

## ORAL HISTORY\_ Workshop 1 PROJECT DESIGN\_ January 29th, 2010

History as a „Wissenschaft“

How to do history in a german context

Classical positivist history: There was a Set of Rules on How to do it

Elite activity: upperclass/ european/ literate/ men

they made decisions about rules

it excludes a large group of people

women are not given that right

non literate are not given that right

working classes are not given that right

there is enough evidence to record or print text documents

History-making then becomes a kind of craft, a guild, with a secret that initiates only certain people who can do it.

Through print text documents in archives a lot of history is put under the table, that is, the history of non-literate peoples, people of color, women. Note: these are the groups of people who are prevented from creating history, so obviously they drop out as Subjects of history.

History ends up reflecting the interests of those creating history: a certain kind of military political history and consolidation of a nation

people under the table make a riot

**interviewing** as a very important remedy

social history develops as a sub-field of history to acknowledge those not included in historical narratives

non elites use oral history to bring their lives into historical record

methodologies

early part of 20ies century

focus on certain groups

post-1865 US civil war: social historians were interested in the

working class, specifically, what was it like to be a slave, recorded oral histories with elder african americans

1930ies in the US 1929 Economic depression

Labor movement, organising unions, social historians asking workers about their experiences

### **PATTERN**

**people who work with their bodies are being asked to become part of history  
marked by their difference in their bodies**

1960ies women liberation, gendered bodies

1970ies gay lesbian, sexual gender identity

1980ies HIV AIDS

marked by their bodies

bodies dropped out of history

how do you work with their bodies

the work of the body has to be incorporated back into history

oral history interview      body to body

you have to use your body to speak

dance studies is different

in other disciplines they still think only about text

example: „your shirt is blue“ (it is not), eye signals sarkasm, text doesn't give that info

some decide to not transcribe interviews so that you must listen to audio or view the

video to see what the voice and body does as part of the interview

2 parallel lists while interviewing text / body

1. what is said in semantic text format

2. what is done with body and voice

3. these two columns may correlate, but sometimes contradict each other, and even sometimes the body movement predicts the semantic meaning

the idea of silence in an interview, the body is always there „speaking“ in nonverbal terms

not only the concrete action, but also interpretation

**oral history records an interpretative process**

notes JF

**meaning that any historical record is contextualized by who creates the record under what conditions. Oral history actually records the context of it's own construction rather than appearing neutral, when in fact no document is neutral.**

interview history contextualises reality

1980ies/ 20 years ago jeff started to do oral history projects in dance

dance artists can speak

aids epidemic was killing dance community

How does it fit what Frankfurt needs?

bringing dance back into history in Frankfurt !

where is my tape recorder?

where is my person?

PROJECT DESIGN PART 1

first

What are your goals?

With an understanding of your project design you have a focus for the improvisation that is an interview.

Why are you doing the interview?

Allowing the person to say what they need to say

## Workshop Topics

- **Research and Archival Oral History Projects**
- **Project Parameters**
- **Narrator Selection Criteria**
- **Repository, Preservation and Access**
- **Data Collection Methods, Survey, Interview, and Technology**
- **Protocol Development**

### **Archival Oral History Projects**

- Archival oral history projects focus on the long-term collection goals of an archive
- Interviews tend to be longer and more open-ended as they are not driven by a specific research agenda; however, they are still shaped by interview protocols developed through preliminary research
- The resulting collection is a group of primary research documents ready to be interpreted by researcher with an agenda

### **Research Oral History Projects**

- Research oral history projects are driven by more specific research interests, while still adhering to the open-ended interview format
- Can include multiple types of data collection, including print or on-line surveys followed by targeted interviews of varying scale and scope
- The project tends to have stronger parameters and more limited narrator selection criteria
- The resulting documents provide data for analysis and interpretation of a research-oriented project
- Documents may or may not end up in an archival repository

### **Grounded Theory**

- Research and archival projects are not mutually exclusive
- Over time, an archival oral history project can generate research questions that can be pursued within the parameters of the original project
- Research projects can generate a shorter list of skilled narrators who can record archival interviews later to gather more scope and context

### **Discussion**

- ID Frankfurt may create a research-focused project and select a sample of narrators for data collection that overlaps to some degree with the Forsythe Ballet narrator sample for an archival interview project
- Additional archival interviewing projects may develop from within the Hochschule curriculum as BA or MA theses, or research and writing projects; could use ID Frankfurt research projects as preliminary research for extended interviews
- An additional, more targeted research interview project might emerge from the ID Frankfurt interview collection. For example, a significant issue in the community may rise from the data analysis... what could that be?
- There may be individuals outside of either project who may be so significant that choices are made to collect data on an archival basis
- Additional discussion TBD...

## **Project Parameters**

- **Geographic, administrative and funding parameters can mutually support a new oral history project**

### **Geography**

- The geographic parameter can provide needed limits to the oral history data collection process
- What are the existing local, regional and national parameters?
- Are there conflicts, overlaps or opportunities in identifying these parameters?

### **Administrative**

- What administrative structures help determine project parameters?  
For example, public and private agencies, academic institutions, archives and other repositories?
- Who are the major individuals who make decisions within these administrative structures?
- Are these structures and individuals in long-term positions to support your project?

### **Funding**

- What are the existing funding structures that can support your proposed project in both the short and long-terms? Remember that funding includes both cash support and in-kind support of both goods (like equipment) and services
- Identify both public and private agencies
- Identify, where possible, family or private individuals who are capable of supporting your project

### **Geography, Administrative structures and Funding opportunities**

- Where do these individual elements overlap, collide, conflict or create the possibility for synergies?

### **Discussion**

- Deciding on a repository can locate a project in a particular geography
- The repository's administrative structure may or may not overlap with desired geographic limits
- For example, a repository may be located in a university setting that requires you to serve either a larger or smaller geographic parameter than you desire
- Funding opportunities to support your project may require you to serve either a larger or smaller geographic parameter than you desire
- Selecting a repository may limit or make available certain funding opportunities
- What administrative positions might need to be created where there currently are none? Who already can provide support or expand their current role to support the project? What are the administrative ramifications of these decisions?
- Other discussion TBD...

## Narrator Sample

- **Defining occupational group**
- **Identifying genres**
- **Identifying roles within group**
- **Identifying risk factors, as needed**

### **Defining occupational group**

- Is this project limited to dance as the primary focus, or are there other performing arts occupational groups involved?
- Are there hybrid interdisciplinary practices that can or should be included?

### **Array of roles within group**

- Creators (choreographers)
- Interpreters (dancers)
- Combined creator/interpreters
- Dramaturgs/educators (includes multiple possibilities within public schools and at all levels up to university/ also private studios and individual free-lancers)
- Designers/technicians
- Musicians, including creators (composers), interpreters, and accompanists, plus others?
- Administrators, including executives, publicists, fundraisers etc. in multiple institutional types
- Critics/writers in a variety of institutional locations
- Designers/technicians
- Musicians, including creators (composers), interpreters, and accompanists, plus others?
- Administrators, including executives, publicists, fundraisers etc. in multiple institutional types
- Critics/writers in a variety of institutional locations

### **Discussion**

- Who might be excluded in the definition of a “dance” occupation group who feel important/significant? E.g., interdisciplinary practices like dance/theater, circus arts, etc. etc.
- What are the implications for opening up the array of roles in the narrator sample for either ID Frankfurt, Forsythe, or Hochschule projects?
- Within dance, many individuals occupy multiple roles simultaneously or serially, over a life-time. What are the implications of this reality for data collection? Does it suggest that the scope of interview be expand(able)?
- Additional discussion TBD...

### **Risk-factor**

- Elder age
- Life-threatening illness
- Acquired or congenital disability
- Cultural invisibility, due to minority identity, class status, age, or other factors
- Perceived “significance” (both within and outside community)

### **Discussion**

- What are the opportunities to cross-reference dance genre, role and risk-factor?
- What, if any, does the risk-factor criteria for choosing narrators provide insight into opportunities for projects? Here are some fantasies I made up to help clarify: for example, is ID Frankfurt interested in reaching out to “amateur” free-lance hip hop dancers in the club scene? This includes issues of age difference, possible ethnic/racial difference, and professionalism as cross-referencing axes of choice-making in selecting narators. Another example: what, if any, outreach does ID Frankfurt have or will have to practitioners in other identity-groups within the geographic scope? Are any elders in the dance community considered free-lance dance artists, however inactive they may be at the moment? Could they be considered unofficial “educators,” especially if they provide or could provide mentorship? Are

Turkish dancers in restaurants considered free-lance dancers? Etc.

- What, if any, do these criteria provide potential for administrative and/or funding support from unexpected locations? For example, could commercial dancers provide access to TV coverage? Could a person of “significance” within the community be a “flagship” interview narrator that can bring in support for other interviews through connections to fund/administrative support.
- Additional discussion TBD...

## Method

- **Survey/questionnaire**
- **Interviews: scale, scope and purpose**
- **Technology: audio/visual options**

### Survey/questionnaire

- Can provide different types of data for analysis and interpretation
- For example, close-ended questions could support data collection on demographics and other statistics
- Open-ended questions can provide data on attitudes and values
- These can be short open-ended and longer open-ended questions
- You can also include a broad “what else is important” question at the end of a survey

### Survey and questionnaire

- On-line and/or paper versions: your choice can have an effect on 1) the rate of return and 2) potentially self-selecting types of responders (e.g., those with computer skills who have on-line access vs. others who don't have access for financial, skill-related, or other reasons)
- What type of outcome can help determine choices of type: is there a print text report or an on-line report or both?

### Survey and questionnaire

- You will want to achieve a sufficiently representative sample for both sending and receiving back your data collection instrument
- You will want sufficient diversity in terms of all the different genres, roles, and other axes of difference you choose to include in your sample

## Discussion

- What is the best case outcome of the survey/questionnaire? Is it hard data for analysis and interpretation, or finding representative narrators for interviews, or both? Both are achievable but it helps to know goals.
- Is the questionnaire/survey format useful for ID Frankfurt, Forsythe and Hochschule projects?
- What is the question protocol for such a survey? It may be smart to link demographic/statistical questions to attitude/values questions. For example, getting hard data on annual income may relate to more open-ended questions about access to space, etc.
- Can we get mentorship from experts in the survey creating field?
- Is “Survey Monkey” available in Germany and in German? Cost?
- Additional discussion TBD...

## Interview data collection

### Scale, scope and purpose of interview

all work together to help determine interview type

#### Life-history interview

- Scale: usually 6-8 interviews, generating 6-16 hours of time recorded
- Scope: usually covers multiple topics in an open-ended question format, including early life, family life, occupational experiences, attitudes and values, connections to historical events and trends. You can focus on embodied practices as much as possible.
- Data type: more focused on attitudes/values than statistical data

#### Occupational interview

- Scale: usually covers 1-2 interviews, generating 1-4 hours in recordings
- Scope: usually covers some aspect of life-context, but focuses primarily on occupational experiences such as training/apprenticeship/schooling, professional and non-professional related experience, goals, obstacles, and accomplishments; some historical contextualization. Depending on the occupation, embodied practices could be central.
- Data type: usually elicits attitudes and values, with some statistical data on income, etc.

#### Research interview

- Scale: usually 1 interview, generating 1-2 hours of recording
- Scope: usually focuses on a tightly controlled protocol of questions that is highly prescribed ahead of time, generating answers for later analysis; less commentary
- Data type: usually more focuses on “information” and statistics; less on attitudes and values, unless prescribed carefully within question protocol

#### Discussion

- What type of interview supports the goals of each project? Is the research interview sufficient for the goals of ID Frankfurt or can a preliminary survey satisfy that data collection need? Can the survey point to a smaller set of skilled and representative narrators for occupational interviews? Could that set of narrators point to possible life-interview option(s)?
- What sort of interviews support the goals of the Forsythe project? Can a survey help identify multiple narrators internationally and over longitudinal time? Does the occupational interview serve the archive's needs or can those narrators help point to skilled and representative narrators for the life-interview option?
- What sort of interviews support the goals of a Hochschule interview project? Given the parameters of a thesis project at the BA or MA level, what are the best options?
- What are the time, human, technical and administrative resources available and how do they match the goals of each project?
- Additional discussion TBD...

## Technology:

### Audio

- Analog vs. digital is a choice best made early
- Digital allows more flexibility for future uses
- Audio is less expensive than video set-up
- Audio is less public than video, allows for more privacy, rapport and intimacy in the interview process
- Audio will normally have no technicians and is more portable
- Records the aural/oral record, but does not record visual/kinesthetic record

### Video

- Digital video is recording the full visual/kinesthetic record, as well as the aural/oral
- Digital video provides flexibility in future uses; audio track can be separated for audio-only uses and video can be used for broadcast
- Digital video is more expensive, requires more equipment such as an external microphone and lighting
- Digital is much less private, reducing rapport and intimacy including the use of additional technicians. Often required set-up in a studio outside of private home

### Discussion

- What are the reasonable possibilities for using each type of technology?
- What are the financial limits for acquiring equipment or use of equipment? (e.g. purchasing digital audio recorders, or using other institutional resources such as the Hochschule, or other local/regional options)
- How to safeguard and monitor use of purchased equipment?
- Is the Bremer video archive a reasonable option?
- Each project may wish to choose technology according to access
- It is possible to do most of the recording in audio, but save one interview at the end of a life-history for video recording, once privacy, trust and rapport are strongly established;; this also reduces total expense for use of video equipment
- Additional discussion TBD...

### final part of day 1 blackboard

This is not a complete list.

it was developed together in the seminar as an example what to ask for and how one could get to more detailed questions.



## Attitudes

short  
open ended

long  
open ended

## Values

max  
open

## Facts / Statistics

### Data close-ended

**Origin** city  
religion  
country

**Age** specific: birthday  
or range: 10-20  
20-30  
30-40

---

### Fixed / Freelance

both  
student university  
hochschule  
professional  
amateur  
current occupation  
padagogue  
dancer  
choreographer  
activist  
therapist  
scientist...

---

**Income** primary income  
secondary sources

---

**Activity** dance  
other

---

**Gender** gender 1 male / female / .....  
gender 2  
gender 3  
FTM female to male  
MTF male to female  
intersex

---

---

**Training** professional dance education  
hobby training  
preeducation 0-3  
3-6...  
genre  
where: institution

---

**How** choosing priorities  
selecting  
level of detail

**Space** rehearsal  
performance  
office  
gathering  
communication  
home  
virtual

**Space** size  
technical  
floor  
availability  
cost

### **Rehearsal space needs**

**What are the questions?**

**How do you formulate them?**

**Where do you rehearse?**

**How do you feel about your rehearsal space?**

define space reactivity, lack of space  
network, community, affiliation

**Funding** get funding  
from where  
how much  
how long  
how often  
reimbursed / cash outlay  
restricted / non restricted

**Tax statues**

**Planning**    short ... %  
                  medium ... %  
                  long range ... %

**Short** satisfied

**Long** satisfied –    agency / selbstbestimmtes Handeln  
                          pro active  
                          re active

**JF NOTE:** It occurs to me that it may be useful to begin a project that outlines several of the main historical events, persons and institutions of Frankfurt's dance history. This outline would serve anyone doing oral histories with Frankfurt-based dance practitioners. It would provide the basic information that any interviewer would need to link their oral history narrator to the larger Frankfurt dance historical matrix. (For example, you have mentioned S.O.A.P. and I believe 1982 for Ballett Frankfurt). There will be other important historical milestones to be identified: Mousunturm, Tanzlabor, ID Frankfurt, etc. etc. Also, there should be more general German dance historical data on this as well, because the Frankfurt scene is also connected to this larger context (e.g. Wigman and Dora Hoyer connections, etc. etc.). Finally, there can be some historical markers for important German/European historical events because the dance scene is also connected to these larger issues. (e.g. WWII, 1989, dates of changes in funding post-1989, etc. etc.)

This project could be a very interesting activity for the dance program to create. Could it be a course? Or perhaps a BA or MA thesis?

Over time, as interviews are completed, important core data from that interview could be incorporated into the matrix of Frankfurt's dance history. If the matrix is on-line, then audio and/or video excerpts could be inserted into the matrix to keep the body present in the history. If students/ interviewers know that one of the goals of their interview is to add to this matrix (and they know the matrix well enough) then they are more likely to create an historically-grounded interview with their narrators. Meaning, they will ask how that narrator fits into the overall matrix of Frankfurt dance, German dance and German/European history.