasim Lootij

Brigitte The fear is that documentation will “harm” the creative process. So, like we were saying earlier, the choreographer isn’t necessarily the right person to document their work. It would be important to decide who should play that role. The person who best understands the creator’s approach and who will respect it.

Sophie That raises another really big and topical question: “Who writes history?” What is the writing of history based on? Traces, archives? Who documents the work? If it’s people from the outside, will they really speak to our reality? That is a big problem when you look at the history of dance, which was written by men and mainly covered the contribution of male choreographers, while women had no voice and female dancers had no voice either or very little. That’s how history has been written. When we’re creating a document for the archives, it’s something we have to think about. It’s a political act.

Josée When we were talking about voices, is it the voice of an archivist or the person taking care of the documentation process? Or is it the voice of the people who create? We can’t force people to use documentation elements like metadata and standardized identifiers. That has to come from the community. There has to be an interest. People won’t do it out of obligation, they’ll do it because they want to. It’s a shared responsibility.

That’s what the digital world means to me: small parts to assemble, “loose joints,” if you will, that are assembled in a very flexible way, because people are interested in doing it or because [the parts] fit well together. So it won’t always be the same type of person in charge of documentation. Each group, each creator will have to find or create their own way of doing things. And, yes, we have to accept that, in certain cases, there won’t be any documentation, because you can’t force someone to do it.

Between documentation where the creator explains and does everything, and documentation where the creator hasn’t necessarily noted everything, or has maybe noted just a part, there is a whole range of voices and possibilities. Which one is best? We can accept something that is plural, the result of putting a variety of perspectives together. We can also accept something that is very controlled, for which everything has been noted from A to Z, where the person who documents knows exactly what form the work should take.

Sophie There’s also a concern with image and identity. The concern that, “When I’m no longer around, what will be left of me? How will people treat my image?”

Josée So it ranges from something perfectly controlled to something totally open. We can have both ways of structuring.



Brigitte Kerhervé

Josée Plamondon



Ginelle To come back to the origin of the choreographic toolkit, I think that when you’re remounting a work, the toolkit is quite utopian because normally, dance is transmitted through human contact, or it’s human contact that enriches the transmission. The work is truly remounted when it comes into contact with the choreographer or the rehearsal director chosen to bring it to life.

Catherine It depends on your stance.

Sophie Ginelle, you talk about the work in terms of its origin, in its en-ti-re-ty, as if the work was a closed entity?

Ginelle In its entirety and integrity. The toolkit is designed to let you reconstruct the work. It gives you the tools to do the best job possible, because Lord knows, aside from ballet, contemporary dance archives are a bit sparse . . . Often we use video recordings [she looks up] to promote the work, so there’s a lot of information missing. Creating choreographic toolkits is a bit of a utopian project—thinking we’ll be able to remount a work with the toolkits. But it’s OK, because thanks to that utopian vision, we’ve really made an effort to gather all the relevant information required to recreate a show. We’ve achieved a certain precision.

That said, it’s through human contact that dance is reborn, even if there’s only one spectator. The human experience is paramount and it’s what motivates us to breathe new life into the work. If, in 50 years’ time, no one is appointed to protect and transmit Jean-Pierre Perreault’s choreographic legacy, it will be forgotten.

But if one person goes to the archives tomorrow and comes across Lucie’s choreographic toolkit, that person will have access to the entire work. The toolkit describes dance in a new way. Even if you don’t understand everything, it describes Lucie, the dancers, the multiple components of a show.

Isabelle It describes a work. It’s wonderful.

what if we started over?



Lise Romy and Anne-Laure, you both worked on giving the toolkit concrete form. What would you do differently if you were to start over?

Romy It took two years to complete *Boîte chorégraphique Bagne*. It's the most comprehensive toolkit, because there was a model, a precise plan of everything to be included. And the choreographer took part in the exercise. He included everything the kit could contain. So if we were to start over, I'd do the same thing for all the toolkits.

Sophie From one toolkit to another, we learned more and more about how to document a work.

Brigitte And about the structure, I imagine?

Romy We determined the structure relatively quickly, drawing inspiration from *Boîte chorégraphique Bras de plomb*, which was developed by Ginelle. But we might have to revisit the question of structure for future toolkits. A fixed structure is perhaps not ideal.

If I were to develop another toolkit, I'd watch the shows before working on the texts. I'd also work more closely with the person writing the descriptions.

Brigitte More interaction with the people involved.

Romy More interaction with the people directly involved, with the choreographer, and with the people transcribing the movements.

The studio video recordings were the most valuable. The video of Isabelle with Louise, where she comments on the work . . . it really helped with the description of the movements.



Lise Gagnon

Brigitte Kerhervé



Lucie Grégoire

Romy Snauwaert



Ginelle In retrospect, I think those videos are more helpful than detailed descriptions. Because you see the person talking. A person who delivers the work, verbally, with her body, but also with words, like in the studio. It's a more direct contact and there's less to decode than with writing.

In the final stages of documenting Fortier's work, I abandoned the format I'd developed for the script. I just took a series of photos that show the work, sequence by sequence. Then I added a brief description of each sequence. If there were more details to be explained, I indicated where to look for them in the video, at specific points.

So I made the writing more interactive, rather than seeing it as a data bank. I see the description as a support or an introduction to videos recorded in the studio—very specific videos where people talk about what they're doing. Where you see the person directing. The camera is off to the side. You see the action, like a director's cut. The person comments on the action and directs it at the same time. You're describing, not evaluating the dance.

Sophie In the person's gestures there's information that isn't about the work, but that stems from an understanding of the work from the inside and is translated through nonverbal communication.

Lise We're talking more about transmission than a description.

Sophie Yes, because you get a lot of information from that as well [she gestures for emphasis] . . . from the flow of speech, the silences, the moments when the person intervenes, insistent gestures when you're demonstrating something. It's a way of repeating the same thing: "put more emphasis here"; "move more slowly there"; "maybe you could try this . . ." It's another type of information.

Isabelle It could almost be decoded. We could create a sequence: in the first video, you simply describe the movement; in the second, you show the intention behind the sequence. You work on the intention. It could be a good idea to decode it like that, to reveal the different layers.

General agreement.

Ginelle I did that with Louise when we were staging *Cartes postales de Chimère*. She stood there commenting on the portrait photos above her, the direction of the lights. She was talking spontaneously, in the context of the work. I wasn't attempting to make a polished documentary, but the footage shows you what was happening as if you were there, learning the piece.

For the last work by Fortier *Danse-Création*, I did interviews with the set designer and lighting designer. I also interviewed the executive director, Gilles Savary, because it was the company's last work. Gilles had held the position for 25 years. That work was important to them. Where did it come from, what was the relationship with the producer, why did they decide to tour the show? There were many elements that influenced the work that weren't danced elements. It's important to include them in the archive.

Brigitte It transmits the entire context.

Sophie For me, a toolkit encompasses all of that. It isn't just a kit to remount or reconstruct a work; it's a treasure chest filled with curios and knowledge.

Isabelle It's a house.

Sophie A house that can be visited by someone looking to perform a role or recreate the work, as well as someone from the outside who would never have imagined entering that space. An artist enters a work and discovers it. It becomes a treasure trove of knowledge.

Anne-Laure If the toolkit were open-ended, it would be constantly evolving. Material would be added, from the remounts, for instance. When we finished the print version of *Boîte chorégraphique Bagne*, we fine-tuned the digital versions of all the other toolkits accordingly. Because the *Bagne* toolkit was really complete. Technically, in an ideal world, you'd have a 360-degree video with two audio tracks—one for the intentions and the other for the movements described. It would be the same video, but the person would be able to view around the dancer or dancers, in the space, and could switch from one audio track to the other.

Ginelle We have to document a work while it is being created and at all subsequent stages. But we especially have to do it when the work is finally presented, because we have a better understanding of what we're doing, especially when we're at the end of the creative process.

We should also document the work during post-production, after the show. It's important to film the objects, dancers and costumes, to conduct interviews with the set design in view. We need to record the space where the work came to life, to provide more information to the person looking at the documents. It demystifies the work. There's a difference between recording rehearsals and the show, because something special happens during the show. If you do it too early, there's a layer of information missing. In English we call it "owning" the work. It means that, at the moment of sharing and experiencing the show, the dancer delivers something that belongs to them. They experience the dance at a deeper level.

It's also interesting to note that when the work is remounted, dancers use their mastery of the role, which also resides in their memory. If we have an opportunity to document the work at that stage, it's important to do so. A choreographic toolkit is a collection of many layers of memory, the many components of the work. Like any memory, the toolkit will always be incomplete. In a way, you leave room for the reader's imagination.

Isabelle I think that creating a toolkit after the work has been created is a good opportunity to re-experience the work.

Ginelle Immediately afterwards, because you're still in the work. It resonates in a different way. It's a good time to [document and] transmit the work.

Anne-Laure I'm a big fan of podcasts. I'd like to be able to listen to just the audio track, the intentions or the music, once the work is complete, just to reimpose myself in it. I'd like to have reminders of the intention and separate media supports.

Catherine I'm fascinated by audio descriptions of choreographic works created for people with a visual impairment. They're accounts of the work from a spectator's perspective. Valérie Castan in France does it. The accounts are supposed to be objective, but they're obviously told through the eyes of the person describing the work. It's really nice to listen to: "They move forward on the stage. Two women are there, standing in the corner . . . One of the women moves to the right . . ." You can be lulled by the description; it offers a different dimension.

Lucie [+]¹ Kim Henry is the first dancer who worked with a choreographic toolkit without the choreographer. I chose Kim to replace Isabelle, who had an injury. It was five weeks before a show that was scheduled to be performed in Vancouver. When I remounted the entire piece with Isabelle, we worked on it for five months. Not every day, but the learning process took time.

[+]¹ Kim had a contract abroad. She left with the choreographic toolkit, the videos of me and Isabelle dancing the piece, and in two weeks she learned the entire structure. When she got back to the studio, she knew the entire work, from A to Z. I didn't have to show her the movements; she knew the sections. It was fantastic. It gave her a really solid base. Of course, we had to work in the studio on her performance; we had to develop and fine-tune the textures and dynamics. But she had already inscribed the work in her body, and it was really thanks to the choreographic toolkit. Given our time limits, I don't think we would have managed without the toolkit.

Kim knew the sequencing of the work; she knew the sections and what each one conveyed—its theme, its intention. But it wasn't enough. Kim really had a good base, and even if I hadn't given her indications, even if we'd just worked on the movement, she would have been able to dance the piece. But if you want to explore deeper layers, to dig deeper in terms of intentions, the vibration of the character . . . I'm not sure how you can include that in a choreographic toolkit.

Romy Why don't we include it?

Lucie You'd have to detail it further, develop it. In my work, practically every gesture or set of gestures has an intention, or several intentions at its source.

Sophie I have question, Lucie. Do you think all of the information that wasn't written, listed and detailed in the toolkit can exist outside the creative process? When you're reflecting on the content with a dancer, could that information resurface at that point? Isn't it precisely in the moment of recreation, the living moment, that information enters that interstitial space between you and [she grabs Kim's shoulders] another person in the flesh? I get the impression that a memory is awakened in the presence of . . . in action . . . and I wonder whether all that can be contained in a toolkit. It's a question.

Lucie What you're saying is very true. It emerges through my encounter with Kim or another dancer. Perhaps the choreographic toolkit is a bit reductive, if its goal is to allow a dancer or another choreographer to remount a work without my presence or the presence of a dancer who has performed the work. Just how far can [the toolkit] take us?

Kim How far can you go while staying true to the intention or to your work? It's interesting, because in my case, I was able to learn the piece in two weeks, using the toolkit. I don't know how we would have managed without it; it was an extraordinary tool. I tried to assimilate as much as possible in a very short timeframe. Today I think I would really have liked to access more information related to intentions. I would have liked to access other images; I would have wanted more visual cues; I would have wanted each section to be broken down even further. But that has a lot to do with the nature of Lucie's work, which is layered. It's not the case with all choreographies, where the process is different. I'm also familiar with Lucie's work. There were descriptions of exercises, for example, that I understood. If I didn't already know Lucie and if I hadn't already done that type of exercise with her in the studio, I don't know how I would have found the source of the movement without bringing my own choices and interpretations to the descriptions.

Sophie Having worked with Lucie, I'd say it's because she provides so much information in her movement, not in her verbal language. She'll say a few words, and then she'll dive into the state and that's when the answer comes. Even if you add a lot of words and explanations, if there isn't that process of validation by the choreographer at the end, you're doing subjective rather than objective work.

Lise On another topic: Kim, did the excerpts from Lucie and Isabelle's notebooks in *Boîte chorégraphique Les Choses dernières* help and inspire you?

Lucie They were just fragments.

Isabelle They made no sense.

Kim Yes, but they were part of the work and the person [who wrote them].

Sophie Part of the secret of the work.

Kim Or the people who experienced it, who constructed it. The notes weren't detailed enough, but I enjoyed them. They were very rich. I didn't look for details in the notes, but I found them really important all the same. The little sketches, pieces of writing. You recognize yourself in them.

Isabelle When I write in my notebook, it's very private. It's not something I plan to share. My notes are personal reminders. I'd have to rewrite them before sharing them. I don't think the notebook is necessary unless I write notes specifically for the toolkit.

Lise It would become a documentation notebook, which isn't the same thing.

Isabelle A documentation notebook in which I would take care to write down relevant information. Often my notes are just spontaneous ideas . . . they're incomprehensible.

Kim I understand, but I didn't see them as a tool to help me understand the piece. It was a real privilege to have access to the notes. They offered a glimpse of the dancer's state of mind when she wrote them.

Sophie It helped you become part of the work.

Kim Yes, probably.

Sophie You became part of the entire piece.

Kim Yes, that's it.

Brigitte The notes are a way to enter the intimate part of the work.

Kim Yes! There were notes I couldn't even decipher, but I didn't mind. It was like I was reading over Isabelle or Lucie's shoulder while they were writing, and I found that very moving.

Lucie When you see an artist's notebooks at an exhibition, you discover a poetry in the sketch of a particular painting.

General agreement.

Ginelle And if the choreographic toolkits aren't only intended for dancers, [the notes] become evocative.



Ginelle Chagnon

Isabelle Poirier

Kim Henry

Brigitte But the creator has to agree to provide access to them.

All: Yes, absolutely.

Lise Kim, what in the toolkit helped you the most?

Kim First I read [the material] and then I went over the piece, section by section. It was well-organized, with plenty of detail. I read the intention, the spirit of the piece. Then I looked at the photos and compared them with the video, because it was easy to get lost in the description of the movements—left foot forward, right hand . . . [she places her right hand on her forehead].

General agreement.

Kim Without the video, I . . . [she sighs, indicating she would have been lost]. And even with the video, it wasn't always clear, because I had two versions of the work—Lucie's version and Isabelle's version. Perhaps it would have helped me if the work had been remounted in the studio.

Several participants: Mm-hmm. OK.

Kim For example, there were all the hand sections. I wanted to know what the texture and intentions were, but it was hard to see on the video. I would have liked to see simple close-ups, in the studio, of Isabelle's hands. More basic information.

All: Yes, yes!

Kim It would have been complementary. Because afterwards, in the studio, all those questions were answered when I saw Lucie doing the movements.

Isabelle This may sound crazy, but perhaps we could create mini-videos? To show movements? All the movements, in the studio. Perhaps we could learn better than way? You have a section and then the video [she gestures with her hands].

Lise So if we were to redo it, Kim would want to have more basic information and Isabelle would want videos instead of photos.

Lucie Without costumes.

Sophie A precise focus.

Isabelle Yes, a precise focus.

Sophie On certain parts of the body.

Lucie Close-ups of the body, near the hands or the face if there's something going on with the face.

Isabelle Louise and I made a video in the studio where I was saying everything, describing each movement in her work. I don't know if anyone will ever watch it . . .

General laughter.

an open toolkit



Lise While creating the toolkits at the FJPP, we realized we were documenting the choreographer's vision. We didn't really document the vision of dancers and collaborators, but that would be something to consider. Because there are many ways to experience a work.

Brigitte Kim, did using the toolkit generate new information that could be used to enrich it? Based on your experience, on everything you learned to recreate the piece? During the recreation process, you asked Lucie for more information, based on elements in the toolkit. Perhaps you could have added that information to the toolkit?

Kim Huh! Probably.

Isabelle For sure. An open toolkit is an interesting idea.

General agreement.

Isabelle Toolkits are always permeable to new experiences.

General agreement.

Isabelle With the choreographer's approval, of course. It would be such a rich resource.

Sophie Once information is transmitted, in reconstructing a work, there is a certain ambiguity. It would be a good idea to correct the explanation to make it more precise and concrete.

Isabelle It would be a living, open entity. The toolkit would no longer be closed.

Josée It would have a contributory structure, so additional information could be added. Like discussions with the person who created the work and with those who will be performing it or who are trying to understand it. We could provide access to videos and documents, but behind them would be a structure. For those of you familiar with [the structure of] Wikipedia, behind each entry there are exchanges on why a certain piece of information was changed, on who added what. Sometimes there are even discussions. It's a very open structure that allows all kinds of things to be connected. You can add information and you can follow who is joining the conversation, see what people have said about a specific topic. You can also see the layers of information that are added.

There are wiki structures like that. For example, *Le violon de Jos (Jos' Fiddle)* documents Quebec's fiddling tradition. It even includes fiddles with digital tools, mechanical foot tappers, etc. They've used a wiki to connect videos of performances and create new links. The documentation is built over time according to users' needs. It will never take the same form as the original content, but the creator's trace remains. The advantage of contributory structures is that, instead of seeing a series of comments, the information is linked and cumulative.

Ginelle How can you protect the work?

Josée The original work remains intact. You have to decide whether to conserve it on that platform or somewhere else. Where is the work? Is this an interpretation of the work? Where is the original version of the choreography stored? In English, it's called a "work," in French *l'œuvre*. But the original work is separate from its manifestation. The original idea is somewhere and there are manifestations of its presence. In many cases, for example in dance, we'll say the original work is what you see during the first run. After that, you're seeing manifestations, other ways of interpreting the work. When you add successive layers, you can always return to the original. There is always a history.

Ginelle Both versions can co-exist. You can have an open toolkit that is enriched by individuals designated by the choreographers (i.e., specialists), along with a more open-ended platform.

Josée Yes, exactly.

Ginelle So one version is protected, the other is more open.

Josée Exactly. In other fields, there are platforms where specialists handle information and do tests. There are platforms with links. Members of the general public—"enlightened amateurs"—can take a work and reinterpret it. There's a space for exchange, which is necessary to promote the work and put it out there. There's also a laboratory space where specialists can discuss topics among themselves.

I like the term "living archives." It's what appealed to me about the toolkits. I come from a library science and IT background. We also deal with archives, but I'm not an archivist. The discussions can become very heated when you want to preserve practices from an archival standpoint, but sometimes this way of doing things doesn't meet certain needs. People may be looking for archives that are living—they want to access the creator's and not the archivist's voice.

How do I recreate a narrative around a toolkit containing various documents without instructions from the key person in all of this—the creator? Our discussion reminds me of a tool developed by the Daniel Langlois Foundation and the Guggenheim Museum—the "variable media" approach—which made it possible to document the wishes of media artwork creators. How can we ensure the longevity of a work? Do we really have to ensure its longevity if it was created in certain conditions? Should it be preserved if it is recreated in other conditions? To what extent can we reproduce a digital work or even a performance? Can you produce it in other places? The artists listed all the conditions that would determine whether the work was still theirs or not. Where do you start and how far are you willing to go? There were artists who were very direct, who said: "I can't accept the work like that. If you don't use this type of light bulb, the work is dead. You can take a photo of it, but the work no longer exists."

I find this approach extremely important, because it's respectful. It respects the value, intention and voice of the creator.



Catherine Would it also be necessary to designate individuals to recreate the work, in the absence of the choreographer and/or once the choreographer passes away? For example, deciding who will be in charge of putting in place a posthumous validation structure for those wanting to remount the work, knowing that if the work is remounted without the authorization of those appointed individuals, it can be seen and shared, but it can't bear the title of the work.

That offers more flexibility for sharing, but it also lets you keep the work's authorial format intact.

Ginelle Absolutely.

Catherine I feel like that is what's missing from the choreographic toolkits—what we call in art the "authorized narrative." It's the voice of the choreographer who says "the reproduction of this work based on the choreographic toolkit can be considered the same as the original work *if, and only if* . . ." followed by a set of conditions. It could be included as a preface.

General agreement.



Anne-Laure Jean

Lucie Grégoire

the pleasure of documenting



Lise I don't think documentation should only be seen in terms of remounting a work. Documentation is a full practice in its own right. It provides meaning, historical context, viewpoints. It can be plural. That's what came out of our reflections on the toolkit and our *Between Traces and Writing* focus day event (see our website for more details).

Brigitte Documentation could be a kind of duty. A duty in service of memory, with different aims. You can focus on a certain aspect of documentation with a view to recreating a work. But if your goal is transmission, to make the work part of history, then your focus will be a bit different.

Lise A duty in the service of memory, but especially a pleasure.

Brigitte Duty and memory have to become a pleasure. It should start with pleasure, but I'm not convinced it does.

Lise Everyone here has that sensibility.

Brigitte That's why we're here. We signed up, because we're interested, but I'd be curious to hear from choreographers who are starting out, who haven't yet made a name for themselves. When you talk to them about documentation, they say, "Yes, I have to do it and I will do it." Or they may say, "No, I'm not interested." It would be a good idea to talk to young choreographers who aren't aware of its importance.

Ginelle It's a question of temperament. Some choreographers start creating and the first thing they do is set up the computer and camera to record everything. The problem is sorting out all the footage afterwards. It's important to edit files and keep them at the end of a production. That's the time to do it, because you're still in the process. It's an important stage in archival practice. Documenting a work can be part of this "housekeeping" process.

Josée Young people do have documentation practices. How can we let them know that it's relatively straightforward to document a work? And if you don't have the right skill set, you can call on others; if you don't like noting things on paper or even on a computer. Like we were saying, the process can be very controlled or very open-ended. If someone doesn't want to take care of documentation but wants to have the last say, we can figure out ways to preserve certain traces. It can be very detailed; it depends on the group. Or it can be less rich, but there are still elements to conserve.

Ginelle You don't always want to keep experimental work in the studio. There can be sensitive material in there. It's important to choose what you want to leave behind.

Kim There are moments in the studio where documentation would have a negative impact on the process, on the intimacy.

Brigitte Certain things happen because you're in a protected space. We have to document what creators want to document, what they consider appropriate. To keep the creator's spirit in the toolkit, not just the vision of someone from the outside who offers a uniform representation of what they imagine should be documented. It doesn't necessarily reflect the creator's wishes or approach.

Josée We have to accept that not everything will be documented and archived. We have to make choices.

Brigitte Certain artists may want that unique moment to stay unique.

Ginelle To preserve the mystery.

Josée The same question arises in Indigenous contexts. Many heritage objects should never be shown during practices that are part of strictly controlled rituals. Only specific individuals can handle or talk about these objects, and everyone has to accept that they can't be seen. There's no point in resisting; certain things can't be shown. Which raises a question: do we store material simply to conserve it without showing it, or do we gather objects to circulate them, to increase knowledge and awareness?

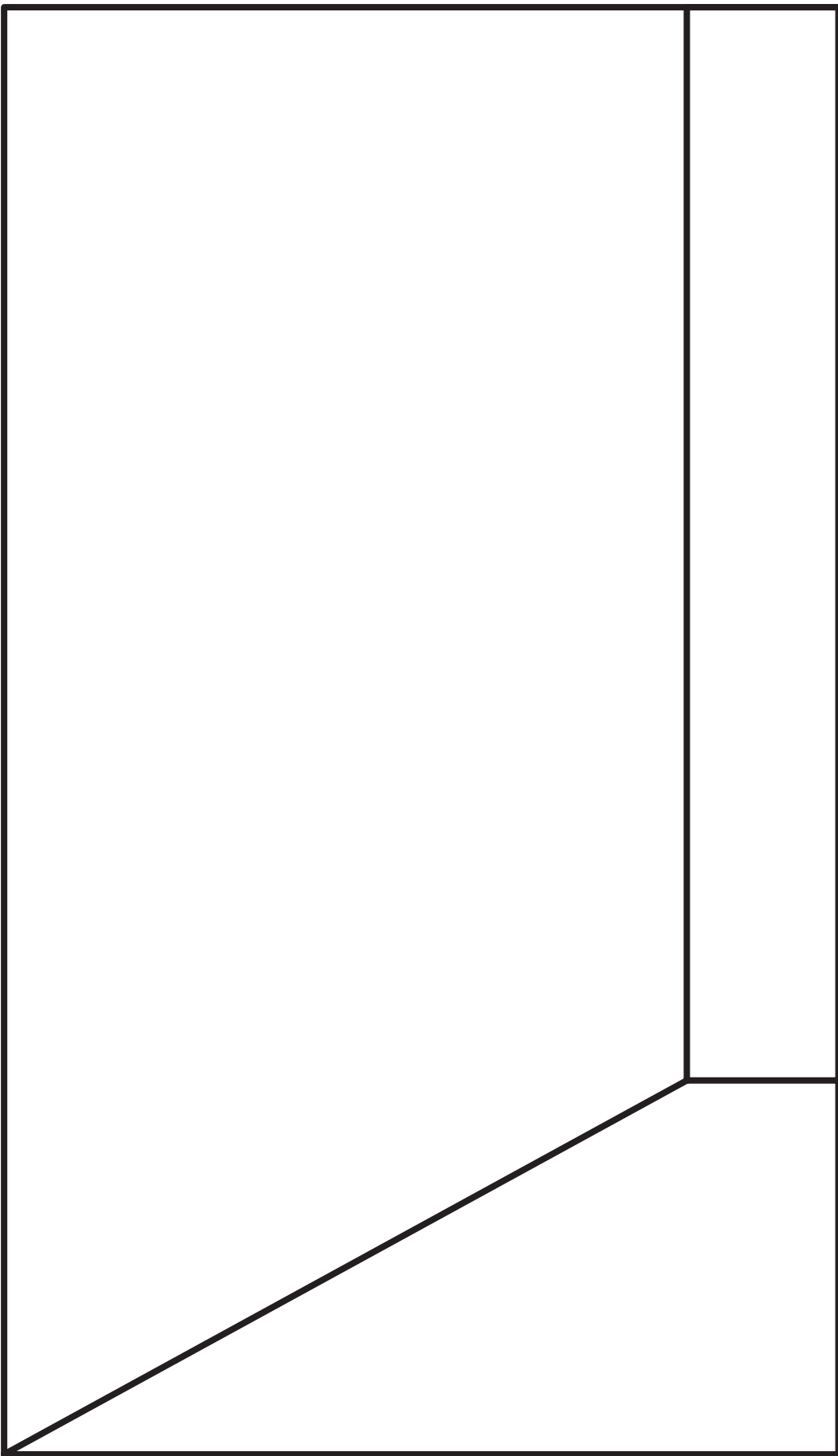
Sophie As Paul Ricœur explains, the moment a document is archived, it becomes silent. The archive speaks when someone reads and uses it.

Ginelle It could be interesting to develop another project where you'd visit the world of the choreographers, dancers and artistic collaborators—you'd see how they talk to people, how they create. It's like learning a new language, another way of thinking, reflecting and seeing the world. We could document that too, even if we don't create choreographic toolkits around the creators and their work. It would be a valuable resource for the dance archives. It would also promote a deeper understanding of the choreographic toolkits.

The next step would be opening the toolkits and allowing for other projects to emerge from them.




reflections



opening a toolkit: daring to say what is missing

Catherine Lavoie-Marcus



During the focus day event *Between Traces and Writing*, Lise Gagnon, Executive Director of the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault, invited two of the toolkits' pioneers—choreographers Danièle Desnoyers and Lucie Grégoire—to take a critical look at this extensive project aimed at documenting their works. To start the discussion, Lise asked the following question: “If we were to redo the exercise, what would you do differently?” Interesting angle. We should recall that the question at the heart of the choreographic toolkits concerned the intrigue of remounting a work: “How can you remount a work that dates back many years?” We realized that the invitation to critically assess the choreographic toolkits was leading us beyond a simple review to an important conceptual issue: should the idea of reworking a choreography perhaps be reworked itself? Within the hands-on adventure of the toolkits lay a new intellectual adventure. Could this shift in critical thinking be dance’s secret double?

This is what Lucie Grégoire replied: “If we were to redo it, I’d pay a lot more attention to precisely describing body states.” Thinking about redoing the exercise brought to life missing elements. The discomfort caused by their absence signalled their importance. The idea of redoing the toolkits caused an internal shift, an inner voice that said, “I realize, after the fact, that this is what is important to me.” The toolkit is a matrix that reveals its value through what is not there. It is not a sealed space. It is continually opening towards an absence that is a driving force. Danièle Desnoyers confided that the inauguration of the toolkit revealed to her what was missing from the traces she had recorded.

This observation took her by surprise, even leading her to reconsider her own creative gestures. From that point on, she decided to do archival work at the moment of creation, even if it meant slowing down the process, given the intense focus involved in stepping back from the work that way. Let us speculate with Danièle Desnoyers: if archiving dance is always a gesture of untimely *detachment*, is it not better to do it too early rather than too late?

The question “If we were to redo the exercise, what would you do differently?” is a call to personal and collective speculation based on clues about what is important to us. Although I was not part of the team that created the toolkits, I feel compelled by this question of reworking—as a choreographic artist and researcher who is drawn to the historical, ethical and aesthetic issues underlying this fascinating adventure of archiving the performing arts. Several years ago, at Anne Bénichou’s invitation, I wrote an article on choreographic *parergon* for the collection *Recréer/scripter*.¹ In the article, I developed ideas inspired by the philosopher Jacques Derrida’s studies on the supplemental aspects (*para*) of the work (*ergon*). I used his image of a frame that allows a painting to appear, in order to develop the idea that a choreographic work also has a frame, albeit a more abstract one, which concerns its “fabrication.” It is a frame with existential, conceptual and technical aspects that, once made visible, explicit and durable, could allow the work to thrive and be preserved over time. The choreographic toolkit initiative seemed the perfect answer to this intuition. It satisfied a certain practical curiosity that my theoretical intuition was keeping alive and undefined,

¹ BENICHO, Anne (Ed.). (2015). *Recréer/Scripter. Mémoires et transmissions des œuvres performatives et chorégraphiques contemporaines*, Dijon: Les presses du réel.

namely “How do you go about doing this, in concrete terms?” Once my curiosity was satisfied, I could not help noticing that certain things were still missing from the toolkit, certain intriguing questions remained. The toolkit forced me to reformulate what is important to me.

The missing elements I am alluding to here have nothing to do with the elucidation of the dance piece’s construction (I do not suspect there are any details missing from the description of body states and so on). Rather, they concern other aspects that are important to me, that are not thematized in the toolkits, and that I believe merit further exploration. They stem from this observation: the toolkits, despite their important role in making the choreographic process explicit, in fact cover several *implicit* operations. Their creation—an admittedly detailed and draconian task—was based on multiple prior operations such as selecting the works to be documented; agreeing on the notion of heritage; establishing documentary categories; deciding on the toolkits’ accessibility and target audience; and establishing authorial regimes. These operations, although silent in the toolkits themselves, are very vocal the moment you pay attention to them. They determine a way of thinking about history, defining its ownership and deciding how it is to be of “service” to us, to borrow Nietzsche’s concept. Protection? Tribute? Consolation? Mythicization? An exercise for historians?

A DIFFICULT DETACHMENT

As stated on the Espace Perreault website, “a choreographic toolkit contains all the elements involved in creating a work in order to ensure its transmission in the long term.” However, having *everything* does not mean we have *permission* to recreate a work. Not surprisingly, the toolkit has proved to be a useful tool for choreographers seeking to remount a work from their repertoire. Lucie Grégoire and Danièle Desnoyers describe how the toolkits were an efficient way to remount their works with new dancers. Yet, despite this detachment and promise of efficiency (the choreographers’ presence is not as necessary during rehearsals for the remount), the work still requires their presence in the end, at the most crucial moment, when the new version is stamped and validated. Only then can it exist as a new version of the work. In the case of researchers and artists who are unfamiliar with the work, this form of transmission allows them to *come closer*. The toolkit certainly does not authorize the remounting of the work by anybody who feels inspired to do so. I cannot propose my re-creation of Lucie Grégoire’s *Les Choses dernières* to a theatre, simply relying on the contents of the toolkit and without obtaining the choreographer’s permission. Even if I stay very close to the carefully established score, I could miss certain details and that would change the nature of the piece. Does it matter?

If yes, then how much? Could I get around the stamp of approval by titling my work “A version of *Les Choses dernières* by Lucie Grégoire”? What are the moral and legal limits of the toolkits’ promise of transmission? There is nothing to indicate who can authorize the public remounting of works once they have been handed down to posterity. When the choreographers are no longer with us, does this responsibility fall to their beneficiaries? Or to specific dancers designated by the choreographer? What if they are not available? The toolkits perhaps do not provide us with *everything* we need to ensure the long-term transmission of the work. We have everything until the question of who history belongs to comes to haunt us . . . when someone with well-meaning or perhaps mischievous intent reinterprets or (mis)appropriates the original work, thus shining a light into the obscure corners of the toolkit. It is then that we realize that *something* was missing.

NOTHING GOES WITHOUT SAYING: THE CHALLENGE OF CANONIZATION

What definition of heritage do the toolkits reflect? I should specify *Montreal’s* heritage or, more broadly, *Quebec’s* heritage, since it is here that the works took form. The toolkits remain silent on this point and on the parameters involved in selecting the works. Yet the project has a strong performative dimension when it comes to the notion of heritage. It directly participates in consecrating certain works, thus helping to create a canonical history of dance in Quebec. Without it being explicitly stated, the toolkits establish a certain authority where dance heritage is concerned, since they were created for works considered worth preserving, transmitting and studying. Works to be rescued from oblivion. Consider the following press clipping supporting this regime of distinction: “There is no better performance than one which, long after the curtain has dropped, leaves you with captivating images that awaken both your senses and your intelligence... [This] show is that of an artist at the height of her art” (p. 12, *Boîte chorégraphique Les Choses dernières*). Reading this excerpt, you would think that the selection of this work was self-evident. Yet, as is often the case in the construction of major histories, there is a clear selection process, sometimes well camouflaged behind the facade of *it goes without saying*. Nothing goes without saying. There is a consciousness, whether of a community or a small group. This consciousness could be the result of a habit, rumour or expert argument. If you turn your attention to it, you can easily identify it. With the toolkits, there is a natural tendency to select works by choreographers who are francophone, white, from the same generation and who work with a similar aesthetic. If the toolkits are a determining factor in creating a canonical account of dance in Quebec, should we not expect a justifiably controversial reception, given the underrepresentation of diverse practices, identities and aesthetics? We soon see how the question “What if we were to redo the exercise?” raises further difficult questions as it comes up against the authoritative elements that the toolkits conceal (authorized transmission and legacy). It is imperative that we reflect on this.

MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

The expression *s’ouvrir la boîte* (literally, opening your mouth) means being outspoken. This project has the power to make room for new voices, off the beaten track and far from the texts of show programs and press kits. It is an opportunity to hear voices that usually remain silent—the voices of designers and dancers—allowing them to join in the chorus of meaning. I hope that through this sincere invitation, the toolkits will give rise to profound reflections on their role in legacy-making which, although implicit, speaks volumes. Because the idea of working always needs to be reworked.

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video, annotation and redocumentarization

Clarisse Bardiot and Alexandre Michaan

Excerpts from the round table discussion
“Technologies numériques : Documentation et création”
during the symposium *Between Traces and Writing*, held by the FJPP
on May 16, 2018 (see the Espace Perreault website).



Since the 1960s, the dance milieu’s response to the problem of documentation has essentially been video recording. Prior to the development of increasingly sophisticated technologies to capture movement, video recordings were the main tool used to archive and document the dancer’s body. But these recordings also sparked extensive debate, since they were often considered a betrayal of the original work. Today, video recordings are normalized to the point that they are almost systematically used—interestingly, not only to document and preserve dance works, but also for promotional purposes. In research on the performing arts, they are the most readily available form of documentary material.

Even though a video recording is an essential document, it remains problematic in several ways, notably in its inherent biases. It has a number of limitations, starting with the impossibility of including all angles and viewpoints, and all of the details in spectators’ usual field of vision. In addition, the lighting conditions may not be optimal; there may be issues with the recording technique (framing or reliability of the visual reproduction); and certain technical elements may not be visible or comprehensible (many elements need to be made explicit in order to become intelligible).

If we look at examples of video recordings such as those of *Hakanāi*, by Adrien Mondot and Claire Bardainne, it is difficult to see whether the interactions are happening in real time between the dancer and projected image, whether the dancer is using sensors and whether it is a pre-recorded sequence. This illegibility of technical elements reveals the extent to which a video recording as a document fails to meet certain needs.

The other problem, and perhaps the most significant challenge immediately faced by researchers in this field, is that creative processes (particularly in the performing arts) generate an enormous quantity of documents and the video recording is, in reality, just the tip of the iceberg.

Of course, a video recording is an essential document on which we generally focus, but it often masks a wealth of important documentation, such as email exchanges, texts, conversations, the use of image-sharing tools to make visual documents accessible to the entire company (Google Drive, etc.), as well as sketches, stage plans, technical elements, riders and so on. All of these documents are a major part of the archive.

With such documentary corpuses, we are faced with fundamental conservation challenges related to born-digital material—in other words, material that originates in a digital form. This concerns documents generated by the creative process as well as documents making up the work. Both form two documentary corpuses that are often mixed together. When you are collecting hard disks or raw documentary material for archival purposes, these categories are difficult to separate. You have to do some detective work to properly classify the material.

Moreover, there are many physical elements that must also be conserved to ensure the work’s longevity: costumes, sets and hardware for technological equipment and devices. Putting all this material aside for a moment, we are still confronted by a sort of “mini big data”—a form of big data at a relatively smaller scale than what you might find in the field of digital conservation—with several hundreds or even thousands of records documenting a single work. We therefore need to think about

big data in this context, bearing in mind that it is impossible to read each one of these archived records.

We soon realize that we need to process documents in bulk, as is the case in the archival field and library science, without having the luxury of processing them one by one. It was this observation that led Clarisse Bardiot to come up with the idea for the open-source software ReCALL (<https://memorecall.com/fr/>).

In 2014, a team began working on the ReCALL prototype (Clarisse Bardiot, Thierry Coduys, Guillaume Jacquemin and Guillaume Marais). They designed the software to assist artists in their documentation process. Artists are usually the first to conserve their creations in the performing arts, given the small percentage of stage works conserved by museums or institutions, or incorporated into the repertoire. The team also sought to help researchers understand creative processes in the context of born-digital material by developing methods to replace traditional research methods. These often cannot be applied in this context, given the abundance of existing documents.

A first open-source software, freely available to artists and researchers, was developed to document works during the creative process. It was based on the principle of following the creative process from the first ideas and beginnings of the project up until the first performances. The user-friendly software was designed to run in the background, so artists would not have to pay too much attention to it.

A subsequent phase of the project gave rise to MemoreCALL, a second software application focused on video documentation which, as mentioned earlier, is essential to a work's historic visibility. This documentation stage generally takes place once the work becomes public, during the first performances. The idea is to document the work at this stage of its existence with sufficient precision in order to address the biases mentioned earlier—for example, by adding elements (annotations) to the video recording, or by using other documents to provide valuable details.

The study conducted prior to the software development process showed that existing documentation strategies in the performing arts include notation systems based on the

model of a musical score. However, such systems have their limitations when it comes to documentation. In the case of dance, notation systems (e.g., Laban and Benesh) are so rarely used that they are in reality very marginal practices. In theatre, by comparison, there are no generalized notation systems, making documentation even more problematic than in the case of dance.

The practice of annotation is far more common than notation and includes all textual commentary (descriptions of the work). A third common documentation strategy is denotation, which involves stepping back from individual documents in order to get an overview of the documentary corpus. These archival approaches are often categorized as close reading (notation and annotation), where close attention is paid to an individual document, and distant reading (denotation), where an entire corpus is analyzed (for example in data visualization).

The idea with ReCALL was to combine both approaches, which are too often adopted independently of one another. There have been several studies on distant reading in relation to problems associated with digital works (the method is also commonly used in art history). The shortcomings of distant reading, when it is entirely independent of close reading, soon become evident: one can lose sight of individual documents in all of their detail. To avoid these shortcomings, an analysis of document metadata must be accompanied by an analysis of individual documents.

This was the driving force behind the development of ReCALL, which could be used for distant reading and denotation, and MemoreCALL, which could mainly be used for annotation, particularly of video recordings. Future versions of both software packages will include notation systems such as scores in order to cover all aspects of choreographic writing.

ReCALL is a multimodal environment that assembles documents of all types (text, images, videos, links, textual notes, etc.) to be viewed in a single interface. The software precisely structures the documents based on metadata—in other words, identification data that are associated with the documents but are not part of them (e.g., the author, production dates and

possible modifications, as well as the technical aspects of audiovisual documents such as file formats, etc.). By analyzing all this data, ReCALL organizes the documentary corpus according to pre-established parameters. The problem with metadata is that it is often incomplete or sometimes misleading, because the data is recorded automatically and cannot always be validated.

MemoreCALL is mainly used to annotate video recordings in order to complete them. The software brings two approaches together, on a smaller scale: an intradocumentary approach, defined as the textual annotation of the document itself (at certain points in the recording), and an interdocumentary approach, where links to other documents, web pages and videos are provided.

This is a process of redocumentarization, the idea being to answer the following questions: How can we reappropriate the document by contextualizing it in a different way without being submerged in big data? And, in reappropriating the document, how can we give it another meaning, a specific interpretation, according to contexts and usages?

These methods are a way to define, as much as possible, the authenticity of works during the period in which we are seeking to preserve them for posterity. We need to know how to define this authenticity, the artist's original intention, not only through one or two documents, but by understanding an entire documentary corpus. Redocumentarization affords the possibility of navigating between an analysis of this corpus and an analysis of specific individual documents, thus allowing for at least a partial understanding of the work's essence—and an understanding of its authenticity through all the components required to ensure its longevity.

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a gesture that unfolds

Danièle Desnoyers

Excerpts from the round table discussion
“Création, récréation : en deçà, au-delà et autour des boîtes chorégraphiques”
held during the focus day event *Between Traces and Writing*,
on May 16, 2018 (see Espace Perreault website)



For me, the choreographic toolkit was both a memory exercise and a very technical exercise that involved compiling all of the elements constituting a work once it was already completed. I soon realized that the peripheral elements (lighting, sound, set, etc.) were relatively well conserved; it was easy to find the traces because they had already been digitized. Since the work had toured extensively, these aspects were well-documented.

However, there was very little documentation of the dance, with the exception of video recordings. All the movements had been memorized by the dancers. I felt an immense loss—a loss of the basic memory of the piece. I had kept my choreographic notebooks, but they were only ever intended for personal use. My notes were brief and had become quite cryptic with the passage of time. They were never intended to be read by anyone else. That said, my notebooks are the subject of great curiosity. They are often fetishized, not by me but by others. They contain all kinds of information, things I see and hear. They also include miscellaneous items like metro tickets and grocery lists. It's all so scattered—a reflection of the chaos in my life more than of the work per se.

The essence of the work, its genesis, the sources of its language—all of the elements that make up dance or the act of choreographing—were absent. I managed to salvage a few fragments of the sound design by Nancy Tobin, because she meticulously documents her work. Her online archives contained the seeds of this project.

By recreating the work, I was able to put together the choreographic toolkit. But when we toured the new work, with a new cast, I realized there were certain elements missing from the toolkit.

The genesis of the work became increasingly important to me. When I invited Paige Culley to perform the piece, the first question she asked was: “Will I be dancing the original work, or will I be performing the interpretation based on the original?” It was a good question. Since we didn't have much time to prepare the piece, I told her we'd be going back to the original—it would be easier for her to decode that version, in which the movements hadn't been altered as much.

However, I hit a wall, because none of the dancers of the original piece were available to demonstrate the movements and transmit the roles. The choreographic toolkit was no longer sufficient; Paige and I had to dissect the movements. With our combined knowledge of movement analysis (not much knowledge in my case, more in hers), we broke down all of the choreographic segments. The question of corporeity, the danced score, proved to be the most problematic, yet it was essential for her to learn her role.

Paige then worked in the studio, using the toolkit and a video recording of the work to put into practice her own analysis of the movement. It made me realize that movement analysis is a valuable tool when it comes to reconstituting a work. I was completely on board with the recreation, and Paige delivered a new version that was very close to the original. There was something very interesting about this process.

I tried to address these blind spots by using different media and interfaces to better document a new creation. We still use video, of course, but at regular intervals and according to very specific angles. We no longer use the camera to take wide shots as a spatial and temporal memory guide. I have hundreds of hours of video footage that I'll never watch, that is basically useless, because it hasn't been properly selected or archived. There's a lot of work to be done with that material.

Here, we used video to offer a glimpse of a specific day, for each week of rehearsals. The video captured the dancers' daily routine during a rehearsal, becoming a kind of weekly report on the creative process. After recording four hours of video, we took a short break and then created a condensed 20-minute version, which became an opening, a window onto the work. One day, for example, there happened to be a breeze in the studio. It profoundly influenced that creative session, so it is helpful to return to that day X, for the dancers as well. Video recordings provide information to both the dancers and choreographer about their respective processes.

A third person took notes and compiled all the terms used in the instructions and comments I gave to the dancers during set periods—in the middle of the creative process and also at the end. I also wrote down my rehearsal and research notes in a journal to keep track of my thoughts. Once again, writing takes time. It's not easy to find the time and space to write. I force myself to write in certain settings, for example during residencies when I can devote my energies to both creation and writing in order to create a more consistent journal.

Despite the challenge of finding time to write, written material is, for me, an extremely precise source, because words allow us to transmit our intentions. In dance, these words are vitally important.

Movement analysis is another valuable documentation tool. Since I'm not an expert, I always wait for the creative process to be more advanced before embarking on this stage.

After experiencing these different modes of transmission and realizing the challenges involved, I developed a new research/artistic project at the Department of Dance at UQAM. My goal was to assess the relevance of using various documentation tools during the creative process, not after completing the work. I also tried to observe how the fact of documenting affects and modifies the work, helps it evolve, and allows the choreographer to become more aware as well.

This journey has had a profound impact on my practice as a whole. Creating a work is, in itself, a colossal task. Systematically and rigorously documenting the process involves an additional workload that should not be underestimated. I wanted to experiment with different forms of documentation to address some of the blind spots I'd noticed—that we'd noticed together. I'd already discussed these blind spots with Lise [Gagnon] and members of the FJPP by the time I created the choreographic toolkit.

Then there is the challenge of compiling documents to make them accessible. Questions arise. What elements will be useful for transmission, as opposed to cultural mediation, which is an entirely different exercise?

Another potential trap: there is something slightly unnatural about documenting that might lead us to idealize the creative process. As we become witnesses of this process, there is a risk that the object of documentation will become more important than the work itself. Is this a danger or simply a paradigm shift? In my case, I'd say this documentation project simply revealed other dimensions of my practice.

To conclude, this project reminded me that the reason we write choreographies is not only to create shows. To my mind, this art symbolizes a daily practice that doesn't only unfold in the studio with the dancers. Creating a choreographic toolkit allowed me to measure the extent to which choreographing a work is a gesture that unfolds not only in time, but through multiple elements. It encompasses a whole range of actions, steps, encounters, dialogues and acts of sharing.

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Choreographic toolkits at the École de danse contemporaine de Montréal

Lucie Boissinot and Geneviève Ethier

The Candace-Loubert media centre at the École de danse contemporaine de Montréal (EDCM) has the mandate to conserve and ensure access to the contemporary choreographic repertoire from Quebec and abroad. For several years now, the school has received audiovisual material donated by choreographers teaching the six performance classes in its professional program—some fifteen creators each year. Their contribution has helped to preserve our contemporary dance heritage. In the interest of building on this foundation, the school acquired the collection of choreographic toolkits produced by the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault.

Our original objective in purchasing the toolkits was not to reconstruct one of the documented works, but rather to conserve Quebec's choreographic heritage. Our main goal was to make it available to EDCM students.

At the EDCM, we have no choice but to prioritize the creation of group works, because of our high student numbers. Since most of the toolkits are devoted to solos or very small dance groups, we have not used them as a transmission tool. Given all the work involved in creating the toolkits, we fully understand why the focus up until now has been on small productions. The EDCM might very well use them as part of a coaching exercise.

Coaching is the transmission of a role by an established dancer to a young dancer. It is a performance exercise aimed at exploring a choreographic world, helping students to evolve in their practice.

At the EDCM, we were thrilled by the idea of the toolkits, and by the depth and exhaustiveness of the project. Much more than a book, a toolkit is primary documentary material, an exceptional memory tool and an artwork in itself! We know of no other archival record containing so much information about a single choreographic work. It is an invaluable resource.

The toolkits can also serve as inspiring models for younger generations in that they demonstrate the relevance of conserving works, documenting creative processes, and situating them in their social and historical context. In fact, the toolkits are an incentive to reflect on the question of conservation in a serious and creative way, and to take concrete actions in order to leave traces.

At the EDCM, students keep personal notebooks or diaries throughout their studies. In them, they reflect on their practice and progress, and on the art of dance as well. They note down the initial instructions of the choreographers they work with, trying to fully comprehend their creative worlds. Through the notebooks, they gradually discover their own narrative thread and place within these choreographic works. They describe intentions, states, feelings, form and technical or performance issues, and note down the

comments and corrections of fellow students, rehearsal directors and artistic collaborators. In doing this, they are in fact intimately connected to the conservation process. These notebooks are their introduction to legacy-building. We believe it is important to explain to them that the notebooks are valuable and will form the cornerstone of their career, reaffirming their legitimacy in the dance world.

Over at least the past decade in Quebec, we have witnessed a shared awakening with regard to our danced heritage and its conservation, along with increased efforts to gather legacy material. As we develop our expertise in this field, it makes sense to sow the first seeds when students embark on their dance training. Why not raise awareness among younger generations while they are still at school? We plan to hold information sessions on the toolkits at the EDCM with precisely this goal in mind.

From our perspective, and in light of the media centre's mission, we believe the project to develop the choreographic toolkits—with such rich, generous and almost exhaustive content—should be continued. The toolkits are a really interesting concept, and a potentially exportable one as well.

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the toolkit on display at the museum

Marie Tissot

POTENTIAL USES OF CHOREOGRAPHIC TOOLKITS BY MUSEUMS

Choreographic toolkits have many potential uses in a museum context, even though the link between dance and museums is not self-evident. The more traditional function of museums is to collect tangible heritage—works, archives, artefacts and specimens—whereas dance disappears in each movement and never remains fixed. However, our modern museums subscribe to the myth of the Mouseion, Temple of the Muses and home to the nine daughters of Mnemosyne (Memory), including Terpsichore, the goddess of dance. Although the gathering of dance material for a museum exhibition poses numerous challenges and paradoxes, the toolkits demonstrate a rigorous method for preserving the constitutive elements of choreographic works.

When bodies no longer remember, documents take over. In this way, dance resembles other art forms such as painting, sculpture, photography and printmaking, where material supports generally permit stable conservation. The use of toolkits by museums as a means to preserve dance is undeniably valuable. But surely the point of conserving dance is to promote it? The toolkits also have potential in terms of presentation. Putting them on display can be beneficial to museums, the dance milieu and visitors alike. As several authors have noted, the display of dance in museums can be developed according to two strategies: a presentation of the dancing body or an exhibition of archives or documents related to dance.¹ An exhibition of the choreographic toolkits would be aligned with the latter approach. This essay seeks to identify issues related to the promotion of Quebec's dance heritage through a museum display of the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault's choreographic toolkits.

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¹ "Exhibitions devoted to the performing arts and dance have multiplied since the late 1990s and are all confronted by the impossibility of recreating a live experience through the presentation of archival material. In response to this intrinsic difficulty when curating the performing arts, two possible solutions have recently emerged: adopting a phenomenological approach to archival records or transforming the museum or gallery space into a stage for living bodies." [Translation] BENICHO, Anne (Ed.). (2015). *Recréer/Scripter. Mémoires et transmissions des œuvres performatives et chorégraphiques contemporaines*, Dijon: Les presses du réel, p. 197

OPENING A TOOLKIT: WHAT IS REVEALED?

The materiality of the toolkits was standardized for reading purposes (print and online format). Certain documents, such as photographs, lighting plans, set design sketches, instructions for makeup and costumes, and choreographic notations can be displayed as-is in a museum. These documents, unfamiliar to the general public, are a bit like stage directions in theatre or film scripts. When they are put on display, the toolkits reveal the work behind the construction of the piece. They also provide links to audio-visual resources that help to recreate the atmosphere of the show in the gallery space. In the toolkits, we rediscover certain compelling stage elements: the aluminum arms from *Bras de plomb*, the framed portraits from *Cartes postales de Chimère*, the chain link fencing from *Bagne*, etc. These elements, directly taken from the work, could be exhibited as objects in a display case, evoking the distancing effect of the stage and taking on the aura of memory objects.²

COMPARING, CONTEXTUALIZING, REVEALING

The choreographic toolkits were developed for works whose creators wished to preserve them for reconstruction purposes. There are therefore two versions of *Bras de plomb* (1993 and 2011), *Duos pour corps et instruments* (2003 and 2014), *Cartes postales de Chimère* (1996 and 2015), and *Choses dernières* (1994 and 2016), and three versions of *Bagne* (1993, 1998 and 2015).

A museum is a place that allows for juxtaposition and comparison, the bringing together of several elements. The gallery could be a space where the original work is juxtaposed with the remount. This would invite a reflexive gaze on choreographic transmission, offering visitors a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the remounting process. Sources of inspiration, triggers, images, references, anecdotes and so on would all be revealed, helping to contextualize the work and allowing visitors an insight into the creative process behind the end result.



RE-CREATION THROUGH THE ARCHIVE: A MUSEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

It is becoming increasingly popular to display archival material in museums. Exhibitions are re-created based on their archives,³ as are dance performances. These reconstructions are developed in the same way as the choreographic toolkits. The goal is to reveal the interest of the original work while developing a shared heritage. Careful research is required to select relevant archives and create a meaningful visitor experience that will bring the past event back to life. It is in this manner that the choreographic toolkits can be displayed in museums.

MAKING THE MATERIAL VISIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE

Looking at the toolkits on display, much like perusing the print or online versions, does not replace the spectator's experience. Rather, it makes the choreographic work visible from a unique angle. The toolkits are currently aimed at dance professionals and researchers. In an exhibition, they would reach other audiences who could look behind the scenes and rediscover these testaments to Quebec's choreographic talent. Museums would have to curate the elements making up the work and develop an effective strategy to display the archives. The goal would be to make the choreographic work visible, offering a contemporary experience that would continue and complete the moment of the performance. Displayed in a museum, the archives of these works could also be (re)performed by artists⁴—from all disciplines—allowing them to move towards new expressions through movement.

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² BERGERON, Yves, "L'invisible objet du Musée. Repenser l'objet immatériel," in BENICHOU, Anne (Ed.). (2015). *Recréer/Scripter. Mémoires et transmissions des œuvres performatives et chorégraphiques contemporaines*, Dijon: Les presses du réel.

³ For example, VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine, initiated the research project "Créer à rebours de l'exposition," aimed at reactivating emblematic exhibitions in Quebec's history. [<http://centrevox.ca/en/exposition/creer-a-rebours-vers-lexposition-the-case-of-montreal-plus-or-minus/>]

⁴ BOUCHER, M.-P. & Lemay, Y. (2010). "Des archives mises en scène par les artistes." *Documentation et bibliothèques*, 56 (2), 76–81. [<https://doi.org/10.7202/1029134ar>]

The choreography (and its toolkit) as authorial polyphony

Katya Montaignac

What remains of a choreographic work? An image, movements, a sensation, a word. Whether we are dancers or spectators, our memories are tied to our emotions and what has marked us. For each one of us, memory is different and, especially, volatile.

THE EPHEMERAL MEMORY OF DANCE

For three years, I had the opportunity to archive more than 3,500 documentary records for the media library at the Centre national de la danse in France. The files included creative notes, photos, communications and critical reviews associated with choreographic works. The media library's objective was to develop, in parallel with its collection of books and videos, an archival fonds for artists and choreographies, given the dearth of publications on dance (compared with other artistic practices, dance remains a rarely documented art).

My reflections stem directly from this experience, which enriched my understanding of how choreographic works are archived and documented. I was confronted by certain methodological questions: what to keep, why and how? Which criteria would I use to select one document, artefact, letter, note or archive over another? To my mind, the choreographic toolkit is a wonderful memory tool, given the ephemeral nature of choreographic works. It allows us to prolong the work (to discover or re-experience it) through the traces of its creation and reception. In this essay, I share some of my thoughts on potential developments afforded by the toolkits. I also play the devil's advocate in order to point out areas of resistance and preconceived ideas regarding the notion of authorship in dance.

THE IMPOSSIBLE RE-CREATION OF A CHOREOGRAPHIC WORK

Initially designed to facilitate the remounting of choreographic works, the toolkits give rise to several questions. First, reconstruction is conditional on copyright: choreographers and their beneficiaries must provide authorization. Furthermore, it ideally involves dancer-to-dancer transmission. It is difficult to imagine remounting a work with only a description of movements—a photo, video or score do not offer a comprehensive view and do not capture the countless nuances, tones, textures and modalities of the performance.

Reconstructing a work therefore involves resisting the temptation (or attempt) to rediscover the original. Dance, an ephemeral art *par excellence*, cannot be repeated: its strength lies in its infinite re-enactment. The same dancer would not perform a choreography in an identical manner ten years later—their body (and memory) will have changed. This ontological instability raises relevant questions concerning the remounting of a work: is the choreographer's presence necessary? Can a choreographer's work be performed by someone who is not familiar with their approach and who has not assimilated their technique? Does the reprisal (or remounting) of a work inevitably involve modifications, forgotten elements, gaps, additions, reinterpretations and even transgressions (voluntary or not)? This is not necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, it is proof that the work is alive.



THE NOTION OF AUTHOR AS PRISM

Between 2001 and 2006, I invited more than 50 individuals (dancers and non-dancers) to perform the same solo, each in their own way. The dancers came from diverse backgrounds and practices. I transmitted the original solo only through a precise description of the movements that each person could perform, according to their own sensibility. The project revealed a dizzying number of possible interpretations of a single score.

I see a choreographic work—and therefore the toolkit representing it—as a kaleidoscope attesting to its intertextuality.

It is difficult to imagine the choreographer as a unique authorial figure when dance is an intrinsically collective practice. When it comes to remounting a work, the choreographer's instructions do not necessarily take precedence over the manner in which the dancers appropriate them. They complement one another, as do the perspectives of all artistic collaborators. If just one collaborator changes, the work shifts.

In this sense, the choreographic toolkit captures the work through the prism of all the perspectives it contains, including articles and critical reviews, since these readings are also components of the work. Even if these different viewpoints sometimes contradict one another, they are mutually enriching and part of a conversation.

Rather than restrict the conditions for remounting a show, the choreographic toolkit could facilitate its dissemination. Why protect a work—which is recorded (and therefore saved) in the toolkit—by limiting its presentation instead of authorizing and encouraging it? The toolkit could foster multiple incarnations of work by adopting a Creative Commons-style licence that would allow creators to legally remix the work (while protecting its copyright).

In this way, the archived work would have a vast potential to be re-enacted. What would the work (or its creators' heirs) lose if there were a radical openness to sharing and free use (under certain conditions)? On the contrary, it seems to me that the perspectives (and richness) afforded by the choreographic toolkits could help to perpetuate the work in multiple forms and variations, each time breathing new life into it.

The reprisal of a choreographic work opens it up to multiple variations. Choreographers who choose to remount a work in their repertoire often take the opportunity to recompose scenes and correct certain details. Choreographers who remount repertory works will naturally re-create an “adaptation” based on their artistic sensibilities, even if they attempt to remain as faithful as possible to the original. This is reflected in numerous examples of reconstruction, from the remounts of *The Rite of Spring* by Millicent Hodson for the Joffrey Ballet, or by Dominique Brun in France, to productions by Les Carnets Bagouet whose members sought to remount repertory pieces through the prism of “master dancers.” There are also reappropriations (or usurpations) of works that are re-created using videos, notably the choreography *Rosas dans Rosas* by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, re-performed by thousands of amateur dancers across the world. The strength and beauty of dance are embodied in these multiple reinterpretations rather than in the (impossible) attempt to reproduce an original form.

MULTIPLE USES (AND READINGS) OF THE TOOLKIT

Each choreographic toolkit was created with an eventual remount in mind. But the toolkits might also have value for dance lovers who could purchase them as they would books. The toolkits would find their place on bookshelves among other meaningful and inspiring works. This perspective encourages an editorial reflection on the contents and format of the toolkit.

I believe that specialized audiences (students and professionals), much like ordinary spectators, would enjoy reading a variety of texts about the work. More than just a tool for remounting, the choreographic toolkit could above all be a collection of documentary traces accompanying the work. It would include not only the elements that nurtured the piece and the secrets of its creation, but also the reflections stemming from it. This is how choreographic works remain profoundly alive—through the exchanges, dialogues and even disagreements they engender.

TAKING A DEEP DIVE INTO THE TOOLKIT, LIKE THE WORK

Entering dance through subjective accounts rather than through a formal, detailed description. Seeing the toolkit not only as an extension of a work, as its documentation, but also as a springboard for the imagination (much like the work itself), regardless of whether the reader has seen the show or not. Reading the toolkit like a novel.

Each work/toolkit could therefore unfold into a distinct creation that would not necessarily have the same tone, content or even structure. The toolkit would extend my experience of taking in the piece by allowing me to re-experience it or by revealing its inner workings to me. I could explore the work without necessarily having seen it before, for the pure pleasure of diving into an account of the danced experience (I've always wondered what it would be like to listen to a live account of a work without seeing it). Experiencing the work vicariously through a polyphony of voices and the embodied accounts of those who have experienced it. Each person has a specific vision of the work—a vision nurtured by their choices and creative sensibilities. One would not only read a toolkit to remount the work, but also to take part in the experience of it. On different levels. In my view, it is all of these multiple responses that recreate the work, bringing out its contrasts, contradictions, discrepancies, connections and shadows.

Reading a toolkit would not necessarily be a historical (and didactic) experience, but would open up the possibility of shared fictions.

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elsewhere

Lise Gagnon

Opening a choreographic toolkit, turning it upside-down, shaking it, diving into it, imagining it differently, and sometimes even destroying it.

These conversations and reflections on our choreographic toolkits and documentation in dance show passion, imagination, critical thinking and commitment. It has been a valuable and moving exercise. A rare one, too.

The choreographic toolkit, as it has been imagined and developed so far, has been seen as a house, a utopia, a technical exercise, a box of curios, a place of transmission, and an ideological act—to be questioned.

At first sight, it is a tool for remounting works, but in actuality, it is a work of memory, a source of inspiration.

A choreographic toolkit necessarily remains incomplete and subjective—appearances can be deceptive. It is impossible to include and document everything. And we wouldn't want to either.

As the contributors to this publication tell us, the toolkit, like any other form of documentation, is an invitation to rediscover, re-explore and reimagine dance.

So there you have it: documentation will always be plural.

We dream of an open toolkit, one that welcomes multiple perspectives on the work. An evolving toolkit that is no longer an object but rather a flow of memories and perceptions, a place to meet and share experiences, a place to go beyond. Elsewhere.

biographies

Clarisse Bardiot is a full professor at Université Rennes 2 and a research fellow at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (Thalim laboratory). Her research focuses on digital humanities, the history and aesthetics of digital performance, the relationship between art, science and technology, the preservation of digital works, and experimental publishing.

Lucie Boissinot has been active in the contemporary dance milieu for some 40 years. She started out as a dancer and went on to become a choreographer and teacher. Today she devotes her time to management and consulting. In 1985, she obtained the Jacqueline Lemieux Prize from the Canada Council for the Arts. She was the artistic and program director at the École de danse contemporaine de Montréal from 2005 to 2023.

Amy Bowring is the Executive and Curatorial Director at Dance Collection Danse and a lecturer at Toronto Metropolitan University. She is one of Canada's foremost advocates for the study and preservation of Canada's dance heritage. Amy has published numerous articles and curated several live and virtual exhibitions. Her book *Navigating Home: Artists of the Newfoundland and Labrador Dance Project* was published in 2019.

Since 1971, Montreal-based artist **Ginelle Chagnon** has been working at deepening the dance medium. She started out as a dancer/performer and eventually came to teach and coach contemporary dance. For many years she was associated with choreographers Jean-Pierre Perreault and Paul-André Fortier. Her sensitive gaze led to work with many other Canadian choreographers, whom she accompanied in their creative and performance processes. Since the '90s she has taken an active interest in documenting, conserving and promoting the contemporary dance repertoire. She gives various workshops that stimulate perception as well as the relationship of the body to a creative context.

In 1989, **Danièle Desnoyers** founded Le Carré des Lombes and has created over 20 remarkable works presented in Canada, the US, Europe and Asia. Her repertoire reflects an approach based on interdisciplinary resonances among movement, diverse forms of music and the visual arts. Today she works as a teaching artist and is a professor of artistic practices at UQAM's Department of Dance.

Geneviève Ethier is passionate about documentary research. She was in charge of the EDCM's media library from 2013 to 2021. She also developed an expertise in copyright through her participation in issue tables with ADÉSAM and RQD (2013–2018). Since 2022, she has been an administrator, documentalist and writer for *Ayurvéda Révolution*.

Lise Gagnon has been the executive director of Espace Perreault since 2013. She has written numerous articles, notably for the theatre journal *JEU*, which she directed for five years. She has also published poems (*Les écrits*) and short stories (in *Arcade* and *Objets trouvés/Objets perdus, Urubu*), and directed the dance video *Élégie. Danse dans la neige*, which was shown in Montreal, Quebec City and Ottawa.

A leading figure in contemporary dance in Quebec, choreographer, dancer and teacher **Lucie Grégoire** has been following her unique artistic path since 1981. She has over 40 creations to her name: solos, in situ works and group pieces, presented in Canada and abroad. Her works explore the feminine and are inspired by the untamed vastness of the Arctic, the Sahara, Amazonia and Iceland, as well as literature, art and cinema.

Since completing her studies at the EDCM in 2011, **Kim Henry** has participated in over 60 dance and physical theatre projects, collaborating with Lucie Grégoire, Harold Rhéaume, Jacques Poulin-Denis and Audrey Bergeron, among others. Since 2014, she has embraced an approach combining dance, photography and video, in collaboration with visual artist Éric Paré.

Anne-Laure Jean is a graphic designer. With a unique sensitivity and subtle touch, she expertly combines texts and images to produce precise, elegant results. She is particularly attracted by arts and culture and mainly works in this field.

Brigitte Kerhervé is an associate professor in the Computer Science department at UQAM. Her research is focused on data management for adaptive and distributed multimedia applications, as well as the archiving of media objects. She works with new media artists to design IT methods and techniques adapted to new audio and video narrative practices.

Catherine Lavoie-Marcus is a choreographer, dancer, researcher and teacher in the performing arts. Her artistic approach is rooted in performative situations that draw on collective intelligence and collaborative processes. Her works are presented in Quebec and abroad, on stages and in galleries, museums and public spaces.

Choreographer, dancer, teacher and Laban notator **Nasim Lootij** left her native Iran in 2006 to study dance in Paris. Since late 2014, she has been based in Montreal where she co-founded the collective *Vâtchik Danse* with playwright and theatre history researcher Kiasa Nazeran. Together they have created *Moi-Me-Man* (2017), *La chute* (2019) and *L'inconsistance* (forthcoming).

Alexandre Michaan is a heritage conservator-restorer specialized in preserving audiovisual and digital works. After pursuing studies in art history, followed by restoration at the Institut national du patrimoine, he now focuses on technological obsolescence in new media in contemporary arts. Since 2017, he has been working with Clarisse Bardiot on the documentation of technological works.

Sophie Michaud started her career in dance in the early 1980s. After 30 years of academic studies and a sustained dance practice, she specialized in supporting choreographic projects. Today she works as a teacher, consultant and artistic mediator in parallel with her work in the studio as rehearsal director and dramaturg.

Katya Montaignac is an artist choreographer, dramaturg and curator. She also helped to build the documentary fonds of the media library at the Centre national de la danse (France) and the portfolios of the Bibliothèque Vincent-Warren portal. She holds a Ph.D. in arts studies and practices from UQAM and is a member of Espace Perreault's artistic and scientific committee.

Josée Plamondon is a librarian and digital information consultant specialized in information science and technology. She develops work methods to improve online accessibility and databases.

Isabelle Poirier danced for the Compagnie Marie Chouinard where she continues to work as a rehearsal director. In 2015, she performed Louise Bédard's *Cartes postales de Chimère* and in 2016, Lucie Grégoire's *Les Choses dernières*. She helped to create the choreographic toolkits documenting both these works. She teaches dance at Concordia University and is a rehearsal director for several choreographers at the École de danse contemporaine de Montréal. She also dances for Ariane Boulet and Lucie Grégoire, and heads up the teaching section of Corpuscule Danse.

Romy Snauwaert has been working in publishing for some 20 years. After years of writing, editing, revising and proofreading content, she is today the executive director of Groupe Nota bene (Alias - Le lézard amoureux - Nota bene - Triptyque - Varia).

Marie Tissot is completing a Ph.D. in museology, cultural mediation and heritage at UQAM, and in theatre studies at the Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3. Her research is focused on legacy-making in the circus arts. Her research for her master's degree in museology was on contemporary dance exhibitions in Quebec museums.

