

Nous tenons à vous faire remarquer que pour l'instant, les notes prises par écrit ne sont disponibles qu'en anglais.

Canadian Dance Assembly Annual Conference
INTERCONNECTIONS: uniting people | doing business | making dance
September 27–29, 2007, DANSpace, Halifax, Nova Scotia

TEXT VERSION OF CLOSING REMARKS (Sept. 29, 2007)
By Megan Andrews: Publisher/Founding Editor, *The Dance Current*

Introduction

My experience at this CDA conference began, as many of yours also did, at a Canadian airport, getting on a plane to go to a perhaps new and unknown place. Normally, when we do this, we take a map, a guidebook or at least contact information for where we are going, sometimes a compass, usually at least a watch, and our travel documents.

I did none of the above. I was lucky to connect with a group of colleagues and together, we helped each other. One of us had the address of the space, and we were able to cost-share a cab into the city. Left on my own, I ended up at the wrong hostel; and as you know from my barefoot presentation yesterday, I was not prepared for the weather change and so got soaked on my way here. I began speaking by saying "good morning, um, good afternoon, good morning" ... it was 12:30pm – and I forgot to eat lunch yesterday.

I spoke at the opening of the conference from the perspective of recent research using theoretical ideas to frame the way in which art functions in a capitalist economy; and I also theorized the dance community as a residually oral culture – functioning in between the spoken word and the written word. What I see at the end of the conference today is that we are continuing to navigate – and sometimes stumble through – the changing terrain in between: between art and business, between fluctuating fees and agreements and standardization, between supply and demand, between the uniqueness of our contexts and a unified, common approach; and in all our relationships: artist to artist, artist to presenter, presenter to artist, organization to funder, funder to organization, artist to audience, audience to artist.

Building Bridges and Making Connections

**Please note: In each section, I have not included comments from every panelist.*

In the opening plenary session yesterday, Barb Clausen (New Works, Vancouver) facilitated a panel on Building Bridges and Making Connections. Points raised by panelists follow:

Barb spoke as a presenter about ways in which her organization offers opportunities for different kinds of relationships.

Véronique MacKenzie (Halifax) spoke as an artist about ways in which she has made and pursued a variety of relationships; she, herself, providing an example of a new phrase I learned this weekend: portfolio artist (a development of the notion of parallel career).

Santee Smith (Kaha:wi Dance Theatre, Toronto) focussed on the verb – the activity – of networking rather than the noun. She commented on the organic growth of a project from a first phone call through the connecting, interacting, exchanging. She emphasized the importance of *healthy* relationships.

Bill Coleman (Coleman Lemieux & Co., Toronto/Montréal) spoke about his process through several community-situated projects and how, just by knocking on doors, he galvanized community participation and engagement in the process. He also spoke about other ways to approach building a project, not necessarily following the models that are in place.

Michael Trent (Dancemakers, Toronto) spoke about his organization and the programming it offers but also about how powerful his experience has been in communicating about the organization's identity and activity very clearly and how that can create a way for people to approach it – building bridges toward his organization as much as away.

Myles Warren (Ontario Arts Council, Toronto) spoke about new funding initiatives, particularly the inter-provincial Ontario/Québec initiative. He also explained that the funders are creating a common database for grant application financial and statistical forms, which reflects common standards based on not-for-profit law.

The discussion following this session focussed significantly on the relationship between artists and presenters and ways to navigate that terrain in between; and also on the changing character of the terrain in terms of the kinds of people and organizations now involved. Many comments emphasized the need for interpersonal interactions. If I remember two things from this session they are: Bill Coleman's story about knocking on doors, and the idea of building bridges outward toward the unknown as much as back toward ourselves.

5 Great Ideas

In this session, small groups led by each of the panelists from the previous session came up with five great ideas. In fact no groups came up with five ideas, and based on the experience in my group, we actually talked about many issues and learned about initiatives that are underway in various regions simply by virtue of thinking about what would be a great idea. I learned about the Emerging Arts Professionals network: www.eapnetwork.ca.

I would characterize the ideas that came out of this session as rather more like needs than ideas, and, while I think this session was fruitful, I would be curious for us, at a future conference, to come to consensus on one collective community initiative and to put a plan in place to see it through – even over three years.

I'll give you a few examples of some of this collection of "ideas" or "needs" which were documented on large sheets of paper.

- More opportunities for focussed in-person meetings between people with common interests and issues
- Professional development opportunities and critical feedback for new creators
- Professional development for writers who may also have transferable skills to offer in the area of critical feedback
- Cultivation of new entry points for the public: (Dusk Dances was mentioned); considering how the public is accessing dance now (the "reality" television show So You Think You Can Dance?); new potential venues, billboards in subways; key questions: Where is the public now and how can we meet them there? How do we build bridges and how can these existing opportunities be maximized?

CDA Annual General Meeting

The CDA AGM was, well, an AGM. However, without going into what was discussed, by whom and how, I thought it was positive that questions were put forward from the membership and clarification was offered by the organization and board on certain points that arose. The documents and reports, both financial and anecdotal, provided a framework for focussed conversation and greater clarity was achieved through dialogue.

CDA/CanDance Joint Session on Fee Standards for Presenters

Being part of the CDA/CanDance joint session on developing fee standards for presenters was informative and heartening. Terry Raininger of Lascelle Wingate Consulting presented findings from an environmental scan of practices in the field of dance presenting. This was phase one of a larger study spearheaded by the CanDance Network of Presenters. Consultant Judy Harquail then facilitated a focussed discussion with all in attendance. The debate that arose in this session was telling of the range of community sentiment, reflecting the challenges that the community faces in formalizing such practices and also revealing the ongoing tension between art and business in a capitalist economy. I believe this undertaking is significant in the continued professionalization of dance in Canada and leads toward establishing best practices across the field. Healthy debate is good; its what we need around topics like this.

Perspectives on Balancing Art and Business

This afternoon we heard from colleagues on the challenges of balancing art and business in a session facilitated by Lata Pada (Sampradaya Dance Creations, Toronto).

Dana Gingras (The Holy Body Tattoo/Animals of Distinction, Vancouver) spoke about the journey of The Holy Body Tattoo and specifically about the role of their management organization, Eponymous, in helping them find a balance between “the vision, folly and dreams” and a viable and fiscally responsible organization. She called it “a beautiful challenge”. Dana also mentioned an interesting choice they made in marketing the company by not putting dancers on the posters – a way of meeting the audience perhaps a little more on their territory? A way of building a bridge?

Harry Paterson (Alberta Ballet, Calgary) discussed his budgeting process and how important it is that the artistic and administrative teams collaborate on the budgeting process, mentioning specifically how long this takes but also how important it is. He mentioned that everyday, in fact, his artistic director reminds the staff of the purpose of their work and of the importance of the art as the overarching aim of their daily activity.

Gay Hauser (Live Art, Halifax) talked about issues of succession and the unfortunate circumstances that faced Live Art at the time of Diane Moore’s illness and passing. She also mentioned the way that, after struggling through this period, Live Art focussed on branding their organization and raising its profile in the Halifax community and beyond.

Jeanne Holmes (Harbourfront Centre, Toronto) spoke about the ways in which her organization works both by inviting companies in and also by providing the facility for people to come toward them on their own to self-present. She made a strong point about the difficult learning that occurred at Harbourfront around the recent changes in their models of presentation, noting that when the models change, the way you interact with people also changes and the relationships have to shift. It’s important in these situations to communicate, articulate and explain the changes to the people in those relationships.

Gilles Savary (Fortier Danse Creation, Montréal) emphasized the importance of arts organizations remaining flexible and adaptable in order to respond to an inherently unstable environment. Again, it’s about being able to navigate the terrain. He cautioned against the pressure to corporatize the arts, the imperative of efficiency and productivity, and the tendency to apply “success” recipes that may not fit the organization’s next year, the artist’s next project.

A Personal Synthesis of Conference Themes

Building bridges, creating and sustaining networks:

- Through Facebook and other online tools
- Considering bridges both toward and away from oneself/organization

- Considering the multiple audience access points in time from creation through post-performance
- Through marketing and programming brochures

The changing individuals in relationships and therefore the nature of the terrain between us in our relationships:

- New kinds of people and organizations are involved in artist-presenter negotiations
- When the models change, relationships and interactions change and this can be very difficult

Questions of language and terminology:

- The (at least) two meanings of the word presenter
- The notion of the portfolio artist
- The need to find ways to speak to corporate donors in their own language
- What do we mean by the term “culturally specific”?
- What do we mean when we agree to “negotiate”?
- What is the difference between a “minimum fee” and a “standard fee”?
- The idea of a “manual” and not a “document”
- How do we define success?

I think it’s interesting to notice just how far the language of economic discourse has pervaded our practice: we talk about supply and demand, production, buying and selling, purchasing unknown quantities. How do we value our art – financially AND artistically? What is its perceived value? I wonder about working on other language that might better reflect our “between-ness” in terms of art/business practices.

The need and desire for shared data, collated, unified information, statistics:

- Online database for common council grant forms: financial and statistical
- destinationdancedanse.ca: online Canadian dance performance database
- The need for common reference points and regular, shared data as a guide

The need to keep our business practice grounded in the values of our art form in terms of flexibility and adaptability, and dynamic and fluid frameworks/models:

- Ability to function in a potentially unstable position
- Importance of flexibility and adaptability, of being fleet and agile, and the need to be careful of systems and the pressure of corporate values
- Question: do we make better art now that we make strategic plans?
- Uniqueness of our individual practices must be sustained and enabled even in developing shared frameworks and “standardizations”

For me, the question of shared values arises and I wonder whether, as a community and in our individual relationships of various kinds, we can in fact come to agreement and consensus while also allowing for and preserving our individuality and agency. If we intend to do so, it will require taking time – to create meaningful and nurturing working contexts. We must be careful of the notion of efficiency because it can undermine these kinds of relationships. Part of the process is being able to speak respectfully, challenging “each other’s ideas” and not “each other”.

Conclusion

I want to return to my experience at the beginning of the conference in not having a map, guidebook or a compass and how I was lost and disoriented as a result.

When I listen to our conversations, I hear us constantly using language of the environment to describe our working context: the ecology, the terrain, the landscape; and I hear us talking about how we also seem to share values, whether as movers and creators – or as managers and presenters – for flexibility and fluidity in our practice and in our relationships. We want to be free to travel our shared landscape in unique and creative ways. However, there can be some danger in this, in the fragmentation of community if we all head in different directions, and in the potential to lose our way. Particularly if we are coming from different places and we want to meet, we need to develop a map or maps, and create and use guidebooks and compasses in order to navigate the terrain and arrive at our individual and collective destinations.

We can build bridges – and avoid floundering in swamps. We can climb mountains – and avoid isolation on impassable ice fields.

Maps are frameworks that provide a common set of reference points and yet leave travellers choice in terms of the specific paths and “points of interest” that they visit. Documents, manuals, fee structures, budgets, contracts, brochures and websites can provide such reference points. These materials are communication tools that provide frameworks for shared conversations. We must then commit to the time required to have real conversations and negotiate decisions in reciprocal relationships.

Maps and guidebooks also enable others – be they new professionals, audiences, volunteers or donors – to choose their routes and find their way, to join us on our artistic journeys.

In conclusion, continuing with the environmental metaphor, this process is an ongoing stewardship, an individual and collective responsibility to care for the ecology in which we work and to care for our relationships with each other. I think that what we have been doing in this room represents strongly the ways in which we are taking on a stewardship role, individually and collectively. The collaboration between CanDance and the CDA in presenting these overlapping

conferences is an example of us choosing a common destination while choosing distinct routes to travel – toward each other.