Psychology Colloquium/Advanced Seminar in Psychology

Learning and memory in dance

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3:30 pm, Friday, 10 September 2010
MLG 13, Lower Ground Floor, M Block (Coffs Harbour)
Video-conferenced to Lecture Hall P158 (Lismore)

All welcome

Experiments will be reported that investigate assumptions about human working and long-term memory in the general domain of movement and, more specifically, contemporary dance. Dance is a rich context for examination of human memory because dance is communicative, expressive, and universal, as well as non-verbal, temporal, spatial and kinesthetic. In the absence of simple notation and documentation systems, especially for contemporary dance, dancers are the somatic repositories of art works that they have composed and/or performed. Focusing initially on working memory, we investigated memory for configural movement (patterns of bodily movement) in addition to memory for positions in space. As hypothesized, concurrent configural movement interfered significantly more with memory for configural movement than a concurrent spatial task or no interference task. In a second study, eye fixations and saccades of expert and novice dance observers were compared to determine the effect of acquired expectations on observations of dance configurations. Measured fixation times of dance experts were significantly shorter than those of novices. Finally, we examined implicit learning of regularities that govern sequences of unfamiliar, discrete dance movements. The exposure group selected significantly more new grammatical sequences in the test phase than the control group. Through exposure, novice observers can learn a grammar that governs the sequencing of dance movements. The contribution of these studies to a theory of temporal cognition will be discussed.