

# Documentation as (Part of) Artistic Practice

Andrea Keiz

Each occasion requires a specific setup for documentation; related to content, purpose, time, and space as well as to the production conditions and financial possibilities the project offers. There are a lot of reasons and ways to keep records. Being aware of your own interest in the work and the purpose of the document helps to decide which format and tools are the best for your current process. In this article, I will propose various forms of documentation that I encountered in my artistic research as well as in my teaching. My work has led me to create a ‘container of knowledge’, rather than linear documentation, as a more appropriate approach to documentation in the artistic field – especially in regards to my experience in dance. This approach allows the diverse points of view necessary to research as well as to transmission. Teaching or sharing knowledge can always be an important part of your research and should therefore be documented as well. We will revisit that idea later on in the text.

My work, in the field of video documentation of performing arts, has triggered thoughts and questions about documentation in general. In the following, I will elaborate on them in relation to the practical issues, and emphasize the value of developing documentation specific to the needs and content of a given project. I still practice different ways of documenting based on various situations such as shows, talks, research processes, education, classes, and rehearsal processes. Often I do a ‘conventional’<sup>1</sup> video documentation to give a visual representation of a show, to help the distribution of the work, or give feedback to the performer(s). The more I am involved in the process of creation the more I try to adjust my work to the content, and use more experimental setups if needed. For me the first approach to documentation is the moment of reflection on what the specificity of the work is.<sup>2</sup>

Through teaching and research within a group of practitioners (AREAL) in Berlin, I have had the chance to develop a series of scores or exercises about documentation in the field of dance. I will share some of these experimental settings for your own practice as well as some thoughts on why documentation in or as artistic research is essential.

## Reasons for Documenting Artistic Research

Artistic research has become an important aspect of contemporary dance as well as in contemporary dance education. The understanding of dance as an art form that creates knowledge is reaching out into a lot of fields – as for instance neuroscience, healthcare, social-learning theory, and more. This brings attention to the deeper knowledge dance can provide, and the opportunity to the dancer to participate in research as an artist. Artistic research is a vast field with a lot of different approaches. In this text I refer to definitions I found in *In Takt* Wintersemester 2015/2016, a brochure offered by the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main (HfMDK):

- *The aim of artistic research is the generation of knowledge.*
- *Artistic research is not art in itself but it is based on artistic workflow.*
- *The base of artistic research is artistic practice.*
- *Artistic research is a process that combines theory and practice.*
- *Artistic research does not necessarily deliver a tangible outcome.*

If the outcome of artistic research is not necessarily a product – how do I trace the development of my research? How can I share my questions and results with peers? How can I publish possible results? What are the appropriate tools?

## How to Document Artistic Research?

A good starting point in order to think through some ways of documenting is: *What is it that I do, and how can I best share it with others?* Writing notes, drawing, talking, taking photos, and recording video are the tools I refer to in the following. They are all shaped by the body that executes the documentation – like Jeff Friedman states in his writing on oral history and the act of speaking.<sup>3</sup> To a certain degree this means that all ways of documenting are subjective and that, especially in the field of movement practice and performing arts, we can benefit from incorporated knowledge and find ways to translate this knowledge to documents. To what extent the document you produce is referring to the progress of your work should be decided according to the purpose of the document.



— Participant of workshop of Anouk Llaurens during IDOCDE Symposium 2016, Vienna. Photo by Andrea Keiz

### WRITING

For a lot of people this is a very familiar way to grab hold of information. We learn to write in school: handwriting, typewriting, computer... The means are changing but the understanding of writing as a series of signs referring to content does not change. The tools we use to write inform our document, as well as the reasons we are writing in the first place.

Writing is a way to treat verbal language as a trace, "which never can reveal the whole experience, but can give some indications for oneself to remember, for others to continue and to find their own interpretation."<sup>4</sup>

- *Are you writing in a book, on a sheet, on a computer?*
- *Are you making notes for yourself to memorize, to share with informed people, or for an external use?*
- *Are you keeping your notes? Are you reading them again, working on them, organizing, archiving them?*



— Participant of workshop of Anouk Llaurens during IDOCDE Symposium 2016, Vienna. Photo by Andrea Keiz

## DRAWING

A pen on a paper, a brush on a canvas, a trace of a movement, fingers with paint, a sketch of a situation, colors, the outline of a vision... As numerous as the tools are as manifold are the optional documents you can produce – before, during, or after your research or class. Drawing with your peers or students could always be used as feedback after given input.<sup>5</sup>

- *Which are your tools?*
- *Are you making sketches, drawings, or are you even using scribbles as part of your documentation?*
- *Do you use drawing to receive feedback during or after transmission of your work?*

## TALKING

When I talk, I share a line of thoughts. Usually I talk to communicate. I organize what I want to transmit in a way that someone else can understand. While talking I can listen to myself and recognize which thoughts are clear, and where I need to put some more effort in. If I talk about a physical experience I have to find the appropriate words. I create a verbal expression out of a physical experience, or I create a verbal expression for a physical experience. Talking about something I heard is again a different process. I

memorize and very often I shorten the bits that are not of importance to me. If I talk in class, I can see if I made myself clear based upon the response of the students.

- *Are you talking to colleagues, sharing the setup of a process?*
- *Are you talking to someone to share an experience?*
- *Are you talking to someone to introduce her or him to your research?*

In terms of movement practice it is interesting to consider what happens when knowledge is transmitted ‘only’ verbally. It stays immaterial within the bodies, spread only through the physical action of talking that does not leave traces other than the understanding of the person you communicated with.<sup>6</sup>

## SOUND RECORDING

Listening to radio used to be an important source of information in the 20th century. Sound recordings are used, in edited versions, for news or feature stories. Everyone will recognize some historical recordings that had been archived and replayed. A well-known example is *The War of the Worlds* by Orson Wells broadcasted as radio play in 1938, where fiction was presented like daily routine and caused some confusion. Sound recording is a time-based way to document. Compared to video recording it delivers ‘smaller’ files that need less storage space. It is quite often used to record interviews, feedback sessions and talks. In combination with a photo it can offer a sufficient documentation of a situation. The evaluation of it is, in general, based on verbal content. These recordings can be transcribed by translating them into a text document that can be archived in addition, or as an alternative to the sound file if they seem to be valuable for further work.<sup>7</sup> Besides this there are, for sure, a lot of alternative ways to use sound recording: to get aware of the sound of the space, the tone of the voices, silence, and more. This can offer information of something new and valuable to think of.

- *Are you catching the sound in the space?*
- *Are you recording (verbal) reflections on your work?*
- *Are you recording your thoughts while proceeding?*

## PHOTO

Taking a photo always means that you decide on a point of view towards something you want to frame, show, keep. The reasons to take a photo might be very diverse, and the moment to choose the frame might be very sudden. As we are very well trained in perceiving framed information, our system has incorporated a lot of perspectives that feel ‘right’, and we choose or reproduce them in a reflex or habit. Take a moment to reflect on your decision. Ask yourself what you are looking at. Trust the idea that through your research process your decision will be informed. To transfer the experience of your research to another media might offer you new and surprising perspectives on what you do. Use the photo camera as an elongation of your body. There is no right or wrong – finally it will be a matter of personal preference what you choose.

- *Do you know already what you want to photograph, or are you looking for something?*
- *Did you consider another perspective?*
- *Do you ask someone else to choose a perspective on a situation?*<sup>8</sup>



— Workshop at Folkwang Universität der Künste 2016. Photos by participants.

Setting up a video camera generates a document that is time based. This can be very helpful, but it can also be a trap. It is helpful, because step by step you can recall what you have worked on. You can see how time is shaping your research and how much the situation is changing during your progress. At the same time it can be a trap to use video because two hours of filming a class or a rehearsal results in two hours of video material. This does not sound too bad yet; but if you think of the whole research process, the question of ‘how to organize your recordings to be able to watch and evaluate your material’ is an important one.

If you have the opportunity to work within a bigger research program, you might have someone assisting and taking care of the video material. Writing annotations while recording is a very efficient way and makes it much easier to revisit the material. There is an existing freeware *piece maker to go*, for example, which helps to make annotation while filming.<sup>9</sup>

In a talk at the Documentary Forum 3 in Berlin 2014, Rabih Mroué pointed out the difference between a video camera on the tripod and the video camera of a handheld cell phone. It was new to see those shaking pictures in news broadcast those days. As a contradiction to the camera on a tripod – the manifestation of power of those in charge of the regime of war, we could suddenly share the perspective of those caught by surprise, who tried to escape and survive.

Although video documentation claims a certain level of objectivity, in a tradition of news broadcast, and representation it can be as well used as a subjective narrator through and about the body. For example by using a handheld camera – a camera as an extension of our body. Like the photo camera the video camera might help you to find a surprising perspective on your work – the video can feed your research process. At the same time video is a medium that gives the possibility of a representation of your work that might be useful as one part of your documentation. As a time-based medium it offers the possibility to go back to the process and to use it for evaluation in combination with nonlinear information.<sup>10</sup>

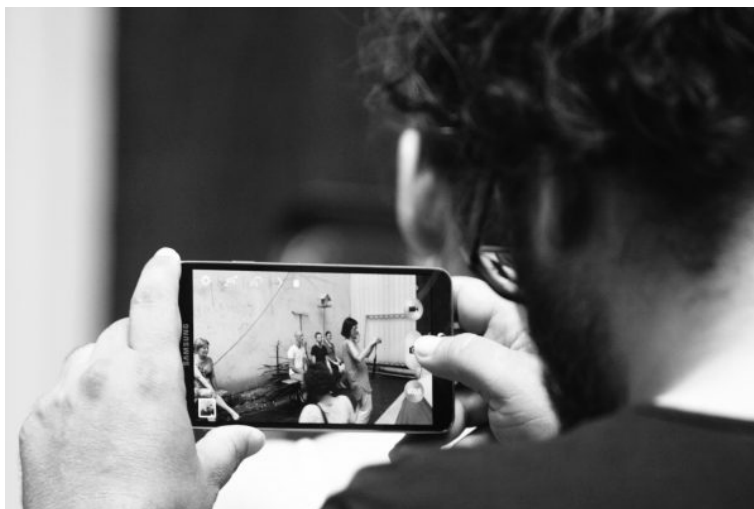
— *Are you looking at the video recordings?*

— *Are you making notes on the content?*

— *How are you organizing/archiving them?*

All these different ways of documentation are valuable with a very specific potential to reflect, share, or distribute your work. Some of them can refer directly to the original event like video for example – offering a sense of time, timing, dramaturgy, setting, lightening, and movement as a visual reference. Others like sound recordings, as well time-based, are offering atmosphere, verbal content, music, and soundscapes. Photos show a snapshot of a situation, they offer a moment to interpret the before and after. The observer has the option to create a context. This was and is used by a lot of artists to create new artworks with a photo as starting point.<sup>11</sup> Drawing, writing, scribbling are all activities referring to the original event in a specific way. Some of them create new artwork, and the ‘origin’ remains as a source of inspiration; some stay in the private archive or body experience and inform the personal reflection on the process. Especially in artistic research, I very much support the option to use documentation in an experimental way, ‘writing’ from a different place: preparing the body and mind through the research itself, and using this mindset to develop your documentation (documentation as artistic practice/research).

As a freelance teacher you share knowledge with people who are interested in your expertise. It is helpful to reflect on how to transmit the results of your own learning and your research to others in order to develop and improve your teaching. The documentation can focus on the process of mediation as well as on the content of your class. It is up to you to decide if a formal question like ‘how do I speak and how do I move’ is your main focus, or the content, or research question of your work. Transmission is always a good feedback on how much you can verbalize and incorporate your interest. Of course your experience and frequency in teaching will have an influence on how you document. But any kind of documents you created on your teaching can be a helpful source for preparation, reflection, progression, and feedback. If you are teaching in an institution you need to be able to provide class plans and to communicate what you have achieved in class. For this ‘documentation of what you did’ is helpful. If you are teaching classes inside an institution or in a non-institutional frame, you want to keep students interested. Reflection and development of your work according to their needs can be inspiring. For the students, for the institution, but most likely also for nourishing your own development you need to find ways to ensure that you provide high quality teaching. If you see teaching as a part of your artistic practice or your artistic research, documentation helps in order to share and discuss with your peers after a series of classes. And – not to forget – a class is always a great place to receive feedback from students. Such feedback could become a valuable part of the documentation of your work as well.



— Exercise on framing, WS of Andrea Keiz during IDOCDE Symposium 2016, Vienna. Photo Martin Streit<sup>12</sup>

The combination of all sorts of documents, gathered in a ‘container of knowledge’, will inform you and others about the research in a multi-layered way. It can offer a variety of entry points for those who access it, thereby serve a range of interests, forms of inquiries, and levels of expertise. However the process of artistic documentation can be very inspiring, one should not forget that, a ‘conventional’ documentation giving a basic understanding of the situation or the process can be very helpful in addition. This kind of documentation can be defined as a baseline in the container that tells about the work, and that is enriched through further artistic documents. As written above, a ‘conventional’ documentation can give a sense of space, time, participants etc. To create the baseline, I call documentation as part of artistic practice/research. In a framework of creating knowledge it is very helpful to have both approaches and to be open to diverse variations of documentation in your artistic process. They might offer a complete new perspective on something you think you already know.

In my own research as part of the artistic research group AREAL in Berlin, I developed an exercise on *documentation as (part of) artistic practice*. This exercise or score supports the reflection on your choice of media for documentation, and the capacity and implementation of it. The method is inviting practitioners to use a combination of the different tools I named earlier (video, photo, writing, drawing, sound and body) in order to describe a work that was just perceived. I encourage everybody to follow one's interest and to use the tools in an experimental way. The resulting documents might be far from a visual representation of 'the original', but a variety of perspectives, towards an experience, the documenting person just had will be produced. Especially for dance this seems to be an appropriate way to get closer to an art form, which is not only visual but speaks also to other senses.

**As a preparation** I do a warm-up in couples called *landscape and explorer*. I learned it from Dieter Heitkamp, and I have transformed it since then to fit a lot of situations. I love to do it in order to wake up curiosity and trust. In this exercise you use all your senses to explore with curiosity and respect the structures, shapes, and textures of a partner who is providing a landscape. Your senses get awakened in an unfamiliar way to support the following exercise of documentation.

**The experiment itself is very simple:** I prepare a little sequence using materials I have access to. I want people to reflect on movement, on words, and on different media like photo, video, or sound in this exercise.

I start with a pedestrian gesture. I do a little movement sequence that I am able to memorize. I start a video work with sound that I have on my computer, and change my location in space, and read a text followed by the movement pattern in place.

I am able to repeat the sequence. I do it once to give everybody the chance to watch first what is happening.

For the first repetition everybody should have chosen a tool to be used in order to document. I remind everybody that also the body is included as a possible media or display to document and perform with as a response.

When I repeat the sequence a second time people should follow with their personal way of documenting.

In a third run everybody has the possibility to change, to adjust, or to insist either on what they did or the tool they choose.

**At the end** we look at the documents together and talk about them.<sup>13</sup> I want to quote feedback I got on a session we did with this experiment:

— ... in my way of approaching the task to document, I was strongly influenced by the warm-up we had done before. The warm-up significantly shaped the choice of method how to document the piece (the 'piece' became a landscape, similar to the body that was explored as a landscape in the warm-up). This reminded me of one of the essential aspects of practice-as-research: to approach something through (having had) a sensory experience.

— ... documentation was not aiming at making a registration of the piece [...] it was constructing the piece performatively, it was extending the piece. [...]

— ... the action of documenting became a tool and medium to explore and reflect on my way of approaching the task, both in the moment and afterwards. Deciding to transpose the method of the warm-up into my method for documenting felt like opening up a creative zone with great freedom and possibilities to play – and I was surprised by myself. (Joa Hug, artistic research group AREAL, Berlin 2012)



- In spring 2016 a symposium, called ÜberReste as part of a DFG Research project, took place in which the question of traces in dance has been discussed intensively.<sup>14</sup>
- A collection of testimonies of audience members recalling performances by Ayara Hernandez Holz.<sup>15</sup>
- Documenting Performance: The Context and Processes of Digital Curation and Archiving that Toni Sant edited recently.<sup>16</sup>

NOTES

1. 'Conventional' in my practice means required by a frontal staged show: a continuous shot, a linear record. Filming with one camera from one position during a regular show. Following the dramaturgy of the piece while panning and zooming carefully. No editing.
2. See as well <http://www.idocde.net/ids/1552>, Andrea Keiz, *Situation and Form* [01.02.2017]
3. Jeff Friedman in *Oral History a Go-Go: Documenting Embodied Knowledges*, 2010
4. See more on *Tracing the Invisible: Writing as a Trace* by Sabina Holzer in this publication.
5. For deeper insight into the use of pen and paper in of poetic documentation see *Moving Drawing Writing: Re-visiting 'Drawing as a Tool for Poetic and Polyphonic Dance Documentation'* of Anouk Llaurent in this publication and on idocde.net.
6. An artistic example for translating memory into words and action in space is the performance *NEW*, by Lupita Pulpo (2013) <http://www.lupitapulpo.org/works/performance/new/> [03.01.2017]
7. For an example of creative/reflective usages of sound/voice recording in dance practice see: Helene Hrotko's document <http://www.idocde.net/ids/481> [03.01.2017]
8. Andrea Keiz, exercise on framing: <http://www.idocde.net/ids/1605> [01.02.2017]
9. <http://motionbank.org/en/event/pm2go-easy-use-video-annotation-tool> (beta version) [15.12.2016]
10. How to deal with video recording in the studio see Andrea Keiz, *Manual for Video Documentation of a Dance Class* in this publication.
11. One example is the starting point of a work of Isabelle Schad / Good Work Productions in the work: "Still Lives" (2005), which is based on reflection on the photo "Stumbling Block" by Jeff Wall
12. See as well: (ex)change of perspective <http://www.idocde.net/ids/1605> [01.02.2017], <http://www.isabelle-schad.net> [15.12.2016]
13. The experiment in an early state with a variety of documents you can access on <http://www.idocde.net/ids/78> [15.12.2016]
14. [https://ueberreste.wordpress.com/about\\_en/](https://ueberreste.wordpress.com/about_en/) [15.12.2016]
15. <http://tracing.dunked.com/> [02.01.2017]
16. See more at: <http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/documenting-performance-9781472588173/#sthash.22Wvv0wX.dpuf> [01.05.2017]

